

English Transcript

Foundations of the Christian Faith – Course 1

Introduction

Welcome to Foundations of the Christian Faith. This is the first of three courses on the essential doctrine of the church. In these courses we'll explore the roots of some of our most important beliefs.

We begin all our GTN training with three important points. First, we teach to the head, heart, and hands. All spiritual training should focus on the truth of God's word.

This information informs our minds which represents our head. Biblical truth should then impact our heart through deeper belief and conviction. We call this inspiration that points to our heart.

Training should not stop with just information and inspiration though. The true measure of effective training is transformation. We must put into practice what we've learned.

This represents our hands or our life. Head, heart, and hands speaks to information, inspiration, and transformation. In addition, every GTN course is based on the vision of 2 Timothy 2:2. The apostle Paul was teaching a young pastor, Timothy, who was then to teach other reliable teachers who would teach others and then by extension would teach others who would teach others.

Our prayer and objective for this training are that each of you will use this material to teach others who could then teach others. This will strengthen your churches to be a greater influence for Christ in your communities.

The final truth relates to spiritual training and that the goal of all spiritual training is spiritual transformation ...

- into the likeness of Christ,
- through the word of God,
- in the power of the Holy Spirit,
- by the grace of God,
- in community with other believers,
- and for the glory of God.

We will approach our discussions of these essential biblical teachings using a topical organization called systematic theology. On page 3 of your handout, we introduce the concept of systematic theology. This is one way of studying the scriptures or the teachings of the Bible topic by topic. Teachings are also called doctrine.

Psalm 1:1-3 tells us that blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in season, and its leaf does not wither, and all that he does prospers.

As we read, study, and meditate on what the Bible teaches, this should impact our lives. Our lives will reflect more of God's character as we are conformed to the likeness of Christ. The word of God is a wonderful gift from God to show us how to live in relationship with him.

The next logical question is why study systematic theology? The study of systematic theology should not just increase our biblical knowledge, but it should also transform our lives. Remember, head, heart, and hands.

Information should lead us to inspiration and then ultimately result in transformation. The book of Ephesians provides an illustration of this truth. The book reveals how orthodoxy, or right teaching, leads to orthopraxy, or right living.

There are six chapters in Ephesians. Chapters 1, 2, and 3 are all about doctrine, all about what we believe, our creeds, our beliefs, who we are in Christ, what the Father, Son, and Spirit have done for us in the way of salvation. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 explain how we are to live out our identity in Christ.

The key verse in this book is chapter 4:1. The Apostle Paul wrote, As a prisoner for the Lord, then I urge you to live, or to walk, in a manner worthy of the calling that you have received. The word that is used for “worthy” is the Greek word “axios”, which means to be in balance, like a scale. You can picture a scale with two arms for weighing items.

On one side of the scale, you can place all the biblical truths and doctrines found in Ephesians chapters 1 through 3. And on the other side of the scale, we can place the practical instructions related to how we are to live out our faith found in chapters 4 through 6. What we believe should be balanced with how we live. Right theology should lead to right living for the glory of God. This is one of the most important aspects of the study of theology. Our goal is not just to know biblical truth, but rather to live a life that is aligned with biblical truth.

Every Christian is a theologian. Every person is a theologian. Everyone has a theology of some sort, no matter what they believe. The atheist is a theologian. They believe God does not exist. The agnostic is a theologian. They are not sure if God exists. The Muslim has a theology that guides their belief in God, sin, salvation, and eternity. The Jewish person has a theology. The Mormon has a theology. Their theology about Jesus is different than the Jesus of the Bible. The same is true of a Jehovah Witness. Everyone has a theology. Every Christian is a theologian.

The question is not, do we need sound doctrine, but rather, is our doctrine sound? Lewis Sperry Schaeffer wrote, “acquiring the knowledge of the spiritual content of the Bible is a lifelong task.”

The study of the Bible is a lifelong process, and we continue to learn more about God, who He is, how He has revealed Himself to us, and how we are to live in relationship with Him. There are wonderful benefits from studying theology and having sound doctrine. I've highlighted a few of these benefits on the bottom of page 3.

