

Compare Major Beliefs of 7 Christian Denominations

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Compare major beliefs of seven different Christian denominations: Anglican / Episcopal, Assembly of God, Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Roman Catholic. Find out where these faith groups intersect and where they diverge or decide which denomination lines up most closely with your own beliefs.

01 | Basis for Doctrine of 15

Christian denominations differ in what they use for the basis of their doctrines and beliefs. The biggest split is between Catholicism and the denominations that have roots in the Protestant Reformation.

- **Anglican/Episcopal:** The Scriptures and the Gospels, and church fathers.
- **Assembly of God:** The Bible only.
- **Baptist:** The Bible only.
- **Lutheran:** The Bible only.
- **Methodist:** The Bible only.
- **Presbyterian:** The Bible and the Confession of Faith.

- **Roman Catholic:** The Bible, church fathers, popes, and bishops.

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Creeds and Confessions





The Apostles Composing the Creed by Somme le Roy. Public Domain

To understand what different Christian denominations believe, you can start with the ancient creeds and confessions, which spell out their major beliefs in a short summary. The Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed both date back to the fourth century.

- **Anglican/Episcopal:** Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed.
- **Assembly of God:** Statement of Fundamental Truths.
- **Baptist:** Generally avoid creeds or confessions that might compromise commitment to the Scriptures as the sole rule of faith.
- **Lutheran:** Apostles' Creed, Nicene Creed, Athanasian Creed, Augsburg Confession, Formula of Concord.
- **Methodist:** Apostles' Creed and Nicene Creed.
- **Presbyterian:** Apostles' Creed, Nicene Creed, Westminster Confession.
- **Roman Catholic:** Many, yet focus on the Apostles' Creed and Nicene Creed.

