

THE HENRY BOX SCHOOL RELIGIOUS STUDIES DEPARTMENT

Christian Beliefs, Teachings and Practices Revision Guide

Name:

Christian Beliefs and Teachings

Revision Guide

Use the following checklist to make sure you have revised everything.

Key Beliefs	Done? ✓
<i>The nature of God:</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• God as omnipotent, loving and just, and the problem of evil and suffering	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The oneness of God and the Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Different Christian beliefs about creation including the role of Word and Spirit (John 1:1-3 and Genesis 1:1-3).	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Different Christian beliefs about the afterlife and their importance, including: resurrection and life after death; judgement, heaven and hell.	
Jesus Christ and Salvation	
Beliefs and teachings about:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• the incarnation and Jesus as the Son of God	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• the crucifixion, resurrection and ascension	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• sin, including original sin	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• the means of salvation, including law, grace and Spirit	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• the role of Christ in salvation including the idea of atonement.	

Key Words

Ascension = Jesus going up to Heaven after his resurrection.

Atonement = The death of Jesus restoring the relationship between God and humans.

Benevolent = loving.

Creation = Making the universe. Christians believe that it was made by God.

Crucifixion = being killed by hanging on a cross, as Jesus was.

God = The creator and ruler of the universe; the supreme being

Grace = the love and mercy given to humans by God.

Heaven = A perfect place of reward after death. Eternity with God.

Hell = A terrible place of punishment after death. Eternity without God.

Incarnation– To become a person. When the Son of God becomes human as Jesus.

Jesus = The son of God. Part of the Trinity. God as human.

Just = The belief that God knows about right and wrong, and judges people fairly on how they live their lives.

Law = the rules that God expects humans to live by.

Monotheism = The belief that there is One God.

Loving = The belief that God is kind and cares for everything in the universe. God is **benevolent**.

Omnipotent = The belief that God is Almighty or all-powerful

Original Sin = the first sin that Adam and Eve committed, which is passed on to all humans.

Purgatory = A place to be cleansed of sins before going to Heaven.

Resurrection = coming back to life as Jesus did after he was crucified.

Salvation = being saved from Hell and being able to go to Heaven.

Soul – The spiritual, immortal part of a human. The part of a human that is like God.

Spirit = the Holy Spirit. Part of the Trinity, sent to Earth after Jesus' ascension, which is God's presence in the world.

The Word = the idea of Jesus existing before the world was created.

Trinity = The belief that God is Three-persons-in-One, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

God as Omnipotent, Loving and Just

Omnipotent (all-powerful)

Christians believe that God is perfect; if there was anything God could not do, then God would not be the Supreme Being. They believe he can do anything, for example, when God makes the world, God makes the heavens and the earth out of nothing.

Christians believe God is almighty because of the Bible stories showing God carrying out impossible activities like miracles. (e.g. calming the storm).

Loving (benevolent)

A Supreme Being has to be completely loving. Without love God could not be perfect.

Christians believe God is loving because of the Bible stories where God looks after people in need, for example when Jesus heals a paralysed man.

God sent his Son Jesus to make a sacrifice to save humans from the punishment their sins deserve. This shows how much he loves people.

Just (fair)

Christians believe God is just because in the Bible God rewards people who follow his rules and punishes those who don't. God gives Moses the 10 Commandments, and tells him to make sure the people follow the rules. If

humans follow God’s rules they can be rewarded in heaven. If they don’t, they can be punished in hell.

If God is loving then God also has to be fair. Fairness (Justice) is love-in-action.

The Problem of Evil

A God who loves people and is omnipotent should have the desire and the power to prevent people from suffering. The fact that suffering exists, despite these qualities of God, is known as the **Problem of Evil**.

The solution to this problem for atheists is simply that God cannot exist, because if He did exist then He would prevent evil and suffering.

Christians, however, need to find some explanation for why a loving, omnipotent God would allow bad thing to happen. Each of their explanations has been challenged by atheists and there is no single solution to the problem of evil.

