

Biblical Convictions 2: Convictions on the Fundamentals of the Faith; Fundamental Doctrinal Convictions

In 1909, two California businessmen [Lyman and Milton Stewart] provided funding for an important project. Their idea was to publish a series of essays defending the Christian faith. Eventually, sixty-four authors agreed to provide ninety essays affirming the basic teachings of the Bible and attacking threats to Christianity. These essays were published in 1917 in a set of twelve volumes and sent out free of charge to ministers, missionaries, professors, and other Protestant religious workers in the US and in other English-speaking countries. Over 3 million volumes—250,000 sets—were sent out. This set of booklets was titled, “The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth.”

Last week, I started a series of messages on biblical convictions, and one of the things that we ought to have strong convictions about is the fundamentals of the Christian faith.

Convictions are, by definition, strongly-held beliefs. The most strongly-held of our beliefs should be those beliefs that define Christianity. It’s no good to claim to be a Christian while at the same time denying the foundational, fundamental beliefs of the faith.

Sadly, many people who call themselves Christians at the same time deny the basic biblical teachings that define Christianity. They claim to be Christians, yet reject the beliefs that make Christianity what it is. They claim that you can be a Christian while denying the fundamentals of the faith.

For example, a famous British theologian, NT Wright, said recently that belief in the resurrection of Jesus was not necessary for being a Christian. Wright cites the example of a friend of his (Marcus Borg) who denies the resurrection and deity of Christ yet, supposedly, loves Jesus and, Wright claims, is no doubt a Christian.

We would disagree with the esteemed British scholar. If you deny the fundamentals of the faith, you are simply not a Christian—even if you claim to love Jesus. The fundamentals of the faith are essential to Christianity; the fundamentals make Christianity what it is.

We are a fundamental church. That means, among other things, that we believe in the fundamental, essential, primary teachings of Christianity. We do not compromise on the Bible’s teachings on these doctrines. We hold these beliefs strongly.

Our highest commitment ought to be to those beliefs that make Christianity what it is. We must strongly affirm these doctrines. Those who deny these doctrines have no right to think of themselves as Christians; denying them means that you are not a Christian. We don't deny them; we strongly affirm these doctrinal convictions.

And it's good to review these doctrines occasionally and reaffirm our belief in them. These foundational teachings form the basis of our faith. We unify around these beliefs; we hold them in common with all other genuine Xns around the world and across the centuries. These doctrines comprise the faith once delivered to the saints.

What are these fundamentals of the faith? What are the fundamental doctrinal convictions of biblical Christianity?

I. Christians believe in God.

Genesis 1:1 *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*

A. One of the most fundamental and basic things we can affirm about God is that he exists. There is a God, and he is the God of the Bible.

B. We are monotheists. We believe in the one and only true and living God.

1. God has revealed himself as Yahweh in the OT. That's his personal name.

2. There is only one God and no others.

Isa 45:22 *Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.*

C. We are also Trinitarians.

1. In the NT, we learn more clearly that God is a Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are equal persons sharing in the singular divine being.

2. The doctrine of the Trinity asserts that one God exists indivisibly and eternally as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God is three persons in one essence/being/divine nature.

3. This is a fundamental doctrine of the faith. Christians are Trinitarians. Some people claiming to be Christian deny the Trinity, but in my view, you cannot be a Christian and deny the Trinity. If you deny the Trinity, you end up denying essential truth about the nature of God.

4. Because the doctrine of the Trinity is somewhat difficult to grasp, true Christians may be rather confused by it. True Christians may be mistaken about the Trinity. Immature faith may fail to comprehend the finer details of the Trinity. A person may be saved without understanding the Trinity, but a saved person will not deny the Trinity when he sees that the Bible teaches it.

Trans: Christians believe in God, and they believe in the right God, the only God, the Trinitarian God of the Bible. These truths about God ought to be strongly-held beliefs; these are profound biblical convictions about God.

II. Christians believe in the inspiration of the Bible.

2 Timothy 3:16–17 *All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

2 Peter 1:20–21 *... no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.*

Hebrews 1:1a *God, ... spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets,*

- A. Inspiration is that supernatural influence whereby the Holy Spirit caused men to compose and record (2 Pet 1:21) without error (Ps 12:6, John 17:17) the very words (1 Cor 2:13) of God's choosing (2 Tim 3:16) in the original manuscripts (1 Cor 14:37) of the Bible.