03 | Inerrancy and Inspiration of Scripture

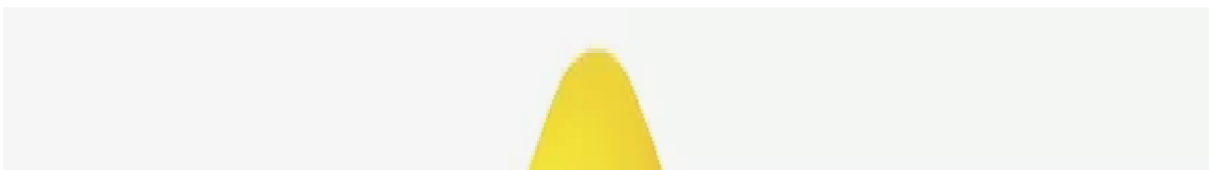
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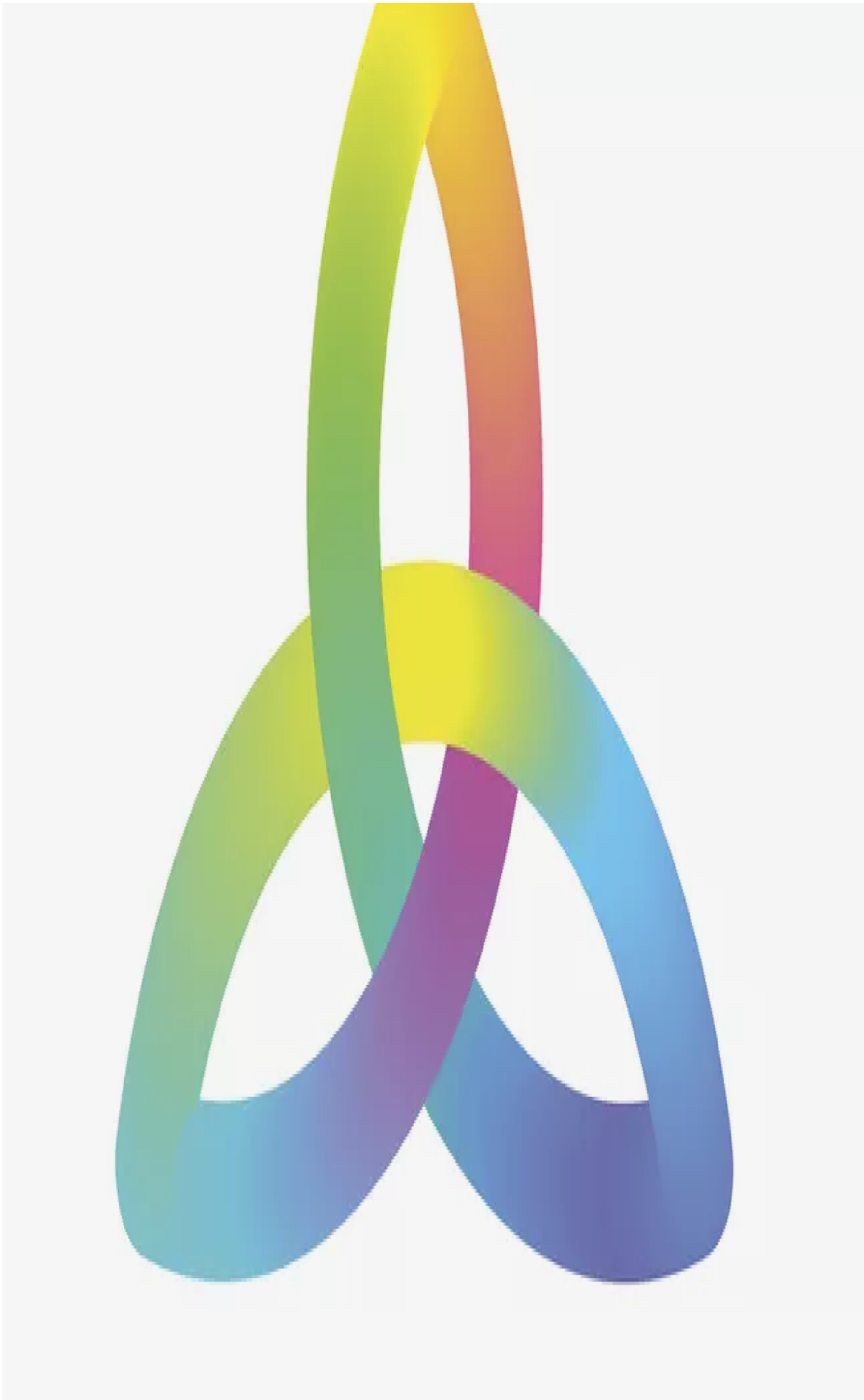
Christian denominations differ in how they view the authority of Scripture. The *Inspiration of Scripture* identifies the belief that God, by the power of the Holy Spirit, directed the writing of the Scriptures. The *Inerrancy of Scripture* means the Bible is without error or fault in all that it teaches, but only in its original handwritten manuscripts.

- **Anglican/Episcopal:** Inspired. (Book of Common Prayer)
- **Baptist:** Inspired and inerrant.
- **Lutheran:** Both the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America consider Scripture to be inspired and inerrant.
- **Methodist:** Inspired and inerrant.
- **Presbyterian:** "For some the Bible is inerrant; for others it is not necessarily factual, but it breathes with the life of God." (PCUSA)
- **Roman Catholic:** God is the author of sacred Scripture: "The divinely revealed realities, which are contained and presented in the text of Sacred Scripture, have been written down under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit ...we must acknowledge that the books of Scripture firmly, faithfully, and without error teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the Sacred Scriptures."
(Catechism - 2nd Edition)

04 | The Trinity

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Trinity Knot or Triquetra Symbol.

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The mysterious doctrine of the Trinity created divisions in the earliest days of Christianity and those differences remain in Christian denominations until this day.

