

Week 30

Biblical Christianity: The Basics

Key Verses

John 1:1-2 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.

John 1:14 And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us; and we saw His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

+ Introduction

Many people love “BLT” sandwiches, and there are many varieties of sandwiches that could be classified as a BLT. You could add a cow or buffalo patty, maybe some chicken, mustard, mayo, onions, or all other sorts of ingredients and still have your sandwich be considered a BLT. But if you were to replace one of the key ingredients (Bacon, Lettuce, or Tomato), then you can no longer call your sandwich a BLT. Bacon, Lettuce, and Tomato are the key, irremovable elements of a BLT.

There are many differences between denominations of Christians, but in this lesson, we will discuss the key points of belief that constitute a “Mere” Christian. ¹ These are the basic beliefs that constitute what it means to be a Christian. If you take any of these things away, then you have moved outside the realm of Christianity and into another belief system. While we cannot be comprehensive in this lesson in any of the given areas, we will highlight significant truths that unveil why they are the basic elements of Christianity.

+ God

Everything starts with God. Without God, there is nothing. He was in the beginning and spoke the world into existence. There are elements of God that are foundational and fundamental. When we think of Mere Christianity, it causes us to take away the fluff and get down to the basics. There are seven basic characteristics of God we must understand and appreciate foundationally and fundamentally to the extent that we **can** understand them. Remember, we are finite beings trying to understand the infinite. We will not have time to go into detail about any of the specific characteristics. However, these are the starting points of our understanding of God.

a. God is Creator

GENESIS 1:1 *In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.*

HEBREWS 11:3 *By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.*

The idea of God as Creator puts into perspective everything else that follows. There is nothing that we can see, feel, hear, or taste that God did not create. There is nothing on this earth or in the heavens that God did not create. Genesis 1 and 2 give us both an overview of creation and some specific details that show how man was designed uniquely from all other forms of creation.

b. God is Transcendent

2 CHRONICLES 2:6A *But who is able to build a house for Him, since the heavens and the highest heavens cannot contain Him?*

1 KINGS 8:27 *But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You, how much less this house which I have built!*

PSALM 139:7-8 *Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? ⁸ If I ascend to heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there.*

God is not limited by space (He is everywhere in His fullness continually) nor by time (there is no "present moment" into which He is locked as we are). Theologians refer to God's freedom from limits and bounds as His infinity, immensity, and transcendence. ² There is no other living being, past or present, that can make the claims of our God. There should be comfort in the fact that God is always there, wherever "there" may be.

c. God is Holy

ISAIAH 6:3 *And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!"*

LEVITICUS 11:44A *For I am the Lord your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, because I am holy.*

When Scripture calls God, or individual persons of the Godhead, 'holy,' the word signifies everything about God that sets Him apart from us and makes Him an object of awe, adoration, and dread to us. ³ It is the holiness of God that separates Him from all creation. It is the holiness of God that cannot tolerate being in the presence of sin. It is the holiness of God that transcends His goodness and purity. The holiness of God is the essence of God.

d. God is Triune (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit)

"Trinity – God's revelation of Himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, unified in the Godhead yet distinct in person and function." ⁴

It is fascinating that a key, cardinal doctrine of Christianity uses a word that is not in the Bible. Although the word "trinity" is not specifically mentioned, the concept, the truth of the Trinity, is all through the Bible. The Trinity's doctrine is difficult to grasp – that we have one God who exists in three Persons. However, it is a crucial doctrine of the Christian faith because it focuses on who God is, on the Deity of Jesus Christ, and the Deity of the Holy Spirit. The *Baptist Faith and Message* booklet explains,

"The eternal triune God reveals Himself to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, with distinct personal attributes, but without division of nature, essence or being."⁵

GENESIS 1:1-2 *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ² And the earth was a formless and desolate emptiness, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters.*

At the very beginning, God is there, and the Spirit of God is present.

JOHN 1:1-2 *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.*

JOHN 1:14 *And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us; and we saw His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

At creation, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit were all present. But, Dr. Charles Ryrie, in his book *A Survey of Bible Doctrine* says, "... the doctrine of the Trinity must not imply in any way that there might be three Gods."⁶ All 3 Persons of the Godhead are eternal; they have always existed; there was never a time when they did not exist.

