



BIBLE

STUDENT BOOK

▶ **12th Grade | Unit 8**

BIBLE 1208

COMPARATIVE RELIGIONS

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Comparative Religions

Introduction

In 1 Timothy, Paul tells us that God "... desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For *there is* one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus ..." (1 Timothy 2:4–5, RSV). Christianity is the only true religion, but it is surrounded by a vast number of other systems, including false Christianity. While there are elements of truth in other religions, only authentic Christianity obtains access to God and salvation from His wrath (Ephesians 4:21).

In this LIFEPAC® you will study the truth claims of Christianity itself and compare them with the beliefs of pseudo-Christian movements, major world religions, the occult, and the New Age. Having a general knowledge of the claims of other religions has a dual value. First, such knowledge is beneficial when you proclaim the Gospel to followers of them. Secondly, a knowledge of the beliefs and practices of other religions shores up the validity of your own faith. Through this study, you will see that Christianity is unique, and better understand why it can undeniably be recognized as the only true religion.

Objectives

Read these objectives. The objectives tell you what you will be able to do when you have successfully completed this LIFEPAC®. When you have finished this LIFEPAC, you should be able to:

1. Define basic Christianity.
2. State the guidelines for determining Christianity's validity.
3. Examine false Christianity.
4. Describe the basic elements of Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism.
5. Define the occult and identify its dangers.
6. Describe God's commands regarding occultism.
7. Define aspects of New Age spirituality.

Survey the LIFEPAK. Ask yourself some questions about this study and write your questions here.

1. CHRISTIANITY

The doctrinal and practical issues that distinguish one religious group from another ranges from slight to extreme. The concern is to clearly define basic Christianity in order to identify those who can truly be called *Christian* and those who seriously **deviate** from historic Biblical doctrine.

Those who do not uphold basic Christianity are more accurately called *pseudo-* or even *false* Christians. We love them and pray that God will give them a clearer knowledge of himself and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Section Objectives

Review these objectives. When you have completed this section, you should be able to:

1. Define basic Christianity.
2. State the guidelines for determining Christianity's validity.
3. Examine false Christianity.

Vocabulary

Study these words to enhance your learning success in this section.

deviate **incarnate**

Note: All vocabulary words in this LIFEPAK appear in **boldface** print the first time they are used. If you are not sure of the meaning when you are reading, study the definitions given.



Read John 1:14, Isaiah 53:5, Matthew 28:1-6, and John 14:1-18

THE BASICS

Christianity consists of specific truth claims culled from the Holy Bible, both the Old and New Testaments. The Bible is God's complete revelation to man, and therefore any doctrine contrary to Scripture is non-Christian.

Definition. From the Biblical root word *Christian*, Christianity is defined as the collective movement of those who "believe in Jesus Christ and follow him." Without Jesus of Nazareth, Christianity would not exist. Jesus did not come to earth to establish a religious system or show us a way to God; he himself *is* the Way. He did not come to tell us the truth; he *is* the Truth. Jesus also did not come to give us life; he *is* the Life. Christianity is not primarily a system of worship, it is a person: Jesus Christ. Christianity's character is defined by the worship, honor, and obedience given to Jesus Christ by those who have faith in him.



Answer true or false.

- 1.1 _____ Being a Christian implies being a follower of Jesus Christ.
- 1.2 _____ You can believe anything you choose and still label your religion Christianity.
- 1.3 _____ The Bible is the source document for the Christian faith.
- 1.4 _____ Jesus Christ was simply a founder of a religious system.
- 1.5 _____ Christianity is primarily about a person: Jesus Christ.

Central Doctrines. Throughout the centuries, Christians have expressed their basic beliefs in Creeds, Articles of Faith, and other summaries. For our purposes, we will incorporate the most important of these beliefs in seven doctrines basic to Christianity. An individual or group must adhere to these beliefs before being considered to be within the boundaries of Christianity. The following seven beliefs not only define Christianity, but serve as guidelines for testing the validity of Christian cults.

1. *There is One and only One True God, revealed to us in Three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.* This is known as the Trinity. The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. Yet, there is only One God. This is the starting point of all Christian belief.
2. *God the Son became man in Jesus of Nazareth.* Jesus Christ is one with the Father (John 10:30), both truly God and truly man. John identifies him as being the **incarnate** Word who was with God the Father "in the beginning ..." "... the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). "... the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us ... full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). "... grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). John claims Jesus Christ is God.
3. *The death of Jesus Christ on the cross was for the forgiveness of our sins* (1 Corinthians 15:3 and 1 Peter 2:24). Out of his love for us, Jesus of Nazareth, God incarnate, was crucified and bore the wrath of God in our place (John 3:16).
4. *Jesus rose again from the dead* (Acts 2:24). In his Resurrection, Jesus defeats sin and death. He proclaimed, "... I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live" (John 11:25). Paul reminds those who deny the bodily Resurrection of Jesus that "... your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins" (1 Corinthians 15:17). Jesus is physically alive today, as both Messiah and LORD (Acts 2:36, Philippians 2:10-11).
5. *God sent his Holy Spirit to the earth.* Jesus assured his disciples, "And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever" (John 14:16). Those who do not believe in the current presence and ministry of God the Holy Spirit have deviated from Christianity.
6. *Christ will, on some unknown day, return to earth in Glory to judge the living and the dead.* This belief is central to the New Testament, based on Christ's words: "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:3).
7. *That the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, are the exclusive Word of God to man* (2 Timothy 3:16). Jesus is the fulfillment of God's prophecies, and Christians await no further revelation until the Lord Jesus Christ comes again.

