

COMPARING THE WORLD'S MAJOR RELIGIONS



Biblical Christianity



Roman Catholicism



Judaism



Islam



Hinduism



Buddhism



Tribal Animism



Atheism

God:

God is Spirit. The creator, infinite, eternal, holy, and good. He is a triune being – one God, yet three persons.

The same as Biblical Christianity.

God is absolutely one. He is essentially spiritual in nature. He is infinite, eternal, holy, and good.

God is one – absolutely. To say that God has a son is an unforgivable sin. Allah is the creator. He is all powerful and all knowing.

God is an impersonal spiritual reality. Everything is God – each thing and each person.

Originally Buddhism said that there is no God. However, in popular Buddhist practice it is common to worship many gods, or to worship the Buddha himself.

Animists worship the spirits of the physical world – rocks, trees, rivers, mountains, etc. They often think of these spirits as “gods.” Usually, there is a belief in one creator god, but he is virtually ignored in animist practice.

There is no God. The belief in God is a myth, a false belief.

Jesus:

The second person of the Holy Trinity – fully God and fully man. He died for our sins, and was resurrected bodily from the dead. He will return in glory to reign on the earth.

The same as Biblical Christianity.

Jesus was probably a good man and an influential moral teacher. He may have been a prophet, but he certainly was not divine, and definitely not the Messiah.

Jesus was a prophet of Allah. He taught Islamic truth and prophesied the coming of Muhammad. Muhammad is a greater prophet than Jesus. Jesus will return to earth and promote Islam as the true faith.

Jesus is often ignored as irrelevant. If considered at all, he is viewed as a good man, possibly a prophet, or maybe even an appearance of one of the gods (e.g. Vishnu).

Jesus is often ignored. Some think he might have been a good moral teacher or philosopher.

There is generally no knowledge of Jesus at all.

Jesus, if he even existed, was a teacher of morality and ethical principles, but nothing more than this.

Salvation:

A free gift, offered through God’s grace and received by faith. It is based on the completed atoning work of Jesus on the cross. Salvation includes eternal life with God in heaven.

The foundation is the same as Biblical Christianity. However, grace comes to the Christian by means of the seven sacraments. Without the sacraments, there is no salvation.

Everything depends on our own moral efforts. Most Jews believe in some type of afterlife, but not all. Many Jews believe in the resurrection of the dead, but not all.

Muslims are to obey Allah’s laws, and their status in the afterlife is based on this. However, at the same time Allah determines the fate of all men. Going to Paradise is uncertain for most people.

Humans are reincarnated over and over, with their next life being determined by their actions in this life (karma). By doing good, and striving to be united with the divine reality, a person may achieve release from the cycle of reincarnation.

This material world does not really exist. Salvation consists of realizing this and recognizing one’s union with ultimate reality. This is called nirvana or enlightenment.

There is a widespread belief in the soul surviving death. Where a person goes after death is determined by the kind of life they lived. Family members may also perform rituals that affect their dead ancestor’s fate.

Salvation is not required. Life is what we make of it. There is nothing after this life.

**Scriptures/
Spiritual Authority:**

The Bible is the inspired Word of God. It is our authority in all matters spiritual, religious, and moral.

In addition to the Bible, the Catholic Church teaches that Church Tradition, Church Councils, and official decrees of the Pope are also authoritative.

The Tanakh (Christian Old Testament) is generally respected as the Word of God. The teachings of the rabbis (the Talmud) are also authoritative.

The Quran is the actual word of God, dictated verbatim to Muhammad. There is some respect given to the Bible – but it is of a much lower standard than the Quran.

There are numerous scriptures: the Vedas, the Upanishads, etc. In addition, the teachings of a religious leader, such as a guru or swami, may also be considered authoritative.

There are numerous scriptures: the Tipitakas, the Dhammapad, various Sutras, etc. Most are collections of sayings or teachings of the Buddha.

Usually no written scriptures. Oral traditions and tribal customs dictate how one lives and believes.

There is no authority other than individual conscience, belief, or opinion. The principles of scientific naturalism determine what is true and valid.

Human Nature:

Humans are both spiritual and physical, created in the image of God. However, because of the Fall, humans are now born inherently sinful by nature.

The same as Biblical Christianity.

Man is both physical and spiritual in nature. However, he is born morally neutral. What he will become is due to his own choices in life.

Humans were created by Allah, and they are both spiritual and physical beings.

Humans are essentially spiritual and divine in nature.

Humans are spiritual beings who are trapped in endless cycles of rebirth in this world. They need to escape from this to be released from both suffering and rebirth.

Humans are both physical and spiritual. The soul lives on after death.

Humans are evolved animals.

Morals:

Humans are sinful and need to be trained in morality. Moral standards are based on the nature of God, and taught in the Bible.

The same as Biblical Christianity. However, there are levels of moral wrong based on severity of consequences.

The Tanakh (Christian Old Testament) gives us guidelines for moral behavior. These are often clarified by the rabbis’ teaching. Man’s conscience is also a moral teacher.

The Quran teaches what is right and good. Humans are required to completely obey the laws of Allah.

Moral behavior is taught in the scriptures and religious tradition. Moral standards may vary from group to group within the Hindu community.

Buddhist scriptures display a high morality, with emphasis on compassion. Love for all living beings is prized highly. The eight-fold path is a basic pattern for good living.

Tribal custom and traditional teaching define what is expected of the individual.

Morals are individual, relative, and situational.

**Social/
Cultural Distinctives:**

An emphasis on community, love, fellowship, compassion for the needy, and service for others.

Much the same as Biblical Christianity. Strong family emphasis. Varies greatly from culture to culture.

Emphasis on education. Strict observance of the Sabbath, circumcision, dietary laws, religious festivals such as Passover, etc. Strong family ties.

The community is very important. Strict dietary laws. Women are usually veiled. Men may wear distinctive headdress. Daily prayer, fasting, the holy month of Ramadan, etc.

Sometimes there is a distinctive mark on the forehead. Certain dietary restrictions, such as not eating beef. Observances of religious festivals (e.g., Diwali).

Varies greatly. May include prayer wheels and flags, lighting candles and chanting, and using prayer beads. Statues of the Buddha are common.

Varies greatly by region.

Varies greatly.