Solution	Response of atheists
Suffering is a punishment for sins that people commit.	Why do seemingly innocent people, such as tiny babies, suffer?
God could only prevent suffering if he took away people’s free will – people will always choose to do things that hurt others.	What about natural evil, such as earthquakes? This isn’t caused by free will, so why does God allow it?
People learn from suffering – if we never suffered, we would never develop into mature people.	Would it not be enough to just have a little bit of suffering instead of extreme events like the Holocaust?
Humans are naturally sinful (shown by Adam and Eve) and God won’t stop them by taking away free will. Natural evil is the punishment for human sin (just as God punished Adam and Eve).	This story is not meant to be taken literally – it is a myth and therefore can’t be used to justify suffering.
God has a plan for our lives, but we can never understand it because God is so much greater than us.	This sounds like a cop-out. This is just a way of accepting suffering without any explanation.



The Trinity



Christians believe that there is **ONE GOD** who has revealed himself as **THREE SEPARATE PERSONS**:

- God the Father,
- God the Son
- God the Holy Spirit.

God the Father

God the Father is understood as the creator. In the apostle's creed, which states Christian beliefs, he is described as 'God the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.' God the Father is strong and powerful. He protects those who follow him. In the Book of Genesis in the Bible, God creates the world and the Garden of Eden for Adam and Eve.



In the Old Testament, God the Father gives Moses the 10 Commandments as rules to live by.

In the New Testament, God is referred to by Jesus as 'Abba, father'. 'Abba' is similar to our word 'daddy'. It is a way of showing that God loves and cares for his followers, and can be trusted as a good father is trusted.

God the Son

Jesus is believed to be God **incarnate**. This means God taking on a body and becoming human. Christians believe that Jesus was not conceived naturally but was placed in Mary by the Holy Spirit. Christians believe that Jesus was completely human, and also completely God.



Jesus shows people the love of God and sets an example to follow. He teaches them to "Love your neighbour" and was prepared to sacrifice his own life to

take the punishment humans deserve for their sins. Christians believe Jesus came back to life after his death to show that he really was God's Son, and also to prove there is life after death.

Jesus shows God's power through performing miracles, calming the storm, healing the paralysed man and feeding the 5,000.

Jesus also teaches about the justice of God. He says that at the end of time God will judge people on how they have lived their lives. Good people will be rewarded with heaven and bad people will be sent to hell.

God the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is God's presence and love in the world. In the Bible the Holy Spirit is called the *paraclete*, which means someone who supports another person by speaking up for them and comforting them. They believe the Holy Spirit will support them when they are judged by God.

After Jesus died, the Bible says that the Holy Spirit came to his followers, to help and strengthen them. This event is called **Pentecost**. Tongues of flame appeared above the heads of the Christians and they were able to speak in different languages.

Some Christians believe that the Holy Spirit gives them God's power to do miraculous things, like speaking different languages and healing people. Other Christians believe that the Holy Spirit helps them to live good lives. The results of living a good life are often called the **fruits of the Spirit**, and include love, joy, peace, goodness etc.

Creation

The story of the creation of the world is mentioned in two key places in the Bible:

- **Genesis** 1:1-3 in the Old Testament
- **John** 1:1-3 in the New Testament





The book of **Genesis** is the first book in the Bible at the beginning of the Old Testament. It tells of the world being created in 6 days with God resting on the 7th Day.

It starts with the words *“In the beginning, God created the Heavens and the Earth. Now the Earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the **spirit of God** was hovering over the waters. And God said, “let there be light,” and there was light.”*

Christians believe that God has always existed and will always exist (He is **eternal**). They believe that God existed before the world was created and that He created the Earth for humans to live on. This part of Genesis shows that the **Holy Spirit** (the Spirit of God) was involved in creation and, like God the Father, existed before the world was created.

The book of **John** is the first book of the New Testament in the Bible. It tells of the idea of Jesus existing before the world was created. This idea of Jesus is known as **‘the Word’** (or ‘logos’ in Greek). It starts by saying *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made.”*

Later in the chapter, John describes the Word as the light which shines in darkness and then writes of the Word becoming flesh as the Son of God, Jesus.

These beliefs are important to Christians today. They show that:

- God the Father created everything.
- Jesus and the Holy Spirit were involved in the creation.
- The Holy Spirit, Jesus and the Father are united in the Trinity.
- God the Father, the Holy Spirit and Jesus are eternal.
- Jesus is the light in the darkness, saving people from Hell.
- God always intended to send Jesus to save people.

