

A Study in Christian Apologetics ~ What We Believe & Why

Lesson Seven: Is Jesus the Christ?

Cogito, Ergo Credo: I Think, Therefore I Believe!

Lesson Seven: Christian Doctrine Overview

I believe in God the Father Almighty; Maker of heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose from the dead; He ascended into heaven; and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic Church; the communion of saints the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

The "Non-Negotiables"

A Christian must understand what makes a person a Christian! After all, it is a title that has meant something special throughout the ages. The study of the proper doctrine is also important so that we will know what the message is that we are proclaiming! In addition, when we understand Orthodoxy, we will be able to tell when a false doctrine arises. It is MUCH more difficult to study and understand all the potential false doctrines; it is much easier to understand the CORRECT doctrines. But while there are several beliefs that are 'not negotiable', there are some that are debatable. These 'intramural debates' are, by definition, not 'required' beliefs for conformance to Orthodoxy. This week we will study a summary of those Doctrines that are basic requirements for acceptance within traditional Orthodoxy.

"Be diligent in these matters [study and spiritual gifts]; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers."
1 Timothy 4:15-16

The Doctrine of God

To summarize, God is the Supreme Being. He is the First Cause, and He is the Standard by which all is measured. Although He is Transcendent, He is also Personal and able to be with us. Further, God is:

Holy - Holiness is the essence of God's nature. He is the ultimate benchmark. 'Holy' stems from an ancient word that literally means 'separate'. This is an indication of God's nature as different from ours. (Ezekiel 15:11b).

Eternal - In essence, to be Eternal means to be apart from time, and to be in existence in and of itself. (Isaiah 57:15b)

Omnipotent - Literally translated, means 'All-Powerful'. The most significant lesson we can take from a study of God's omnipotence is that we are not. (Jeremiah 32:17)

Omnipresent - Like God's relationship to time, God's relationship to space is separate (yet within) it. He exists apart from space, and cannot be contained by it or anything else in His creation. (Psalm 139:7-8)

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Omniscient - Naturally, a Being who is Omnipotent and Omnipresent is 'All-Knowing'. The Creator Of All Things by definition would 'know all things' that are within His nature to know. (1 John 3:20b)

Transcendent - A Being with qualities such as those above would by definition be separate from the creation that He has created. He is not a part of it, He is different from it, and not contained or controlled by any of it. This is the definition of transcendent. (Exodus 3:14b)

Personal - He is self-conscious, self-determinant, clearly experiences emotions, and has a first person distinction from others. (Genesis 1:26a)

Love - God's very nature is that of pure 'giving'. God has chosen to describe this LOVE to us using the language of a Father. (1 John 4:7b, 8b, 9)

The bottom line is, a being with these attributes deserves our acknowledgement and our attention. In other words, GOD is to be *revered!* He is not to be ignored, or His attributes diminished! To do so would be the most foolish and disrespectful thing a person could do.

The Doctrine of the Trinity

The doctrine of the Trinity is tricky, yet simple: One God is three persons (tri-unity; or three-in-oneness). As Christians we believe this, even though the word 'Trinity' is never found in the Bible, because this is the way the Bible presents God to us. The Bible presents God as the Father, and as the Son, and as the Holy Spirit. Each of these are referred to as a person in the Bible, and each of the persons of the 'Godhead' speaks to and references the others as a separate person. Yet the Bible clearly tells us that there is only ONE God! There are many instances in the Bible when all three persons are mentioned together: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all." (2 Corinthians 13:14.) But clearly there is only one God: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. (Deuteronomy 6:4)

Clearly a biblical concept? YES! Difficult if not impossible to understand? YES! But we should not be surprised at our lack of ability to understand the nature of an omnipotent, infinite God! "Now we see as but a poor reflection in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known." 1 Corinthians 13:12

The Doctrine of Jesus

Jesus of Nazareth is the "God Man". As confusing as the claim is, it is one of the most important within Christian doctrine. Mankind has been searching for God since the beginning of time. But we are finite, while God is infinite. He has spoken to us through Prophets and through Scripture, but in our history mankind has needed more. So God condescended (came down to be with) to become one of us, so we could best relate to Him, and understand Him on our terms (Immanuel = God with us). In order to do this, He retained His Godly nature, present in a Human form. Again, this is the best way that we could understand what and who God is, on human terms.

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The Doctrine of Man

Mankind is God's crowing creation, for we were created in the image of God. Did God create to have companionship? Yes He did, but not for the reason commonly thought. God is not lonely without mankind, because He is in an eternal relationship within the Trinity. He did not need mankind in order to fulfill Himself or any need, because He is by definition 'needless'. He created because that is what a Creator does, and He created man so that He could express His Loving nature by giving.

