

Bible Basics

**Fundamental Doctrines
of the
Christian Faith**



By Pastor John Feakes

Bible Basics: The Fundamental Doctrines
of the Christian Faith

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Introduction

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness”

-2 Timothy 3:16

From its very beginning, Christianity has been a *teaching* religion. It has a unique *message* to share that is anchored solidly in history—past, present, and future. According to the Bible, the centerpiece of history is God Himself, who came into the world in the Person of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Bible insists that one must believe the Gospel (the good news) of Jesus Christ in order to have a right relationship with God. Here we see that the way of salvation involves a content-rich message that one must understand, believe, and act upon in order to find eternal salvation.

Of course, one needn't be a scholar to have a right relationship with God. Paul reminded his disciple Timothy that he had known the Scriptures since he was a child, and that what he knew was sufficient for salvation (2 Timothy 3:15). As someone once said concerning essential Bible doctrine, “The main things are the plain things.”

My prayer is that this introduction to the “main things” of Christian doctrine will leave you blessed, encouraged, and closer to God.

J.F.

1. The Doctrine of God

The Bible nowhere tries to argue for the existence of God. Rather, the Bible simply assumes that God exists and insists that it is foolish to do otherwise (Psalm 14:1). This is because God has made His existence abundantly clear immediately in every person's heart. He has also given us the ability to recognize the Creator's "signature" on the created order (Romans 1:18-20).

Isaiah 42:5-9 describes God as the eternal creator of the world. We learn here that God is a personal agent (he has a mind, will, and emotions), and not simply an impersonal force. As such, God can and does communicate with people. When He does, we can be sure that His word is always the truth; *God cannot lie* (Hebrews 6:18; Titus 1:2).

The God of the Bible has revealed Himself to be a singular Being (there is only one God). However, this singular Being is multi-personal. That is to say, there are Three eternal and divine Persons who share the exact same undivided nature. We refer to these Persons as the Father, the Son (Jesus), and the Holy Spirit (1 John 5:7). *God exists as a Trinity.*

At a point in time, the Son took a human nature; He entered the human race without ceasing to be God. Jesus, we may say, is one Person now with two natures. He is the ultimate representative of God and man, for he is both. (See John 1:1,14; 1 Timothy 3:16; Philippians 2:5-11)

2. The Doctrine of the Bible

The Bible is God's revelation to humankind. Though He used men to write and preserve His special revelation, every word of the Bible is what God ordained to be there (Proverbs 30:5-6).

The Bible is actually a sacred library of books that took 40 men over 1500 years to write. It is split into two great parts, the Old Testament (written from c.1400 BC to 400 BC) and the New Testament (written from c. AD 40-95).

The 39 books of the Old Testament are arranged by genera. Genesis to Esther are historical books. From Job to Song of Solomon we have poetry. The last section (from Isaiah to Malachi) is prophecy. All of these books were written before Jesus was born. Nevertheless, He is the great theme of all of them (John 5:39; Acts 10:43).

The New Testament was written shortly after Jesus completed His earthly ministry. Of course, He is the great theme of these books as well. The first five books of the New Testament are historical. From Romans to Jude we have letters that deal with both theology and practical instruction for Christians. The last book of the Bible is prophetical in nature.

The entire Bible is inerrant and infallible (Psalm 119:160). It is from God (2 Peter 1:20-21; 2 Timothy 3:16-17) and should be studied (2 Timothy 2:15) and applied to our lives (Psalm 119:9).

3. Creation and Corruption

The world we live in today is a mess. Violence, sickness, and natural disasters plague the planet. If God is so good, why did He make a world like this? This short answer is, he didn't. Genesis 1:26-31 explains that God created a "very good" world in the beginning. There was no suffering, bloodshed or death. This world was entrusted to the care of our first parents, Adam and Eve. They were the king and queen over the created order.

God gave them one moral command, a restriction from eating from one particular tree (Genesis 2:16-17). God warned them that the penalty for their disobedience (sin) would be death. Physical death is when a person's spirit separates from their body. Spiritual death occurs when a person's spirit becomes estranged from God, who is the source of all truth, love, and joy.

According to Genesis 3:1-7, Adam and Eve sinned against God and their disobedience changed the world forever. When they fell, the created order fell too (Romans 5:12; 8:19-23). The suffering and death we now see in the world testifies to the fact that a holy God will not allow moral evil in His universe to go unpunished (Psalm 9:16).

The world is in a mess right now. It limps along, a mere shadow of the very good world it once was. The good news is that God will not leave us in this terrible condition. God in Christ will change things!

4. Sin and Salvation

Adam was father and representative of the whole human family. When he fell, the whole human race fell with him. This left the human race with two huge problems:

Humans are guilty of sinning (Romans 3:23).
Humans are sinners by nature (Genesis 8:21;
Psalm 51:5).

