

## The Stoic Religion

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by Wayne Goff

The Stoic philosophy was very influential in the first century. I refer to it as a “religion” because it held to a pantheistic view of the universe. Stoics believed in a *seemingly* rational being with intelligence and will, but not really a personal god.

“The Stoics believed in a perpetual cycle of cosmic destruction, in which the entire universe was destroyed by fire and then reborn with everything occurring exactly as before” (Hubbard, Moyer, Paul & the Stoics).

There are some Americans today who would feel comfortable with a non-personal “god”(?) empowering the universe. In this sense, they would be similar to the Stoics.

These same people would probably subscribe also to the Stoic notion that the mature person does not need any help from others in order to attain peace, happiness and contentment. According to Epictetus, one of Paul’s Stoic contemporaries, the key to moral transformation was simply to “purify your thinking” (Epictetus, *Discourses* 4:1.112).

### Christianity

The apostle Paul met the Stoics in Athens, Greece, and was very familiar with their philosophy. The great difference between Paul’s faith and teaching and the Stoic’s is that Paul taught the personal God who opposes all forces of evil, and who commands us to be a certain way and to do certain things.

Like the Stoics, Christians are expected to endure hardships (2 Tim. 2:3), suffering (Rom. 8:18), and to overcome by the power of the Spirit-led mind (Romans 8). The difference is that the Stoics thought one could do this without Divine guidance.

The New Testament teaches us to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, Romans 12:2; to overcome lust and evil by putting on the mind of Christ, Romans 13:14; and by purifying our minds by thinking on good, pure things (Philippians 4:8).

### Biblical Love

The Stoic philosophy had no teaching in comparison to the love (agapē) found in the New Testament. But then again, neither did any other world philosophy! Divine love which God displayed in the giving of His only begotten Son who died for the sins of the world (Jn. 3:16; Romans 5:8-10) is offered as the greatest motive to becoming a child of God. God then enjoins the Christian to love like He does! *“But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil”* (Luke 6:35). The Stoic believed love to be overly emotional and therefore dangerous to the thought processes of one trying to gain mastery over himself. Christianity says the greatest of all is “love,” 1 Corinthians 13:13!

Stoicism came to an end over the years, and though some of its precepts remain in the minds of the unreligious, Christianity is alive and well and calls us to be and to become the great product of Divine love. Rather than being “overly emotional,” true love is learned, disciplined, calculating, and cool. It treats one’s neighbor as oneself. It does to others what God expects. Love triumphs over life, death and all things in this passing world.

Dear reader, are you a Christian?

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