

Essentials of Christianity (pt 3)
3/7/2010

Introduction _____

Today we will continue our study on the **essentials of Christianity**. Before we get the ball rolling, let me put a plug in for a couple of great resources that I have found to be very helpful for understanding the essentials of the faith.

Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine
By: Wayne Grudem
ISBN: 0310286700

The Moody Handbook of Theology: Revised and Expanded
By: Paul Enns
ISBN: 0802434347

There are many other good ones, but I have found these to be thorough, yet simple.

Bibliology: last week, we started to look at the **first** category of essential Christian doctrine-- **bibliology**--the doctrine of the Bible.

What is essential to believe about the Bible?

First of all: that the Bible is the Word of God

The Bible is God's chosen way of revealing Himself to mankind.

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

¹⁷ so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

The scripture does tell us that God uses other means to reveal Himself by (we'll get into that in another part of the study), but it is the **Bible**-- the Word of God, that He has ordained to be the primary means of divine revelation, and the source by which we test all other modes of revelation--genuine or otherwise.

Consider the power there is in the written word for Paul the apostle to say:

NAU Galatians 1:6 I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel;

⁷ which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.

⁸ But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!

If only Joseph Smith would have heeded this before being seduced into thinking he was receiving the book of mormon--via--angelic visitation.

Bibliology Part II

There are some other subjects that fall under the category of bibliology; that I am only going to review briefly because these other subjects are mainly used to support the one supreme fact that *IS* essential, and that is that **the Bible is the Word of God**.

Some of these other categories are just building blocks that add on to the foundation. What we already covered is the foundation.

If establishing the fact that the Bible is the word of God seems too simplistic for any of you seasoned veterans of biblical study, consider the fact that many well-schooled, biblically trained, alleged “born again” believers have abandoned their faith and become agnostic or atheists, because they no longer believed the Bible to be the word of God.

Once that was called into question everything else went down hill. Satan was able to contaminate their understanding.

If we’re honest with ourselves, many of us would have to admit that we too have battled the mental headgame of whether the Bible is really God’s word.

If the enemy has ever side-tracked your mind with doubting whether God exists or whether Christianity is true, then you’ve been challenged about the validity of the Bible.

Other Fields of Study

There are other fields of study in the category of **bibliology**. These are areas of study that are normally used to support the Bible’s claim to be the word of God.

For example: the study of the **Canon of scripture** and the **Study of textual criticism**.

In the study of the **canon of scripture**: the word canon literally means, *reed or measuring rod*.

When used in bibliology it means, *to set, to establish, to form a rule*. It refers to what books do and do not belong in the Bible.

The canon of scripture is the list of all the books that belong in the Bible.

The subject plays a supporting role to the first category we covered because in order to know that the Bible is the word of God we have to know what books belong there.

There are a lot of schools of thought and theories (some good, some bad) about determining what books are canonical.

But we're not going to venture off into a study of canonicity. Suffice to say that there is **no compelling reason** to challenge the authenticity of the 66 books that make up our Bible.

Nor is there any **compelling reason** why there should be any more than the 66 books that make up our Bible.

Textual Criticism: is another field of study that has been helpful in substantiating the text of our Bible. Textual criticism is primarily focused on ancient manuscripts: Greek, Hebrew, Aramaic (*the original languages the Bible was written in*).

This field of study analyzes manuscripts to determine their authenticity; it examines variations to try and explain them.

Many of these variations are reflected in the various English translations we currently read.

Summary of These Fields

Let me try and offer a summary of things that hopefully will help us, given that there is MUCH information to sift through regarding these subjects.

How do we know that we have the right books in the canon of Scripture we now possess? The question can be answered **in two different ways.**

First, if we are asking upon what we should base our confidence, the answer must ultimately be that our confidence is based on the faithfulness of God.

We know that God loves his people, and it is supremely important that God's people have his own words, for they are our life.

^{NAU} Deuteronomy 32:46 he said to them, "Take to your heart all the words with which I am warning you today, which you shall command your sons to observe carefully, even all the words of this law.

⁴⁷ "For it is not an idle word for you; indeed it is your life. And by this word you will prolong your days in the land, which you are about to cross the Jordan to possess."

We also know that God our Father is in control of all history.

Just as the process of writing the scriptures is not solely in the hands of men, nor is the preservation of His words solely in man's hands.

The severity of the punishments that come to those who add to or take from God's words confirms the importance for God's people of having a correct canon.

^{NAU} Revelation 22:18 I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book;

¹⁹ *and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.*

^{NAU} *Proverbs 30:5 Every word of God is tested; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him.*

⁶ *Do not add to His words Or He will reprove you, and you will be proved a liar.*

There could be no greater punishments than these, for they are the punishments of eternal judgment.

Peter makes reference of those who mishandle the scriptures.
Turn to 2Peter 3:16.

^{NAU} *2 Peter 3:16 as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.*

This shows that God himself places supreme value on our having a correct collection of God-breathed writings, no more and no less.

The preservation and correct assembling of the canon of Scripture should ultimately be seen by believers, then, not as part of church history subsequent to God's great central acts of redemption for his people, but as an integral part of the history of redemption itself.

Just as God was at work in creation, in the calling of his people Israel, in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, and in the early work and writings of the apostles, so God was at work in the preservation and assembling together of the books of Scripture for the benefit of his people for the entire church age.

Ultimately, then, we base our confidence in the correctness of our present canon on the faithfulness of God.

The question of how we know that we have the right books can, **secondly**, be answered in a somewhat different way.

