

# REAL LIFE AND FOUNDATIONAL FAITH<sup>i</sup>

Jesus said, “*Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.*” (John 4:23-24)

Today is a good time to consider the foundational truths of your Christian faith... what doctrines do Christians believe that defines their faith? What are the key beliefs that mark genuine Christianity according to Scripture? Are you the kind of worshiper that the Father seeks... worshiping in truth and in spirit?

Pastor Mel Lawrenz, in his book titled “Putting The Pieces Back Together,”<sup>ii</sup> says... “Whether you feel that your life is a pile of puzzle pieces and you just don’t know where to begin, or that you have a basically sound picture of who you are and who God sees you to be, we all need to progress in putting the pieces of our lives ‘together.’

‘Together’ is a crucial word... as it expresses our irrepressible hope that we can connect all the roles we have, all the impulses that drive us, all the responsibilities we bear, and all the convictions we commit to. Faith and life should connect... and they do connect. Our beliefs about God and his ways in the world, about human nature, about the afterlife, and about everything else must cohere if they are true.”

Pastor Lawrenz points out, “They are the building blocks with which we can build a faith we can live in.”

A foundational faith is one that is focused on the person and work of Jesus Christ. Secondly, our Christian faith and doctrine is rooted firmly in the divine written revelation of the Old and New Testaments—God’s explanation of himself to humanity.

The 5 bedrock issues that are the vital essentials of biblical Christianity, regardless of denomination or tradition are:

1. The authority of Scripture
2. The Virgin Birth
3. The deity of Christ
4. The substitutionary atonement, and
5. The bodily resurrection and physical return of Christ.

Are you struggling with what it means to say that Jesus Christ is God, that the Bible is inerrant, and that Christ’s atonement for sin is the only way to God? Do you believe that God possess complete knowledge about the future and that those without faith in Christ will suffer eternal punishment in hell rather than just cease to exist? Have you lost hold of the essential, historical, biblical doctrines that define your Christian faith that are vital and relevant for the church of Christ today?

## A PERSONAL TESTIMONY

A few years ago, just before Christmas I heard the gospel of salvation—the Good News that Jesus, God’s Son, died and rose again as my personal Savior. At age 55, I finally understood that when Jesus was on the cross I was on his mind... that he died for my sins! The Word of God through the work of the Holy Spirit has forever changed my life.

The apostle John wrote... *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives. My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense-- Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.”* (1 John 1:9-2:2)

I received the gift of faith and the Holy Spirit came to live in me to empower me to live in such a way that I might glorify God and bring him pleasure. I became a “born-again believer” with an “evangelical Christian” faith that is rooted in the belief that God is the center of all reality and it his glory that matters the most.

During my first 55 years of life I had come to believe that the Christmas and Easter stories were historical truth. I believed that God was the creator of all things but I still didn’t know which came first, the chicken or the egg?? I had never read the Bible and so I did not know whom God was or what he had said or what he had done.

After I had heard the gospel of my salvation I acknowledged my sin and told God that I trusted in Jesus’ life giving death and resurrection; and I was filled with an unexplainable joy and a desire to know my heavenly Father. I began to read the Bible, to pray and to meditate on his Word—to seek his face! I have spent the ensuing years making up for those lost 55 years by devoting myself to the pursuit of knowing God and Jesus Christ. My life is not my own it is totally committed to honoring, obeying and serving Christ as there is... “No Reality More Breathtaking Than Jesus Christ!!”

#### JESUS CHRIST... THE ONE FOUNDATION

According to 1 Corinthians 3:10-12, the Church’s one foundation is Jesus Christ. The person of Christ is the cornerstone of the Church. The doctrine of Christ is the cornerstone of all that the Church teaches. In 1 Corinthians 3:10b-11 the apostle Paul wrote, *“By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.”*

The viability and authenticity of Christian faith stands or falls on its view of Christ. It is not simply theology but Christian theology—Christ-centered theology—that the church believes, lives and teaches. The true Christian churches fundamental purpose must be to preach Christ, to worship Christ, and to see Christ’s transforming power reflected in the lives of those who have believed in his name.

#### CHRISTIANS CAN PROCLAIM:

##### **Jesus, You Are My King<sup>iii</sup>**

I am forgiven because you were forsaken. I am accepted; you were condemned.

I’m alive and well, your Spirit is within me because you died and rose again.

Amazing love, how can it be that you, my King would die for me?