- **Anglican/Episcopal:** "There is only one living and true God, everlasting, without body, parts, or suffering; of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; the Maker, and Preserver of all things both visible and invisible. And in unity of this Godhead there are three Persons, of one substance, power, and eternity; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit." (Anglican Beliefs)
- **Assembly of God:** "The terms 'Trinity' and 'persons' as related to the Godhead, while not found in the Scriptures, are words in harmony with Scripture,...We, therefore, may speak with propriety of the Lord our God who is One Lord, as a trinity or as one Being of three persons..." (AOG Statement of Fundamental Truths)

- **Baptist:** "The Lord our God is the one and only living and true God; Whose subsistence is in and of Himself...In this divine and infinite Being there are three subsistences, the Father, the Word or Son, and the Holy Spirit. All are one in substance, power, and eternity; each having the whole divine essence, yet this essence being undivided." (Baptist Confession of Faith)
- **Lutheran:** "We worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; Neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the Substance. For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost is all one: the glory equal, the majesty coeternal." (The Nicene Creed and the Filioque: A Lutheran Approach)
- **Methodist:** "We join with millions of Christians through the ages in an understanding of God as a Trinity—three persons in one: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God, who is one, is revealed in three distinct persons. 'God in three persons, blessed Trinity' is one way of speaking about the several ways we experience God." (United Methodist Member's Handbook)
- **Presbyterian:** "We believe and teach that God is one in essence or nature ... Notwithstanding we believe and teach that the same immense, one and indivisible God is in person inseparably and without confusion distinguished as Father, Son and Holy Spirit so, as the Father has begotten the Son from eternity, the Son is begotten by an ineffable generation, and the Holy Spirit truly proceeds from them both, and the same from eternity and is to be worshipped with both. Thus there are not three gods, but three persons..." (What We Believe)
- **Roman Catholic:** "Thus, in the words of the Athanasian Creed: 'the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God, and yet

there are not three Gods but one God.' In this Trinity of Persons the Son is begotten of the Father by an eternal generation, and the Holy Spirit proceeds by an eternal procession from the Father and the Son. Yet, notwithstanding this difference as to origin, the Persons are co-eternal and co-equal: all alike are uncreated and omnipotent." (Dogma of the Trinity)

05 | Nature of Christ

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These seven Christian denominations all agree on the nature of Christ—that Jesus Christ is fully human and fully God. This doctrine, as spelled out in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, states: "He became truly man while remaining truly God. Jesus Christ is true God and true man."

