

## WHAT ARE THE BASIC TRUTHS OF THE BIBLE?

### ABOUT GOD, BIBLE, SIN, JESUS, RE-CREATION, CHURCH, DISCIPLESHIP, GRACE, FAITH

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#### PROLOGUE

I begin with a personal story about how this study began. A few years ago, my wife and I traveled by bus from Guatemala City to Tegucigalpa, a day's journey of 15-16 hours. As we traveled, we saw numerous villages on the mountainsides. With little else to do, I began contemplating the situation of those who lived in those very remote villages. What exposure do they have to outside influences? What religious influences have they had in their lives? What do they know about the Bible?

*If I had a short amount of time to communicate with them the basic truths of God's word, what would I say? What would I include or exclude? Would I share a typical "salvation" package? What would be most important for them to hear?*

#### OUTLINE OF BASIC TOPICS OR TEACHINGS AND NECESSARY HUMAN RESPONSES

God/Jesus	Recognize him, see God as visible in natural revelation
Bible/covenants	Recognize him through his self-revelation in the Bible (special revelation); know him and respect him for who he is—according to his nature, including Father, Son, Spirit; understand the "why" of his word and his authority; understand how to honor and worship him
Human condition/sin	Recognize the human condition, recognize the nature of reality, the inability of human beings to fix their own situation; respond to him
Salvation	Repentance, reconciliation, renewal
Church	Relationships
Commitment	Reflect his image
Grace/Faith	Rejoice in God's goodness toward us

#### INTRODUCTION

My religious heritage has a strong focus on correct doctrine. This focus necessarily includes the ability to retain the essentials and to discard the peripherals—to define biblically things that are disputable or opinion and to give freedom in areas not central to faith in Christ (Romans 14). Any person who interprets Scripture through this framework must periodically evaluate whether non-essentials have crept into the faith corpus. Am I correctly identifying and defining the essentials and non-essentials?

#### I—AN IMPORTANT QUESTION ABOUT GOD

If all I had was the Bible, and I were to read the Bible with the intention of doing what God put me here to do, with the intention of pleasing God and doing his will, what would that look like? Would I keep living my life as I currently do, or would some aspects of my life change radically?

Assume for a moment that we could find correct answers to such questions by considering what the Bible says about various subjects—the Triune God, humankind, spiritual and physical reality. Where would those teachings lead us? What is God like? What is the reality of his visible creation? What is the reality of his invisible creation? What is his human creation like? What purposes of God can we discern in the answers to these questions? To take time to ponder these questions and try to discern correct answers is a worthwhile task.

In what follows I do not want to short-circuit your own personal discovery process. I only suggest something of where such investigations will likely lead us. While some things can be discerned by natural revelation through observing the world in which we live, the Bible as God's special revelation must be the primary source of answers.

Based on Genesis 1-3 and other Scriptures (for example, Eccl. 12:13), a basic purpose of human creation is to fear God and keep his commandments. God made humankind to be like him, in his image, but the image of God bestowed in creation was blurred (lost, twisted) in the garden through entrance of sin and the fall of Adam and Eve. Exactly what happened and the all the implications are not given in detail in Genesis, but what is obvious is that reflecting the image of God became more difficult or even impossible for human beings. God's original purpose was no longer possible. Two things were needed: re-creation which God accomplished through Jesus Christ, and sustainability of the re-created human nature which God accomplished through the giving of his Spirit.

**FEAR GOD.** God made us for relationship with him, in his image and likeness, to be blessed and to bless. He made us to bring his rule to visible physical creation, with the intent that his human creation would thus participate with him in glory and holiness, in dominion, and in full, abundant life. To understand this intention of God requires that human beings recognize God for who he is, and that they recognize their own created nature—in his image and participants in the divine nature.

God desires to be recognized for who he is. Recognizing God's nature and supremacy leads all human creation to respect him—to adore and praise and worship him. The natural world by its very nature exalts and praises the Creator, but the human creation with free moral agency can decide to praise or not to praise. It is natural to praise the Creator, but some choose rather to praise created things. To recognize God and praise him for his glorious nature is a first step, but does not reflect the totality of God's purpose and desire for human beings.

**FOLLOW JESUS.** Ultimately, fallen humanity cannot experience re-creation and restored relationship with God without an example of the possibilities of the invisible spiritual world. God sent Jesus so that relationship could be restored, but also so that human beings could have an example to follow, a demonstration of the possibilities of human existence. Human existence in the biological realm is not the whole of life. Human beings were created also as spiritual beings. Our biological or physical bodies only allow us to reside on this planet. Our existence is not defined by the visible, physical realities we see and experience. In fact, these are only temporary, and we can (and will) exist apart from the visible created bodies we use to identify ourselves and to distinguish ourselves.

Jesus came perfectly balancing what it means to be spirit beings that live in a physical world. Jesus became a full participant with us in our humanity, emptying himself, becoming like us, experiencing the physical death that entered the world as a result of sin, and demonstrating his power over death so that restoration of relationship and eternal existence with the Father is declared possible. In his death on the cross, he declares resolved our struggle with sin, with death, and with the uncertainties of the future. In his resurrection and ascension are made visible all our possibilities and hopes.

God wishes us to become followers of Jesus, to learn from him (to be disciples), and to imitate him so that we also reflect God's glory.

