

Introduction

The Fundamentals of the Faith were taken from the Word of God, and can be traced through the first two thousand years of Christianity. However, when the attack of relativism arose, the response was the articulation of basic beliefs that all Christians should share. In 1877 a conference at the Church of the Holy Trinity in New York pastors from all major denominations called out the significant rise of liberalism in their circles, and led a new cry for a return to the foundations of Christianity. These basic beliefs were trumpeted in another conference in 1895. A group called the Niagra group laid out the five tenants of belief that someone should have if they are to call themselves a Christian.

The Attack

The new liberalism that was showing up in the mainline denominations was from the Higher Critics in Europe. A relativism, or belief that there are no absolute truths in this world, was beginning to find its way from Europe, to American Academia, and finally to the churches. The Critics began to call in to question the basic truths of God's Word. Protestant churches were beginning to remove from the pulpit, and refuse to ordain, any pastor who did not affirm the basic truths of the Christian religion. This was causing controversy as the liberals began to fight back. There was a need to declare what was true and this is what the Niagra group did. In 1910, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, USA declared that these five truths must be affirmed by any candidate that was seeking ordination. Over the next few decades men like Bishop Manning of the Episcopal church and James Broucher of the Northern Baptist group called on believers to "play ball" and get along with those who did not espouse the fundamentals. Fundamentalists like J. Gresham Machen believed it was unthinkable that any fundamentalist should work side side with the liberals. The fight was on, and has continued over the next 100 years.

The "Fundamentals"

The fundamentals of the Christian Faith can be listed as follows: (1) the inerrancy of the Scriptures, (2) the deity of Christ, (3) His virgin birth, (4) His substitutionary atonement, and (5) His physical resurrection and future bodily return.

Inerrancy of Scripture

Since God cannot lie (Heb. 6:18; Titus 1:2; Rom. 3:4) and the Bible is the Word of God (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20-21), it makes logical sense that the Bible is completely inspired and without error (Jn. 17:17; Ps. 119:160). In fact, this is the affirmation of Scripture itself. The psalmist writes, "The words of the Lord are *pure words*; as silver tried in a furnace on the earth, refined seven times" (Ps. 12:6). Solomon writes, "Every word of God proves true" (Prov. 30:5). From biblical affirmations like these, Christian theologians have concluded the doctrine of *inerrancy*.

A well accepted definition of inerrancy is this: *everything the Bible teaches, it teaches without error*. This would include everything from theology and morals to history and science.

Jesus believed that the entire OT was inspired by God—even down to the smallest letter. He said, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, *not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen*, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished” (Mt. 5:17-18). OT scholar R. Laird Harris writes, “The ‘smallest’ letter was the Hebrew ‘Yodh,’ the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet. Just what is meant by the ‘least stroke of the pen’ is less clear. Most take it to refer to the small parts of Hebrew letters which distinguish one from the other, like our dot over the ‘i’ and cross of the ‘t.’”[2] Moreover, Jesus included the “Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms” (Lk. 24:44) in his understanding of the OT. Jesus claimed, “The Scripture cannot be broken” (Jn. 10:35), and he held that Scripture was different than religious tradition (Mk. 7:5-13). He believed in Sodom and Gomorrah, and its judgment (Mt. 10:15). He believed in Noah and the historic Flood (Mt. 24:37). He believed in the historic Adam and Eve (Mt. 19:4). He believed in the prophet Elijah (Lk. 4:25). Jesus believed in the traditional authorship of the OT books (Mk. 12:26 MOSES; Mk. 12:36 DAVID; Mt. 24:15 DANIEL). He even believed in highly criticized sections of Scripture like Jonah and the whale (Mt. 12:39-41), citing them as historical events.

The Deity of Christ

1: The Bible Teaches That There Is One True God Jesus’ divinity is part of the doctrine of the Trinity. This is important to understand because many objectors to the deity of Jesus misunderstand what Christians believe about the Trinity. Christians believe what the Bible teaches—that there is only one true and living God (Deuteronomy 6:4; cf. 1 Corinthians 8:6).