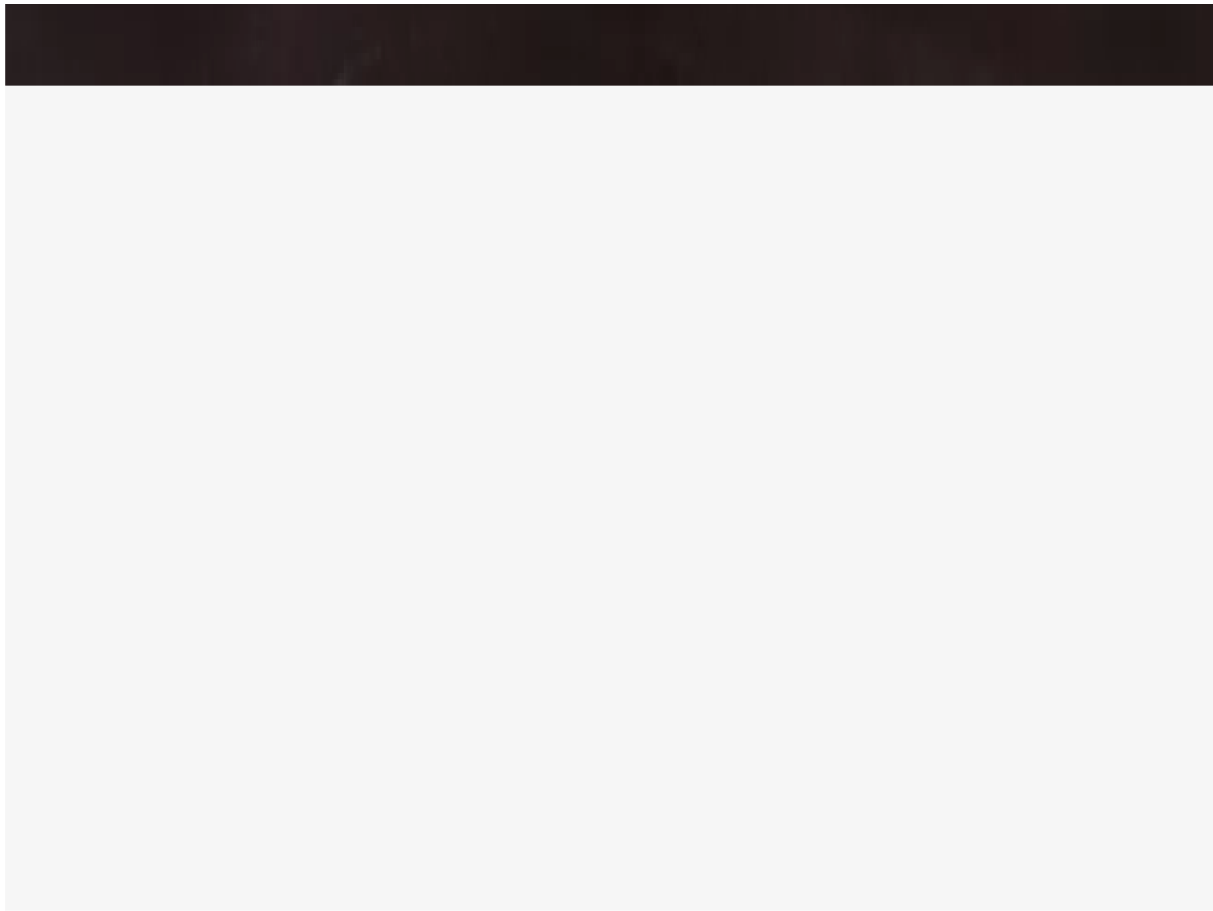
Other views regarding the nature of Christ were debated in the early church, with all being labeled as heresy.

06 | Resurrection of Christ

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All seven denominations agree that the resurrection of Jesus Christ was a real event, historically verified. The Catechism of the Catholic Church says, "The mystery of Christ's resurrection is a real event, with manifestations that were historically verified, as the New Testament bears witness."

Belief in the resurrection means that Jesus Christ, after being crucified on the cross and buried in the tomb, rose to life from the dead. This doctrine is the cornerstone of Christian faith and the foundation of Christian hope. By rising from the dead, Jesus Christ fulfilled his own promise to do so and solidified the pledge he made to his followers that they too would be raised from the dead to experience eternal life (John 14:19).

Protestant Christian denominations are in general agreement regarding God's plan of salvation, but Roman Catholics take a different viewpoint.

- **Anglican/Episcopal:** "We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by Faith, and not for our own works or deservings. Wherefore, that we are justified by Faith only, is a most wholesome Doctrine..." (39 Articles Anglican Communion)
- **Assembly of God:** "Salvation is received through repentance toward God and faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ. By the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, being justified by grace through faith, man becomes an heir of God, according to the hope of eternal life." (AG.org)
- **Baptist:** "Salvation involves the redemption of the whole man, and is offered freely to all who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, who by His own blood obtained eternal redemption for the believer ... There is no salvation apart from personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord." (SBC)
- **Lutheran:** "Faith in Christ is the only way for men to obtain personal reconciliation with God, that is, forgiveness of sins ..." (LCMS)
- **Methodist:** "We are accounted righteous before God only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, by faith, and not for our own works or deservings. Wherefore, that we are justified by faith, only..." (UMC)
- **Presbyterian:** "Presbyterians believe God has offered us salvation because of God's loving nature. It is not a right or a privilege to be earned by being 'good enough,' ... we are all saved solely by the grace of God ... Out of the greatest possible love and compassion God

reached out to us and redeemed us through Jesus Christ, the only one who was ever without sin. Through Jesus' death and resurrection God triumphed over sin." (PCUSA)

