

WHAT CHRISTIANS BELIEVE

This is a brief, introductory study about What Christians Believe. There are six lessons available, if you should choose to continue. If you wish to continue, please contact one of the members, or let me (Jim West) know by calling my cell phone ([removed for web]) or emailing me at [removed for web]. The church phone is: 451-1190. The study is concerned with the following topics:

- The Doctrine of the Scriptures
- The Doctrine of God
- The Doctrine of Man
- The Doctrine of Salvation
- The Doctrine of the Church
- The Doctrine of the Future

This class will last one hour. The focus of the study is Christian doctrine (teaching). What are the basic teachings of the Christian Faith and how do they relate to our lives? The purpose of the class is not only to present what Christians believe, but to have discussion and fellowship around the teachings of the Bible (with juice, coffee and pastries!).

The class will be taught by myself (Jim West). We thank God for your attendance and participation.

In this brief study we are concerned with some of "the elementary dear Watson" teachings of the Christian Faith. This means that our study will be very basic. A deceased football coach (Vince Lombardi of the Green Bay Packers) once instructed his players: "Fundamentals, fundamentals, fundamentals." This is our interest, too, that is, the *fundamental* teachings of the Bible. If you understand and apply the fundamentals to your life, you will be changed. In short, you win the game of life! This especially includes death, as Jesus' resurrection defeats even death (1 Corinthians 15:55)!

THE DOCTRINE OF THE SCRIPTURES

A. Revelation ("uncovering")

1. For men to know God, God must reveal Himself. This means there is the need for *revelation*!
2. God reveals Himself in two ways:
 - a. *General Revelation*—through creation (Psalm 19:16). Creation reveals to all men that there is a Creator, and that we are sinners against Him without excuse (Romans 1:20). The upshot is that creation is clear. The reason its clearness is not always recognized is our spiritual blindness, which we inherit at birth (1 Corinthians 2:14).

For example, an evolutionist looks at creation and sees only chance (the Big Bang), or a

materialist looks at creation and concludes that matter, and not God, is eternal (Psalm 90:2). Some study creation and are dumb-they see nothing. Others look at creation and conclude what they call "intelligent design." Others see beauty, but not God. And others see infinity in the creation. Still others look at man and conclude that man himself is a god!

- i. Caesar (The Roman Emperor, Domitian, was called "the Lord God")
- ii. The State ("God walking on the earth," said a philosopher)
- iii. Herod: He was called a god when he gave a great speech-Acts 12:22.
- iv. Ancestor worship
- v. Praying to the saints
- vi. Money (Matthew 6:24)

A false interpretation of the creation leads to worshipping the creature instead of the Creator (Romans 1:25). it is common for men to project a false god from themselves so that their God is created in the image of man instead of man in the image of God (Psalm 50:21).

EXAMPLE:

For example, you hear people say, "My idea of God is...." Or, "I think God is like this...."

The General revelation where God reveals Himself includes man, too, who God made in His own image (Genesis 1:26-27; Genesis 9:6). No other creature is God's image, which means that man is both unique and special. Unhappily, the image of God in man has been marred (but not lost!) by sin. Man is special not because he is a higher animal or a mammal, or the ancestor of unintelligent, half-human predecessors, but because God made him after His own image. In other words, man isn't "star dust."

Because man is spiritually blind, he needs verbal revelation to instruct him. At best, the creation is silent speech (Psalm 19:2-3).

EXAMPLE:

When American astronauts circled the moon in Apollo 8, astronaut Bill Anders, quoted Genesis 1, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). But earlier in 1961 when the Russian cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin was rocketed into outer space,

he (reportedly) said that he didn't see God up there. Why the difference? The answer is that man needs

- b. *Special Revelation*, that is, the Bible (Psalm 19:17-11). The "law" (Scripture) imparts truth than can "convert the soul" (verse 7). See also 2 Timothy 3:15. The Bible contains "all things that pertain to life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3), so that Christians may be "thoroughly furnished to do every good work" (2 Timothy 3:17).

1 Timothy 3:15 tells us that Jesus Christ is the main subject of the whole Bible. It is faith (trust) in Jesus Christ that saves us from sin. It is said that "open the Bible anywhere and it bleeds." This saying is true because Jesus and his death and resurrection is the central message of the Bible.

General revelation (the creation) is best understood only through Special Revelation. To understand creation clearly, we must put on "the eyeglasses of Scripture."

B. THE BIBLE (this word means "book").

1. It is inspired in the original Hebrew and Greek languages (Old and New Testaments respectively).
 - a. "Inspired" means "God-breathed" (2 Timothy 3:16). This means its words are as truly God's as if God actually breathed them out in audible speech.
 - b. Note: the writers were "moved" (2 Peter 1:21) and their writings "inspired." They were "moved" (borne along) by God the Holy Spirit.

The Bible teaches that God is a Trinity: He is Three-in-One and one-in-Three. There are Three Persons in the Trinity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit and these three are One God (Matthew 28:19; Matthew 3:16-17). Any other god beside the Trinity is a false god.

- c. The Bible is the God-breathed words of God through men.
- d. Inspiration assures us that the Bible is true, inerrant, and infallible (Psalm 119:140).

