

# BASIC BELIEFS

## “as of first importance”

### Key question

What are the most basic Christian beliefs?

### Key Definition

Basic beliefs or fundamentals are the essential beliefs that a person must embrace to be considered a Christian.

### Key text

## II Timothy 2

“<sup>14</sup> Remind {them} of these things, and solemnly charge {them} in the presence of God not to wrangle about words, which is useless, {and leads} to the ruin of the hearers. <sup>15</sup> Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth. <sup>16</sup> But avoid worldly {and} empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness,”

### Introduction

1. There is a growing trend in Western culture to regard traditional Christianity as a belief system that is no longer viable for thoughtful people. Consider the following popular ideas.
  - a. **Postmodernism** - The global village has demanded: 1) pluralism with respect to values, 2) the elevation of the common human quest for meaning above all narrow roads that do not respect the sincerely held beliefs of others.
  - b. **Pluralism** – Any belief system must respect the “common human experience” as it is reflected in a culturally pluralistic world.
  - c. **Universalism** - Any system that is exclusive is seen as hostile to humanity and therefore not worthy of respect. Traditional Christianity claims to be exclusive on a number of fronts. If these exclusive tenants are maintained, Christian faith loses its credibility.
2. What are the fundamentals of the Christian faith?
  - a. What must a person believe in order to be recognized as a Christian?
  - b. When we talk about majoring on majors and minoring on minors, what is major?
  - c. How do we define mere Christianity without making it minimal Christianity?
3. Christianity is distinct from Judaism, Islam and many other religions in that:
  - a. It is a religion of beliefs rather than ethics or religious experience.

- b. It is offensive to monotheism because it believes that Jesus was fully God while distinct from God the Father.
- c. It is offensive to polytheism in that it claims to be monotheistic.
- d. It is offensive to pantheism in that it distinguishes between the Creator and the creation placing humans above the rest of creation.
- e. Its doctrine of justification before God based on grace (through faith in Jesus alone and not on human merit) is offensive to nearly all other religions.

## A. **The Creeds are an expression of the fundamentals of the Christian faith.**

### 1. **The Apostle's Creed**

- \* I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth:
- \* And in Jesus Christ, his only begotten 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 again from the dead:
- \* He ascended into heaven, and sits 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:
- \* I believe in the holy catholic church: the communion of saints:
- \* The forgiveness of sins:
- \* The resurrection of the body:
- \* And the life everlasting. Amen.

Notes: The *Apostle's Creed* was developed between the second and ninth centuries. It is the most popular creed used in worship by Western Christians. Its central doctrines are those of the Trinity and God the Creator.

Legend has it that the Apostles wrote this creed on the tenth day after Christ's ascension into heaven. That is not the case, though the name stuck. However, each of the doctrines found in the creed can be traced to statements current in the apostolic period. The earliest written version of the creed is perhaps the *Interrogatory Creed of Hippolytus* (ca. A.D. 215). The current form is first found in the writings of *Caesarius of Arles* (d 542).

The creed was apparently used as a summary of Christian doctrine for baptismal candidates in the churches of Rome. Hence it is also known as *The Roman Symbol*. As in Hippolytus' version it was given in question and answer format with the baptismal candidates answering in the affirmative that they believed each statement.

### 2. **The Nicene Creed**

- \* I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.
- \* And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one sustenance with the Father, by whom all things were made.
- \* Who, for us men for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again,

according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

- \* And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets.
- \* And I believe one holy catholic and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Notes: In the first three centuries, the church found itself in a hostile environment. On the one hand, it grappled with the challenge of relating the language of the gospel, developed in a Hebraic and Jewish-Christian context, to a Graeco-Roman world. On the other hand, it was threatened not only by persecution, but also by ideas that were in conflict with the biblical witness.

In A.D. 312, Constantine won control of the Roman Empire in the battle of Milvian Bridge. Attributing his victory to the intervention of Jesus Christ, he elevated Christianity to favored status in the empire. "One God, one Lord, one faith, one church, one empire, one emperor" became his motto.