Amazing love, I know its true; it’s my joy to honor you.

In all I do I honor you.

You are my King. Jesus, you are my King.

## THE INERRANT SCRIPTURE

Church life as well as our personal lives must be governed by the rule of *sola scriptura* (scripture alone). Biblical inerrancy, the Virgin Birth of Jesus, the doctrine of substitutionary atonement, and the bodily resurrection and physical return of Christ are the bedrock upon which all evangelical theology and practice must be grounded. Among these, biblical inerrancy understandably serves as the cornerstone of Christian theology and practice. Inerrancy is a way of saying we have confidence in the Scriptures and that we take them to be reliable and authoritative. The term “inerrant,” meaning “without error,” requires our subordination to the Scriptures in ordering our lives by submitting to its authority as the Word of God.

Scriptures originated with the Holy Spirit, were written by men, were recognized and received by the early church following the ministry of our Lord Jesus under the care of his apostles. Scripture is the final arbiter in all matters of life and death and faith and truth. In today’s world, the authority of Scripture serves you as source of strength and comfort in understanding our world, as well as the means of checking the religious claims of others.

While traveling out of the country recently I was evangelized by a very zealous Muslim who, within just a few minutes, proclaimed the many foundational tenets of Islam. I politely and carefully listened, letting him share his beliefs and foundational doctrines of the Islamic religion for living in this world and for eternal life after death.

I was already familiar with them from some previous study and seminars. The crux of the issue between Islam and Christianity is one of inerrancy. After listening with interest and intent I complimented him for his zeal and his obvious knowledge of Islam and his desire for me to believe what he thought to be TRUTH. I responded by asking him, “What if the Qur’an (the Islamic Holy book) and what the prophet Mohammed had spoken were not entirely correct”?

I pointed out that the Holy Bible on which the Christian religion is founded says this, “*Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.*”<sup>iv</sup> Jesus said, “*I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and he who lives and believes in me will never die.*”<sup>v</sup> I challenged him that in the light of these two Scriptures and his desire for eternal life he might want to read the Holy Bible and ask God to show him the truth.

## THE VIRGIN BIRTH

Because the Scriptures are inerrant, our primary concern when it comes to the doctrine of the virgin birth of Jesus is not to prove it but rather to consider its impact on our lives. We discover in the reality of Jesus’ incarnation that God is greater than life’s problems.

Through the virgin birth of Jesus of Nazareth, God became human. This is the sensational and mysterious truth of the events of the Christmas Story. The Creator chose to become man in order to deliver humanity from the meaninglessness and depravity that were the result of man’s own sin and sinful rebellion. The doctrine of the Virgin Birth of the Lord Jesus brings comfort and hope to all who believe—to those who receive him!

In John 5:24-27 we see this, “*I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life. I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son*

*of God and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man.”*

Jesus Christ is the only one qualified to be our mediator because he alone has the ability to save sinners... as well as the desire, to do so. He shows divine love for sinners by having given himself on the cross as a ransom for all. His divine standing is universal... no one else is equal to the task. We must have the courage to warn others that to deny the deity of Christ endangers their eternal souls. When we share the gospel, we commend our listeners into the hands of the God-man, Jesus Christ, confident that he knows each of us best and loves each one with a just and perfect love.

#### THE DEITY OF CHRIST... Christ is God

What if Christ were not fully divine? Could he still be the Savior of the world? The answer is clearly “NO” and there are several reasons why the doctrine of the deity of Christ is of practical importance to the Christian church.

First, only one who is divine could satisfactorily explain the Divine One to man. The apostle John wrote, “*No one has ever seen God, but God the one and only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known*”<sup>vi</sup>.” Jesus’ ability to reveal God to us is predicated on his being divine.

Secondly, only one who is divine could resurrect Christ... if Jesus were only human, it would be impossible for him to resurrect himself; a mere mortal man could not raise himself. Third, only God in the flesh could serve as mediator between God and man, to bridge the gap between man and God.

Thus the deity of Christ as revealed in Scripture serves to engender faith and perseverance in that faith in the face of challenges to the contrary... *Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.* Hebrews 11:1

#### SUBSTITUTIONARY ATONEMENT

The doctrine of the substitutionary atonement is the crux of the true gospel. It is primarily through this demonstration of God’s love that the Lord Jesus reveals his identity: “*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many*”<sup>vii</sup>.” Jesus, God himself, came to this earth to live as a man... he was perfect—sinless. Because he had no sin of his own to die for, he could die for someone else’s sin. In his love, he died in our place—taking the consequences of our sin on himself.