The words translated “given by inspiration of God” is *theopneustos*, from the Greek noun for God, *theos* + the Greek verb, *pneo*, meaning “to breathe.” The Bible is God-breathed; God is the source.¹

- B. The Bible is not merely another human book. God is the ultimate author, although he used “holy men of God” to write it.
- C. We believe the Bible is literally true and accurate, the only rule for faith and practice.

John 17:17 *thy word is truth.*

- D. We use a couple of words to describe inspiration.

¹ From Scott Estell's material on bibliology.

1. Inspiration is verbal. The *words* are inspired, not just the thoughts or concepts behind the words.

Matthew 5:18 [Jesus said,] *till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.*

2. Inspiration is plenary. Plenary means “full.” *All* the words, each and every one of them is inspired. The Bible is entirely inspired, fully inspired; all of it is equally inspired.

E. And because the Bible is inspired, we believe it is

1. Inerrant—there are no errors in it; what it teaches is true.
2. Infallible—it is incapable of leading us astray.

Trans: We ought to be convinced of the fact that the Bible is the very Word of God. As such, it is true and authoritative. We should hold a strong conviction about the inspiration of God’s Word.

And because it’s inspired, we ought to read it, memorize it, meditate upon it, and obey it.

III. Christians believe in human sinfulness.

Jeremiah 17:9 *The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?*

Romans 3:10–12 *As it is written: “There is none righteous, no, not one; 11 There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. 12 They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one.”*

Romans 3:23 *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,*

- A. Here is a statement regarding human sinfulness from our confession of faith:

We believe that originally man freely chose to transgress the expressed will of God and thereby mankind incurred sin, condemnation, and physical and spiritual death, so that man is a sinner by nature and by choice, and is totally depraved, destitute of any moral good, and utterly unable to merit God’s favor or contribute to his salvation.

- B. How did mankind become sinful in the first place? We believe in original sin. Adam’s sin somehow affects all mankind.

Romans 5:12, 19 ... *just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned—... By one man's disobedience many were made sinners.*

God imputes/credits Adam's sin to the entire race. Ever since the time of Adam, people sin because they are sinful by nature.

- C. Sin separates us from God, which makes sin our biggest problem. God is holy, and we are sinful. That means that we cannot have fellowship with God because of our sin.

Isaiah 59:2 ... *your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear.*

Romans 6:23a *For the wages of sin is death, ...*

- D. We ought to be very concerned about finding forgiveness of sin. If we do not find forgiveness, we will forever be separated from God.

John 3:36 ... *he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.*

- E. Sub-Christian churches often teach error regarding the sinfulness of man. They assert that man is basically good or spiritually neutral. He's mistaken or weak, but he's not dead in sin.

- F. But the fundamental teaching of the Bible is clear.

Ec 7:20 *For there is not a righteous man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.*

Ephesians 2:1 *you .. were dead in trespasses and sins,*

We must affirm the sinfulness of human beings. That's a fundamental of the faith. If we were not sinners, we would not need a savior.

This leads us to the next fundamental of the faith...

- IV. Christians believe in salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

- A. How do we find forgiveness of sin?

Luke 19:10 *For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.*

1Tim 1:15 ... *Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners...*

- B. Jesus Christ forgives those who trust in him for salvation.

John 3:36 *He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; ...*

- C. Christianity makes exclusive claims about providing the one and only way of salvation. Jesus is not *a* way of salvation; he is the *only* way.

John 14:6; Acts 4:12

- D. Here is another statement from our confession of faith:

We believe in the salvation of sinners through Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, who is the only Savior of men by virtue of His shed blood, i.e., His substitutionary death for sinners. We believe that salvation is completely dependent on the grace of God, is a free gift of God that man cannot earn or merit in any way, is applied by the work of the Holy Spirit using the instrumentality of the Word of God, and is appropriated by repentance and faith in the resurrected Son of God.

- E. The Bible teaches that we appropriate salvation through repentance and faith. What is that?

1. Repentance is the change of mind away from sin and to God. Repentance includes an understanding of sin, a genuine regret or sorrow for sin, a conscious rejection of sin and a desire to seek God's pardon.
2. Saving faith is the knowledge of, assent to, and trust in both the person and work of Christ as the only basis of deliverance from sin.
3. Salvation happens at the moment you *turn* from sin and *trust* in Christ for forgiveness and eternal life.