These seven beliefs discern the validity of those who claim to be Christians. Those who deviate from any of these essential elements are non-Christian in their doctrine.

Complete these statements.

- 1.6** Throughout the centuries, Christians have expressed their basic beliefs in _____, Articles of Faith, and other basic summaries.
- 1.7** The basic and supreme Christian belief is the doctrine of the _____.
- 1.8** Seven basic doctrines are essential to _____.
- 1.9** The guidelines for identifying true Christianity can also be used to discern the _____ of those who claim to be Christian or followers of Jesus Christ.

Complete this activity.

- 1.10** In your own words, list each of the seven essential elements of the Christian faith.

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____
- e. _____
- f. _____
- g. _____

VALIDITY

Before you study world religions and cults, you must know *what* you believe and *why* you believe it. Your beliefs must be deeply rooted in the authority of the Trinity, Scripture, regeneration, and heritage.

The Trinity. The power of God is seen throughout history and the pages of Scripture. God created all that is and has sole authority over it. God loves his creation.

Jesus Christ is the fullest and most definitive revelation of God to man. After his Resurrection, he claimed, "... All power [authority] is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matthew 28:18).

The Holy Spirit is sent to us to exalt Christ, regenerate us, sanctify us and teach us to understand God.

Scripture. The self-proclaimed God-given authority of the Scriptures is clearly seen in both its historical accuracy and the clear fulfillment of its prophecies within history.

Scripture contains the complete counsel of God concerning all things for his glory, man's salvation, faith,

and life. "All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness ..." (2 Timothy 3:16). "The law of the LORD *is* perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple" (Psalm 19:7).

Regeneration. All those whom Christ saves are regenerated, or given the Second Birth, which changes the direction of the heart toward God. Anyone who is regenerate can testify to the change of heart God gave them, from animosity and hatred towards God, to honoring and loving him.

Heritage. Since the beginning of the church, people have passed their beliefs and convictions to others within their family and community. Your beliefs and practices are very likely a result of the influence of your parents. The instruction you received from your parents you will likely pass on to your children. Many traditions are passed down through generations of ancestry, thus proving the Christian faith is grounded within history.

Answer these questions.

1.11 How does the triune God validate the Christian faith?

1.12 Where is the authority of the Scriptures clearly seen?

1.13 How does regeneration give validity to the Christianity?

1.14 How does heritage lend validity to Christianity?



Read Luke 9:49–50

TRUE AND FALSE CHRISTIANITY

Categories exist within Christianity as well as within many other world religions. The four main categories are Roman Catholicism, the Orthodox churches (sometimes called “Eastern Orthodox” because of their origins in countries east of Western Europe such as Greece and Russia), the Anglican churches (Church of England, a unique form of Protestantism), and Protestantism. Most believers within these four main categories of Christians hold to basic Christian doctrine as explored previously in this section. However, other groups attempt to convince people that they are Christian but do not hold to the basic doctrine. We call these latter groups *pseudo-*, or *false* Christians.



Choose the correct answer.

- 1.15 Within Christianity, there are different _____.
 - a. theories
 - b. categories
 - c. basic beliefs
 - d. none of these

- 1.16 Most believers in the main categories of Christianity hold to _____.
 - a. no beliefs
 - b. many different beliefs
 - c. strange teachings
 - d. basic Christianity

- 1.17 Those who call themselves Christians but do not hold to basic Christian doctrine are _____.
 - a. Pagans
 - b. Buddhists
 - c. pseudo-Christians
 - d. nonbelievers

Complete these activities.

- 1.18 Name the three of the seven elements of basic Christianity.
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____

- 1.19 List the four main categories of Christianity.
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
 - d. _____

- 1.20 What is the greatest difference between true and false Christians?
 - _____
 - _____

Denominations and sects. You may have heard the terms *denomination* and *sect* in reference to certain groups within the Christian community. The four categories of Christianity mentioned above are sometimes called denominations, but within Protestantism, there are many different denominations such as Baptists, Lutherans, Presbyterians, etc. Sects

arise within denominations. Authentic Christian denominations and sects share central Christian affirmations and hold to basic Christian doctrine. Heritage, belief, and practice varies among the different sects and denominations; but all hold to basic Christian truth claims.



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