The Afterlife

Judgement

Christians believe that God will judge them when they die and will decide who goes to Heaven and who goes to Hell. One way that this is explained is through a story that Jesus told, called the parable of the sheep and the goats. This explains who will be rewarded in Heaven and who will be punished in Hell.

The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats



This parable describes good people as sheep and bad people as goats. It explains that Jesus will divide people, as a shepherd separates his sheep and goats. The division will be based on people's



actions. If people have helped others, then they will be the good sheep and will go to Heaven. If they have not helped others, then they will be the bad goats and will go to Hell.

Then he will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me...Whatever you did for anyone who needed help, you did for me.'

Resurrection

Christians believe that after they die, they will be resurrected (brought back to life). This resurrection will not be on Earth, but in Heaven. This is shown to Christians through the resurrection of Christ. Christians disagree about when this will happen. Some believe it will happen to each person soon after death, while others believe that it will happen on a Judgement Day some time in the future when Jesus will return to decide who goes to Heaven.

Many Christians, including Roman Catholics, believe that the body will be resurrected and will go to Heaven, but that the body will be transformed into a perfect state in which there is no suffering. Many other Christians believe that it is just the soul that is resurrected, not the body.

“So it will be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable.”



Heaven, Hell and Purgatory



Heaven

Christians believe that if you have lived a good life, followed God’s rules, been baptised to wash away original sin and repented your sins then you will be rewarded in Heaven, which is an eternity with God.

- A traditional view of heaven is that it is a place filled with peace. There are angels and people playing harps with light and white everywhere.
- Another view of heaven is that it will be a new, perfect earth – we will live like we have done on earth, but without any sin or suffering.
- Most Christians accept that heaven will be completely different to any experience we could have on earth and that we will not know what it is like until we get there.

Hell

If you have not done all of the things necessary to get into Heaven, Christians believe you will go to Hell.

- The traditional view of hell is of a fiery place filled with demons torturing wicked people.
- Many Christian believe that this is symbolic, not literal. They believe that hell is a poetic way of describing an eternity away from God.
- Some Christians believe that hell is not real at all and focus on the idea of God as loving and forgiving.

Purgatory

Roman Catholics (but not other Christians) believe that most Christians are not ready to go straight to heaven when they die. First they must go to purgatory to work off their sins. Protestants do not believe in Purgatory.

Catholics will often pray for the soul of a dead person so that they will not have to spend too long in purgatory.

The Life of Jesus

The Incarnation and Jesus as the Son of God



Jesus' mother Mary was visited by an angel to tell her that she was going to become pregnant with the son of God, Jesus. She was surprised as she was not yet married, but was engaged to Joseph, and was a virgin.

Christians believe that Mary became pregnant through a miracle by the Holy Spirit and they describe Jesus as 'God incarnate' (God in human form). The events of Jesus' birth show that he was special: important people (the wise men) coming to visit him; a star to guide the way; expensive gifts.

In the gospel of John in the Bible, Jesus is described as God's son: "The word became flesh and made his dwelling amongst us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."

Every week in church, Christians will recite their statement of faith, The Apostles' Creed, which includes the following: "I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only son, Our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit."

Because he is seen as the Son of God, Jesus is believed to be fully God and fully human. He is said to understand the difficulties of being human, whilst also having the power and knowledge of God. In his teachings, Jesus talks of God as the Father. He doesn't usually describe himself as God's son, but before his death, when he is asked by the high priest, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?", he replies, "I am."

Throughout his later life, Jesus performed miracles, and this is seen as evidence that he is the son of God.

Christians try to follow the example of Jesus and they look at his actions to help guide them in their everyday lives.

Crucifixion, Resurrection, Ascension

Crucifixion

At the age of around 33 years, Jesus had been preaching for 3 years. He had a large following, who respected his teachings, but he also had enemies. These enemies felt threatened by his influence and wanted to get rid of him.

He was arrested by Roman soldiers for the crime of blasphemy and was sentenced to death by crucifixion (being nailed to a cross until he died).

As he was fully human (as well as fully God) Jesus suffered as he died; he cried out for God's help. This suffering is seen as extremely important to Christians as it shows that God understands what it is like to experience human misery.

"Jesus called out with a loud voice, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.' When he had said this, he breathed his last."