We can also see the distinctions in function concerning redemption. Wayne Grudem explains it like this:

"God the Father planned redemption and sent His Son into the world (John 3:16; Galatians 4:4; Ephesians 1:9-10). The Son obeyed the Father and accomplished redemption for us (John 6:38; Hebrews 10:5-7). God the Father did not come and die for our sins, nor did God the Holy Spirit, that was the particular work of the Son. Then after Jesus ascended back into heaven, the Holy Spirit was sent by the Father and the Son to apply redemption to us."⁷

e. Eternal

PSALM 90:1-2 *Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. ² Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever You had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting You are God.*

Some often ask, "who made God?" For our finite minds, it is difficult to grasp the fact that no one made God. God has merely always been. As the psalmist so eloquently put it, "*from everlasting to everlasting You are God.*" We are finite; we are born, grow, age, and eventually die. Our flesh is temporary and perishable. But God is eternal and imperishable. God has always existed and always will exist.

f. All-Powerful (Omnipotent)

JEREMIAH 32:17 *Oh, Lord God! You Yourself made the heavens and earth by Your great power and with Your outstretched arm. Nothing is too difficult for You!*

Omnipotence means in practice the power to do everything that is in His rational and moral perfection (i.e., His wisdom and goodness) God wills to do.⁸ The power of God is demonstrated throughout the Bible. Sometimes in dramatic ways and sometimes in subtle ways. Luke reminds us in the first chapter of his Gospel of the omnipotence of God.

LUKE 1:37 *For nothing will be impossible with God.*

The context of that verse is an angel talking to Mary about giving birth to God's Son supernaturally as a virgin. That is only possible because nothing is impossible with God. He is all-powerful at all times in all ways.

g. Sovereign (In-Charge)

God's sovereignty is a natural consequence of His omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence. These divine traits set the minimum boundary for God's sovereign control in the universe, which is to say that nothing in the universe occurs without God's permission.⁹

GENESIS 50:20A *As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good,*

ROMANS 8:28 *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose.*

ISAIAH 55:8-9 *"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," declares the Lord.⁹ "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts.*

Christians believe in God as revealed in the Bible. We believe that He created the universe out of nothing. We believe that He sustains and holds the universe together, and we believe that He has a purpose for the future of His creation. Christians also believe that there is one God (we are monotheistic) but that His nature is Triune. One God, three persons: The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Father, Son, and Spirit are three distinct persons, but they are one in essence and nature. The Trinity is a profound mystery that cannot be easily explained or encapsulated with an easy analogy. We cannot fully comprehend it, but we can stand in awe of it as a foundation of our faith.

The basic beliefs of Christians regarding God's nature are that He is the Creator and that He is transcendent beyond time, space, and everything we observe in the universe. He is Holy, completely singular, and separate from everything else in creation. He is eternal, meaning He preexists time and space, and He will continue to live forever. He is all-powerful, all-knowing, and in charge of everything that goes on in the world. There is disagreement among Christians about how God wields His sovereignty in human history, but all Christians believe with assurance that God is in charge of the direction that history is moving.

+ Humans and Sin

- a. Made in God's Image (Genesis 1 and 2)
- b. Made Male and Female (Genesis 1 and 2)
- c. Fallen Nature Because of Sin (Genesis 2 and 3)
- d. In Need of Restoration to God (Romans 3 and 5)
- e. Cannot Solve the Problem of Sin Without God's Intervention (Romans 6)

Christians believe that God created humans in His image and that we are separate from other created things and responsible for the rest of His creation. Humans are unique and consequently more important than the animals and the rest of God's creation. It also means that humans have a responsibility to act to display God's image in the world.

Christians believe that God's good world is broken because of human sin. We read in Genesis 2 and 3 about humans abusing the freedom given by God, bringing sin and death into the picture. The results of sin are 1) a broken relationship with God, 2) broken relationships between men and women, 3) pain in childbirth and in work, 4) and broken relationships between all humans. All the pain, suffering, and evil in the world can be traced back to the human decision to rebel against God and reject His image and nature in favor of our own will. The broken relationship with God leads to chaos, confusion, loneliness, and an overwhelming feeling that something is missing inside of us.

Humans have searched for a way to understand the transcendence of God for thousands of years, but Christians believe that humans can only come to know God through His personal self-revelation. The human heart, mind, and will are corrupted by sin, and man's relationship with God can only be restored through God's intervention. Thankfully the love of God was so great that He sent His only Son, Jesus, as a gift to all humanity in the midst of our brokenness.

+ Jesus

Christians agree to these key points on who Jesus is, what He did, and what our relationship should be to Him.

- a. Fully God (John 1)
- b. Fully Human (John 1)
- c. Reveals God's Character and Priorities (Colossians 1)
- d. Declared God's Kingdom Come (Matthew 3-4)
- e. Lived with Perfect Righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:22)

- f. **Willingly Gave His Life (Philippians 2:8)**
- g. **Raised From the Dead After Three Days (Luke 24:6-7)**
- h. **Ascended to Heaven and Promised the Holy Spirit to His Followers (Acts 1)**
- i. **Will Return Again in Glory (Titus 2:13)**

HEBREWS 12:2 *fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before Him He endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

Who Jesus is:

Christians believe that Jesus is the Son of God and the Savior of the world. This means that Jesus, in His nature, is both 100% God and 100% human. Over the past 2,000 years, the church has denounced many heresies (false teachings) regarding the nature of Jesus. For example, the church has affirmed that Jesus is truly God. He is not a semi-divine being, an angel, or an enlightened teacher. In His very nature, He is equal with God the Father, and He existed with God in the beginning.