- Sound doctrine provides a right understanding of God's person and character. The only way for us to know God is for Him to reveal Himself to us, and the only place He does this in such a way that we can have a relationship with Him is through the Bible.
- Studying theology enables us to respond appropriately to God. Wrong ideas about God can produce unacceptable worship of God. We call this idolatry. In Acts 17, the people were worshiping many diverse kinds of gods and idols. They even had an altar or statue to the unknown God.
- God's Word is designed to produce godly affections in our soul. Here are just a few examples.
 - Psalm 1:2, But His delight is in the law of the Lord, and on His law He meditates day and night.
 - Psalm 19:8, The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart. The commandments of the Lord are pure, enlightening the eyes.
 - Psalm 119:16, I will delight in your statutes. I will not forget your word. Jeremiah 15:16, Your words are found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart. For I am called by your name, O Lord God of hosts.
 - John 15:11, These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. These are just a few examples showing that the Word of God is intended to produce deep affection for God.
- The study of theology produces stability in the Christian life. We see this in Ephesians chapters 4:13-14. Until we all attain the unity of faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children tossed to and fro by the waves and carried by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness and deceitful schemes.
- The sound doctrine will keep us secure, keep us walking in the right path. We are not deceived. The study of theology protects us against false teaching.
- Maturity comes from the study of God's Word and sound theology. Sound theology keeps us focused on Christ. Hebrews 2:11 says, Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. There is stability, like an anchor in sound theology. Theology can become an anchor to our faith because it is all focused on Christ.
- Sound theology helps us to encourage others. Titus 1:9 says, He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also able to rebuke those who contradict it.
- Studying theology or having sound doctrine helps us endure testing and trials. When Jesus was tested in the wilderness for 40 days, where did he turn when Satan tempted him? He said, It is written. Jesus came back to the Word of God. The Word of God helps us stand firm in the face of temptation, in the face of opposition, in the face of spiritual attack.

- Lastly, studying theology and having sound doctrine strengthens the Church. We read this in Ephesians 4:15-16. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow, so that it is built up in love.

On page 4 you can see there are different doctrinal levels. And I use this picture there, you can see, of a target. The center of the target is the bullseye.

Convictions/Absolutes

These are the most essential doctrines. Let's call these doctrines convictions and absolutes. These are the doctrines, if denied or misunderstood, can keep us out of heaven. If we are off base with essentials, we can seriously distort the revelation of God, leading to gross sin and error. These are the doctrines we would be prepared to die for. We should have just a few core, essential doctrines.

These will not change over time. Examples of essential doctrines are that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant word of God, the doctrine of the Trinity, Father, Son, and Spirit, one God in three persons, doctrine of the virgin birth, the deity of Christ, the substitutionary atonement. These are all core, essential doctrines of faith.

Persuasions

The next level out we would call persuasions. These are any doctrines or truths which you have studied and have gained a level of understanding that you hold strongly. You may have many of these, and you defend the reasons why you believe them. Your position on these issues may change as you mature spiritually over time. Some examples of these might be your view of spiritual gifts, end times, even spiritual leadership roles in the church.

Opinions

The next level out we would call opinions. These are issues where Christ followers can disagree and where there may be more than one valid viewpoint. The truth is that God knows what the meaning is for any doctrine or any teaching in the Bible, but we may come at it with our own opinions, and usually these have little to do with salvation. The sad truth is that most churches divide over doctrine at the level of opinion.

You may be open to discussing these opinions and changing them over time. Opinions are often shaped and changed by the needs of arising out of culture. Some examples could be worship styles, music, different translations of the Bible, how we dress, diet, how we approach communion, modes of baptism, the structure and roles within a church as an example.

Questions

Then there's a fourth level of doctrine we'll call questions, and there are lots of questions that we don't have the answers to. The secret things belong to God, but the things that he

has revealed are the things that we should be living out. When we get to heaven, if those questions are important, God will give us the answers, and if not, we can let them go.

Our focus in these three doctrine courses will be convictions and absolutes. What are the core doctrine? That if we get them wrong, it has an impact on salvation. It has an impact on living a righteous life.

At the bottom of page four, there are three different courses that are part of Foundations of the Christian Faith.

- Course 1 will focus on the theology of the Bible, the doctrines of God, God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, and then a summary of the Trinity.
- Course 2 will focus on the theology of man, sin, and salvation.
- Course 3 will focus on angels and demons, the church, and end times.

There are wonderful benefits to studying theology and having sound doctrine that we have talked about. There are various levels of theology, and our goal is that they focus on the essentials, the convictions, the absolutes. We can live in harmony with others regarding our persuasions and opinions.

I'm sure that you may have knowledge about much that will be taught. This information may be helpful with teaching these doctrines to those in your churches in a simple, repeatable manner. The result is that every person in our churches would be grounded in sound doctrine so we all reach unity in the faith and knowledge of the Son of God and become mature.

The New Testament speaks much about false teachers that are going to come up within the church, so we need to be on guard. We need to know the truth so that we can represent it and teach others and confront the false teachings. False teachers were present in the early church and they are present in our world today.

With this as a brief introduction, we will continue in the next lesson with the doctrine of the Bible or Bibliology, the study of the Bible, the Word of God.