The new emperor soon discovered that "one faith and one church" were fractured by theological disputes, especially conflicting understandings of the nature of Christ, long a point of controversy. Arius, a priest of the church in Alexandria, asserted that the divine Christ, the Word through whom all things have their existence, was created by God before the beginning of time. Therefore, the divinity of Christ was similar to the divinity of God, but not of the same essence. Arius was opposed by the bishop, Alexander, together with his associate and successor, Athanasius. They affirmed that the divinity of Christ, the Son, is of the same substance as the divinity of God, the Father. To hold otherwise, they said, was to open the possibility of polytheism, and to imply that knowledge of God in Christ was not final knowledge of God.

To counter a widening rift within the church, Constantine convened a council in Nicaea in A.D. 325. A creed reflecting the position of Alexander and Athanasius was written and signed by a majority of the bishops. Nevertheless, the two parties continued to battle each other. In A.D. 381, a second council met in Constantinople. It adopted a revised and expanded form of the A.D. 325 creed, now known as the Nicene Creed.

The Nicene Creed is the most ecumenical of creeds. The Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and most Protestant churches affirm this creed. Nevertheless, in contrast to Eastern Orthodox churches, the western churches state that the Holy Spirit proceeds not only from the Father, but from the Father and the Son (Latin, *filioque*). To the eastern churches, saying that the Holy Spirit proceeds from both Father and Son threatens the distinctiveness of the person of the Holy Spirit; to the western churches, the *filioque* guards the unity of the triune God. This issue remains unresolved in the ecumenical dialogue.

- B. **The Fundamentals** – (as articulated in the modernist / fundamentalist controversies of the early 1900's) They can be accessed on line ([www.xmission.com/~fidelis/](http://www.xmission.com/~fidelis/)).
- The term "fundamentalism" has its origin in a series of pamphlets published between 1910 and 1915. Entitled "The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth," these booklets were authored by leading evangelical churchmen and were circulated free of charge among clergymen and

seminarians. By and large, fundamentalism was a response to the loss of influence traditional revivalism experienced in America during the early years of the twentieth century. This loss of influence, coupled with the liberalizing trends of German biblical criticism and the encroachment of Darwinian theories about the origin of the universe, prompted a response by conservative churchmen. The result was the 12 pamphlets. In 1920, a journalist and Baptist layman named Curtis Lee Laws appropriated the term ‘fundamentalist’ as a designation for those who were ready “to do battle royal for the Fundamentals.”

### Three principle texts that reveal the fundamentals of the Christian faith:

## 1. The Gospel Message

Key text

I Corinthians 15:1-5

“<sup>1</sup> Now I make known to you brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, <sup>2</sup> by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. <sup>3</sup> For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that **Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures**, <sup>4</sup> and that He was buried, and that **He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures**, <sup>5</sup> and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.”

- a. *“<sup>1</sup> Now I make known to you brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand,”*
  1. Here we see the normal pattern of conversion: preaching – receiving – standing.
  2. Saving faith is a continual life direction and belief.
- b. *“<sup>2</sup> by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain”*
  1. Eternal security is conditioned on continued faith.
  2. Eternal security is not conditioned on maintaining an ethical standard.
- c. *“<sup>3</sup> For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins” according to the Scriptures,”*
  1. Christ’s death not his ethical teaching is the essence of the good news.
  2. The Scripture is the guide to authenticating any Christian teaching.
- d. *“<sup>4</sup> and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,” <sup>5</sup> and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.”*
  1. The resurrection is at the center of NT gospel preaching.
  2. The resurrection was a space, time, physical event.

### 3. The Lord Jesus Christ

#### Key text

#### Colossians 1:13-20

“<sup>13</sup> For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, <sup>14</sup> in whom we have **redemption, the forgiveness of sins**. <sup>15</sup> He is the **image of the invisible God**, the firstborn over all creation. <sup>16</sup> For **by him all things were created**: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. <sup>17</sup> He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup> And he is **the head of the body, the church**; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. <sup>19</sup> For God was pleased to have **all his fullness dwell in him**, <sup>20</sup> and **through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.**”

