

Essentials of Christianity (pt 1)
2/21/2010

*Introduction*_____

Good morning to everyone on this Lord's Day!

Now that things are a little more on tract after the snow storms we had, let me share with you the direction we're going to go for the next several weeks.

Since we have been on the subject of discipleship for a few weeks, this is probably as good a time as any to accomplish something that's been on my heart for some time.

I have mentioned it on several occasions in times past, but now I believe it's time take us down this path for our spiritual growth.

We are going to set aside our verse by verse teaching through Luke, and begin a **survey of the essentials of the Christian faith.**

It's probably no coincidence that at this present time, our children are being taught this subject in the classes down stairs. I believe our church is in a season right now where this will be very beneficial for our flock.

This is an excellent way to supplement and support what we do in going verse by verse through the scriptures.

Every so often it's good to break up the routine of going verse by verse in order to spend some time working through a particular subject we want to focus on.

At some level we do this while we're going verse by verse because we'll hit a theme in the process and we'll focus on it. But now we're going to do something different from that.

Introduction pt 2 _____

For the next several weeks we are going to work through, in a systematic way, the **essential teachings of the Christian faith**; what some call the "NON NEGOTIABLES"

I would like to use two sections of scripture from which to launch from. Both teach some very basic principles that really get to the heart of why I feel we need to take the time to go through this type of study.

The first passages we'll look at are what we read through last week, but this time we'll be emphasizing a different aspect.

These verses provide scriptural support for the need of unity in the essentials.

(slide) Turn to Ephesians 4:11-16.

Last week I made an announcement about the usage of particular gifts in a particular context. Now we'll look at another grouping of gifts and the purpose they fulfill.

Starting at vs 11.

^{NAU} Ephesians 4:11 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers,

¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;

¹³ *until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.*

Vs 13-- the unity of the faith means an agreement on the “essentials;” doctrinal unity. This is the ministry goal of the offices listed in verse 11. This is the greatest emphasis in their calling--to cause the body of Christ to learn and conform to the essentials of the Christian faith.

Vs 12-- this is part of the equipping that these offices are endeavoring to achieve. These offices are to help the saints obtain the knowledge of the Son of God.

And, as a result of our corporate growth in these things...

^{NAU} *Ephesians 4:14 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;*

¹⁵ *but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ,*

¹⁶ *from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.*

Doctrinal unity is something we should be striving for. This is how we fulfill the goal of verse 3.

^{NAU} *Ephesians 4:3 being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

And the goal listed in verse 14 is crucial for us to achieve if we are ever going to fulfill the ones listed in vss 15-16.

If we are bouncing around in confusion over what the essential foundations of the Christian faith are, how will we properly accomplish the goal of mutual edification.

In fact I would argue that the need for studying these things and equipping ourselves in the days we live in, is even greater than those who were living in the past.

Deception, both outside and inside the church, is at an all time high. **In** the church today, we are experiencing a fresh new wave of attacks from the enemy, that is both **subtle** and **highly poisonous**.

A large growing movement within Christianity is countering what biblically-minded Christians have historically believed about *what* the Bible teaches since apostolic times.

These liberally-minded folks are showing complete indifference to doctrinal purity.

One source I read said: **(slide)**

Many young evangelicals dislike both “traditional” Christianity” and the seeker sensitive churches. Traditional Christianity is described as too focused on “being right,” too much into “Bible studies” and “apologetics materials.” Instead, the young evangelicals are lusting after “a renewed encounter with a God” that goes beyond “doctrinal definitions; experiencing God beyond the boundaries of Scripture.”¹

How subtle, how spiritual sounding... how deceptive. How far outside the “boundaries of scripture” are we talking about.

¹ Cloud

John Wimber-- “let all things be done...”

How great the is need for us to be keenly aware of the **essentials of the Christian faith.**

Is the goal of achieving unity in the faith unrealistic? Is this really possible, or are we just swinging our fists into the air?

The answer is NO, we’re not justing swinging our fists into the air; and a resounding YES, unity in the essentials is **obtainable**, it is to be **expected**.

Turn with me to the **second set** of passages that we’ll cover today, these are found in the book of **Jude 1:1-4**.

There is indeed a core body of beliefs for us to agree upon and defend. **(slide)**

^{NAU} Jude 1:1 Jude, a bond-servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, To those who are the called, beloved in God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ:

² May mercy and peace and love be multiplied to you.

³ Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.

⁴ For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Vs 3-- It would've been nice, even preferable, to write to you about the common salvation. Common salvation meaning, the body of truth that the churches commonly agreed upon.

This indicates that already at this time what the churches by and large needed to agree on, they did! There were essentials or non-negotiable's that were commonly recognized.