- **Roman Catholic:** Salvation is received by virtue of the sacrament of Baptism. It may be lost by mortal sin and regained by Penance. (CE)

08 | Original Sin

of 15

Original sin is another basic Christian doctrine accepted by all seven denominations as defined below:

- **Anglican/Episcopal:** "Original sin standeth not in the following of Adam ... but it is the fault and corruption of the Nature of every man." (39 Articles Anglican Communion)
- **Assembly of God:** "Man was created good and upright; for God said, "Let us make man in our own image, after our likeness." However, man by voluntary transgression fell and thereby incurred not only physical death but also spiritual death, which is separation from God." (AG.org)
- **Baptist:** "In the beginning man was innocent of sin ... By his free choice man sinned against God and brought sin into the human race. Through the temptation of Satan man transgressed the command of God, and inherited a nature and an environment inclined toward sin." (SBC)
- **Lutheran:** "Sin came into the world by the fall of the first man ... By this Fall not only he himself, but also his natural offspring have lost the original knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, and thus all men are sinners already by birth..." (LCMS)

- **Methodist:** "Original sin standeth not in the following of Adam (as the Pelagians do vainly talk), but it is the corruption of the nature of every man." (UMC)
- **Presbyterian:** "Presbyterians believe the Bible when it says that 'all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.'" (Romans 3:23) (PCUSA)
- **Roman Catholic:** "... Adam and Eve committed a personal sin, but this sin affected the human nature that they would then transmit in a fallen state. It is a sin which will be transmitted by propagation to all mankind, that is, by the transmission of a human nature deprived of original holiness and justice." (Catechism - 404)



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The doctrine of atonement deals with the removal or covering of sin in order to restore the relationship between humans and God. Learn what each denomination believes regarding atonement for sin:

- **Anglican/Episcopal** - "He came to be the Lamb without spot, who, by sacrifice of himself once made, should take away the sins of the world ..." (39 Articles Anglican Communion)
- **Assembly of God** - "Man's only hope of redemption is through the shed blood of Jesus Christ the Son of God." (AG.org)
- **Baptist** - "Christ honored the divine law by His personal obedience, and in His substitutionary death on the cross He made provision for the redemption of men from sin." (SBC)
- **Lutheran** - "Jesus Christ is therefore 'true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary,' true God and true man in one undivided and indivisible person. The purpose of this miraculous incarnation of the Son of God was that He might become the Mediator between God and men, both fulfilling the divine Law and suffering and dying in the place of mankind. In this manner God reconciled the whole sinful world unto Himself." (LCMS)
- **Methodist** - "The offering of Christ, once made, is that perfect redemption, propitiation, and satisfaction for all the sins of the whole world, both original and actual; and there is none other satisfaction for sin but that alone." (UMC)
- **Presbyterian** - "Through Jesus' death and resurrection God triumphed over sin." (PCUSA)
- **Roman Catholic** - "By his death and resurrection, Jesus Christ has 'opened' heaven to us." (Catechism - 1026)

10 | Nature of Mary

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Roman Catholics differ significantly from Protestant denominations in regard to their views on Mary, the mother of Jesus. Here are varying beliefs about

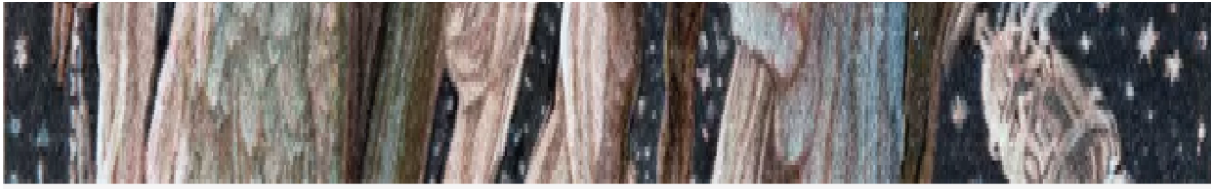
the nature of Mary:

- **Anglican/Episcopal:** Anglicans believe Jesus was conceived and born of the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit. Mary was a virgin both when she conceived Jesus and when she gave birth. Anglicans have difficulties with the Catholic belief in her immaculate conception—the idea that Mary was free from the stain of original sin from the moment of her own conception. (Guardian Unlimited)
- **Assembly of God and Baptist:** Mary was a virgin both when she conceived Jesus and when she gave birth. (Luke 1:34–38). Though "highly favored" by God (Luke 1:28), Mary was human and conceived in sin.
- **Lutheran:** Jesus was conceived and born of the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit. Mary was a virgin both when she conceived Jesus and when she gave birth. (Lutheran confession of the Apostles' Creed.)
- **Methodist:** Mary was a virgin both when she conceived Jesus and when she gave birth. The United Methodist Church does not subscribe to the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception—that Mary herself was conceived without original sin. (UMC)
- **Presbyterian:** Jesus was conceived and born of the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit. Mary is honored as "God-bearer" and a model for Christians. (PCUSA)
- **Roman Catholic:** From conception, Mary was without original sin, she is the Immaculate Conception. Mary is the "Mother of God." Mary was a virgin when she conceived Jesus and when she gave birth. She remained a virgin throughout her life. (Catechism - 2nd Edition)

11 | Angels

of 15





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These Christian denominations all believe in angels, who appear frequently in the Bible. Here are some specific teachings:

- **Anglican/Episcopal:** Angels are "the highest beings in the scale of creation...their work consists in the worship of God, and in the service of men." (A Manual of Instruction for Members of the Anglican Church by Vernon Staley, page 146.)
- **Assembly of God:** Angels are spiritual beings sent by God to minister to believers (Hebrews 1:14). They are obedient to God and glorify God (Psalm 103:20; Revelation 5:8–13).
- **Baptist:** God created an order of spiritual beings, called angels, to serve Him and do his will (Psalm 148:1–5; Colossians 1:16). Angels

are ministering spirits to the heirs of salvation. They are obedient to God and glorify God (Psalm 103:20; Revelation 5:8–13).

- **Lutheran:** "Angels are God's messengers. Elsewhere in the Bible, angels are described as spirits...The word 'angel' is actually a description of what they do ... They are beings who do not have a physical body." (LCMS)
- **Methodist:** Founder John Wesley wrote three sermons on angels, referring to biblical evidence.
- **Presbyterian:** Beliefs are discussed in *Presbyterians Today: Angels*
- **Roman Catholic:** "The existence of the spiritual, non-corporeal beings that Sacred Scripture usually calls "angels" is a truth of faith...They are personal and immortal creatures, surpassing in perfection all visible creatures." (Catechism - 2nd Edition)

12 | Satan and Demons

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Mainline Christian denominations generally believe that Satan, the Devil, and demons are all fallen angels. Here is what they say about these beliefs:

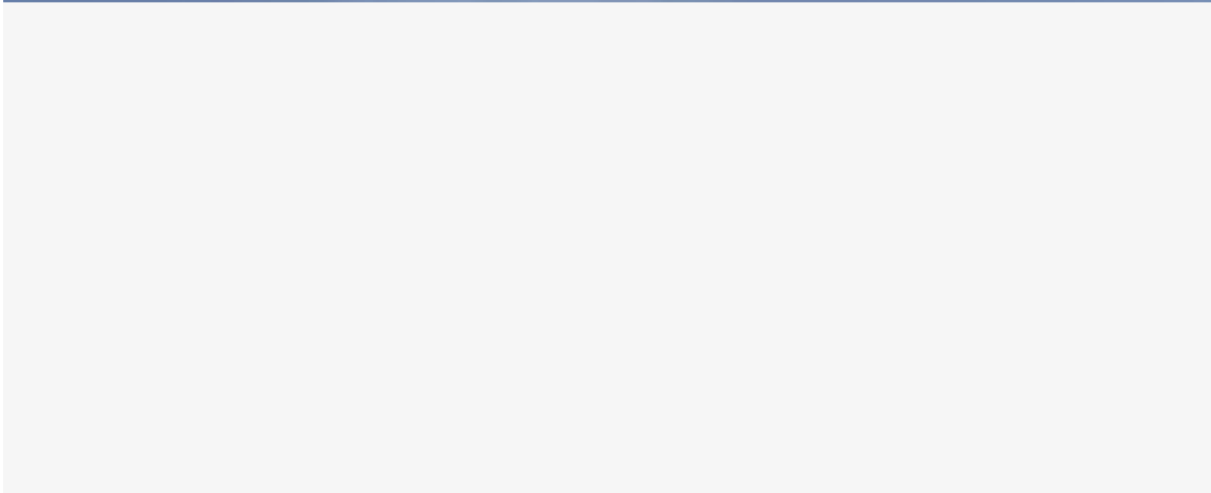
- **Anglican/Episcopal:** The existence of the Devil is referred to in the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, part of the *Book of Common Prayer*, which defines the doctrines and practices of the Church of England. While the baptismal liturgy in the *Book of Common Worship* contains references to battling the Devil, an alternate service was approved in 2015 and eliminates this reference.
- **Assembly of God:** Satan and demons are fallen angels, evil spirits (Mat. 10:1). Satan rebelled against God (Isaiah 14:12–15; Ezek. 28:12–15). Satan and his demons do everything in their power to

oppose God and those who do God's will (1 Pet. 5:8; 2 Cor. 11:14–15). Though enemies of God and Christians, they are defeated enemies by the blood of Jesus Christ (1 John 4:4). Satan's destiny is the lake of fire for all eternity (Revelation 20:10).

- **Baptist:** "Historic Baptists believe in the literal reality and actual personality of Satan (Job 1:6-12; 2:1–7; Matthew 4:1–11). In other words, they believe that the one referred to in the Bible as the Devil or Satan is a real person, though they certainly do not perceive him as the caricatured red figure with horns, a long tail, and a pitchfork." (Baptist Pillar - Doctrine)
- **Lutheran:** "Satan is the chief evil angel, the 'prince of demons' (Luke 11:15). Here is how our Lord Jesus Christ describes Satan: 'He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies' (John 8:44)." (LCMS)
- **Methodist:** See the Sermon on Satan's Devices by John Wesley, founder of Methodism.
- **Presbyterian:** Beliefs are discussed in *Presbyterians Today*: Do Presbyterians believe in the devil?
- **Roman Catholic:** Satan or the devil is a fallen angel. Satan, though powerful and evil, is limited by God's divine providence. (Catechism - 2nd Edition)









Benjamin Howell / Getty Images

Beliefs concerning human free will versus predestination have divided Christian denominations since the time of the Protestant Reformation.

- **Anglican/Episcopal** - "Predestination to Life is the everlasting purpose of God, whereby ... he hath constantly decreed by his counsel secret to us, to deliver from curse and damnation those whom he hath chosen ... to bring them by Christ to everlasting salvation ..." (39 Articles Anglican Communion)
- **Assembly of God** - "And on the basis of His foreknowledge believers are chosen in Christ. Thus God in His sovereignty has provided the plan of salvation whereby all can be saved. In this plan man's will is taken into consideration. Salvation is available to "whosoever will." (AG.org)
- **Baptist** - "Election is the gracious purpose of God, according to which He regenerates, justifies, sanctifies, and glorifies sinners. It is consistent with the free agency of man ..." (SBC)
- **Lutheran** - "...we reject ... the doctrine that conversion is wrought not by the grace and power of God alone, but in part also by the co-operation of man himself ... or anything else whereby man's conversion and salvation is taken out of the gracious hands of God and made to depend on what man does or leaves undone. We reject

also the doctrine that man is able to decide for conversion through 'powers imparted by grace' ..." (LCMS)