- a. “<sup>13</sup>For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves,”
1. Our salvation is likened to a rescue that is accomplished for us by Christ. It is not something we do.
  2. The Kingdom of God is described as the Kingdom of God’s Son thus linking the Father and Son in a unique way.
- b. “<sup>14</sup>in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”
1. “Redemption” is a term suggesting payment.
  2. Redemption and forgiveness of sins are linked.
- c. “<sup>15</sup>He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.”
1. Christ is the image of God in a unique way.
  2. As the first born of all creation he is not created but rather the first in rank of all creation. He is the fountainhead of creation.
- d. “<sup>16</sup>For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.”
1. The creation is not limited to the physical cosmos but includes the spiritual world and history as well.
  2. The creation exists for Christ. He is more than an instrument of creation; he is Lord of it.
- e. “<sup>17</sup>He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”

1. Christ is eternal.
  2. Christ gives meaning to all life and preserves the creation through time.
- f. *“<sup>18</sup>And he is the head of the body, the church;”*
1. The church is his present incarnate body in the earth.
  2. As “head” he is both the source and Lord of the church.
- g. *“he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.”*
1. Christ is Lord of the resurrected from the dead.
  2. As participant in and conqueror of death he is Lord of both the living and the dead.
- h. *“<sup>19</sup>For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, <sup>20</sup>and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.”*
1. The fullness of deity rested with Christ.
  2. The reconciliation of all things to God is through Christ’s sacrifice.
  3. Peace with God is won for us through the cross.

## 4. The Christian Life

Key text

Ephesians 2:8-10

*“<sup>8</sup> For it is by **grace you have been saved, through faith** —and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — <sup>9</sup> not by works, so that no one can boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are God’s workmanship, **created in Christ Jesus to do good works**, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”*

- a. *“<sup>8</sup> For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith —and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — <sup>9</sup> not by works, so that no one can boast.”*
1. The nature of our salvation is such that it can in no way be credited to our wisdom, virtue, or privilege.
  2. God initiates salvation.
  3. Salvation is based on faith not faithfulness.
- b. *“<sup>10</sup> For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”*
1. We are God’s property.

2. Ethics are an expected fruit of salvation.
3. True saving faith is independent of and prior to faithfulness.
4. While saving faith will always bear fruit in the believer's life, the fruit may not be evident to anyone but God (in the case of a born again heart).

### **Basic Christian Library**

#### **A Concordance to the Bible**

A concordance is a list of all the major words used in the Bible with a reference to where they can be found. Its value is in finding a verse when you only know a few words from memory. It also tells you how a word is used in the Bible by showing you all the references. I recommend one of two concordances: **Young's Analytical Concordance to the Bible**, Eerdmans, and **Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible**. There are others that will serve just as well. **Nave's Topical Bible**, Moody Press, arranges key passages by topic and not only gives the reference but also prints out the text so you do not have to look it up in your Bible. **Vine – An Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words**, Nelson Publishing is also very helpful. It is a dictionary of major Greek and Hebrew words referenced by their English translation. You do not have to know Greek or Hebrew to use it.

#### **A Bible Dictionary**

A good Bible dictionary is indispensable in helping a student answer many of the questions that arise in reading the Bible. I would recommend **The New Bible Dictionary** by Douglas, Eerdmans as one of many good possibilities. Any dictionary published by one of the big Christian publishers (Word, Eerdmans, Zondervan, IV, Victor, Moody, Nelson, etc.) will be good. If you want a heavy duty version I recommend **The International Standard Bible Encycloaedia** by Orr, Eerdmans

#### **A Bible Commentary**

A good commentary will give you an idea of how specific texts of Scripture are interpreted by those who spend their life doing just that in the company of others who also study the Bible. A commentary is not meant to replace your personal study but rather to let you know how your understanding of the text compares with others who have spend hundreds of hours in prayerful study. I like **The Bible Knowledge Commentary** by Walvoord and Zuck, Victor. **The New Bible Commentary: Revised** by Guthrie, Eerdmans is also a good choice.

#### **A Basic Christian Theology Text**

Look at the list below for some suggestions. A good theology text will give you a summary of basic Christian teaching on most subjects. I recommend the following:

Bruce Milne, **Know the Truth**, IV, 1998

This short concise text is an excellent starter for anyone interested in examining Christian doctrine for the first time. It is balanced and contains helpful discussion questions that can be used in a class. It comes from a Reformed perspective.