The word "inerrant" means that the Bible *does not* contains mistakes. The word "infallible" means that the Bible *cannot* make mistakes.

2. The Bible is the standard of faith and practice. This means that the Bible alone is the rule by which true Christians determine what to believe and do.

2 Timothy 3:15 teaches that the Bible is all about Jesus Christ our Savior. Jesus Christ is the God-man. Every Christmas we celebrate the incarnation, "God becoming man without ceasing to be God." Jesus came to save us from our sins.

He saves us from: (1) The pollution of sin. (2) The power of sin. (3) The penalty of sin (hell), and the (4) pleasure of sin.

Sin is when we fail to live up to, or transgress God's law (which is the Ten Commandments). See 1 John 3:4. God's law explains what sin really is (and isn't!).

3. Scores of prophecies, given hundreds of years before the event, concerning precise details, and fulfilled exactly, confirm the truth that the Bible is from God. Here are some examples:
 - a. Micah 5:2 and Matthew 2:1 (Micah prophesied Bethlehem as the place of the Messiah's birth).
 - b. Zechariah 9:9 and Matthew 21:1-5 (Zechariah prophesied Christ's riding into Jerusalem on a donkey)
 - c. Psalm 22:1 prophesies what Jesus would cry out on the cross (Matthew 27:46).
 - d. Psalm 22:16 tells you that Jesus' feet and hands would be pierced (with nails). See Matthew 27:35 and John 20:25.
 - e. Psalm 22:8 tells you that the Jews would mock Jesus when He was on the cross (Matthew 27:41-44).
 - f. Psalm 22:18 prophesies that Jesus' crucifiers would gamble for his clothes (John 19:24).
 - g. Isaiah 7:14 tells us that the Messiah would be born of a virgin (Matthew 1:23).
 - h. Jesus' resurrection is predicted in Psalm 16:10 and Psalm 118:22.

C. HOW WE KNOW THE BRBLE IS GOD'S WORD.

1. The Bible is God's word because God declares it to be so. This is called "the self-attestation" of Scripture, which means that the Bible bears witness of itself. To ask "how do we know that the Bible is God's word?" is really to ask, "How do we know that God's word is God's word?" The answer is that God's word is God's word immediately when He spoke it. And because God is God, there is no higher authority to which we can appeal to prove that His word is really His

(Hebrews 6:18). Over 2000 times the Old Testament uses the phrase, "Thus says the Lord."

2. We know the Bible is God's word because of the testimony of God the Holy Spirit in Christian hearts (1 Corinthians 2:10-12; Luke 24:27, 45; Ephesians 1:17; 2 Corinthians 4:6). The big word we use to describe this is illumination, which means that God's Spirit bears witness in our hearts, flooding our hearts with divine light (2 Corinthians 4:6).
3. We know that the Bible is God's word because God is all-powerful. God is the Almighty Communicator; He personally communicates this information because he is able to do so. When a lion roars, we hear and tremble. How much more so when God speaks (Amos 3:8; John 10:27)!
4. Our knowing the Bible to be God's word should not make Christians timid and defensive. When someone challenges us, "How do you know the Bible is God's word?" we should be quite incredulous! We should be like the Lord who "marveled" at the unbelief of His countrymen (Mark 6:6). "Does it rain in the Amazon? is there ice in Antarctica? Is there salt water in the oceans?" The marvel is not why Christians receive the Bible as God's word, but why non-Christians do not?!
5. To accept the Bible as God's word means that Christians renounce their own ideas about right and wrong and trust God's word instead. For example, we hear people say, "I just try to do what i think is right," or, "Every man must follow his own conscience," or "To your *own* self be true." When we unmask these statements we will see that behind the facade of sincerity is the engine of autonomy or self-law. The Bible condemns autonomy or the making of our own laws in many passages (Judges 21:25; Proverbs 14:12; 16:2). The choices are between God's law and our own law- Consider the following (self-law) statements:
 - a. I can earn salvation and get to heaven by my own good actions.
 - b. Gay marriage is true marriage.
 - c. Sex outside of marriage is good.
 - d. Capital punishment is murder.
 - e. All roads lead to heaven.
 - f. My body and my tongue belong to me.
 - g. No one tells me what to do.
 - h. You cannot legislate morality.

- i. Our children should be allowed to choose their own religion.

Autonomy or self-law is celebrated in a famous song by Frank Sinatra. The song is *My Way* and some of its lyrics are:

And now, the end is here
And so I face the Final Curtain
My friend, I'll say it Clear

I'll state my case of which I'm certain
I've lived a life that's full
I've traveled each and every highway
And, more much more than this, ***I did it my way.***

For what is man, what has he got?
If not himself, then he has naught
To say the things he truly feels and ***not the words of one who kneels***
The record shows I took the blows and ***did it my way!*** (my emphases)

A Christian loves God's word and will not trust himself. He will not sing *My Way*. Christians read the Bible all the time because they love God. *What do Christians believe?* Christians believe that the Bible alone is the word of God. We trust the whole Bible and the Christ of the Bible, Who said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man comes to the Father but by Me" (John 14:6). If Jesus is the only way of salvation, then He expects everyone who hears His message to become a Christian. Are you a Christian?