JOHN 1:1-4; 14 *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was with God in the beginning. ³ Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴ In Him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind ... ¹⁴ The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

Christians also affirm that Jesus was fully human, meaning He experienced weakness, frailty, and temptation just like we do. Christians reject false teachings that suggest that Jesus was God, simply pretending to be human. Jesus had a real body, and He was truly human.

What Jesus Did:

Jesus gathered disciples, declared that God's Kingdom was at hand, and began an incredible public ministry of teaching and healing. Jesus declared that all of the promises that God made to Israel were being fulfilled in Him, and this got Him into hot water with the religious and political leaders in Jerusalem. Jesus perfectly revealed God's character to the world, and He willingly laid down His life, allowing Himself to be killed at the hands of the Romans and at the behest of the Jewish leaders. After three days, Jesus was raised by the Father and revealed Himself to His disciples.

Why did Jesus do these things? To accomplish two huge objectives: 1) To reveal the hidden God to the world and 2) to redeem humanity from sin. Jesus shows us God's nature and character, and He provides grace and forgiveness from sin and restoration to God. Believing these things about Jesus is essential to being a mere Christian.

+ The Holy Spirit

- a. The Third Person of the Trinity
- b. Given to All Believers
- c. Empowers the Church
- d. Works Mysteriously Through God's People

Before He left, Jesus promised to send His followers a Helper. He was talking about the Holy Spirit.

JOHN 14:16-17 *"I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth..."*

JOHN 15:26 *When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me...*

JOHN 16:13-14 *When He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. ¹⁴ He will glorify Me..."*

The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity, eternally present with the Father and the Son. We see the Holy Spirit at work in both the Old and New Testament, resting on the prophets as they spoke the truth, giving favor to God's anointed, and finally coming to center stage in the book of Acts. At Pentecost, the followers of Jesus saw tongues of fire rest on their heads as they were able to speak so that people from other parts of the world could understand them in their own language. The Holy Spirit gives gifts to believers, empowers them, and equips them to help the church flourish and do God's work in the world. The movement of the Holy Spirit is often mysterious, but it is available to all believers.

+ The Church

- a. Established by Jesus
- b. Made up of Believers
- c. God's Instrument to Establish His Kingdom in the World
- d. Essential in the Life of a Christian

EPHESIANS 2:19-22 *So then you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, ²⁰ having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone, ²¹ in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, ²² in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit. (NASB)*

The church is God's vessel to bring His Kingdom to the world until He returns. The Bible refers to the church as a holy nation, a royal priesthood, and the bride of Christ. The church has existed since Jesus left, and it has grown at an incredible rate in the past 2,000 years. The church has taken on varied structures and practices in different cultures and time periods, but it is bound together through time and space by Jesus Himself and the Holy Spirit. The church is the gathered body of believers. Being made in God's image, we are made for community, so following Jesus cannot be done alone. We need each other, and involvement in the church is essential in the life of all believers.

The church exists in, through, and because of Jesus Christ. Thus, it is a distinctive New Testament reality. Yet it is at the same time a continuation, through a new phase of redemptive history, of Israel, the seed of Abraham, God's covenant people of the Old Testament times.¹⁰ The establishment of the church is through the new covenant, which Jesus talked about in the Upper Room the night before He was crucified.

JOHN 13:34-35 *I am giving you a new commandment, that you love one another; just as I have loved you, that you also love one another.*³⁵ *By this all people will know that you are My disciples: if you have love for one another."*

We are to be relational vertically with God and horizontally with one another, which is the essence of the church.

+ Conclusion

Each of these beliefs is based on Scripture which is our ultimate authority. As Christians, we need to know what we believe and why. These truths impact our lives both personally and relationally. This is not a cafeteria-style of Christianity where you can pick and choose which truths you want to embrace. Mere Christianity is "all in," where we embrace the fullness of these truths in our lives each day.

¹ This phrase was coined by C.S. Lewis in his classic book, *Mere Christianity*, which explains the basics of the Christian faith.

² J. I. Packer; *Concise Theology*; Tyndale House Publishers, Wheaton, IL, 1993; p. 28. ³ J. I. Packer; *Concise Theology*; p. 43.

⁴ *The Baptist Faith & Message* (the book), p. 26.

⁵ *The Baptist Faith and Message* (the booklet), p. 7.

⁶ Charles Ryrie, *A Survey of Bible Doctrine*, Moody Publishers; Chicago, IL, 1972.

⁷ Wayne Grudem, *Bible Doctrine*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1999, p. 116.

⁸ J. I. Packer; *Concise Theology*; p. 36.

⁹ <https://www.gotquestions.org/God-is-sovereign.html>

¹⁰ J. I. Packer; *Concise Theology*; p.199.