

What Christians Believe About Jesus Christ

What do Christians “most surely believe” (see Luke 1:1; KJV)? What should we believe with all our hearts? This series focuses on some of the truths that Christians believe most strongly.

Just as we believe in God, *Christians believe in Jesus Christ as God’s Son*. It is this belief in Christ that separates Christians from the rest of mankind.

What do we believe about Christ? People have a variety of views about Him. Some believe He was a good man, perhaps a prophet, maybe a revolutionary, probably a rabbi or teacher, but not the divine Son of God. What do we believe? We believe what the Bible says—so let us examine what the Bible teaches about Jesus Christ. These are the truths that we believe about Him.

JESUS CHRIST WAS A REAL HUMAN BEING

Jesus lived as an historical figure. Some in the first century or two after the beginning of the Christian era doubted that. They believed that flesh was evil¹ and Deity could not inhabit sinful flesh; therefore, they claimed that Jesus was not really human, but only seemed to have a human body.²

Perhaps to combat such a notion, the apostles and early evangelists emphasized that Jesus was not only God but was also human; He had a fleshly body. John wrote that “the Word” who was in the beginning with God (John 1:1) “became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).³ In 1 John 1:1, 2, the apostle John testified that he and others had “heard” and “seen” and “touched with [their] hands” “the Word of Life,” the One who was “with the Father and [who] was manifested to [them].” Paul wrote,

... Christ Jesus, ... although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Philippians 2:5–8; see also Hebrews 2:5–18).

The Gospel Accounts emphasize Jesus’ humanity as well as His deity. He was born of a woman (Galatians 4:4)—just as all human beings are born—at a certain time in history, in a certain place (Luke 2:1–7). Like other children, He matured physically, mentally, and socially (Luke 2:52). He was a part of a family, grew up in a certain city, and had an occupation (Mark 6:1–4). He “grew tired and thirsty and hungry like other men”⁴ (see Matthew 4:2; John 4:6, 7; 19:28). Like other people, He wept (John

¹The view of all flesh as being evil was a major doctrine of Gnosticism, a heresy that affected the early church.

²This view is called Docetism, from the Greek word for “seems” (δοκέω, *dokēō*).

³The doctrine that the divine Word became flesh is referred to as the “incarnation” of Christ.

⁴Jim Smeal, *Study Guide for DC 301V, Systematic Christian Doctrine Videotape Course* (Florence, Ala: Heritage Christian University, n.d.), 79.

11:35); He became angry (Mark 3:5); and He was sometimes distressed and troubled (Mark 14:33, 34; 15:34). Just as everyone dies, His life ended in death. The writer of Hebrews accurately said, “He [was] made like His brethren [human beings] in all things” (Hebrews 2:17).⁵ In one way, however, He was different: Even though He was human and had the ability to sin, He never gave in to temptation and sinned (Hebrews 4:15).

Because Jesus was a real human being, He can sympathize with us and is able to serve as our High Priest in heaven (Hebrews 2:17, 18; 4:14–16). He lived as a man in order to set us an example, that we might follow “in His steps” (1 Peter 2:21).

JESUS CHRIST IS DEITY

Jesus is the Son of God. When He came to earth, He was a divine being as well as a human being.⁶ Belief in Jesus’ deity is what distinguishes Christians from all others. Few today would deny that a man named Jesus lived, that He grew up in Nazareth, that He became a well-known Jewish teacher, and that He was finally crucified by the Romans. Most people accept Jesus’ humanity, but only those who, in some sense, are followers of Jesus believe that He was God in the flesh.

One who accepts the Bible as the inspired Word of God must also accept that Jesus is the Son of God. The Scriptures record that, after Jesus’ baptism, God spoke from heaven, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased” (Matthew 3:17). On the Mount of Transfiguration, God spoke again concerning Jesus, saying, “This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!” (Matthew 17:5).

Mark 1:1 refers to “Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” As John concluded His Gospel Account, he wrote,

⁵First Timothy 2:5 says, “There is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” Paul spoke of Christ as a man even though He had ascended to heaven more than thirty years earlier.

⁶In this lesson we are not concerned about *reasons* to believe that Jesus was the Son of God, as He claimed to be, but only with the fact that the Bible teaches that He was Deity. We have good reasons to believe that what the Bible says is true. For additional study, see Hugo McCord, “The Inspiration & Authority of the Bible,” *Truth for Today* (April 2000), and Hugo McCord, “Jesus Christ, the Divine Son of God,” *Truth for Today* (May 2000). These series are also available online at www.biblecourses.com.

Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name (John 20:30, 31; see Hebrews 1).

When the eunuch heard Philip’s teaching on the road from Jerusalem to Gaza, he responded, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God” (Acts 8:37).

Some deny that Jesus is part of the Godhead and assert that He never said He was the Son of God. However, the Gospel Accounts make it clear that Jesus claimed to be Deity. In John 8:58 Jesus said He existed before Abraham. Only if He were divine would He be justified in making such a claim.

According to John 10:32–38, Jesus’ enemies accused Him of blasphemy because He made Himself out “to be God.” *Jesus did not deny that He claimed to be God!* Rather, He defended His right to make such a claim for Himself and concluded by saying, “The Father is in Me, and I in the Father.”

In John 8:24 Jesus said, “Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am *He*, you will die in your sins.” The word “He” is in italics in the NASB, indicating that it was added by the translators to help readers better understand what was written. In the original, Jesus said, “Unless you believe that I am, you will die in your sins.” His use of “I am” (ἐγώ εἰμι, *ego eimi*) would have reminded His hearers of the way God identified Himself in the Old Testament as “I AM” (Exodus 3:14). That phrase was translated in the Septuagint with the same words that Jesus used in John 8:24. Jesus’ Jewish hearers would have immediately realized that Jesus was claiming to be God.

One consequence of the fact that Jesus is the divine Son of God is that He shares the characteristics of God.⁷ Another is that belief in Christ as

⁷During His time on earth, the divine Christ gave up some of the prerogatives of Deity (Philippians 2:6, 7)—for example, He was no longer omnipresent, but was, in His human body, limited to being in one place at one time. However, He retained other characteristics of Deity: He exhibited divine power and divine knowledge. Therefore, we see that—even while He was on the earth—He was still the divine Word, the second person of the Godhead.

the Son of God is essential to salvation (John 3:16; 5:24; 8:24; Acts 8:36, 37; 16:30–34; Romans 10:9, 10). Just as Peter confessed, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16), we must believe that Jesus is the Son of God if we want to be saved.⁸

JESUS CHRIST WAS, AND IS, THE CHRIST, THE MESSIAH

Jesus was the King who was to come. The Jews had been looking for the Messiah (the “Anointed One”)⁹ for hundreds of years. Jesus came to earth in fulfillment of the prophecies which had led them to expect a Messiah:

- He came as the prophet like Moses (Deuteronomy 18:18, 19; Acts 3:21–24).
- He came as the king who was to sit on David’s throne (2 Samuel 7:12, 13, 16; Psalm 89:3, 4, 26–29; Luke 1:31–33).
- He came as the One who would be called “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God” and would govern with justice and righteousness (Isaiah 9:6, 7).
- He came as the righteous Branch who was descended from David and would reign as king (Jeremiah 23:5, 6).
- He came to be the Ruler in Israel who would be born at Bethlehem (Micah 5:2).

During Jesus’ earthly ministry, He claimed to be the One for whom the Jews had been looking. The Samaritan woman at the well said, “I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us.” Jesus replied, “I who speak to you am He” (John 4:25, 26). When He was asked by the high priest, “Are You the Christ . . . ?” He answered, “I am” (Mark 14:61, 62). When he was asked by Pilate, “Are You the King of the Jews?” He responded with an affirmation (Mark 15:2). After

⁸Regarding the importance of confessing our faith, see Matthew 10:32, 33; Romans 10:9, 10.

⁹“Messiah” is the English form of a Hebrew word (מָשִׁיחַ, *mashiach*) which literally means “Anointed One.” The Greek equivalent, also meaning “Anointed One,” is “Christ” (Χριστός, *christos*). Prophets, priests, and kings were anointed in Old Testament times. “Jesus” was Christ’s personal name (Matthew 1:21); “Christ” was a title describing Jesus’ role or office. However, it came to be used as a part of His personal name (either as “Christ Jesus” or as “Jesus Christ”), probably to distinguish Him from other men named “Jesus” (see, for example, Acts 13:6).

Jesus’ ascension, Peter proclaimed, “Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified” (Acts 2:36). As the Christ or Messiah, Jesus is the fulfillment of the redemptive plan that God brought to fruition through His people, the nation of Israel.