- **Methodist** - "The condition of man after the fall of Adam is such that he cannot turn and prepare himself, by his own natural strength and works, to faith, and calling upon God; wherefore we have no power to do good works ..." (UMC)
- **Presbyterian** - "There is nothing that we can do to earn God's favor. Rather, our salvation comes from God alone. We are able to choose God because God first chose us." (PCUSA)
- **Roman Catholic** - "God predestines no one to go to hell" (Catechism - 1037; See also "Notion of Predestination" - CE)

14 | Eternal Security

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The doctrine of eternal security deals with the question: Can salvation be lost? Christian denominations have divided on this subject since the time of the Protestant Reformation.

- **Anglican/Episcopal** - "Holy Baptism is full initiation by water and the Holy Spirit into Christ's Body the Church. The bond which God establishes in Baptism is indissoluble." (BCP, 1979, p. 298)
- **Assembly of God** - Assembly of God Christians believe salvation can be lost: "The General Council of the Assemblies of God disapproves of the unconditional security position which holds that it is impossible for a person once saved to be lost." (AG.org)
- **Baptist** - Baptists believe salvation cannot be lost: "All true believers endure to the end. Those whom God has accepted in Christ, and

sanctified by His Spirit, will never fall away from the state of grace, but shall persevere to the end." (SBC)

- **Lutheran** - Lutherans believe salvation can be lost when a believer does not persist in the faith: "... it is possible for a true believer to fall from faith, as Scripture itself soberly and repeatedly warns us ... A person may be restored to faith in the same way he or she came to faith ... by repenting of his or her sin and unbelief and trusting completely in the life, death and resurrection of Christ alone for forgiveness and salvation." (LCMS)
- **Methodist** - Methodists believe salvation can be lost: "God accepts my choice ... and continues to reach out to me with the grace of repentance to bring me back to the way of salvation and sanctification." (UMC)
- **Presbyterian** - With reformed theology at the core of Presbyterian beliefs, the church teaches that a person who truly has been regenerated by God, will remain in God's stead. (PCUSA; Reformed.org)
- **Roman Catholic** - Catholics believe salvation can be lost: "The first effect of mortal sin in man is to avert him from his true last end, and deprive his soul of sanctifying grace." Final perseverance is a gift from God, but man must cooperate with the gift. (CE)

15 | Faith vs Works

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The doctrinal question of whether salvation is by faith or by works has divided Christian denominations for centuries.

- **Anglican/Episcopal** - "Albeit that Good Works ... cannot put away our sins ... yet are they pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ, and do

spring out necessarily of a true and lively Faith ..." (39 Articles Anglican Communion)

- **Assembly of God** - "Good works are very important to the believer. When we appear before the judgment seat of Christ, what we have done while in the body, whether good or bad, will determine our reward. But good works can only issue out of our right relationship with Christ." (AG.org)
- **Baptist** - "All Christians are under obligation to seek to make the will of Christ supreme in our own lives and in human society ... We should work to provide for the orphaned, the needy, the abused, the aged, the helpless, and the sick ... " (SBC)
- **Lutheran** - "Before God only those works are good which are done for the glory of God and the good of man, according to the rule of divine Law. Such works, however, no man performs unless he first believes that God has forgiven him his sins and has given him eternal life by grace ..." (LCMS)
- **Methodist** - "Although good works ... cannot put away our sins ... they are pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ, and spring out of a true and lively faith ..." (UMC)
- **Presbyterian** - Positions vary depending on the branch of Presbyterianism.
- **Roman Catholic** - Works have merit in Catholicism. "An indulgence is obtained through the Church who ... intervenes in favor of individual Christians and opens for them the treasury of the merits of Christ and the saints to obtain from the Father of mercies the remission of the temporal punishments due for their sins. Thus the Church does not want simply to come to the aid of these Christians, but also to spur

them to works of devotion ... (Indulgentarium Doctrina 5, Catholic Answers)

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