Erickson, Millard. **Christian Theology**. Grand Rapids, Baker, 1985

This is a clear and very thorough recent textbook in systematic theology from a Baptist perspective. Erickson, who is a highly respected professor who has taught at –Bethel Seminary, Southwestern Baptist Seminary, and Western Seminary. He interacts with modern trends, is very irenic, balanced, and practical in his style. This is a seminary level text. I agree with him on almost all points.

Erickson, Millard. **Introducing Christian Doctrine**. Grand Rapids, Baker, 1992

This is a condensed version of Christian Theology. It is a college level text. This would be a good entry level text for most people.

Oden, Thomas. **Systematic Theology (Vol.I The Living God, Vol.II The Word of Life, Vol.III Life in the Spirit.)** San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987 Oden is a brilliant, and highly respected Methodist theologian who has moved from his previous liberal theological convictions to a conservative evangelical position. He interacts extensively with theologians from the early history of the church. This is delightful reading.

Grudem, Wayne. **Systematic Theology**. Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publishing House, 1994

Grudem's book is wonderfully outlined, very clear, user friendly to lay people, and practical. It reflects a Reformed Baptist position with a Charismatic leaning. I like its usefulness and format but feel that it is not as thorough or irenic as Erickson.

Grudem, Wayne. **Bible Doctrine**. Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publishing House, 1999

This is a condensed version of Systematic Theology. This text is even more useful than Grudem's big volume. It is very attractive for new students of theology.

Ryrie, Charles. **Basic Theology**. Wheaton, Ill: Victor, 1986.

This is a clearly written introduction to systematic theology from a dispensational perspective, by a former professor of mine. It is a good basic text.

### **Spiritual Formation**

Richard Foster & James Bryan Smith, **Devotional Classics**, Harper Collins, 1993

This collection of writings exposes me to a broad range of spiritual experiences all of which are challenging.

Watchman Nee, **The Normal Christian Life**, Christian Literature Crusade, 1957

All of Nee's books have been challenging, with some (The Spiritual Man (3 volumes)) being hard to understand. While I do not always agree with Nee, I am always challenged by his writings.

Kenneth Boa, **Conformed to His Image**, Zondervan, 2001

While not at all a devotional read, it is a great summary of how to think about the breadth of Christian Spiritual formation.

Larry Crabb, **Inside Out**, NavPress 1988

I read everything Crabb writes and am seldom left empty.

Jonathan Edwards, **Religious Affections**, Multnomah, 1984

Edwards is not easy reading but it is worth the effort. A classic on "religious feelings."

C.S.Lewis, **Mere Christianity**, Macmillan, 1960

All of Lewis' stuff is worth reading. This is a classic.



Ray Stedman, **Body Life**, Regal, 1972, 1993

Body Life was very helpful in shaping my expectations and vision for what the church could be.

## **Authors who have shaped or who reflect my thinking**

**Theology** - Millard Erickson, (I find myself in general agreement with Dr. Erickson on most issues both in terms of content and style of expression.)

**Culture** - Chuck Colson, Richard Newhouse, Dinesh D'Souza (I greatly respect the sensitivity and insight with which these men express the Christian's posture in the world).

**Counseling** - Larry Crabb (I admire his style of communication, his growth process, and the way he has integrated his faith into the psychological areas of life.)

**Biblical studies** - D.A. Carson, N.T. Wright (I find these men to be not only brilliant but also fair and faithful in applying the Word of God to the questions of modern life.)

**Apologetics** – Carl F.H. Henry, Edward Carnell, (These two writers were helpful in shaping the way I thought about life and faith when I was a new believer.)

step one

## **The Gospel**

All people share two things in common: **they are seekers** and **they are frustrated**.

People envision and long for a utopian immortality – an abundant and long life. This desire is often expressed as a **search for happiness and personal peace** or a **quest for social freedom and justice** in a community of mutual respect and love.

But people are frustrated in their searching. They know something is terribly wrong in this world.

