

Lesson 1

Essential Christian Doctrines

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DETERMINING A DOCTRINE'S RELEVANCE AND IMPORTANCE

A doctrine is a teaching that is considered part of the church's creed. Each doctrine is relevant for our daily walk and abiding in Christ, yet not all doctrines are relevant for salvation. One appropriate method for the study of Biblical doctrines is to divide each doctrine into one of three groups or categories of doctrines taught within Scripture.

First Category: Doctrines that are essential to the Christian faith, such as the Trinity, the full deity and humanity of Jesus Christ, justification by faith, the authority of Scripture, and the bodily return of Jesus. ***These doctrines represent the most fundamental truths of the Christian faith, and a denial of these doctrines represents nothing less than an eventual denial of Christianity itself.***

Second Category: Non-essential doctrines on which believing Christians may disagree but which will result in significant boundaries between denominations. Whether to baptize infants or adult believers falls into this category. The question of whether women should be ordained as church leaders also belongs within this category, etc... Often the definition of election/predestination falls into this category.

Third Category: Non-essential doctrines over which Christians should learn to disagree agreeably. "Christians who affirm the bodily, historical, and victorious return of the Lord Jesus Christ may differ over timetable and sequence without rupturing the fellowship of the church. Christians may find themselves in disagreement over any number of issues related to the interpretation of difficult texts or the understanding of matters of common disagreement. Nevertheless, standing together on issues of more urgent importance, believers should accept one another without compromise when this category of doctrines are in question. This is where election/predestination should reside.

Another method of examining God's doctrine is by dividing God's attributes between God's communicable attributes and God's incommunicable attributes.

A communicable attribute is one that can be transferred from one person to another. (An analogical comparison is that of diseases, some are contagious and some are not.) In like manner, God's communicable attributes are those that can be transferred to His creatures.

In contrast, an incommunicable attribute is one that cannot be transferred. God's incommunicable attributes, therefore, cannot be attributes of humans. Even God cannot communicate certain characteristics of His being to His creatures.

The distinction between God's incommunicable and communicable attributes is important because it helps us come to a clear understanding of the difference between God and any creature. No creature can ever possess an incommunicable attribute of God Almighty.

Incommunicable attributes of God (not shared by creatures) include His aseity, infinity, eternity, omnipresence, immensity, omniscience, and others.

Communicable attributes include, to name a few, holiness, love, goodness, justice, righteousness, and wisdom.

Many of these attributes are discussed within this book.

Today, the Apostles Creed and the Nicene Creed represents the most basic teachings of the Christian beliefs. These are called the Essential Doctrines. They are considered essential beliefs one must have for salvation.

As a review and for thoroughness, I am listing the 14 Essential doctrines and their meanings immediately below.

- ⇒ **God's Unity:** There is only one God. He has always existed and will always exist. There is one –and only one –God, Creator of the universe.
- ⇒ **God's Tri-Unity (Trinity):** While there is only one God, he exists eternally in three persons.
 - ⇒ **The Father is called God**
 - *2 Thessalonians 1:2* Grace to you and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - ⇒ **The Son (Jesus) is called God**
 - *John 1:1-5* In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (2) He was in the beginning with God. (3) All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. (4) In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. (5) The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it
 - *John 10:30-33* I and the Father are one.” (31) The Jews picked up stones again to stone Him. (32) Jesus answered them, “I showed you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you stoning Me?” (33) The Jews answered Him, “For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because You, being a man, make Yourself out to be God.”
 - *John 20:28* Thomas answered and said to Him, “My Lord and my God!”
 - *Hebrews 1:8* But of the Son He says, “YOUR THRONE, O GOD, IS FOREVER AND EVER, AND THE RIGHTEOUS SCEPTER IS THE SCEPTER OF HIS KINGDOM.
 - *Philippians 2:9-11* For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, (10) so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, (11) and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.
 - ⇒ **The Holy Spirit is called God**
 - *Acts 5:3-4* But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land? (4) While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.
 - *2 Corinthians 3:17* Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.
 - ⇒ God is one substance, but three Persons in relationship. There are more than 60 passages in the Bible that mention the three Persons together. The doctrine of the Trinity was formally developed in the early church in reaction to errant teaching on the nature of God. To affirm the Church's stance on the nature of God, the Trinity was formally included within the Nicene Creed (325 A.D.) and the later Apostles Creed. As a result of these early ecumenical creeds, any departure from the Christian doctrine of the Trinity was considered heresy. These creeds affirm the early Christian conviction that Jesus was God. The term "Trinity", is not found in the Bible.
 - *Matthew 28:19* - "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit"
 - *2 Corinthians 13:14* - "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen."
 - *Revelation 1:4-5* - "John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace to you, and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before the throne, and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth."

