

BEYOND THE BASICS

CHAPTER 3 - REVIEW OF THE BASICS

Definition

The basics are beliefs that are generally accepted by Christians of all sorts. These doctrines are not the viewpoints that differentiate between the various denominations, but those tenets of the faith that people, for the most part, can all agree upon. Most people around the world have heard of these beliefs, even people that are not religious. What I am identifying as basics are what make up the material of most preaching in most churches. The basics tell us what it is all about, but they do not necessarily place any difficult burdens on the hearers. By themselves they do not require action or radical changes. They simply educated the hearer on the essence of the teachings being presented. That is why they are called the basics.

On the Surface

Surface basics are those beliefs that people are generally aware of and can identify if asked. We can agree that there is a God, and God is bigger and more powerful than we are. However, not everyone agrees on the details of the nature and character of God. Some folks tend to see God in human terms, and others tend to overemphasize a number of His characteristics while ignoring other of His characteristics. We do know that God is spirit and His worshipers must worship in spirit and truth (John 4:24). Also, God is love (1 John 4:8), and He is merciful, gracious, longsuffering, faithful, and forgiving (Exodus 34:6-7). He is also just (Zechariah 9:9). God is supreme over all that exists (1 Chronicles 29:11, 12). We know God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:16-17; Matthew 28:19). God makes us part of His family (Romans 8:15-17). The Holy Spirit convicts and judges (John 16:7-11). The Holy Spirit enables us (2 Corinthians 3:3&6). The Holy Spirit teaches us (Nehemiah 9:20). The Holy Spirit guides us (John 16:13&14).

Although some do not believe that the Bible is inspired, most will agree that the Bible is from God (2 Timothy 3:16&17), and the Bible has a purpose (John 20:31). In fact, the Bible is God's self-revelation and it sets the standard for our faith. The Bible has saving power (Romans 1:16). In addition, the Bible is a weapon for spiritual warfare (Ephesians 6:17).

We also know we do have adversaries in the spiritual realm, and they are entirely devoted to our annihilation. These spirits are created beings (Nehemiah 9:6, Colossians 1:16), but they are limited in what they can do (Job 1:6&12). They will do all they can to ruin us. The truth is that every one of us has fallen short of the mark (Romans 3:23). All sin, any sin, makes one a sinner, and all sin cuts us off from our holy God. There is only one way back to God (Acts 4:12). God designated Jesus to be the Savior of the world, and there is no one else His equal. Salvation belongs to the Lord (Psalms 3:8).

God gave us the church and He called it the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22&23). However, the church is also called the bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:25-27,32), and the family of God (Ephesians 3:14&15), all of which speaks of a relationship. The relationship that should exist between God and man, and between man and man, is spelled out in detail.

Jesus did what we could not do (Colossians 1:13,14,19-22). He identified Himself with humanity to such a degree that He took responsibility for all human sin (Romans 5:18). He took our sins upon Himself and took our punishment upon Himself. The price He paid was sufficient to cover all the evil humanity could ever do (Titus 2:14, John 1:29). When Jesus died as the perfect sacrifice He took care of all the worlds sin. The task was finished (John 19:30). Jesus has power over life and

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death as well as the power to forgive sin. He is our Creator and source of life. There is absolutely no way to get back to God except through Jesus (John 14:6).

Our God is a gift giver who gives only good gifts. The Gifts of the Spirit given to individual people are listed in scripture (1 Corinthians 12:8-11). The Gifts, described in lesson 2, include Wisdom, Knowledge, Faith, Healing, Working of miracles, Prophecy, Discerning of spirits, Tongues, Interpretation of tongues. Any person can be given different gifts as the requirement arises. The same Holy Spirit that gives gifts to individuals also gives gifts to the church. Gifts to the church are people endowed for life with special capabilities. These people are given for ministries that function within the church and serve the church. The gifts that the Holy Spirit gave to the church are identified in (Romans 12:6-8), (1 Corinthians 12:27-30), and (Ephesians 4:11). These gifts include Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors, Teachers, Helpers, Administrators, Service Givers, Exhorters, Givers, Leaders, Performers of Acts of Mercy. However, some believe that many of the gifts were just for the first few years, not for today.