- F. The Bible teaches very clearly that good works cannot earn salvation. Nothing we do contributes to our own salvation. Salvation is purely a gift; we do nothing to earn it or deserve. All we do is accept the free gift of salvation by faith. And we can do that only because the Spirit of God works in our hearts. We cannot claim credit for any part of our salvation; it's all of grace.

That's why we affirm that salvation is by faith *alone*. Our works don't add anything to salvation. We do good works because we are saved, not in order to be saved.

- G. This is a fundamental teaching of the Bible that all genuine Christians affirm. But it's more than just a biblical doctrine; it's a truth that we must accept personally and sincerely in order to be saved. Believing this fundamental doctrine is the basis of eternal life. Your eternal destiny depends on this belief. We believe it because it is true, and we believe it to the saving of our souls.

Do you believe it?

V. Christians believe in the humanity and deity of Christ.

Many people claim to believe in Jesus or to love Jesus, but that does not guarantee that they believe the right things about Jesus. Some perhaps believe in a false Jesus, an unbiblical Jesus, a mythical Jesus. It's important that we believe the truth about Jesus.

John 1:1, 14

- A. Jesus is the Word/Logos made flesh. He is both God and man: he has all the characteristics of both God and man. He is the God-man, 100% God and 100% man.

The historic statement from the Council of Chalcedon (AD 451): "The two natures [of Christ] are united in one person ... without confusion, conversion, division or separation. . . . We must neither divide the person nor confound the natures."

Christ is one person with two natures. The two natures of Christ—both divine and human—must remain united yet distinct. Cf. the hypostatic union.

- B. Nearly every cult and sub-standard version of Christianity denies the deity of Christ. They believe that he's a created being or an arch-angel or some semi-god, but not God in the flesh.
- C. Genuine Christianity believes in the deity of Christ. That is a fundamental distinction of Christianity. If someone denies it, he is simply not a Christian.

We believe other profound things about Jesus...

VI. Christians believe in the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ.

1 Corinthians 15:3–4 ... *Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures,*

- A. One of the most certain facts of ancient history is that Jesus of Nazareth died on the cross. Historically speaking, you cannot deny that fact. Even secular, atheist historians do not deny that fact.
- B. But the Bible also affirms that Jesus' death had special significance. The Bible asserts that Christ died for us, on our behalf (2 Cor 5:15, 21). Jesus' death atoned for our sins through his sacrificial, substitutionary death.
 - 1. "To atone" = to wipe away; to satisfy by a payment. Jesus became a voluntary substitute for sinners and suffered the punishment of sin in their place.
 - 2. The death of Christ was the payment for man's forgiveness. Jesus' sufferings were the legal equivalent to the infinite debt that sinners owed.
- C. Jesus was buried and rose again on the third day. The disciples found the tomb empty, and hundreds of people saw Jesus alive after his death. Virtually all of the NT authors assert that Jesus rose from the dead.
- D. The resurrection of Jesus is the cornerstone of Christianity. Paul tells us that if Christ is not raised from the dead, then the entire structure of the Christian faith is empty (1 Cor 15:17).
- E. You cannot be a Christian and deny Jesus' resurrection. The resurrection of Christ is a fundamental, definitional doctrine. To deny it is to put yourself outside of the Christian faith.

VII. Christians believe in heaven and hell.

Mt 25:46 And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

- A. Immediately upon death, Christians enter the presence of God. To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. Jesus has been preparing a heavenly home for believers, and they begin dwelling with the Lord immediately upon death.
- B. Non-Christians face the prospect of eternal punishment. The unregenerate wicked will enter a place of punishment immediately upon death.
- C. Eternal rewards for the faithful and eternal punishment for the wicked are good motivators for faith in Christ. If you want to enjoy eternity in heaven and avoid the perils of hell, you must get saved.

- D. Sadly, some well-meaning people today deny the existence of hell. They don't think that the eternal punishment of the wicked is a nice idea; it does not sit well with them. So they try to find ways of denying it.
- E. Others claim that hell is not eternal, or that most people won't go there. They claim that you don't need to believe in Jesus to go to heaven. But those claims contradict biblical teaching.
- F. Jesus spoke frequently about the reality of both heaven and hell. He clearly affirmed that the wicked will spend eternity in hell, and the righteous will spend eternity in heaven. Jesus claimed that entry to heaven depends on faith in him; he alone holds the keys to heaven.