**BE FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT.** God did not re-create us and once again leave us alone in our struggles, hoping that we might succeed where human beings formerly failed. Through his Spirit he gives us his presence. We thus have confirmation and reminders of his purpose. Through his Spirit he empowers our lives and our testimony. Through his Spirit, he guarantees his promise of our inheritance, providing presence when we feel distance, even as the Holy Spirit powers our prayer life.

We become like God in each of these manifestations of his reality—one God, revealed in distinct personalities, making possible that we reach the peak of our possibilities according to his purpose.

We become like God as we become like what we worship, we become like Jesus as disciples, we become like God's Spirit and stride forward toward the invisible, spiritual realm as the ultimate expression of God's purpose for us, a place where his rule and reign in our lives and in all creation will once and for all be restored.

## **II—AN IMPORTANT QUESTION ABOUT THE CHURCH**

If all I had was the Bible, and if I were to read the Bible with the intention of understanding the church, what does that church look like? When I read in the New Testament that Jesus' disciples after his death became part of a church, and if I wanted to be part of that same church, what would that church look like? Would it look like most of the Christian churches in our world today, the churches that we humans have reasoned out and established here on earth? Would it be defined by its place or location, or by its organization, to be like those groups that we refer to as churches? Or would it look radically different? What are the basics with regard to the church?

Remember that Christians are God-fearing, Jesus-following, and Holy Spirit-filled. Fearing God includes recognizing him, respecting and worshiping him, and responding to him. Following Jesus has to do with obedience, discipleship and commitment, as we seek to become like him. Being filled with the Holy Spirit gives us God's power within us to live faithful, joyful lives.

Biblically, the church is the place where the nature of reality is explored, embraced, and experienced in community. The Bible is the revelation of God; its purpose is to reveal God to his human creation. The special revelation of Scripture reveals the nature of God, the nature of the world, and human nature. The church is the place where God is recognized for who he is.

### **THE CHURCH MUST GET 'GOD' RIGHT**

The church must understand the nature of God; must recognize God for who he is, in affirmation of eternal, unconditional relationships, full fellowship, omni-supernatural characteristics

Church is the place where God is worshiped, revered, respected because of he is worthy of worship. The Creator is worshiped by the created, just as all creation sings the glory of God.

### **THE CHURCH MUST GET 'HUMANITY' (HUMAN CREATION) RIGHT**

The church must understand the nature of human creation and God's purpose for human beings whom he created in his image.

Church is place where human capacity, both negative and positive, is affirmed, within the limitations of existence on planet Earth.

### **THE CHURCH MUST GET 'WORSHIP' RIGHT**

Right worship deals with God's truth, right actions, and appropriate applications of Scripture. Reverence and respect for God involves emotions and actions taught by God. Those actions are consistent with God's nature. [God does not want to be worshiped by those actions that are inconsistent with and do not reflect his nature.] Worship does not depend upon human (physical) nature and desires, but is rather based on who God is and his nature. Worship connects the spiritual God with the spiritual side of his human creation. Worship appeals to the human spirit, not to the human flesh.

Church is the place where response to God is encouraged and facilitated. Response to God and the reestablishment of relationship with God precedes establishing healthy relationships with other human beings.

#### THE CHURCH MUST GET 'RESPONSE TO GOD' RIGHT

Response to God is acknowledgement of who he is, thus is a "faith response." This response includes turning from a non-God life (repentance) to imitate him (discipleship, reflection) and serve him. Sin is living as though God does not exist.

Church is a place where healthy relationships are experienced. Relationships between humans are possible because of relationship with God.

#### THE CHURCH MUST GET 'RELATIONSHIPS' RIGHT

Jesus came to heal broken relationships, both vertically and horizontally.

Church is a place where people are empowered for Christian living.

#### THE CHURCH MUST GET 'RIGHTEOUSNESS' RIGHT SO THAT GOD IS REFLECTED IN OUR LIVES

Righteousness is not a condition for our relationship with God. Righteousness is the result of relationship with God. While there is a connection between righteousness and covenant relationship, God maintains covenant through his loving kindness apart from perfect righteousness. We are righteous only because God has declared us righteous on the basis of Jesus' death. God's righteousness within us allows us to reflect his glory and to experience continuing transformation into his likeness and image.

### III—AN IMPORTANT QUESTION ABOUT OUR LIVES

Given basic truths about God and his nature which are revealed in the Bible, and understanding the nature and authority of Jesus and his Word, how shall we then live? How can we reflect in our lives the restored relationships God desires—both with him and with our fellow human beings? What is God's will for our lives?

This question looks like an ethical or lifestyle question, but the answer to this question must be rooted in biblical principles. From the foundation of principles comes our value system, and out of our value system grows our behavior or ethics. The order is knowledge, understanding and affirmation, and then behaviors. Truth must be accepted, applied, and then acted upon.

### CONCLUSION

At times the thought of going "back to basics" troubles me. When I think about how to advise someone who has lived an entire lifetime without biblical knowledge of God, away from God and away from his purpose and his guidance, the answers and solutions to moral dilemmas—the things that seem so clear through the traditions of my inherited religious grid—are not nearly so black and white. What does it mean for a person who has lived a pagan life to turn to God?

If such a person comes to know God and recognize God according to his revealed nature in the Bible, if such a person wants to respect and worship God, if such a person wants to turn from a former ungodly way of life and to embrace a renewed, re-created life of reconciliation and healthy relationships, how is that possible? All things are possible with God. What should I say? How should I guide such a person to become the reflection of God's glory and goodness? What would you share to help such a person toward genuine transformation that constantly renews one's thinking to understand God's will?