

What Doctrines Are Fundamental?, Part 3

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 3:11, John 1:1, Romans 10:4

Code: A328

V. The Fundamental Doctrines Are All Summed up in the Person and Work of Christ

Paul wrote, "No man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:11). Christ Himself embodied or established every doctrine that is essential to genuine Christianity. Those who reject any of the cardinal doctrines of the faith worship a "christ" who is not the Christ of Scripture.

How are the fundamentals of the faith personified in Christ?

With regard to the inspiration and authority of Scripture, He is the incarnate Word (John 1:1, 14). He upheld the written Word's absolute authority (Matthew 5:18). Christ Himself established *sola Scriptura* as a fundamental doctrine when He upbraided the Pharisees for nullifying Scripture with their own traditions: "Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, 'This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me. But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.' Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men.... You nicely set aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition" (Mark 7:6-9). Our Lord had much to say about the authority and infallibility of the Word of God.

In the doctrine of justification by faith, it is Christ's own perfect righteousness, imputed to the believer, that makes the pivotal difference between true biblical justification and the corrupted doctrine of Roman Catholicism and the cults. That is what Paul meant when he wrote, "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes" (Romans 10:4). It is also why Paul wrote that Christ is become to us righteousness (1 Corinthians 1:30), and it is why Jeremiah called Him "The Lord our righteousness" (Jeremiah 23:6). The Lord Himself, Jesus Christ, is our righteousness (Jeremiah 33:16). That is the very essence of justification by faith alone, *sola fide*.

Of course, all the fundamental doctrines related to the incarnation — the Virgin Birth of Christ, His deity, His humanity, and His sinlessness — are part and parcel of who He is. To deny any of those doctrines is to attack Christ Himself.

The essential doctrines related to His work — His atoning death, His resurrection, and the reality of His miracles — are the very basis of the Gospel (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:1-4; Hebrews 2:3-4). Reject them and you nullify the heart of the Christian message.

The fundamentals of the faith are so closely identified with Christ that the apostle John used the expression "the teaching of Christ" as a kind of shorthand for the set of doctrines he regarded as fundamental. To him, these doctrines represented the difference between true Christianity and false religion.

That is why he wrote, "Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son" (2 John 9). Far from encouraging union with those who denied the fundamental truths of the faith, John forbade any form of spiritual fellowship with or encouragement of such false religion (vv. 10-11).

So What?

It has not been my purpose here to attempt to give an exhaustive list of fundamental doctrines. Such a task is beyond the scope of this article. Furthermore, the attempt to precisely identify and number such a list of doctrines would be an extremely difficult thing to do. However, a reasonable list of fundamentals would necessarily begin with these doctrines explicitly identified in Scripture as non-negotiable: the absolute authority of Scripture over tradition (*sola Scriptura*), justification by faith alone (*sola fide*), the deity of Christ, and the Trinity.

But what are we to do with this understanding? First of all, we should resist any temptation to wield these doctrines like a judge's gavel that consigns multitudes to eternal doom. We must not set ourselves up as judges of other people's eternal fate.

On the other hand, we must recognize that those who have turned away from sound doctrine in matters essential to salvation are condemning themselves. "He who does not believe has been judged already" (John 3:18). Our passion ought to be to proclaim the fundamentals with clarity and precision, in order to turn people away from the darkness of error. We must confront head-on the blindness and unbelief that will be the reason multitudes will one day hear the Lord say, "I never knew you; depart from Me" (Matthew 7:23). Again, it must be stressed that those who act as if crucial doctrines were of no consequence only heap the false teacher's guilt on themselves (2 John 11).

We have no right to pronounce a sentence of eternal doom against anyone (John 5:22). But by the same token, we have no business receiving just anyone into the communion and fellowship of the church. We should no more forge spiritual bonds with people whose religion is fundamentally in error than we would seek fellowship with those guilty of heinous sin. To do so is tantamount to the arrogance shown by the Corinthians, who refused to dismiss from their fellowship a man living in the grossest kind of sin (1 Corinthians 5:1-3).

We must also remember that serious error can be extremely subtle. False teachers don't wear a sign proclaiming who they are. They disguise themselves as apostles of Christ (2 Corinthians 11:13). "And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness" (vv. 14-15). In view of the current hunger for ecumenical compromise, nothing is more desperately needed in the church right now than a new movement to reemphasize the fundamental articles of the faith.

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