

Christian Research Institute

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What Are The Essentials?

The Essentials of Christianity

Essential Christianity. We hear a lot of discussion about essentials and non-essentials, but what are the essentials of Christianity?

When we talk about the essentials of Christianity we're referring to the basic elements that make up and characterize our faith, and which, of course, separate it from other beliefs. Let's survey these doctrines.

First, we believe in **the authority of Scripture**, which is another way of saying that the Bible is God's inspired, infallible, and inerrant Word. It's the ultimate source for knowledge about God, as well as the definitive guide for our daily lives.

Next we **affirm the existence of a triune God** or one God in three distinct persons - the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This God is self-existent, eternal, unchanging, omnipotent, omnipresent, holy, righteous, and loving. God created the universe from nothing and He rules over His creation sovereignly including both human and angelic beings.

We also hold that **man is a physical and spiritual being** who is created in God's image. But because of his sin or transgression, man has lost his fellowship with God. The extent of sin is so great that its effects continue to this very day in the form of cruelty, suffering, and death.

By God's grace, **Jesus Christ - Who is fully God and fully man - was sent to save us from our bondage to sin**. We believe that Christ was born of a virgin, died for our sins, physically rose from the dead, and will one day return to judge the world and deliver His people. Faith in Christ is the only means by which mankind can escape eternal damnation and judgment.

Finally, we recognize **the church as God's ordained institution** headed by Christ. The church is composed of all believers, and is organized for worship, for fellowship, for the administration of the sacraments, for spiritual growth and support, and for evangelizing the world.

Much more can and will be said, but we hope this summary has encouraged you to explore the links on the right and continue studying the essentials.

What We Believe

It is the commitment of the Christian Research Institute to faithfully uphold the revealed truths of Holy Scripture. We therefore commit ourselves to the following summary statement of the vital teachings of Scripture and the Christian faith. We believe that:

(1) The Holy Scriptures, comprised of Old and New Testaments, are fully and verbally inspired by God and are therefore infallible in the original writings and completely trustworthy in all areas in which they speak. Their central salvation message and essential teachings are clear and accessible to all who follow the standard and self-evident rules of literary interpretation. They are therefore the supreme, unmediated, and final authority of faith and practice for every believer.

(2) There is only one eternal, almighty and perfect God. Within the Being of this one true God exist three eternally distinct and coequal Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These three Persons are the one true God.

(3) Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God, the Second Person of the Trinity, who took upon Himself human flesh through the miraculous conception by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary. He who is true God became true man, uniting two natures in one person forever. Christ lived a perfect, sinless life, died on the cross as an atoning sacrifice for our sins, rose bodily from the dead, and ascended into Heaven where He now serves as our High Priest, our only Mediator. He will return bodily and visibly to the earth as King of kings and will judge every human being who has ever lived.

(4) The Holy Spirit is the eternal Third Person of the Triune God, the Regenerator and Sanctifier of the redeemed, the Bestower of spiritual fruit and gifts, and the abiding Advocate who empowers believers for godly living and service.

(5) In Adam human beings were created in the image of God (i.e., they share in a finite way the communicable attributes of God, including personality, spirituality, rationality, and morality). Through the fall of Adam that image of God in humanity has been defiled, although not eradicated. Every human being is radically corrupt and estranged from God. Human beings are condemned by God because of their descent into sin, both through their relationship to Adam and through individual choice. The desperate need of humanity is forgiveness of sins and consequent restoration of fellowship with God; yet humans remain totally unable to atone for and restore themselves.

(6) Jesus' death on the cross provided a penal substitutory atonement for the sins of humanity. In salvation we are rescued from God's wrath by His unmerited grace alone, through faith alone, on account of Christ alone.

(7) Those who have received the free gift of salvation will be raised from the dead or raptured (snatched up from their earthly lives) to meet Christ at His Second Coming, and their bodies will be transformed like unto His glorious, immortal body. They will live forever in the fellowship and Kingdom of God in a new heaven and a new earth. Eternal, conscious punishment apart from the fellowship and Kingdom of God (hell) is the ultimate destiny of unredeemed humanity, Satan, and his entire angelic host.