- ⇒ **Human Depravity:** Since God is a personal Being, He wants a personal relationship with each human being. Human depravity means that every human positionally is in the **worst possible position** they can be before God Almighty and therefore are spiritually separated from God, totally incapable of saving himself. When Adam sinned, he died spiritually and his relationship with God was severed. Additionally, all of Adam's descendants are "dead in trespasses" (*Eph2:1 And you were dead in your trespasses and sins.*). Without a new birth (being created anew) no one can enter life everlasting with God (*John 3:3 Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."*).
- ⇒ **Christ's Virgin Birth:** Jesus was born as a result of a miracle: Mary, Jesus' mother, became pregnant without ever having sexual relations. The doctrine of Jesus' Virgin Birth is not primarily about Mary's virginity and miraculous conception. Though this miracle fulfilled a preordained prophecy (*Isaiah 7:14 Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel.*), the reason it is essential has to do with God's supernatural intervention.
- ⇒ **Man's Sinful Nature.** Our sin nature is not merely something we do –it is who we are. The Instant Adam sinned against God, we all became positionally sinners and lost. It is much like my grandfather who migrated from Germany to the United States. His choice became my choice. His choice were all of his descendant's choice. Our depravity is transmitted to us from our parents.
 - (*Psalm 51:5*) *Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me.*
 - (*1 Corinthians 15:22*) *For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.*
 - (*Romans 5:12-15*). *Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned— (13) for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. (14) Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come. (15) But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many*

Because of God the Holy Spirit's intervention, the natural birth process of humans was interrupted in the case of Jesus. Jesus did not inherit a sin nature as God was truly His father. In other words, Jesus not only did not sin, but could not sin even when tempted. He was perfect.

- ⇒ **Christ's Humanity:** Jesus was also fully human. Jesus got tired; He slept; He sweated; He got hungry and thirsty. Without being fully human, Jesus could not pay the price for human sin. He needed to be divine to have the power to save us, and He needed to be human in order to adequately represent us. Christ had to be both divine and human.
- ⇒ **Necessity of God's Grace:** Because of human depravity, we cannot save ourselves. It is by God's grace alone that salvation is possible. God is right to call humankind to account for sin. However, by His grace, undeserving people will be united in fellowship with Him and avoid judgment. Without God's grace, no one could come into relationship with God. Relationship with God is peace, joy, and eternal life itself.
- ⇒ **The penalty for sin is death** –not only physical death (separation of the soul from the body), but also spiritual death (separation of ourselves from God). The penalty we owe to God was paid by Christ through His death on the cross. The acceptable payment had to be perfect, complete, and without fault. Christ, the perfect man, gave Himself in our place, so that whosoever believes in Him will not die (physically and spiritually) but have everlasting life (*John 3:16 "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life)*

⇒ **Christ's Bodily Resurrection:** The atoning death of Christ paid for our sins, but the process was not complete until He had defeated death by being physically resurrected in the same body (John 2:19-25). Because Christ is the victor over death and the prototype of a new, glorified physical body, all of humanity will be resurrected and live forever in either heaven or hell.