**Personal peace and happiness are fleeting realities at best and there seems to be no end to social strife and injustice.**

The Bible explains this condition. It calls the object of our seeking **the kingdom of God** and it calls our basic frustration “**sin.**” The Bible contains both good and bad news: **good news about God and bad news about you and me.**

### **Creation**

#### **The Good news**

God created us to *enjoy an abundant and eternal life in intimate harmony with Himself and His creation.*

"And God created man in His own image. . . And God blessed them. . . And God saw all that He had made and behold, it was very good." Genesis 1:27-31

#### **The Bad news**

We have chosen to exist in active or passive rebellion against God and in so doing *we have died, being separated from God and His Kingdom.*

"For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." Romans 3:23

"All of us, like sheep, have gone astray; we have turned every one of us, to his own way. . ." Isaiah 53:6

"Your sins have been a barrier between you and your God." Isaiah 59:2

### Commandments

#### The Good news

God has given to us *moral laws and religious rituals to show us the true nature of our alienation from Him and the nature of His salvation.*

"Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions . . . Therefore that Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith." Galatians 3:19-24

#### The Bad news

We have sought to use religious rituals and moral laws to *justify our entitlement to eternal life through our own merit apart from God's grace.*

"For not knowing about God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God." Romans 10:3

### Cross

#### The Good news

God sent His Son *to redeem us from the death curse of our sin* by dying in our place and offering us life in His Kingdom.

"Christ has suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God." 1 Peter 3:18

"And when you were dead in your transgressions. . . He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross." Colossians 2:13-14

#### The Bad news

We often come to the cross for our forgiveness *but do not pick up and bear the cross in our lifestyle.*

"I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and delivered

### Commitment

#### The Good news

We can participate in God's kingdom *by repenting of our independence from God (sin) and by trusting in His provision for our redemption – Jesus Christ.*

"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life." John 5:24

"For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law. . ." Romans 3:28

#### The Bad news

We can often limit faith to an *intellectual confession* or equate it with *faithfulness to the Law.*

"Not every one who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'" Matthew 7:21-23

## A Closing Word

### Three thresholds of spiritual development

- The striving for **Gusto**. "I want a full and happy life."
- The striving for **Goodness**. "I should be a better person."
- The striving for **Grace**. "I come to and follow after Christ."

### Three Responses to the Gospel

- For some the gospel is **foolishness** – they see no need to deal with God in their search for life.
- For some the gospel is a **stumbling block** – they want to deal with God on their own terms.
- For some the gospel is **the power and wisdom of God** – they hear it as good news and gladly receive it in faith.

"For the Jews ask for signs, and Greeks search for wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God." 1Corinthians 1:22-24

### Expressing your commitment

**Saving faith** is privately expressed through calling out to God in prayer and confession of personal commitment to Christ.

". . . If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved." Romans 10:9

**Water baptism** is the public expression of faith and is the rite of initiation into the Christian community.

"Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Acts 2:38

step two

## The Christian life

Becoming a Christian is not the end but the beginning of a dynamic relationship with God involving spiritual growth. **Spiritual growth** implies that spiritual maturity is a *process* involving time and that the church is made up of Christians at all stages of development. As in all of life, the possibility of arrested development exists.

### It is possible to be a Christian and yet not be a healthy or mature believer.

- The **natural man** – does not have true saving faith.
- The **spiritual believer** – has faith that results in freedom, faithfulness, and fruitfulness.
- The **carnal believer** – has faith that is spiritually undeveloped.

"But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him. . . but he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no man. . . And I, brethren could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to babes in Christ. . . . for since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?" 1 Corinthians 2:14-3:3

All Christians are called to a commitment that results in **freedom, faithfulness, and fruitfulness**. True faith normally results in three experiences:

- An inner freedom from **psychological guilt, bondage to sin, and fear of condemnation** by God.
- A strong impulse to follow **Christ as Lord**.
- An effective **power to build** the Kingdom of God.

**Christians learn of God and His Kingdom through three windows —**

**The Jehovah of the Old Testament** — a powerful father, a loving provider, and a holy, just judge. It is in the Old Testament that we learn of the importance of faithfulness.

**The Jesus of the Gospels** — a merciful redeemer, a relational brother, and a servant King. It is in the Gospels that we learn of the nature and means of fruitfulness.

**The Christ of the epistles** of the New Testament — an indwelling comforter, a gracious enabler, and a functioning head of the church. It is in the epistles that we learn of the radical freedom we have in Christ.

### **FREEDOM - Personal Peace**

Freedom is the assurance that I am secure and loved by God. There is no condemnation for those in Christ. Psychological guilt (fear of rejection and condemnation ) has no place in the lives of those who are in Christ.