We come into the world double disasters. We are guilty sinners whose crimes must be punished. Eternal conscious torment in hell is our future. What's more, our sin natures prevent entrance into heaven. We are simply unfit to fellowship with God in that blessed place. The picture is a bleak one indeed! The good news is that God in Christ has solved both of these great problems.

The Bible is clear that Christ came into the world and died in our place. That is, Christ was punished for the wrong things we did. He made us savable. He *provided* us with forgiveness and salvation. We *appropriate* these benefits by trusting in Jesus. Ephesians 2:8-9 and Romans 4:5 are tremendous verse passages that remind us that salvation is a free gift that needs to be received by faith. There is more. When a person receives Christ as Savior, they're not just declared innocent, but they are made righteous. Somehow, God is able to make us new creatures, fit for the kingdom of God. That is our message to the world (2 Corinthians 5:14-21).

5. Israel and the Old Testament

Before Christ came, God had used His special people, national-ethnic Israel, as His exclusive channel of special revelation and blessing (Deuteronomy 4:5-8, 32-40; Ephesians 2:11-12). Central to Israel's religious system was the Mosaic Law and God's covenant associated with it.

The law of Moses contained 613 commandments, which were intended to accomplish several things. First, the law was intended to keep civil order in the land that God had promised His people. Second, the law showed clearly that God alone could be trusted to make reconciliation between Himself and mankind; we can only approach God on His terms.

Third, the law showed us that rules and regulations are powerless to establish a right relationship with God. In fact, because no one was able to keep the law flawlessly, the law brought condemnation and death. In effect, the law showed us that we are in need of a Savior, someone who could fulfill the law on our behalf. Finally, the law looked ahead, whether in clear prophecy, or in symbol, shadow, and type, to Jesus Christ, Israel's Messiah and the Savior of the world.

It is important to understand that before and after the giving of the Law, God chose to respond to a person's faith in order to grant salvation (Romans 4:1-13). The question is, now that Christ has come, what does the believer have to do with the Law?

6. The Church and the New Testament

The English word “church” translates the Greek “ekklesia,” which refers to a “called-out” group of people. During His earthly ministry, the Lord Jesus said that He would build His church (Matthew 16:18). Unseen by the Old Testament prophets, this group forms a unique and mysterious entity.

Shortly after Christ ascended into heaven, the church was officially born (Acts 2). The Holy Spirit baptized all believers in Jesus into a single spiritual body (1 Corinthians 12:12-13). The church is the body of Christ (Ephesians 5:28-32), and a temple, a habitation for God in the Spirit (Ephesians 2:22; 1 Corinthians 6:19). Christians are called both living stones and New Covenant priests (1 Peter 2:4-10).

At its inception and during its very early history, the church was made up of only Jewish believers. Soon it became clear that God desired His unique body to be made up of both Jews and Gentiles. During this present “church age” God is using the church as His channel of revelation and blessing. Unbelieving Israel has been set aside for now. When the church has fulfilled its mission, Israel will recognize and receive her Messiah. God has not cast away His people (Romans 11:25-29).

The Mosaic Law, however, has been forever set aside. It was fulfilled in Christ the Lord, who is “the end of the Law for righteousness to everyone who believes” (Romans 10:4; also see Galatians 3-5).

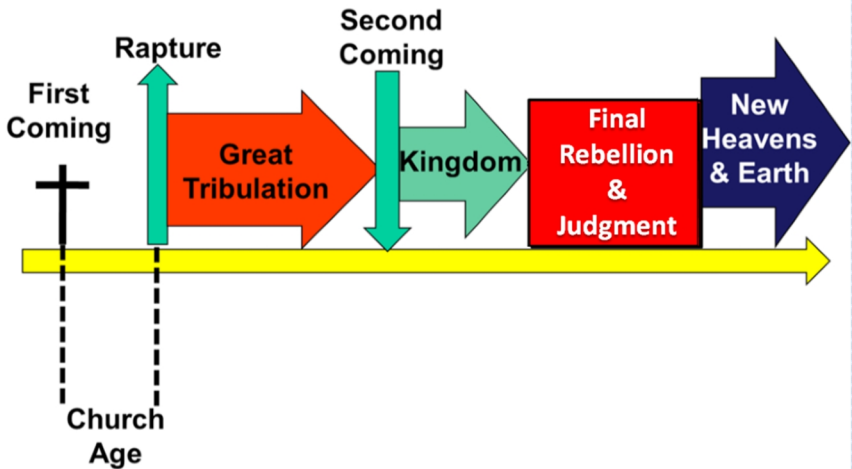
7. Future Things

The Bible is replete with teachings concerning the future. Paul had only three weeks with the saints in Thessalonica (Acts 17:2). Even so, when he wrote to them concerning the future, he was confident they had perfect understanding of these things (1 Thessalonians 5:1). Prophecy is a Bible basic!

