

Essentials of the Christian Faith

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Introduction

When it comes to the essentials of the historic Christian faith, all believers should be able to explain what they believe and why they believe it.

The six essentials that will be covered in this course are:

1. The Bible
2. God the Father
3. Jesus
4. The Holy Spirit and his relationship to the believer
5. Salvation
6. The End Times

Faith and Reason

God's revelation about himself and his redemptive plan for mankind requires both faith and reason. God has revealed himself in both concrete and abstract terms that man can reasonably understand and grasp (ie. Natural and moral laws, the incarnational ministry of his Son, the Holy Scriptures, the gospel story, etc.). God has also revealed aspects of his plan and his own nature that, though they do not violate reason, are beyond our ability to fully grasp or explain (ie. Creation, miracles, the incarnation itself, sovereignty of God, the Trinity, etc.).

The response of man regarding both the known and not fully known revelation of God is faith. God gives us enough information to make a reasonable determination regarding himself. Faith, then, takes the next step to believe based upon this reasonable yet incomplete information.

What do we believe about the Bible?

Our church's doctrinal statement:

We believe that the Bible is the final authority of the believer for faith and practice and should be interpreted normally, literally, grammatically, historically and contextually. We believe in the plenary and verbal inspiration of the Scriptures, whereas the Holy Spirit superintended the divinely prepared human authors of Scripture so that using their own backgrounds, personalities and styles, they composed and recorded without error God's revelation to man in the words of the original autographs (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:20-21).

Authority of the Scriptures

The Bible is the final authority for faith and practice. What we mean by this is that there is no authority that we can appeal to in determining truth and how we can live to please God.

Every other authority (the church, pastor, author, priest, Pope, etc.) has to subordinate themselves to the Scriptures. If any man or institution makes a statement that contradicts the Word, that statement, no matter who made it, is wrong.

Every experience has to be measured by the teachings of God's Word. If we experience something in life that seems like truth, yet that experience contradicts the Word, it is not from God and should be rejected.

Why do we hold such a high view of scripture?

Inspiration

The scriptures are inspired by God. What does this mean?

- Are the words of scripture inspired?
- Are the writers of scripture inspired?
- Are the concepts of scripture inspired?

The two main texts that we turn to in understanding inspiration are 2 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:20-21.

2 Timothy 3:16 ¹⁶ All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness..."

The phrase "All Scripture is God breathed" (πᾶσα γραφὴ θεόπνευστος) means that all the written text of the Bible is the product of God. Therefore, it is not the writers themselves or the concepts that are inspired but the very words.

Jesus endorsed verbal plenary inspiration in the following statements:

Matthew 5:18 ¹⁸ "For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.

Luke 20:27-38. He defended the belief of life after death by citing **Exodus 3:6** "..."I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Jesus used verb tense to prove his point.

Matthew 22:41-46 ⁴¹ Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question: ⁴² "What do you think about the Christ, whose son is He?" They said to Him, "The son of David." ⁴³ He said to them, "Then how does David in the Spirit call Him 'Lord,' saying, ⁴⁴ 'THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, "SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I PUT YOUR ENEMIES BENEATH YOUR FEET "'? ⁴⁵ "If David then calls

Him 'Lord,' how is He his son?" ⁴⁶ No one was able to answer Him a word, nor did anyone dare from that day on to ask Him another question.

Paul endorsed the idea that inspiration was communicated through words:

1 Corinthians 2:12-13 ¹² Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, ¹³ which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual *thoughts* with spiritual *words*.

Process of inspiration

2 Peter 1:20-21 ²⁰ But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is *a matter* of one's own interpretation, ²¹ for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

Inerrancy

Does the Bible contain error?

Because God has superintended the writing of each human author, every word of Scripture is wholly true and without error in the original autographs. This truth is based upon the following syllogism: (1) the words of scripture are the product of God (1 Cor. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20-21), (2) It is impossible for God to lie (Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18), therefore, (3) the Bible is wholly true and without error as it was originally written (Jn. 10:35).

Jesus cited OT passages referring to Adam and Eve (Matt. 19:3-5), the Noahic flood (Matt. 24:38-39) and the account of Jonah (Matt. 12:40) as historically accurate.

But we don't have the original documents any longer...what about our Bible today?

Illustration of the "RULER"

Canon

How was it determined that the books contained in our Bible are the only books that are inspired by God? Why not the Apocrypha or other ancient religious writings (ie. Quran, Book of Mormon, etc.)?

The term Canon refers to the rule or standard by which each of the books of the Bible were observed to be inspired by God. Because God inspired all of scripture (2 Tim. 3:16), by its very nature all of inspired scripture is self-authenticating. In general there are five tests that seem sufficient to determine whether or not a book bears evidence that it is inspired by God: (1) Is the book written by a prophet of God? Was it directly written or its writings overseen by one who possessed divine authority (ie. prophet, apostle)? (2)

Was the writer confirmed by acts of God? Did the author perform miracles or did their prophecies come true? (3) Does the book tell the truth about God? Is its message consistent with other received scriptures? (4) Is the book dynamic? Does it come with the power of God to change lives? (5) Was the book accepted by the people of God? Did the original recipients receive the book as divinely authoritative?¹

All 66 books of the Bible pass these self authenticating tests of divine origin. By contrast, it is not difficult to discern by reading the Apocrypha, the Quran or the Book of Mormon that these writings do not measure up to the tests of canonicity.

The OT scriptures were accepted by the NT writers to be from God. Jesus referred to the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms as Scripture (Lk. 24:44-45). Paul referred to the OT as Holy Scripture (2 Tim. 3:15). At the council of Jamnia (AD 90) the OT was publicly recognized as canonical.²

The NT scriptures showed early acceptance by its recipients and (in the case of Paul's writings) was even referred to by the Apostle Peter as equal to OT scripture (2 Pet. 3:16). "Since A.D. 397 the Christian church has considered the canon of the Bible to be complete."³

¹ The five tests for canonicity are a summary of: Geisler and Nix. General Introduction to the Bible. p.222-231

² Enns. Moody Handbook of Theology. p.171

³ Ryrie. Basic Theology. p.106