“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. There is deliverance from bondage to sin for those in Christ. We are no longer trapped without power to resist sin but by yielding to the Spirit of Christ within us we can overcome sin. For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin. He condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.” Romans 8:3-4

When we look at ourselves and one another in the context of “the Spirit” of Christ we see a person who’s sin is forgiven, a person who is accepted fully by God.

When we look at ourselves and one another in the context of “the flesh” we see a “wretched person” with many flaws, sins, and acts of rebellion.

“For the mind set on the flesh is death but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace.” Romans 8:6

The fact the God accepts us in Christ does not mean that He approves of everything that we do.

We are secure in our relationship with Him because we are His children not because we are perfect disciples.

### **FAITHFULNESS - Holy living**

**True faithfulness is from the inside out.** Holiness starts with our new identity in Christ. In baptism we died and were raised with Christ through our identification with Him. Holiness is simply being true to our new identity in Christ.

“If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is.” Colossians 3:1

### **Faith and Faithfulness have a special relationship.**

- Justification is by faith (not faithfulness).
- Justification *inspires* faithfulness.

“For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” Ephesians 2:8-10

### **Holiness**

**Real holiness involves our motives and thoughts.** Holiness is simply the way we look at things (ourselves, life, others, & God). Holiness extends to our outward conduct in every expression of life. It is manifested in the way we relate to the demands of life.

“Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.” Colossians 3:2-3

“And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.” Colossians 3:17

“. . . But speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ,” Ephesians 4:15

### **FRUITFULNESS - A living ministry**

**A fruitful ministry is on the far side of an intimate relationship with Grace, the Cross, and the Spirit of Christ.**

Fruitful ministry starts with sensing our full acceptance through the Grace of Christ. We love because we have first been loved by God.

“I urge you therefore, brethren by the mercies of God, . . .” Romans 12:1a

**Fruitful ministry requires self-sacrifice through our identification with the Cross of Christ.**

We are called to minister to other’s needs, not manipulate others to meet our needs.

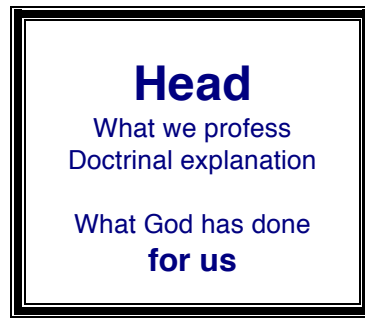
“Present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice,” Romans 12:1b

**Fruitful ministry comes with the proper use of service gifts through the Spirit of Christ.**

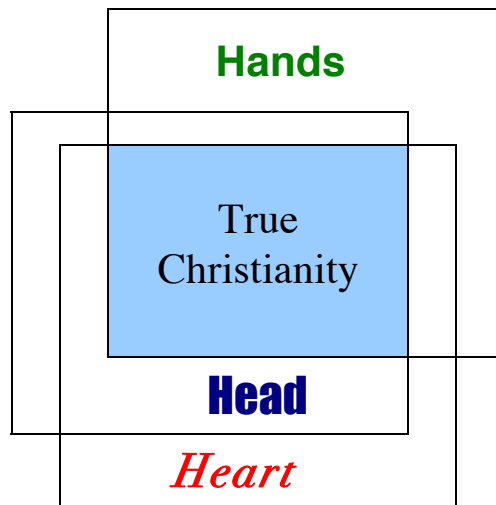
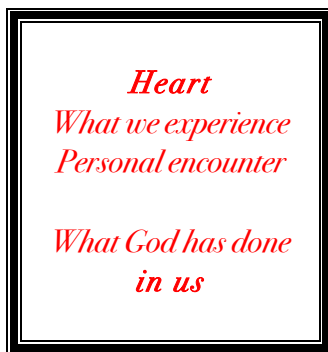
“and since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us let each exercise them accordingly” Romans 12:6

### ***I Timothy 1***

“13 Retain the standard of **sound words** which you have heard from me, in the **faith** and **love** which are in Christ Jesus. 14 Guard through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you.”



*Christian  
faith*



The local church (a pamphlet)

step three

## **The Local Church**

The local church plays an integral role in God's plan and our lives as followers of Christ. We can understand this role by looking at **Purposes, Principles, & Programs** of the church.