The next event on God's calendar is the rapture of the church; God will suddenly transport His church into heaven to be with Jesus (John 14:1-3; 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18). Shortly after this, Satan's man, the Antichrist (a.k.a. "the beast"), will arise on the world stage. He will have millions of loyal followers (Revelation 13:4). He will establish a seven-year peace treaty with Israel, but half way through he will break the treaty and seek to destroy God's people (Daniel 9:27; Matthew 24:15-21). The last three and a half years of the present age will be the most terrible (Mark 13:14-20). Along with Antichrist's reign of terror, the world will experience God's supernatural judgments (Revelation 6-19).

The present world will end with the return of Christ (Revelation 19). He will consign the wicked to "the pit" and establish His kingdom (Revelation 20:1-6). His kingdom will last 1,000 years, at the end of which time there will be a final rebellion against Christ's wise and benevolent rule (Revelation 20:7-15). God will consign the wicked to the Lake of Fire. The righteous will inherit a new and perfect world of peace, love, and joy (Revelation 21:1-5).

Future Things Chronology: Additional Information:



solid understanding of Daniel, we can come to the book of Revelation, where the same symbolic language is used. Additional information from the other books of the Bible may then be (carefully!) inserted in the basic chronology given in these two sources.

8. Prayer

Minimally, prayer is simply addressing God. More than that, prayer must be, to one extent or other, a sincere expression of dependence and gratitude (Philippians 4:6-7). Prayer is a skill to be taught and learned. In Luke 11:1-4, Christ's disciples asked Him to teach them how to pray. In response the Lord gave them a model prayer (also see His model prayer in Matthew 6:9-13) that includes at least seven basic concerns and petitions:

1. God's glory; 2. God's kingdom; 3. God's will; 4. Our needs; 5. Confession of sin (the need for forgiveness); 6. Pursuit of holiness; 7. Protection

Additional Guides to Prayer:

Jesus stressed that prayers are to be heartfelt, not mindless rote or chant (Matthew 6:7). When we pray, our motives should be free of selfishness (Matthew 6:5; James 4:2-3). The Bible instructs us to be consistent in our prayers (1 Thessalonians 5:17; Ephesians 6:18). The Lord Jesus spoke two parables meant to encourage persistent prayer (Luke 11:5-10; 18:1-8).

It is important to recognize and appreciate that prayer is a tremendous privilege. Only through Christ's redemptive work on the cross could we be granted such a privilege as this. May we never forget the tremendous cost of our having bold access to the throne of grace (Hebrews 4:15-16).

The Lord Jesus in Prayer:

Jesus Christ was (and is!) the perfect human. He walked a flawless, faithful walk with His heavenly Father. If we are to walk as He walked (1 John 2:6), then we must be people of prayer, just as He was a man of prayer.

Somehow, mysteriously, the Lord prayed to His Father at incarnation (Hebrews 10:5-7). He prayed at His baptism, at the very beginning of His public ministry (Luke 3:21). Later we are told that He prayed early in the morning before sunrise (Mark 1:35). He often withdrew into the wilderness to pray (Luke 5:16). On at least one occasion He spent the whole night in prayer (Luke 6:12). Later He sent apostles away by boat, but remained and prayed (Mark 6:44-45).

On one occasion He publicly gave thanks to His Father for revealing Gospel mysteries to the simple and humble (Luke 10:21). On another occasion He prayed publicly that the Father would be glorified (John 12:28). This prayer got an audible response from the Father in heaven! John 17 contains Christ's magnificent "High Priestly Prayer." Shortly after, the Lord prayed fervently in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22). At the very end of life, He addressed His Father in prayer, "Into Your hands I commit My Spirit" (Luke 23:46). Even now the Lord is praying and making intercession for us (Hebrews 7:25). He is our Perfect Advocate, Jesus Christ the Righteous, Holy One of God (1 John 2:1)!

“For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.”