We face a powerful enemy whose goal is to defeat the church and lead the world astray. If we are to stand we need God's strength and we need His supernatural armor (Ephesians 6:10&11). To be strong means to be powerful through union with Christ. Weapons of this world are of no use; we need divine power (2 Corinthians 10:3-5). The armor God provides for us, described in lesson 2, includes: The Belt of Truth, The Breastplate of Righteousness, The Boots of the Gospel of Peace, The Shield of Faith, The Helmet of Salvation, and The Sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God (Ephesians 6:13-18).

There is yet another weapon that God gave us to assist us in surviving life in this place and time, prayer. Prayer is a spiritual communion with God; sharing of thoughts and emotions; an intimate relationship with deep understanding. Prayer is a conversation with God. In prayer we share our feelings, desires, disappointments, joys, expectations, whatever we would share with any close intimate friend. We ask questions and then we need to have the courtesy to listen. We offer praise, say thank you, and sometimes have to say, "I'm sorry. Please forgive me." God desires prayer because we need to be in contact with Him. Jesus told us not to be upset, but to pray (Luke 18:1). He will respond to those who go to Him (Matthew 7:7&8). We need to pray about everything (Philippians 4:6&7). Prayer includes: Conversation, Confession, Praise, Intercession, and Supplication. Remember, we were created for fellowship with God.

Beneath the Surface

There is another level of the details that goes underneath the surface, and which brings about a more focused description of Christianity. If asked about Christian beliefs most would probably not mention these. However, if told about them, they would acknowledge that they had, in fact, heard them before. These beliefs develop, add to, and define the surface information. For a person not raised in the faith, these are the things that persuade a decision for Christ. Many people fail to recognize the principles just under the surface. They have probably been exposed to them, but the remembrance is stored away in the subconscious out of memory.

God has revealed to us that we cannot find Him, (Job 37:23). We are not able to comprehend Him because our human minds are too small to encompass Him. God tells us "I am God and there is

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no other; I am God and there is none like me"(Isaiah 46:9-10). He created all that exists and it all belongs to Him. Our God reigns (Revelation 19:6). No matter what men or demons may strive for, God's way will triumph over all. Our God is merciful, gracious, longsuffering, faithful, and forgiving (Exodus 34:6-7). In His mercy, He gives us what we need, not what we have earned. God is slow to anger, loving, and forgiving (Numbers 14:18-20). With God, there is no shadow of turning (James 1:17). God is omniscient (all knowing) (1 Samuel 2:3, Job 28:24). God not only has all understanding and knowledge about everything, but also about all time, past, present and future. God is perfect in all ways (Psalm 18:30). God is eternal (Psalm 93:2). God always was, is now, and always will be. God is good and righteous (Psalm 145:7). Because of who and what He is, God cannot do evil or be unfair (Job 34:10). As a matter of fact, He cannot even look upon evil because of His purity (Habakkuk 1:13). God has infinite understanding (Psalm 147:5). God understands us fully, perfectly. God's acts, He does not react (Romans 5:8). God had His plans in place before creation and He carries them out as He wills.

One of the mysteries of our God is the doctrine of the Incarnation. God the Son became a human being, and lived life on our earth as one of us. The human He became was Jesus. When God the Son stepped out of eternity into time and space, He left His divine attributes in the care of God the Father. He was born as an infant, had to learn to walk and talk, went through puberty and teen years, and became a young adult. He was both loved and hated, had good friends and evil enemies. He experienced everything common to man, including torture and death. Jesus was a Holy Spirit filled human being (Matthew 3:16). He was baptized by John the Baptist. The great works Jesus did were not done in His own power as God the Son, but as a human being filled with the Holy Spirit. How much more do we need the Spirit of God! We are limited only by how much of ourselves we give to the Holy Spirit, and how much of us has a "Private Property, Keep Out" sign.

The Holy Spirit is a gift from the Father (Luke 11:13). The Holy Spirit creates life. It is the Spirit that continues to breath life into the flesh (John 6:63). The Holy Spirit lives within us (1 Corinthians 3:16&17). The Spirit allows us to know God (John 14:16,17&26). The indwelling Spirit testifies of Jesus (John 15:26). We know that Jesus also dwells with us by the Spirit (1 John 3:24). The Holy Spirit convicts and judges (John 16:7-11). The Holy Spirit makes us like Jesus (Philippians 2:5). The Holy Spirit is God's seal upon us (Ephesians 1:13, 14, 17), a guarantee of authenticity that proves that we belong to the Father.