- *John 2:19-25 Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."²⁰ The Jews then said, "It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?"²¹ But He was speaking of the temple of His body.²² So when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken.²³ Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name, observing His signs which He was doing.²⁴ But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men,²⁵ and because He did not need anyone to testify concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man.*

⇒ **Christ's Ascension:** Christ died for our sins and was physically resurrected for our salvation. Then forty days later, He was taken up ("ascended") bodily into heaven. Because Christ has ascended to the Father, the Holy Spirit now guides us, shows us where we are wrong and comforts us when we hurt. Jesus' going to the father means our life is kept safe in heaven with God.

⇒ **Christ's Intercession:** Christ's bodily ascension allowed him to serve as our mediator (or high priest) before God. In God's presence, Christ prays continually on our behalf. Like a lawyer defends someone before a judge, so Jesus defends us before the bar of God's law and against the accusations of Satan (*Rev. 12:10 Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, he who accuses them before our God day and night."*)

⇒ **Christ's Second Coming:** Just as Christ left the world physically, so He will return in the same manner. His second coming is the hope of the world. When He returns, dead believers will receive their resurrected bodies. Believers that are alive when He returns, will not die, but will be transformed into immortal physical bodies. Christ's bodily return to earth will be visible to all, and believers will rule with Him in his kingdom and live with him forever. Those who do not believe will be separated from God's goodness forever. (Judgment by God.)

In addition to the Essential doctrines, there are practices by Christians which are considered essential for living a fulfilled, abundant Christian life, and in accordance with God's commandments. They are listed below for thoroughness.

- Baptism
- Prayer
- Reading, studying, meditating upon God's Word
- Evangelism
- Spiritual Gifts
- Church Membership
- Communion
- Christian Service
- Money Management
- Christian Fellowship
- Walking By Faith

It is outside of this document to evaluate each of these essential practices, however; I have written a separate document, *The Basics of Christianity*, that goes into the above in great detail.

AT A GLANCE: ESSENTIAL CHRISTIAN PRACTICES

Essential Doctrines

1. God's Unity
2. God's Trinity
3. Human Depravity
4. Christ's Virgin Birth
5. Man's Sinful Nature
6. Christ's Humanity
7. The Necessity For God's Grace
8. The Penalty For Sin Is Death
9. Christ's Bodily Resurrection
10. Christ's Ascension
11. Christ's Intercession
12. Christ's Second Coming

Essential Christian Practices

1. Baptism
2. Prayer
3. Reading & studying God's Word
4. Evangelism
5. Spiritual Gifts
6. Church Membership
7. Communion
8. Christian Service
9. Money Management
10. Christian Fellowship
11. Walking By Faith

The Apostle's Creed

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, the creator of the heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, Our Lord: Who was conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into Heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father Almighty, whence He shall judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic (universal) church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.