But man rebelled—taking for himself the glory that is deserved to God. This 'primary' sin causes us to commit 'secondary' sins such as losing perspective of values, causing moral depravity and a general tendency toward evil.

"But your iniquities have separated you from your God;
Isaiah 59:2a

"We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way..." **Isaiah 53:6a**

The Doctrine of Salvation

When we know that there is a holy God, we may desire above all else to be reconciled to Him despite our innate separation. We are so sinful (unholy) that we cannot achieve the perfection His holiness requires on our own. The law that was given to describe holiness (in human terms) is impossible for us to achieve. We find that we are completely and totally unable to be reconciled to God because of our state, and even unworthy to be reconciled to Him. There is literally nothing we can do. The individual facing this dilemma is horrified.

We cannot do it, no matter what we do, so God did it for us. God has provided the means of reconciliation, fulfilling the same requirements as the old covenant, with a pure and innocent sacrifice, this time for all that believe. Jesus fulfilled this for us.- He is the Christ (chosen one.) Jesus became the ultimate sacrifice - the one of perfect purity and of unlimited worth (because He is Himself God!). His sacrifice now justifies sinners freely without compromising the perfection of His holiness. The law of the old covenant is now fulfilled in those who believe in the Christ as their salvation to God. This new covenant replaces the old, and this trust (aka faith) is the cornerstone of the new covenant.

Faith in Jesus as the Christ is the definition of Christianity. But what is 'faith'? Is it another word for belief?" No! Faith goes far beyond just 'mere acceptance' of an ideal, or a creed. In a word, it is TRUST, it is LIFE; it is LIVING. We cannot earn our salvation by our works - remember that our reconciliation back to God comes from HIM, not from US. When a true faith exists, repentance occurs. Repentance is a change of heart, affecting our future behavior as well. Therefore, a real faith by definition produces a changed life - a NEW life (born again)!

The Doctrine of the Church

The 'Church' is the body of believers throughout the world, and in all times. The Church is both local and universal. It is visible and tangible, as well as invisible and mystic. A person is a member of the Church of Jesus Christ if he is a true believer, whether he lives and worships in a large cathedral, or gathers under a tree in the jungle in submission to his Lord. It is the gathering of saints in a home, a city, or a region. It is a timeless community.

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"...in Him we were also
chosen...in order that we...might
be for the praise of His glory."
Ephesians 1:11a,12a,c

The Church has specific purposes which include Ministry To God (worship); Ministry To Believers (for growth); Ministry To The World (evangelism); and the Observance Of Sacraments (obedience to and proclamation of Christ.) The local Church is well-balanced when **all** members participate in these attributes.

What Christianity is NOT!

There are many misconceptions about Christianity (which provide opportunity for an Apologist!) For instance, Christianity is not a legacy or a heritage. It is not 'going to Church' or following any particular ritual. It is not mere intellectual assent to the facts of Jesus Christ. Being a Christian does not mean "I Am A Christian Because Of My Deeds". Being A Christian does not mean "I'm Perfect" or "I Do Not Sin Anymore". Being A Christian does not Mean "I Never Have Doubts About My Salvation".

Being a Christian *does* mean, by the grace of God, that we believe that Jesus is the Son of God. We trust Him to reconcile us back to God by the sacrifice of His perfect life, in place of us with our imperfections that separated us from God.

A most clear description of how we become a Christian was given to us by John:

"...to all who **RECEIVED** Him, to those who **BELIEVED** in His Name, He gave the right to **BECOME** children of God." John 1:12

So in summary, a Christian is a person who, after searching for meaning because of a God-enabled REPENTANT spirit, has BELIEVED in Jesus as the Christ, RECEIVED Him as LORD, and is BECOMING sanctified.

"The study of doctrine is simply a pursuit of God's will and word, in order to live our lives in a manner that glorifies Him. Our doctrine then, forms our belief system that controls and compels our behavior."

Faith Works, John McArthur

"Study, to show thyself approved unto God."

2 Timothy 2:15

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Thinking Points

Two Minute Drill: What are the Christian doctrinal 'non-negotiables', and why?

Why do we need to know our doctrine?

How do we determine if a belief is 'un-orthodox'?

What is the 'single message' of Christianity?

Can you think of examples of un-orthodox doctrine and its impact on the Church and society?

Lesson Summary

There are a few non-negotiable doctrines that are required for one to be included in traditional Orthodoxy

There are many intramural debates regarding doctrinal issues

Conclusion: A Christian must understand doctrine to know what to defend and proclaim, and to be obedient to our Lord.

Next Lesson: Why Christianity is Unique

Resources:

[This We Believe](#); Zacharias, Packer, Erickson-Tada, etc.; Zondervan; 2000

www.carm.org

www.whyibelieve.org