We might wish to focus on the process by which we become persuaded that the books we have now in the canon are the right ones. In this process two factors are at work:

1. the activity of the Holy Spirit convincing us as we read Scripture for ourselves,

2. and the historical data that we have available for our consideration.

Is factor #1 more subjective than manuscript evidence, absolutely not!!

Ultimately, the deciding factor in someone coming to a full persuasion and assurance that the Bible is God's Word is an inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts in a way that is immediate and undeniable.

As we read Scripture the Holy Spirit works to convince us that the books we have in Scripture are all from God and are his words to us.

It has been the testimony of Christians throughout the ages that as they read the books of the Bible, the words of Scripture speak to their hearts as no other books do.

Day after day, year after year, Christians find that the words of the Bible are indeed the words of God speaking to them with an

authority, a power, and a persuasiveness that no other writings possess.

Truly the Word of God is ,

"...living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Heb 4:12).

How did I come to know the Bible is the word of God. Someone told me? Well, yes. But doesn't it boil down to the work of the Spirit?

The Spirit is our translator.

NAU John 14:26 "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.

Reading the Bible is a spiritual exercise and requires the Spirit to fully comprehend, and the Spirit recognizes ONE source of inspiration.

Turn to 1Corinthians 2:12-16

NAU 1 Corinthians 2:12 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.

¹⁴ But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

¹⁵ But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one.

¹⁶ For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE WILL INSTRUCT HIM? But we have the mind of Christ.

Yet the process by which we become persuaded that the present canon is right is **also helped by historical data.**

Of course, if the assembling of the canon was one part of God's central acts in the history of redemption (as was stated earlier), then Christians today should not presume to take it upon themselves to attempt to add to or subtract from the books of the canon: the process was completed.

Nevertheless, a thorough investigation of the historical circumstances surrounding the assembling of the canon is helpful in confirming our conviction that the decisions made by the early church were correct decisions.

But let me throw in this one quote:

There is therefore historical confirmation for the correctness of the current canon. Yet it must be remembered in connection with any historical investigation that the work of the early church was not to bestow divine authority or even ecclesiastical authority upon some merely human writings, but rather to recognize the divinely authored characteristic of writings that already had such a quality. This is because the ultimate criterion of canonicity is divine authorship, not human or ecclesiastical (church) approval.¹

More detailed data is readily available for those who wish to pursue more specialized investigations. But this is far as we're going with it today.

There maybe certain questions about textual data that we may not be able to answer. But this in no way detracts from the reliability of the scriptures.

¹ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Zondervan Publishing, 1994).

When questions arise-- I usually invoke **Deuteronomy 29:29**

^{NAU} Deuteronomy 29:29 *"The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law.*

Sola Scriptura _____

The last component of this topic that I believe the Bible claims to be essential is:

The Scriptures Are The Final Authority

Some people would entitle this category as: the Sufficiency of Scripture.

My personal favorite is the phrase adopted from the reformation:

Sola Scriptura-- Latin for *"scripture alone."*

What Sola Scriptura Is:

1. The doctrine of sola scriptura, simply stated, is that the Scriptures alone are sufficient to function as the infallible rule of faith for the Church.

The emphasis here is on the nature of Scripture. The Scriptures are, as God-breathed revelation, sufficient to provide the "rule of faith" necessary for the Church's mission in this world.

Further, the Scriptures provide an infallible rule of faith, one that cannot err, one not affected by personal whims, social trends, or any other outside force. While the Church faces a myriad of challenging situations over time, the Scriptures themselves do not change and therefore provide the Church with a firm foundation.

2. All that one must believe to be a Christian is found in Scripture, and in no other source.

This is not to say that the necessary beliefs of the faith could not be summarized in a shorter form. However, there is no necessary belief, doctrine, or dogma absolutely required of a person for entrance into the kingdom of heaven that is not found in the revelation of God in the pages of Scripture.

To summarize:

The Bible claims to be the sole and sufficient infallible rule of faith for the Christian Church. The Scriptures are not in need of any supplement; their authority comes from their nature as God-breathed revelation; their authority is not dependent upon man, church, or council. The Scriptures are self-consistent, self-interpreting, and self-authenticating. The Christian Church looks to the Scriptures as the only infallible and sufficient rule of faith, and the Church is always subject to the Word, and is constantly changed thereby.²

Turn to 2Peter 1:1-4:

^{NAU} 2 Peter 1:1 Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ:

² Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord;

³ seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence.

²J. White

⁴ *For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.*

All this is important because:

MANY DENY THE ALL-SUFFICIENCY OF THE SCRIPTURES

A. SUCH AS ROMAN CATHOLICS, GREEK ORTHODOX, ETC.

1. Who accept in ADDITION to the Bible...
 - a. Traditions of the church which have arisen over the years
 - b. Papal or ecclesiastical decrees
2. Allowing such "traditions" or "decrees" to take precedence over the Scriptures

B. SUCH AS MORMONS, JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES, ETC.

1. Who accept in ADDITION to the Bible...
 - a. Latter-day prophets
 - b. Modern-day revelations
2. Who allow their "revelations" to take precedence over the Scriptures.

The Essential Christian Response _____

That the Bible be taught and obeyed.

This is the Christian mandate.

Turn to 2Tim 4:1-4; James 1:21-25

^{NAU} 2 Timothy 4:1 *I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom:*

² *preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.*

³ *For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires,*

⁴ *and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.*

^{NAU} James 1:21 *Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.*

²² *But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.*

²³ *For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror;*

²⁴ *for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was.*

²⁵ *But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.*

If scripture is all sufficient it governs everything we do in life.