

**Foundations: Christian Essentials**

What does someone have to believe to be a Christian? Is it just “believing in Jesus”? How about “believing in God”? Those things are good, but we have to understand exactly what the Bible teaches about who Jesus is, who God is, and what “believing” is. The Bible is our standard for what we should believe and how we should live. God has graciously spoken to us clearly through his word what he is like.

Here are five things the Bible teaches that are absolutely essential for us to believe. These things separate Christianity from every false religion and worldview.

1. The Trinity - The Bible teaches that there is one God, but that this God exists in three persons--the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In other words, there are three distinct, co-equal, co-eternal persons that comprise the being of God. Confused yet? Don't worry. There are many analogies people try to use to describe the Trinity, but ultimately, nothing can truly illustrate the uniqueness of the Trinity, so let's look at Scripture:
  - a. Matthew 6:9 - *“Pray then like this: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.”*
  - b. John 20:28-29 - *“Thomas answered him, ‘My Lord and my God!’ Jesus said to him, ‘Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.’”*
  - c. Acts 5:3-4 - *“But Peter said, ‘Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?... You have not lied to man but to God.’”*
  - d. Deuteronomy 6:4 - *“Hear O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.”*

Do you see each member of the Trinity in these verses and how God is still one? These verses, among others, show that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all God. In addition to these verses, we also see all three persons present at the baptism of Jesus (Mark 1:9-11) and we see that people are supposed to be baptized into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19-20). While these three persons are all God, they are distinct from one another. They communicate with each other and each plays a different role in our salvation. The Father chooses who will be saved (Eph. 1:3-6), the Son atones for our sins (Rom. 3:23-25), and the Spirit applies Jesus' work to us (John 16:8).

2. The Resurrection - The resurrection of Jesus is the rock upon which Christianity stands or falls. In fact, it is so important that the apostle Paul said, “If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins” (1 Cor. 15:17). The reason we know that our sins are forgiven is because Jesus rose from the dead. That one event validated everything that Jesus said and did.

In fact, if there were no resurrection, Christianity would have never gotten off the ground. Paul says, “[H]e was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the

Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas [Peter], then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive...Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared to me" (1 Cor. 15:3b-8). That's a lot of people! Why did people believe Jesus was who he said he was? Because he proved it!

3. Salvation by grace alone - "Grace" is God's undeserved favor. Since all people are sinners, we cannot save ourselves. The only way we can be saved is through God showing us undeserved favor through Jesus Christ.

*Ephesians 2:4-5 - "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ--by grace you have been saved..."*

Even though we were spiritually dead and had willingly disobeyed God, he has given us new life through Jesus, even though we didn't deserve it! That's grace! It's something we can't earn; otherwise, it wouldn't be grace.

4. Salvation through faith alone - Faith is the mechanism through which God extends his grace to us. But faith isn't simply believing that God exists or intellectually agreeing that the Bible is true. The Biblical definition of faith is trust. If I say that I have faith that this chair will hold me up but I don't sit in it, do I really have faith in the chair? No, I have to sit in the chair to demonstrate my faith in it.

*Ephesians 2:8-9 - "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."*

The way God extends his grace to us is through us having faith, trusting that God is who he says he is, that his promises are certain, and that Jesus really did pay for our sins on the cross. There is nothing we do to earn God's grace, we simply receive it by faith.

5. Salvation through Christ alone - It's very easy for some people to believe that there are multiple ways to God, or that it doesn't matter what you believe as long as you are sincere. But the Bible says that we are only saved by the blood of Christ. That is the only thing that can pay for our sins. Acts 4:12 - *"And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."*

If we could be saved in any other way, then why would God send his Son to die a painful death? This is also important because there are billions of people who do not believe that Christ is the only way. It is our responsibility and privilege to tell them about God's gift of salvation through Jesus.