

How to Study the Bible for All It's Worth

The Essentials of Christianity

Session 2

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.

Explanations & Definitions

Infallibility- The theology/doctrine/belief that the Bible is free from mistakes, incapable of error, will not mislead, deceive, or disappoint.

Inerrancy - The whole of Scripture and all its parts, down to the very words of the original, were given by divine inspiration. That inspiration, strictly speaking, applies only to the autographic text of Scripture, which in the providence of God can be ascertained from available manuscripts with great accuracy. This doctrine does not assert that no errors in the copies were transmitted through history or that one does not have to study the text carefully in regard to textual problems and interpretation.

The view that the Bible is inerrant is rooted in our view of God. If there are good reasons to believe in a God who is Supreme Being, unlimited in His very nature (unlimited in power, knowledge, goodness, wisdom and so on), then there is little problem with the possibility of such a Being communicating with mankind in a way that would preclude the possibility of error. In fact, if such a God exists then one would expect this kind of revelation from Him. The real problem would be if no such communication existed.

Excerpted from "The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy" Zondervan 1979 pages 493-502.

Omnipotent - having absolute power over all.

Omnipresent - present in all places at all times.

Sovereignly - having supreme rank, power, authority, preeminent, indisputable

Sin - missing the mark.

Transgression - to go beyond limits set or prescribed.