The Bible is fairly clear that both heaven and hell are eternal destinies. We must affirm this fundamental truth.

VIII. Christians believe in the return of Christ.

Acts 1:11 ... *this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.*

1Th 4:16 *For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: ...*

- A. Some people would hesitate to claim that the return of Jesus is a fundamental of the faith, but I believe it is. It is a fundamental because Jesus and the apostles repeatedly promised that Jesus would return again. The NT is full of information regarding Jesus' second coming. So if Jesus is not going to return again, Jesus and the NT authors are all wrong. If all of that is wrong, then Christianity is also wrong. If the Bible is true, then Jesus will come again. If you deny it, you are denying the faith.
- B. Christians have various views on the Second Coming of Christ. Some of these views are more biblical than others. As long as someone affirms the truth that Jesus is coming again, he is orthodox on this issue. You cannot deny it and still think of yourself as a Christian.
- C. We hold a particular view of Jesus' Second Coming. We believe that the return of Jesus Christ that will take place in two stages.
 - 1. The first stage is the *Rapture*, i.e., Jesus' personal, imminent, and pretribulational coming for all saints of the church age.

1 Thessalonians 4:16–17 *For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.*

2. The second stage is the *Revelation* or the Second Coming in Glory, His personal and public coming at the close of the Tribulation Period to establish the messianic, Millennial Kingdom. The Church will reign with Christ for the thousand years.
 3. After the Millennium there will be a new heaven and earth wherein God will dwell eternally with His people.
- D. We believe that the Rapture is imminent, meaning that it could happen at any time. There are no events that must occur before the Rapture. Because Jesus could return at any time, we are responsible to be ready. Matthew 24:44 *Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.*
- E. We hold a premillennial, pretribulational view of Jesus' Second Coming, which says that Christ's Second Advent will happen before the tribulation and before the millennium. Other views are not necessarily heretical; they are not damnable heresy, but we do not hold them.

Although Christians have various views regarding the details of Jesus' Second Coming, all genuine Christians believe that Jesus will return. They may disagree regarding various details about it, but they don't deny that it will happen. It is a fundamental of the faith; you cannot deny it and still think of yourself as a Christian. If you deny it, you are calling Jesus a liar.

These fundamentals of the faith are the basic parameters of Christianity. The fundamentals form the boundaries of the faith. If you intentionally deny any of these basic tenets of the faith, you put yourself outside the boundaries of Christianity. Many people and churches deny these fundamental convictions and still call themselves Christians, but they have no right to that word; they are not Christians.

At the same time, true believers may be ignorant, mistaken, or poorly taught on some of these doctrines and still be saved. E.g., the thief on the cross probably knew only that he was a sinner and that Jesus was the savior; his knowledge was very rudimentary. He didn't know anything about the Trinity or the inspiration of Scripture. Still, Jesus assured him that he was saved. Genuine saving faith may be quite small—like a grain of mustard seed—and still be saving faith. Little children can be saved even if they don't fully grasp all of the implications of these doctrines.

The problem is that some people knowingly, intentionally reject these fundamentals of the faith and still think of themselves as Christians. They are not ignorant; they know what the Bible teaches on these issues and they reject these teachings. Knowingly, intentionally rejecting any of the fundamentals of the faith puts you outside the faith.

True Christians hold these doctrines strongly; these are our doctrinal convictions, our strongly-held beliefs. These are non-negotiables of the faith. We must believe them as we find them in the Bible. To fail to believe them is to put yourself outside the faith once delivered to the saints. These are the truths that the Bible commands us to hold fast without wavering or compromising. We can and should be bold and fervent in holding these doctrinal convictions.

[Christians may have lots of different ideas regarding many biblical teachings. One of the reasons there are so many different denominations is that people believe differently about many aspects of the Christian life. However, anyone professing to be a Christian should acknowledge these fundamentals of the faith. If they don't, it brings their Christian faith into question—how can you claim to be a Christian if you deny these foundational truths? You can't.

We don't deny them; we fully and fervently affirm them. We strongly believe these fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith. These are the most significant and foundational of our doctrinal convictions. We hold these beliefs without compromise and without apology. These beliefs are what make us Christians, and we dare not deny them.]