JESUS CHRIST WAS, AND IS, LORD

Peter said that God had made Jesus not only Christ, but also “Lord” (Acts 2:36).¹⁰ As Lord, He is our Master, Ruler, and King. He is, in fact, “the blessed . . . Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords” (1 Timothy 6:15).¹¹ He has “all authority . . . in heaven and on earth” (Matthew 28:18). Even on the cross, a sign put there by Pilate unwittingly acknowledged the truth of Jesus’ Lordship. It said, “THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS” (Matthew 27:37). Christians are told to “sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts” (1 Peter 3:15).

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In the Old Testament, God’s personal name was “Yahweh” (“Jehovah”; KJV). In the Septuagint, “Yahweh” is replaced by the word κύριος (*kurios*), which is rendered “Lord” in English versions. When people in New Testament times heard Jesus called “Lord” (also from κύριος, *kurios*), they were associating Him with Yahweh, the Lord God who created all things and who now rules over His creation.

Today, people must be willing to acknowledge Jesus as their Lord in order to be saved

¹⁰In the New Testament, *kurios* can be applied to men who are “lords” or “masters” or “rulers” (see Matthew 18:25). (It is still used in this sense today, as in the title of the “House of Lords” in the British Parliament.) “Lord” is most often applied to God and to Christ. God is the supreme Lord, the Ruler over everything.

¹¹“King of kings” means “the greatest king,” and “Lord of lords” means “the greatest lord.”

(Romans 10:9, 10). In the end everyone will confess Him as Lord, although it will be too late for many (Philippians 2:11). It is just as important that the people who acknowledge Jesus as Lord *act* as if they accept Him as their Lord and Master, by bowing before Him in obedience to His will and by doing their best every day of their lives to obey Him. We must try not to be like those to whom Jesus said, “Why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?” (Luke 6:46; see Matthew 7:21).

JESUS CHRIST WAS, AND IS, SAVIOR

“Jesus” means “Savior.” Our Lord was given this name because He was to “save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). He said that He came “to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10¹²). He is not just “a savior”; He is the *only* Savior. He said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me” (John 14:6). Peter said concerning Him, “And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

To say that one can be saved only in and through Christ may seem to be very narrow-minded. After all, only about 30 percent of the world’s population is “Christian” in any sense of the word. However, even if we are regarded as narrow-minded, we who accept the Bible as God’s Word must likewise accept, and proclaim, the fact that no one can be saved today without believing in Christ.

JESUS CHRIST WAS, AND IS, OUR SACRIFICE

Jesus was “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). He was “offered once to bear the sins of many” (Hebrews 9:28), and “He offered up Himself” (Hebrews 7:27) as a sacrifice for sin. Only through His death on the cross and the blood He shed on that cross can people have their sins washed away (Ephesians 1:7; Revelation 1:5; 7:14).

¹²See also Luke 2:11; John 4:42; Acts 5:31; 13:23; Titus 1:4; 1 John 4:14.

JESUS CHRIST WAS, AND IS, ETERNALLY WITH HIS FATHER IN HEAVEN

Jesus is an eternal being. Before He lived as a man on earth, He was with the Father in heaven—even at the time of creation. We read,

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being (John 1:1–3).

John went on to declare that “the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). Jesus Christ was made, for a time, a human being, “lower than the angels” (Hebrews 2:7, 9). Near the end of His earthly ministry, Jesus told His disciples, “I came forth from the Father and have come into the world; I am leaving the world again and going to the Father” (John 16:28).

Having served as our perfect sacrifice, Jesus returned to heaven, where He is now seated at the Father’s right hand (Hebrews 10:12).¹³ He serves as the Christian’s High Priest and mediator (Hebrews 2:17, 18; 4:14–16; 8:1). When the time comes, He will return and take those who are His to live with Him forever (see John 14:3; 1 Thessalonians 5:9, 10; 2 Timothy 2:10, 11).

CONCLUSION

“What do you think about the Christ, whose son is He?” (Matthew 22:42). That question is not just academic. Your answer to it will determine how you live your life now and where you will spend eternity. To have hope of inheriting an eternal heavenly home prepared for you by Christ (John 14:1–3), you must believe that He is the Son of God!

If you are a Christian and sincerely believe in Christ, then you need to act like it! True believers in Christ will respond obediently to the Lord’s words in Luke 9:23: “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me.” We must seek to do His will in everything! Coy Roper

¹³See also 1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 1:3, 13; 12:2; Ephesians 1:19, 20; Colossians 3:1; 1 Peter 3:22.