A promise is one's assurance to another to do or not to do something specified, a pronouncement which gives the person to whom it is made a right to expect or request the performance or restraint of the specified act. There are many promises given in the Word of God, most of which have either disappeared from our memory or are misunderstood. Some biblical scholars say there are between seven hundred and eight hundred promises in the New Testament alone. Some promises from God, but not all, come with strings attached and take the form of "If you will, - - - , then I will - - - ." Most people remember the "Then I will" part and forget all about the "If you will" part. These promises frequently have to do with God's blessing associated with our obedience. We are promised "if we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive our sins" (1 John 1:9). Again, we are promised "If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sins and heal their land" (2 Chronicles 7:14). Also, "If two of you on agree on earth concerning anything they ask, it will

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be done for them by My Father in heaven" (Matthew 18:19). The list continues: "If you abide in Me and My words abide in you, you shall ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you" (John 15:7). If you continue in my word you shall be My disciple" (John 8:31). There are many, many more.

Not all promises have strings attached. For example:

- "I will be a refuge for the oppressed" (Psalm 9:9).
- "You shall receive power and be witnesses unto me" (Acts 1:8).
- "When He appears we shall be like Him" (1 John 3:2).
- "I am with you always" (Matthew 28:20).
- "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5).

There are many instructions and commands given in the Word of God, a myriad of which, like the promises, have either slipped from memory or are ignored. When it is a command, it does not allow room for choice. A command implies the formal exercise of absolute authority by a sovereign. A commandment is an authoritative order or mandate, the violation of which carries a consequence. While some promises are stated as a choice, some commands are in the form of "You do this or else." For example, God told Adam and Eve "You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Genesis 2:17). Most New Testament commands have to do with living the Christian life. For example:

- "Be holy because I am holy" (1 Peter 1:16).
- "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17).
- "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers" (2 Corinthians 6:14).
- "Be faithful unto death" (Revelation 2:10).
- "Forgive one another as God forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32).
- "Do good to them that hate you" (Matthew 5:44).
- "Keep yourself pure" (1 Timothy 5:22).

Some people know the names Devil, Satan, and Lucifer, and really are not concerned to know a great deal more. Some folks just cannot get serious about something in the spiritual realm that they cannot see, so they do not give much credence to what is said about the enemy. For most people, what lies just under the surface may have been heard, but has been relegated to the subconscious. Satan is the Commander-in-Chief of the enemy forces. By nature he is a thorough scoundrel (John 8:44), never to be trusted. He hinders the work of evangelism (2 Corinthians 4:4) and attacks God's chosen leaders (Zechariah 3:1&2). The demons have their specialties but follow the prime directive from their leader (John 10:10). They try to keep us from God's Word, spoken, written, or living (Matthew 13:19). The real spiritual battlefield is in your mind (Genesis 6:5, Matthew 15:18&19). Everything they do has only one purpose, to separate us from God and destroy us.

Relevance of the Basics

Something is relevant only if it bears upon or relates to the matter at hand. The matter at hand is fully becoming what God created us to be, beings like Himself. Some may believe that they already have heard the basic, so the basics are now for someone else less knowledgeable than themselves. Others may believe that the basics are sufficient, and those individuals neither need nor want anything additional or more profound other than the basic. Still others believe that with our modern

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understanding of things spiritual if we do the right things, say the right things, and appear the right ways, the basics are not really relevant anymore. Having heard the basics, we have figured out what we want to do, so we believe what we want is all that is necessary. By definition a basic is something at or something forming a base, a fundamental forming a foundation on which to build. Basics are essential to what is built upon them. Without a firm foundation to build upon, whatever is constructed is destined to fall to pieces (Matthew 7:24-27).

The Command to Grow Up

The basics, by nature, are comparatively straightforward and understandable; consequently many Sunday morning sermons persistently talk about the basics, but from various viewpoints. The basics are food for spiritual toddlers, not for spiritual adults. We are called to go beyond that (Hebrews 5:12 — 6:2). Infants can be easily swayed by all sorts of bizarre doctrine (Ephesians 4:14-16). All foundations are laid for the purpose of building something upon them. The basics of Christianity are intended for building a mature healthy church, the Body of Christ, in the midst of this world. The Word of God is spiritual food, and if we do not get beyond the basics we will never mature because we will still be living on spiritual milk (1 Corinthians 3:1-3). We will be weak in faith and unproductive (1 Corinthians 14:20). We are here on a mission for God, but will be rendered incapable of carrying out that assignment if we remain spiritual infants.