

Paul is said to be the Father of a New religion. What did Paul establish as the main tenets of Christian faith? How did Christianity evolve to what it is today?

Pagan religions of the time, such as those associated with the Roman predecessors, the Greeks, were steeped in mythology and superstition. Their manufacture of religious icons and heroes included the likes of Dionysus, whom they believed was the “*Son of God*.” They also attributed miraculous qualities to these figures such as virgin birth, vicarious atonement through martyred death, and later resurrection. Paul, who adopted a Greek name to appeal to his gentile audience, was clearly influenced by these beliefs as he wrote a good portion of the New Testament that is almost exclusively dedicated to the “*miracle-laden*” life and deeds of Jesus. The Christian Scriptures, in fact, are often identified as the Greek New Testament, as it was originally written in that language.

Despite Jesus’ pronouncement (Paul never met Jesus personally), “*I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel,*” (Matthew 15:24) Paul took his message to the gentiles. (The truth of the matter is that he was woefully unsuccessful with converting Jews to his Jesus movement) Cognizant that the rigors of Judaism were an impediment to conversion, he made the process of becoming “*Jewish*” extremely easy. He abolished the need for circumcision, professing a belief in Jesus supplanted the performance of Mitzvot, and one merely had to dunk in water (Baptism) in order to join! Furthermore, Paul preached that the slightest infraction against the Torah was tantamount to violating the entire Torah, therefore the only way to be redeemed was to admit that one hasn’t the power to do good and must accept the vicarious atonement offered by the blood of Jesus.

**Here are the major religious philosophies and beliefs that Paul “*invented*”:**

- Suspension of circumcision as a prerequisite for “conversion” to Judaism
- Vicarious (or transfer of guilt) atonement through belief in the resurrected body of Jesus.
- Abrogation of basic Jewish practices such as observance of the Sabbath and Holidays, Kashrut, and family purity laws.
- Belief that one could not achieve the “*Kingdom of Heaven,*” through righteous deeds, unless one also believed in Jesus as the Messiah and god.
- Concept of the Trinity or tripartite godhead that consists of The Father, The Son and The Holy Spirit.
- The claim that the Messiah had to die and be resurrected from the dead.

**These form the major tenets of most of Christendom to this day.**

It should be noted at this point, and conveyed to the students, that Christianity today is not a monolithic system. Just like Judaism, it defies superficial generalizations. In telling the history of Christianity, we are using the Catholic Church as a reference point. When we speak of contemporary missionary work targeting Jews, we will identify them as Fundamentalist or Evangelical Christians. There are many denominations today that do not practice overt (or even covert) proselytizing of Jews. One of them is the Catholic Church who pronounced from the Vatican that Judaism is a valid system for approaching God, and its followers will inherit the kingdom of Heaven (we are eternally grateful to the Pope for that concession).