As evidenced by Jesus’ resurrection, God accepted Jesus’ death as an overwhelmingly sufficient payment for yours and my sin—in fulfillment of the requirement of God’s holy law. 1 Peter 3:18 explains nicely, “*For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit...*”

#### THE RESURRECTION AND RETURN OF CHRIST

The substitutionary atonement demonstrates the depth of God’s love and plan for sinners. The truth of the resurrection testifies to the promise and the power of God. **Death** the final enemy has been defeated.

1 Cor. 15:20-22 But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.

The resurrection is a historical event; but it is also an event that anticipates the future... it points to the day when all things will be summed up in Christ upon his return. This means that the doctrine of the bodily resurrection of Christ cannot be separated from the doctrine of the Second Coming. Christ's resurrection is a saving event... Jesus said, "*I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.*"

As Christians we must take what the Bible says about time, history, and prophecy seriously in a literal sense. We hold as a living hope that time serves God, being converted by him into fulfilled prophecy according to his purposes as he promised in Scripture. Christians believe quite simply that not only do individuals need a Savior, but also that history, left to solely human devices, is unable to provide one. Because of his loving kindness, God has intervened by sending his Son to provide an effective and legitimate redemptive history for you and I and all who receive Christ—to those who believe in Christ's life giving death and resurrection.

The believing that the Bible talks of is so much more than just believing "about."

- It is your **acknowledging** that the gospel is true, then **committing** your life to this truth, and your **trusting** in God for his promised salvation and eternal life.
- A.C.T. makes it easy to remind yourself of biblical believing... Acknowledging, Committing to, and Trusting in.

The apostle Paul wrote, "*In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.*"<sup>viii</sup> The "blessed hope" of Christ's return gives men and women the confidence to invest in the future.

In the 15<sup>th</sup> Chapter of Paul's epistle (letter) to the Corinthian church he addresses the resurrection of Christ and of the dead.

*Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.*

*For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time...*

*But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.*

*For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead...*" 1 Corinthians 15:1-8, 12-20.

NOW WHAT? A personal faith is required.

God exists in all his majesty, being the Creator-Owner of the universe. He is a loving, caring God but equally he is a holy lawgiver. His holiness demands that his law be kept perfectly. He can have nothing to do with any lawbreaker... only perfect people can live in heaven with a perfect God.

The Bible tells us that you and I were born into the world a lawbreaker, alienated from God... we are far from perfect. God's law says that all sin demands the death penalty... so that not only do we die physically but we face something the Bible calls the "second death"—an entire eternity of suffering in the Lake of Fire. Since we are sinners, there is no way we can avoid this death... we are helpless!

Jesus, God himself, came to this earth to live as a man... he was perfect—sinless. Because he had no sin of his own to die for, he could die for someone else's sin. In his love, he died in our place—taking the consequences of each of our sin on himself.

As evidenced by Jesus' resurrection, God accepted Jesus' death as an overwhelmingly sufficient payment for yours and my sin—a fulfillment of the requirement of God's holy law. Our response is to receive Christ's live giving death and resurrection as our own through the gift of faith from the Son of God who loved us and gave himself for us.

**READ...** *I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me... I believe that when Jesus died on the cross, he died in my place. I rest in the fact that he alone has saved me from the judgment on my sin. In Him, my resurrected Savior, I now have a perfection that is not my own, but is counted as mine because I trust Him. The life I live in the body, I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.<sup>ix</sup> Because of what Christ has done I know that I will enjoy life with God both now and forever in heaven.*

Since the "theological foundation" upon which the Church of Jesus Christ is built is a matter of divine revelation recorded in God's inerrant and infallible Word... it is predetermined and unchanging. It is comprised of the things the church (you and I and all other believers) must believe and live out in order to be the true biblical Christian church.

<sup>i</sup> By Dan Scheel and based on a **Foundational Faith** by John Koessler, Moody Bible Institute and "And Beginning With Moses" by John R. Cross, Goodseed Ministry

<sup>ii</sup> Publisher is Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI

<sup>iii</sup> Song by Billy James Foote

<sup>iv</sup> John 17:3

<sup>v</sup> John 11:25

<sup>vi</sup> John 1:18

<sup>vii</sup> Mark 10:45

<sup>viii</sup> Acts 17:30-31

<sup>ix</sup> Galatians 2:20