

DYERTHOUGHTS

== COMMON SENSE ==
APOLOGETICS

Essential Beliefs

What is the bare minimum to make Banana Bread? The easy answer is bananas. You also need at least flour and eggs. Sugar, chocolate chips, and nuts are extras but not essentials. How about pizza? We need dough, sauce and cheese. We may like to have meat, peppers, mushrooms, seasonings but they are not essential. What is the bare minimum a person has to have right about the Christian Faith in order to be considered a Christian?

There are certain things, which if we believe them will send us to hell regardless of how sincere we are in our faith or how much love we may have for God. 1st Timothy 4:1-2 says, "But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons." Therefore, we have to get certain things right about Christian doctrine or we suffer the consequences.

The first thing we must have right is SIN. We must recognize that we were and still are sinners. All men have sinned and fallen short of God's glory (Romans 3:23). 1st John 1:8-10 gives us three attitudes in regards to sin. The first attitude (1:8) is the man who says that he currently has no sins. This is of the utmost arrogance to claim that you have rid yourself of all defilement. Which sports player could ever claim they have reached the pinnacle of performance and are no longer in need of working on their game? How could any Christian claim to have reached a state where they no longer have any room for growth, only a need to maintain? The second attitude (1:10) is the man who claims that he has never sinned. This is the scoffer who refuses to see a need to repent and accept the Gospel. This attitude and the Gospel are like water and oil. How could a man claim he has never sinned and then accept Jesus Christ as a sacrifice for the sins which he refuses to accept that he has committed? The last attitude (1:8) is the correct one because it is the man who is willing to accept, in contrast to the others, who he was and still is. That is, he is willing to have an attitude of confession of his sins. Confession of sins is a characteristic which dominates his attitude and leaves him humbled in the sight of his God. Truly, the parable of Pharisee and the Tax-Collector (Luke 18:9-14) illustrates this perfectly. It was the man who was willing to see himself through the eyes of God who went away justified. If we are not willing to have this attitude about ourselves then we cannot be a Christian.

Secondly, we must get the Gospel correct. Paul tells us in Galatians 1:8-9 that if a man preaches a false Gospel he is to be cut off!!! So then what is the Gospel? According to 1st Corinthians 15:1-4 it is that (1) Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, (2) He was buried, (3) He was raised on the third day according to the

Scriptures, and (4) He appeared physically risen to the Apostles and over 500 others. Therefore, the Gospel centers around the person and work of Jesus. A few other statements in the New Testament help us to understand specifically what about His person and work do we have to accept.

If we refuse to accept that Christ came in the flesh then we are of the anti-Christ (1st John 4:2-3). If we do not believe that Jesus is God in the flesh (John 8:24) we will die in our sins. This excludes Jehovah Witnesses and Mormons. It also shows us that we do not worship the same God of Islam since they do not accept his deity. Also, we have to accept the physical death/burial/resurrection of Jesus (1st Corinthians 15"14, 17). To deny his physical resurrection is to deny that Jesus' work was a satisfactory offering to God. It would mean that Jesus was corrupt and needed to stay in the grave. Faith is only as valid as the person in whom you put it. If you have a false view of Jesus then your faith is in vain.

Thirdly, about the Gospel, we must accept Salvation by Grace, not by works. Galatians 5:4 explains that those who want to mix salvation by law with salvation by grace have fallen from grace. It is kind of hard to believe you are still a Christian if you have fallen from grace. Therefore, we must be careful not to distort the idea of salvation by grace. See pamphlet on "Salvation is Free" for more information.

Lastly, we have to have the New Birth right. Acts 8:26-39 is the story of Philip converting the Ethiopian Eunuch. Verses 35-36 help us to understand something critical. It says that Philip preached Jesus (the Gospel) to the Ethiopian man. But then the Ethiopian turns and wants to be baptized. Obviously, when preaching Jesus we do not simply preach what Christ did for us, but we also have to preach the proper response. If we were to tell someone about salvation in Jesus through His sacrifice, they asked us what they must do to be saved, and we told them to do twenty push-ups, are we to believe God is obligated to bestow salvation on that person? Certainly not!!! Therefore, when people teach we are to pray Jesus into our hearts they are distorting the Gospel because God never commanded such a thing. Rather, God commanded for men to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus (Acts 2:38) to enter into the covenant. Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3:3-5 that a man **MUST** be born again to enter the Kingdom. Therefore, if we do not receive the correct new birth then we cannot enter the Kingdom of God!!! This new birth was universally accepted as Christian Baptism. Please see the Pamphlet entitled "The New Birth" for more information. In conclusion, we need to be careful what we list out as essential beliefs. Let us not add in things like leadership structure, church policy, women roles, miraculous gifts, etc... as tests of fellowship for our brothers and sisters in Christ. Let us steer far away from being a legalist who believes God's grace can't cover our doctrinal errors.