(8) The Christian church, which is the body and bride of Christ, is composed of all persons who through saving faith in Jesus Christ have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit. Corporately and individually, its members strive to worship, serve, and glorify God through prayer and praise, diligent study and application of the Scriptures, evangelism, sanctified living, good works, and observance of the rites of baptism and the Lord's Supper. The ultimate mission of the church is the discipleship of all nations - not only the saving of souls (which is primary) but also the bringing of the gospel to bear on every aspect of life and thought - until the Lord returns.

THE RELIABILITY OF THE BIBLE

Obviously, a vast amount of time has passed since the Bible was first penned. So, how do we know that the Bible is reliable?

The Bible is a historical document. Interestingly enough, if you subject it to the same tests that you subject other historical documents to, you'll discover that the Bible proves itself to be far superior to any other ancient writing.

First, let's look at the New Testament which, incidentally, was originally written in the Greek language between 50 and 100 A.D. Although we don't have the original autographs, there are presently some 5,000 Greek manuscripts in existence, with as many as 25,000 more copies. Just as amazing is the fact that the earliest manuscripts can be dated back as far as 120 A.D. This is tremendous when you consider that only seven of Plato's manuscripts are in existence today — and there's a 1,300-year gap which separates the earliest copy from the original writing! Equally amazing is another fact; and that is, that the New Testament has been virtually unaltered. This has been demonstrated by scholars who have compared the earliest written manuscripts with manuscripts written centuries later. And remember, the accounts in the New Testament were recorded directly by eyewitnesses, (or by those who were associated with them) and in fact had close contact with the events themselves.

But what about the Old Testament? Let's take a quick look at one of the most incredible finds of the century — the Dead Sea Scrolls. With the discovery of these manuscripts at Qumran in 1946, texts were found that were about 1,000 years older than any previously-known Old Testament manuscript. And when compared with the later texts, these writings proved to be virtually identical.

With every turn of the archaeologist's spade, we see further evidence of Scripture's trustworthiness. Such renowned and historical scholars as William Albright and Sir Frederick Kenyon have clearly testified that the findings of archaeology have served to underscore the authenticity of the Bible. Well, is the Bible reliable? I believe the evidence speaks for itself. And with that, I rest my case.

On the reliability of Scripture, that's the CRI Perspective. I'm Hank Hanegraaff.

IS THE BIBLE MYTH?

If I've heard it once I've heard it a million times, "You can't take the Bible literally." You often hear people say that although it may be inspirational, it's also full of myths and fables. Well, is this really true?

If the Bible is really full of myths and fables, it would certainly be appropriate to read it as such. However, the simple fact is that the Bible certainly doesn't fit that category.

For one thing, the biblical writers flatly denied teaching mythology. For example, Peter said, "We didn't follow cleverly devised tales when we told you about the power and coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His Majesty" (2 Pet. 1:16). In fact, the Apostle Paul urged Timothy to teach his congregation to disregard mythology (1 Tim. 1:4). He warned that a time was coming when people would "turn away their ears from the truth and turn aside to mythology" (2 Tim. 4:4).

Besides all of this, the myths of the ancient world were never based on solid historical fact. They were stories invented to explain such recurring phenomena like the changing of the seasons or the motion of the stars. The events recorded in the Scripture, on the other hand, are firmly rooted in history. By way of illustration, it is an accepted historical fact that Israel became a nation after the exodus from Egypt. Later, Israel became a monarchy, David and Solomon really lived, and on and on and on. It is also a historical fact that Jesus was a Jew who preached about God the Father, who claimed to be God, worked miracles, and was crucified during Pilate's reign. All of this is, in fact, literal history.

In addition, the supernatural aspects of Scripture are presented just as matter-of-factly as the rest. And indeed, the most stupendous miracle recorded in the Bible, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, has been authenticated by numerous scholarly studies including the late great Dr. Simon Greenleaf. Dr. Greenleaf was the Royal Professor of Legal Evidences at Harvard University. He was goaded by his students into looking at the evidences for the resurrection. After a thorough examination he came back and said, "There is not a single unbiased juror in the world who would ever look at the evidence and deny it. Dr. Simon Greenleaf became a Christian. The Bible is not mythology and was never meant to be read as such.

That's the CRI Perspective. I'm Hank Hanegraaff.