- Romans 15:4

Jesus said that His words are spirit and life (John 6: 63). God’s word is true from the beginning (Psalm 119:160) and it is His truth that sets people free (John 8:32). God’s word sets people free from confusion; it is by faith we understand (Hebrews 11:3). It also sets us free from guilt and despair and instead replaces these with renewal and hope. The following verses tell us the truth about those who have entered into a love/trust relationship with the Lord Jesus. *No matter how the believer may feel, these words remain unchangeably true.*

Christ’s People Are:

Forgiven

(1 John 1:9; Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 2:13; 1 John 2:12)

Justified

(Romans 8:33-34)

New Creations

(2 Corinthians 5:17; 1 Peter 1:23; Titus 3:5)

Adopted into God’s Family

(Romans 8:15-17; John 1:12; Galatians 4:7; Ephesians 1:4-6; 1 Peter 1:3-4)

Redeemed, Purchased by Christ Himself

(1 Corinthians 6:19-20; 1 Peter 1:18-20)

Washed, Clean, and Set Apart

(1 Corinthians 6:11)

Free

(John 8:31-32; 2 Corinthians 3:17; Romans 6:17-18)

Clothed with God's Own Righteousness

(2 Corinthians 5:21)

Secure in this Position

(2 Corinthians 1:21-22; John 10:28-30; Ephesians 1:13-14)

Overcomers

(Romans 16:20; Revelation 12:7-11)

Spiritually Positioned with Christ in Heaven

(Ephesians 1:20-23, 2:6)

Granted Authority over Evil Spirits

(Luke 10:19-20)

Granted Protection

(1 John 5:18)

Never Alone

(Matthew 28:20; Hebrews 13:5-6)

“Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ . To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.”

- 2 Peter 3:18

In Defense of the Faith

What we covered so far form what I take to be the very basics of the Christian faith. Central to it all is the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus Christ. For those that love and trust Him, His Gospel is good news indeed! For many people, however, trusting in Christ is simply an irrational leap in the dark. What good reason can there be for believing the biblical record and for trusting in Christ? The short answer is that mountains of fine books have been written on the topic. People with the highest intellectual credentials from a broad spectrum of academic disciplines have advanced many good arguments for the Christian faith. In short, their approaches to defending the faith can be distilled down into two main philosophies.

The first is called *evidentialism*. As the name implies, the evidentialist seeks to bring as much pertinent historical, scientific, and philosophical data to the table as possible. His intention is to show that when the ordinary rules of historic, scientific, and philosophical investigation are applied to the Bible and its claims, the most reasonable conclusion is that the Bible is very probably true. The overriding philosophy here is to “follow the evidence where it leads.” Many ardent defenders of the Christian faith were once skeptics who adopted this very approach. For them the evidence was positively overwhelming; their conversion to Christianity was, among other things, an expression of their intellectual honesty.

The second approach is more philosophical. Using this *presuppositional* approach, the Christian openly admits that He takes, on faith, that the Bible is the perfect word of God. He will then point out that *everyone has ultimate faith commitments*. For instance, the atheist assumes that unaided human reason is generally reliable. Whatever reason he gives for holding this view comes out of the use of (supposedly) unaided human reason. He simply assumes this to be correct. He cannot prove it to be so.

To break the stalemate between the two competing faith systems, the Christian will point out that the non-believer's faith commitments about reality simply do not provide him with what he needs to make sense of the world. Minimally, there must be objective standards, a "right" way to reason (i.e. the laws of logic). In addition, he must have some guarantee that his mind and senses are at least generally reliable and that natural processes have, and will continue to, unfold in a generally uniform way. The God of the Bible is the only One qualified to supply these necessary "preconditions of intelligibility." God alone can provide us with the objective standards for reason; He alone accounts for our ability to think rationally or act morally. He alone guarantees that our minds and senses are generally reliable (He designed them!). He alone can (and does) guarantee that the world is an orderly, intelligible cosmos. Ironically, it is the non-believer's ability to think and learn that gives us a powerful reason to trust in the God of the Bible!

Additional Resources

Learning the Bible:

Books:

Max Anders, *30 Days to Understanding the Bible*

Ray Stedman, *Adventuring Through the Bible* (two volumes; Old Testament, New Testament)

Websites:

Newlifesanctuarychurch.com

Sermonaudio.com

Evidential Defense for the Faith

Books:

Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*

Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ*

William Lane Craig, *On Guard*

Norman Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*

John Warwick Montgomery, *Faith Founded on Fact: Essays in Evidential Apologetics*

Phil Fernandes, *The God Who Sits Enthroned;*
(see also *Hijacking the Historical Jesus*)

Websites:

Reasonablefaith.org
Apologetics315.com

Presuppositional Defense for the Faith**Books:**

Greg Bahnsen, *Always Ready: Directions for Defending the Faith*; (Dr. Bahnsen also wrote *Van Til's Apologetic*, another fine book on the topic)

Jason Lisle, *The Ultimate Proof of Creation*

Websites:

Newlifesanctuarychurch.com
Apologetics315.com

Focus on the Biblical Doctrines of Creation and the Flood**Books:**

Walter T. Brown, *In the Beginning: Compelling Evidence for Creation and the Flood*

Vance Ferrell, *Science vs Evolution*

Jonathan Sarfati, *Refuting Evolution vols. 1&2*

Websites:

Creation.com
Answersingenesis.org
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