### **Purposes of the Local Church**

In God's plan for advancing His Kingdom, each Christian is to be related to a local church, the Body of Christ, through which God expresses His kingdom on earth. We understand that

**The church is**

**the people of God** (*confessing faith in Christ*)

**in a community** (*in relationship with each other*)

**with a mission** (*following Christ*).

As "the body of Christ" the church's purpose is most simply stated as:

**responding to Christ**

through

**Exalting** Christ as Creator, Redeemer, and Lord.

**Exemplifying** the values of His kingdom.

**Edifying** His body, the Church.

**Evangelizing** His world.

**Enhancing** our culture.

**Embracing** our heritage

### **Principles of the Local Church**

In scripture God gives us principles to guide the church in accomplishing His purposes. These principles direct four key relationships:

- **Members communicating with one another.**
- **The assembly addressing God.**
- **God ministering to the church.**
- **God ministering through the church.**

#### **1. Relationships**

"And they devoted themselves to . . . fellowship." Acts 2:42

**The church functions as God intends when members interact about their faith.**

The local congregation is to facilitate and not frustrate **vital relational experiences** within the church and marketplace. These relationships are based on grace and truth.

When people come to us untaught, burned out or wounded, the church should not ask them to serve, but to learn, rest and heal. After they have learned, rested, and healed, they should be expected to teach, comfort and heal others. We want to create a place where people are free to be honest and where truth is welcomed.

## 2. Worship

"And they devoted themselves to . . . prayer. . . praising God." Acts 2:42, 47

**The church functions as God intends when corporate worship and prayer are an integral part of its life. The church worships when the assembly speaks directly to God in praise or thanksgiving.**

The local church is to facilitate and not frustrate the **vital worship experiences** of corporate and private prayer and praise. Worship means attributing worth to God. This is best accomplished when we talk *to* God, not just *about* God. By definition sermons, announcements, or any part of a service addressed to the congregation belong in another category.

Private prayer and worship is an important part of preparation for corporate worship.

## 3. Teaching

"And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. . ." Acts 2:42

**The church functions as God intends when the ministry of the word is presented with power and integrated into all of life.**

The local church is to facilitate and not frustrate **vital learning experiences** by encouraging expository Bible teaching, personal Bible study and ministry development.

The truths of the Scripture are food for our souls. Without them we are weak and vulnerable. Bible teaching should be sensitive to both the Biblical context and current cultural. It should encourage people to faith and good works in response to God's nature and mercy.

Personal study of Scripture should be encouraged and assisted by sound teaching so that every believer becomes equipped to define, defend, declare and demonstrate the word of life.

## 4. Spiritual gifts

". . . and many wonders and signs were done. . . and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need. . . and the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved." Acts 2:43-37

**The church functions as God intends when the gifts of the Holy Spirit are understood and are operative.**

Our gifts and talents are to be used to serve others in the name of Christ. This service is to be in response to God's grace and in the context of self-sacrifice.

The local church is to facilitate and not frustrate **vital ministry experiences** to, within, and outside the church.



Some gifts, such as teaching or preaching, minister *to* the entire body,. (1 Peter 4:11). Others, like rendering service (1 Peter 4:11), find better expression *within* the body as members serve one another. Most gifts can also be used *outside* the body in evangelism and social service.

### **Programs of the Local Church**

The ministry programs of the local church are the flexible “wineskins” that give structure to parts of the ministry.

#### **The local church is to be flexible as it gives structured opportunities for ministry.**

Because we are ambassadors for Christ who are called to a cross-cultural ministry, we must adapt to the culture in innovative and practical ways. The programs should serve people despite differing gifts, levels of maturity, and experience.

Not all programs will succeed, and no two churches are identical. Successful methods in one may prove disastrous in another, but **all methods must be consistent with the purposes and principles of Christ’s church.** Programs that help the local church to function according to principles should be continued. Programs that hinder the functioning of the church according to the principles should be discontinued or changed.

Programs, policies, and procedures in the local church should reflect a sensitivity to **scriptural** principles, **historical** roots of the church and the **cultural** setting in which the church exists. Our priorities are to be ordered in the following way: Properties assists programs in serving people who submit to the principles of the Kingdom of God.

