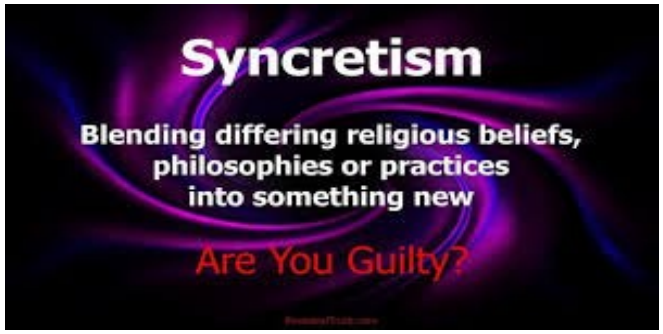


Mark's gospel records the critical point in time when Jesus called the 12 men who became the foundation of

> *"He appointed twelve (whom he named apostles) so that they would be with him ..."* (Mk. 3:14 NET).

the new expression of the people of God (Church): Unlike the Rabbi's of the day - or modern educational facilities to which students apply for entry/acceptance - Jesus *called* the disciples *He wanted* (v 13) to *be with him*. In 1st century Judaism, the objective of a disciple was two-fold: to acquire knowledge/understanding from his teacher, and to become like his rabbi in terms of his character. Both these objectives were achieved as the student or learner spent considerable time in the company of, and subject to the authority of, his rabbi. Jesus used this methodology to the train the 12. Having modelled and taught the lifestyle of the kingdom of God for 3 years, when He returned back to the glory of His Father in Heaven, He commissioned these men (His apostles) to imitate what He had done with them, all within the con-

> *"Go and make disciples of all nations...teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."* (Matthew 28:19,20 NIV).

text of the church (the new Israel of God): Christianity is a "Coram Deo" religion. God gathers His elect into His church (new spiritual humanity, Kingdom of God) as the word of God is truthfully and faithfully proclaimed. These "called ones" respond to the Spirit's regenerating and quickening work in their soul and, just like the 12 whom Christ chose, they also come to Jesus, and continue to respond to the desire that the same Spirit of God implants within them to spend time with Jesus, learn from Him, and live for Him.

God Dwells in the Midst of His People

The Bible begins with God dwelling in the midst of His image-bearing people, whom He created to experience true life in a close personal relationship with Himself. Sin destroyed this reality. The righteous, morally pure, holy God cannot dwell with unrighteous, impure, unholy people! In fact, the Bible warns that if one was able to behold God's transcendent, majestic glory, just one glimpse would be fatal! Mankind forfeited the privilege of living with God when Adam and his wife Eve - the God appointed representatives of the human race - betrayed their Creator when they were deceived into disobeying their loving Lord in Eden.



Yet in amazing mercy, God initiated His redemptive plan to restore His now lost people back into a right relationship with Himself. God's Son, Jesus, is the only way back home to God. In (and through) Christ, God's redeemed people experience God's presence spiritually again. When Christ returns, then His people will dwell in His presence fully and forever. God's has guaranteed this promise by giving the indwelling presence of His Holy Spirit to every believer (Ephesians 1:13-14).

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What's the BIG Idea?

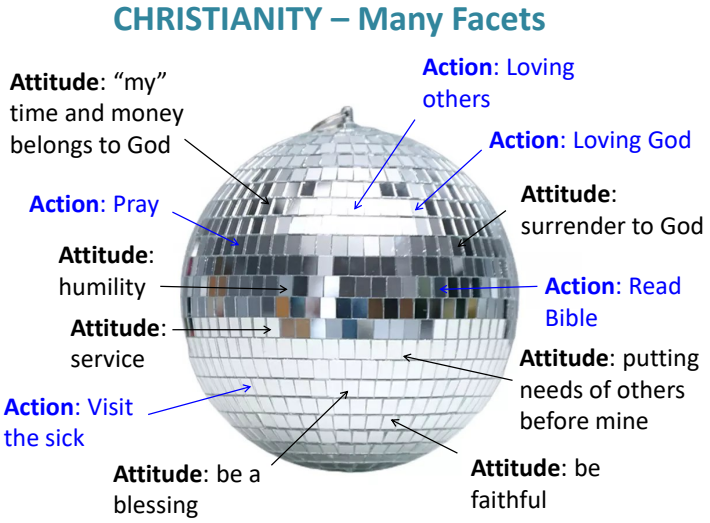


Christianity

One V Many

Every organisation comprises a myriad of different essential individual parts, all of which contribute to the overall functioning of the whole e.g. one V many. This is also the case with Christianity - the religion derived from the revelation of God's truth to mankind in the Bible.