Contrary to many who like to take pot shots at the church universal, the church is not living in a state of flux over what it holds as essential.

Don't be thrown for a loop over some of the denominational distinctive's that we have in Christendom, as though that means there's no consensus about what the truth is.

The true church is in agreement over the essentials, though we may have in-house debates over some non-essentials. The NT is very clear about what the essentials are.

Jude here is saying I would love to write to you about these things, but at this time it is necessary to take you down a different road. I want to exhort you to earnestly contend for the faith that was once handed down.

We will be going the opposite direction that Jude was taking his readers.

But I wanted to use this to point out simply that the foundation of our beliefs has been laid--**it is knowable**, and defending it is necessary.

*The Essentials of Christianity*_____

For our purposes, I decided to simplify things as much as possible to make it more accessible. For some reason, it seems like it's easier to wrap our minds around a teaching called "Essentials of Christianity" rather than "Systematic Theology."

But systematic theology is exactly what we'll be covering.

Systematic theology is a process of collecting and organizing various components and/or doctrines of the Bible according their theme; the arranging of biblical data into topical form.

This makes it very effective for learning what the Bible teaches about a particular subject: like the Trinity, resurrection or salvation.

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The word **systematic** means *the assemblage of things into a whole*. While **theology** is a compound word from the Greek word for God "theos;" and "ology", which comes from the Greek word "logos," which essentially means *word or discourse*.

Which as a whole means "the science or the study of God.

Let me say up front that as much as we're going to try and simplify this, there might be some challenging terminology. But we need to step up to the challenge.

You've probably heard it said before that the "gospel is simple enough for a child to understand." That certainly is true. God can reveal Himself to a small child.

But eventually that small child will need to grow and mature. As he grows, the limited understanding he had as a child will have to expand if he hopes to mature.

Sometimes in our quest to simplify biblical information in order to present it, we can actually retard people's growth by encouraging the natural propensity that we all have to be lazy.

Spiritual depth comes from spiritual meat.

Growing spiritually requires that we dig, toil and sweat and allow ourselves to be stretched and be pulled from our comfort zones.

Sometimes when we listen to sermons and biblical teachings we will be confronted with terminology that is unfamiliar to us. Sometimes this will cause us to shrink back and retreat to something more simplified.

As hard as Bible teachers endeavor to give their students, their sheep, lessons that they can fully understand; biblical language can only be simplified so much.

We need to allow ourselves to be pushed beyond our intellectual limitations.

In the course of this study we are going to interact with some theological language that may stretch us. Let's try not to be intimidated by that.

Systematic Theology

Why systematic theology? Let's look at three logical reasons why we need systematic theology, and how it helps to deliver to us the **essentials of Christianity**.

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As an Explanation of Christianity

Systematic theology is necessary as a researched and studied explanation as well as a systematic organization of the doctrines that are foundational and necessary to Christianity. As a result of systematic theology, Christians are able to have a clear understanding about the fundamental beliefs of the Christian faith. The Bible was not written in a doctrinal outline; hence, it is important to systematize the parts of the Bible to understand the doctrinal emphasis of the entire Bible.

As an Apologetic for Christianity

Systematic theology enables Christians to defend their beliefs rationally against opponents and antagonists to the faith. Early in the Christian church believers used their systematized beliefs to address opponents and unbelievers. This is perhaps even more important today with the emergence of humanism, Communism, cults, and Eastern religions. The systemized doctrines of the Christian faith must be researched, delineated, and presented as a defense of historic Christianity.

As a Means of Maturity for Christians

Systematic theology is an assertion of Christian truth; these same truths are essential to the maturity of believers (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Paul's writings make it clear that doctrine (theology) is foundational to Christian maturity, inasmuch as Paul normally builds a doctrinal foundation in his epistles (e.g., Eph. 1-3) before he exhorts believers to live correctly (e.g. Eph. 4-6). Also many Christians have faithfully attended church services for decades and yet have little understanding of the major doctrines of the Christian faith. Yet a knowledge of correct doctrine is important in Christian maturity; moreover, it protects the believer from error (cf. 1 John 4:1, 6; Jude 4).²

² Paul P Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Moody, Chicago, 1989).

As we prepare to take communion today, let me show you what my ultimate goal is in this study.

Turn to Ephesians 1:16-19; 3:16-19

^{NAU} Ephesians 1:16 do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers;

¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him.

¹⁸ I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,

¹⁹ and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might

^{NAU} Ephesians 3:16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man,

^{NAU} Ephesians 3:19 and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.

Notes

Paul P Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Moody, Chicago, 1989).