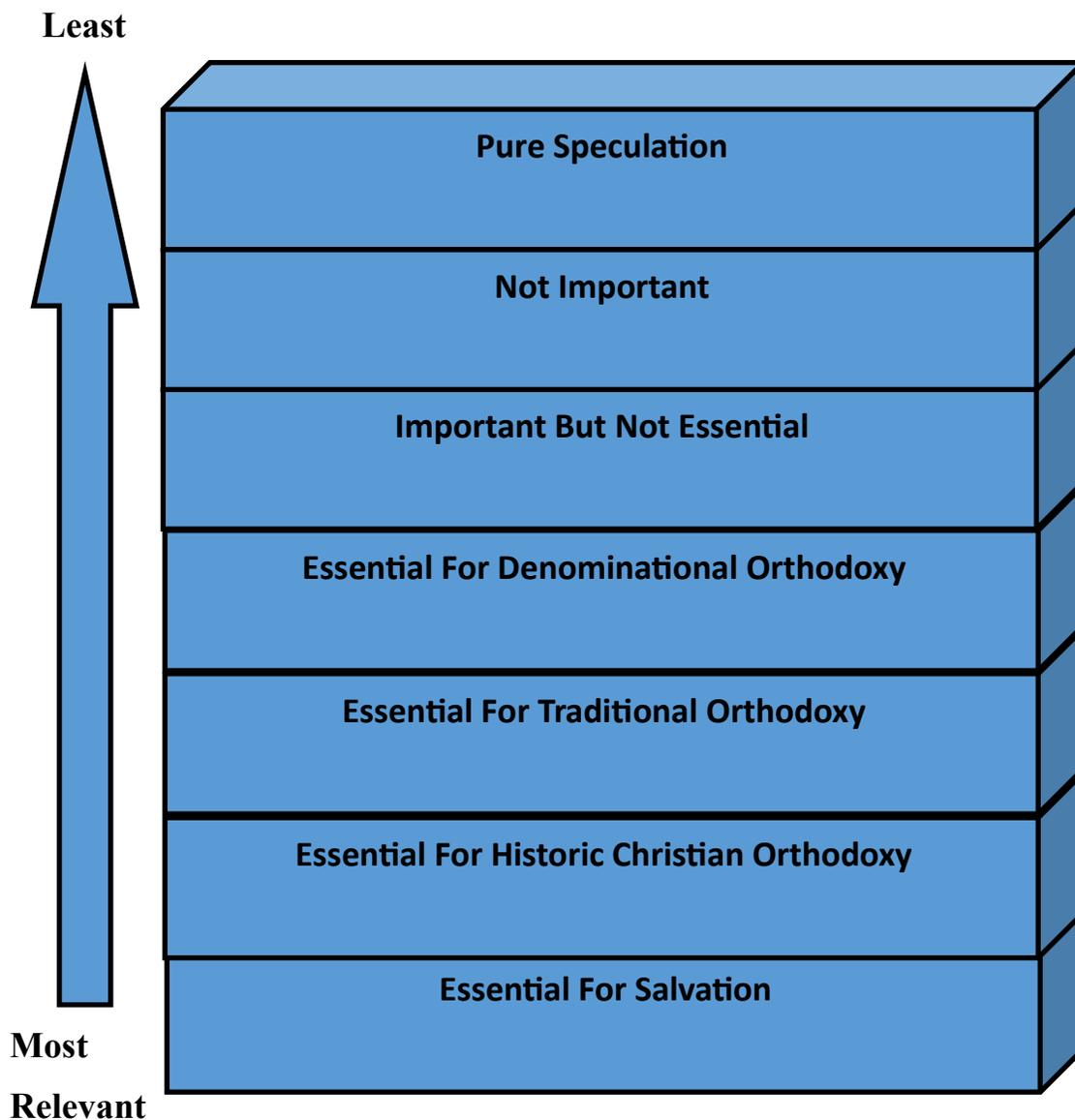
The Nicene Creed

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten by the Father, God of God, Light of Light, True God from True God, begotten not made, of one being with the Father. Through Him all things were made, For us and for our salvation, He came down from heaven; by the power of the Holy Spirit He became incarnate from the virgin Mary, and became man. For our sake He was crucified under Pontius Pilate; He suffered death and was buried. On the third day He arose again in accordance with the scriptures; He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and His kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and Son. With the Father and son He is worshipped and glorified. He has spoken through the prophets. We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church. We acknowledge baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.

In the Christian sense the term, "Orthodoxy" means "conforming to the Christian faith as represented in the creeds of the early Church." The first seven ecumenical councils were held between the years of 325 and 787 with the aim of formalizing accepted doctrines. Each council categorized doctrines with great care to ensure the integrity of Christian Orthodoxy, often deriving categories as shown below.



In this Bible Study the three categories mentioned earlier in this lesson will be covered as shown below. A very complete treatment of Basic Christian Doctrines are covered in another Bible Study. All other lessons in this Bible Study devote themselves to the highly important, yet non-essential Christian doctrines.