It's often easier to understand something complex by breaking it down into its individual sub-component parts (facets). Yet this reductionist approach is also problematic, often resulting in a lack of balance or understanding, because one ends up focused so much on the individual parts that the "big picture" is missed! Christianity and the Kingdom of God are essentially synonyms, expressing a major theme which undergirds the entire Bible. It



makes good sense to subdivide this complex "whole" (one) into its "many" component parts - provided that we realise that in the process of "drilling down" into the content of the Christian faith it is possible to "lose sight of the elephant!" We need to do both i.e. maintain a high level appreciation for the "one," whilst at the same time appreciating the "many" individual facets that are important to our overall understanding of the whole. It has been said that "main thing is to do the main thing!" But equally, the "main thing is to **see** the main thing!"

Is there one "Big Idea" or "Main thing" that encapsulates Christianity? Is there one central summary message? Is there one "takeaway" of Christianity, or the Christian Faith or the Kingdom of God?

What's the BIG Idea?

At the time of the Protestant Reformation, now over 500 years ago, Martin Luther - the man whom God used to initiate the reformation and the resulting transformation of the Church - might have answered this question using a couple of Latin words - "Coram Deo." Latin is now a "dead" language - like Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek: the languages in which the Bible was originally written. What does "Coram Deo" mean in English? "Deo" is a noun that means God. "Coram" is an adverb related to the noun "Cora" which literally means "pupil of the eye." Thus "Coram Deo" means *"living in the Presence of," "under the authority of,"* and *"to the honour and glory of God."*

Jesus expressed the same idea in different words e.g. when asked what was the Greatest Commandment in God's law, He replied:

"'You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: *'Love your neighbor as yourself.'* The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments" (Matthew 22:37-40 NLT).

And in the context of one of Jesus' great teaching discourses, the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said:

'Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously … (Matthew 6:33 NLT).

Later the apostle Paul expressed the same priority in his letters to the Ephesians and Philippians:

"...that you may know (Christ) better" (Eph 1:17 NIV); *"I want to know Christ… "*(Phil 3:10 NIV).

Coram Deo Disciple

To live as a "Coram Deo" disciple is to orient one's life so that every moment of every day, one is mindfully aware of God's closeness and proximity, wherever one is, and in everything one does. Though God is "invisible" to our physical sense organs, it is to know that Jesus is present with us spiritually, by His Holy Spirit, moment by moment, every day!

Then (Jesus) said to the crowd, *"If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross daily, and follow me.* [24] *If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it.* [25] *And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but are yourself lost or destroyed?"* (Luke 9:23-25 NLT).

To live "Coram Deo" is to utterly subordinate oneself to the service of Almighty God, living completely under His authority and control, willingly accepting and responding to His Lordship and Sovereignty. It is to forsake one's own rights, interests and desires, and to recognise that, given who Jesus my Saviour is and what He has done for me, there is no price that I will not pay, no cost that is too high, no sacrifice that is too great to distract me from living as a devoted disciple of my Lord Jesus Christ.

Syncretism

This term describes a concept where God's truth is blended with other expressions of "truth" - usually derived from one's surrounding culture. Though this reality has plagued God's people across redemptive history, it has no place in the life of a true disciple of Jesus Christ: I cannot follow Christ *on my terms,* regardless of the messaging that modern evangelical Christianity often communicates. To "take up your cross daily" means to die (be crucified) to self and to be utterly, wholeheartedly, exclusively committed to Jesus, not just today, but tomorrow, and the day after, and the day after that etc.