2: The Bible Teaches That Jesus Pre-Existed Before The World Was Genesis 1:1 tells us, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” In John 1:1 we read the same words, “In the beginning.”⁸ John informs us in John 1:1 that in the beginning was the Word (logos) and that the Word was not only with God but was God. This Word is the one who brought all things into being at creation (John 1:3). In his prayer in John 17:3–5 Jesus both refers to his pre-existence and uses terminology that can only be used about deity: Paul’s words in Philippians 2:5–8

3: Jesus Is Creator Not Creature Jehovah’s Witnesses believe Paul’s statement in Colossians 1:15 that the “firstborn of all creation” teaches that Jesus was a created being. However, the Jehovah’s Witnesses’ teaching resembles the view of the ancient Colossian heresy that Paul had to combat. (Genesis. 49:3–4; Exodus 4:22). In fact, the evidence that Jesus is supreme over all creation comes in Colossians 1:16. Here, Paul absolutely rules out the idea that Jesus is a created being because he presents

Jesus as the Creator of the entire universe which exists by his creative power (John 1:1–3; Hebrews 1:2, 8–10).

4: Jesus Identifies Himself as Divine John 8:13-28 Isaiah 41:4; 43:10–13, 25; 46:4; 48:12; cf. John 13:19). These are the very words (ego eimi) that caused the Roman soldiers to fall to the ground after they came to arrest Jesus (John 18:6). Jesus' explicit identification of himself with Yahweh of the Old Testament is why the Jewish leaders wanted to stone him for blasphemy (see John 5:18; 10:33).

5: The Apostles Identified Jesus as Divine 2 Peter 1:1; cf. Titus 2:13 1 Peter 3:15. James 2:1; cf. 1 Corinthians 2:8; Psalm 24:7–8

6: The Jewish Leaders Recognized Jesus' Claim to Divinity Mark 2:5-7, 14:61-64

7: The Early Church in the New Testament Prayed to Jesus John 14:13–14; 16:26. Acts 7:59

8: The Early Church in the New Testament Worshipped Jesus Matthew 2:2, 14:33, 28:9. (John 20:28). The confession of deity here is unmistakable, clearly demonstrating that worship belongs only to God (Revelation 22:9) because Jesus accepted Thomas's worship of him (John 20:29).

9: Jesus Made Claims That No Human Being Could Ever Make Matt 7:21-23, Matt 11:28

10: Jesus Is the Son of God

More than anyone else who has walked this earth, Jesus the Messiah is uniquely entitled to be called the Son of God (John 1:49, 11:27) – “the unique One, who is himself God” (monogenēs theos – see John 1:18 NLT). (John 19:7; cf. John 10:36). According to the Law, it was blasphemy to use God's name (Leviticus 24:16). Therefore, by referring to himself as the Son of God, Jesus was claiming to share “the rights and authority of God himself (cf. [John] 1:34; 5:19–30).” The significance of this is that failure to believe in Jesus as the Son of God brings judgement because we are already dead in our sins (see John 3:18, Ephesians 2:1), but believing in Jesus as the Son of God brings eternal life (see John 3:15–17, 6:40, 20:31).

The Virgin Birth

Perhaps the most theologically important detail surrounding Christ's birth is the virgin conception, popularly referred to as the virgin birth. Both Matthew and Luke mention it (Matthew 1:18; Luke 1:27, 34). Because Jesus was miraculously conceived by the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35), He had a human mother, but not a human father. Due to His unique conception, Jesus, as the babe in the manger, was 100% God and 100% man.

His Substitutionary Atonement

Romans 6:23 1 Peter 1:18-19; Matthew 20:28; Romans 3:21; 2 Corinthians 5:21 Ephesians 2:1-5, 12 ; Colossians 1:21-22

Sin has created a problem for man. God took care of this problem with the offering up of the Son of God to pay for man's sin. His death, burial, and resurrection satisfied the Holy nature of God.

Physical Resurrection and Bodily Return

I Corinthians 15 is a treatise on the resurrection. The account can be found in the gospels and the importance is found throughout the book of Acts and the NT. Revelation 19:7-9, 14-16; Thessalonians 3:13; Zechariah 14:9; Revelation 19:15-16; Revelation 20:2; Revelation 20:4-6; Revelation 19:20; Revelation 20:1-3 These passages outline the return of Christ and what He will do next.

Conclusion

These basic tenants of the Christian faith are clearly laid out in scripture. If someone rejects these beliefs it is often because they have rejected the fact that God's Word is the basis for all truth, and that there are absolute truths in scripture. God's Word must be taken by faith, but it is clearly taught. The believer uses scripture as the basis for our faith. A clear understanding of scripture and a familiarity with how to find and explain these truths is an important part of Christianity.