Christians believe that Jesus made the ultimate sacrifice for them – dying so that other people could be saved (see below about salvation). This makes them confident that they will be forgiven for their sins.

Resurrection

Jesus was taken off the cross and placed in a tomb. Because it was a holy day (the Sabbath), his body could not be properly prepared and buried as this kind of work is forbidden on the Sabbath. On the third day, some of Jesus' female followers went to prepare the body for burial but they found that the stone had been rolled away from the tomb and his body wasn't there, just the cloths it had been wrapped in.

The women saw and spoke to an angel, who told them that Jesus had risen from the dead. Jesus appeared to several people, including his disciples.

The resurrection is one of the most important elements of Christian belief as it shows that Jesus had power over death and proved that he was the son of God. It also showed people that they may be able to overcome death and go to Heaven.

Ascension

"When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven."

After Jesus had been resurrected for some time, he ascended up to Heaven. This shows Christians that he is now in Heaven with his Father (God) and that they will see him when they get to Heaven.

Sin and Salvation

Christians believe that there are two ways in which everybody is sinful. They are born with **original sin**, which comes from the first sin that Adam and Eve committed when they disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden and ate the forbidden fruit. Everybody also commits sins in their lives by disobeying the **laws** of God. For example, by lying or stealing.



If people die without being forgiven for their sins, they will spend eternity away from God, in **Hell**. They cannot get close to God in Heaven while they are sinful. God does not want this to happen, but He is also fair and just. It would not be just to allow everybody to go straight to Heaven even though they have sinned.

God gives people a way of being forgiven by sending Jesus to Earth to be sacrificed. He does this through His **grace** because He wants people to have a way to be forgiven as he loves the humans he created. To be saved, Christians need to follow the **law** of God and, when they break God's law, they need to realise that they have done so and ask for **forgiveness**. To be given forgiveness, they need to **repent** (say sorry) for the things they have done wrong. They also need to be **baptised** to wash away original sin and to show that they accept Jesus' sacrifice.

Jesus sacrificed himself through the **crucifixion** to pay the price for humans' sins so that humans could be close to God. This is known as **atonement**. Through atonement, Christians are given **salvation** and can go to **Heaven** to spend eternity with God. Christians believe that the **Holy Spirit** was sent down after the ascension to help them in many ways. The Holy Spirit helps Christians to spread God's message and also guides and strengthens them in their lives. This makes it possible for them to follow God's rules, to get close to God and to achieve salvation.

Sample Exam Questions

1 Mark Questions

- 1.1 Which one of the following is an action or thought that separates humans from God?
- 2.1 Which one of the following is the idea that everyone is born with the inclination to do bad things?
- 3.1 Which one of the following is the belief that Jesus came back from the dead?
- 4.1 Which one of the following is the belief that God has three parts?

2 Mark Questions

- 1.2 Give two parts of the trinity.
- 2.2 Give two terms that describe God's nature.
- 3.2 Give two examples of sin in Christianity.
- 4.2 Give two events that happened to Jesus after his death.

4 Mark Questions

- 1.3 Explain two ways in which belief in the resurrection may affect Christians today.
- 2.3 Explain two ways in which the belief that God is just may affect Christians today.
- 3.3 Explain two ways in which the belief that Jesus is the son of God may affect Christians today.
- 4.3 Explain two ways in which belief in the afterlife may affect Christians today.

5 Mark Questions

In each answer you must refer to sacred writings or another source of Christian belief and teaching.

- 1.4 Explain two Christian teachings about salvation.
- 2.4 Explain two Christian beliefs about life after death.
- 3.4 Explain two Christian beliefs about why Jesus' crucifixion is important.

4.4 Explain two Christian beliefs about the creation.

12 Mark Questions

Each question will include a statement and the following instructions:

Evaluate this statement. In your answer, you should:

- *refer to Christian teaching*
- *give developed arguments to support this statement*
- *give developed arguments to support a different point of view*
- *reach a justified conclusion.*

1.5 “It is impossible for God to be both loving and just.”

2.5 “The incarnation is the most important Christian belief.”

3.5 “Life on Earth only makes sense if you believe in Heaven and Hell.”

4.5 “It is part of human nature to be sinful.”