

The Fundamental List - Week 1 - The Importance of Knowing What You Believe

Two men are walking in the woods one day when they come upon a gigantic hole, so big and deep that they can't see the bottom of it. Naturally, their curiosity gets the best of them, and they start looking for things to throw in the hole. They find sticks and rocks and throw them in but never hear anything hit the bottom of the hole.

Eventually, they find an old railroad tie and figure they'll definitely hear that hit the bottom, so they lug it over and throw it in. A few seconds pass, but they still don't hear it hit the bottom. They shrug and start to walk away when all of a sudden, a cow comes charging through the woods at them and jumps into the hole!

"That was crazy!" they say to each other. As they're walking out of the woods, a farmer is walking into the woods at the same time and greets them. The men tell the farmer about the hole they found. The farmer then asks if the guys have seen his cow. They say, "as a matter of fact we saw a cow come sprinting through the woods and jump into that hole!"

The farmer shakes his head and says, "hmm, well that couldn't have been my cow. My cow was tied to a railroad tie."

I suppose that is an example of the negative side of curiosity, but curiosity is a good thing when it comes to your relationship with God. Why? Because, for the follower of Jesus, asking questions and knowing what you believe, the fundamental, the essential things about faith, is of the utmost importance.

What you believe about God and what He has done will determine how you live your life.

A. W. Tozer

What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.

Why is it the most important thing about us?

There are implications connected to what we truly believe about who God is and what He has done. Those implications are not just esoteric, philosophical ponderings reserved for theologians.

What we **truly** believe about God directly impacts how we live every day of our lives and the kind and quality of life we live. We see the result of that belief in the world around us every single day.

It's not even just a religious question. You see, everyone has a belief about who God is and what He has done. Even if you say you are an atheist. Even atheists believe something about God, they believe He doesn't exist. That belief about God influences how they live, how they treat the people around them, their moral compass, their actions at work, the decisions they make, etc ...

But if you are a follower of Jesus, it is especially important that you understand what it is that you believe.

- J.I. Packer quoting Charles Spurgeon in *Knowing God*

Nothing will so enlarge the intellect, nothing so magnify the whole soul of man, as a devout, earnest, continued investigation of the great subject of the Deity.

Figuring out what you believe about God can profoundly affect you.

For example, what you believe about God and what He has done will dictate your identity and how you answer the question, "Who am I."

Are you

- a victim,
- a screw-up,
- a failure,
- a mistake,
- someone anyone even cares about?

Or ...

Are you

- created with a purpose,
- designed for something great,
- are you valuable,

- are you loved,
- are you forgiven,
- are you secure?

What you believe about God and what He has done will determine how you answer the question of your identity.

What you believe about God and what He has done will determine how you treat the people in your life.

Are they

- a means to an end,
- annoying,
- unnecessary,
- a burden

Or ...

Are they

- people created in God's image
- people in the process of growing and maturing
- important for my own growth
- an opportunity for me to show the love of God

What you believe about God and what He has done will determine how you treat the people around you.

So, what you believe is not some **philosophical** question it is a **practical** question because it has **practical** implications.

The problem is, **You don't know what you don't know.**

Taking Olivia climbing ...

And so, when it comes to trying to understand who God is and what He has done, it requires **curiosity** and **humility**.

– Eleanor Roosevelt

I think, at a child's birth, if a mother could ask a fairy godmother to endow it with the most useful gift, that gift would be curiosity.

Curiosity leads us to ask questions and asking questions leads us to understanding.

Why do I believe the Bible?

Why do I believe God created the earth?

Why do I believe that lying is wrong, that adultery is wrong?

Why do I believe that God loves and has forgiven me and given me the hope of eternal life?

These kinds of questions are important to ask.

So, I'm curious, are you asking these kinds of questions? Because if you are not it will be reflected in how you live your life and the kind and quality of the life you live.

God is not afraid of your hard questions.

Questions like,

Why does God allow evil in the world?

Why do evil people seem to prosper?

Why do bad things happen to good people?

Why did He create the platypus? (It seems like such a ridiculous animal)

People sometimes fear asking hard questions because they think "questioning their faith" is bad.

But God is big enough for your hard questions and He is a Father who is full of grace and patience. Asking hard questions doesn't mean you don't believe it just means you don't understand.

Curiosity about the most complex and difficult issues of life and faith is fuel that moves us forward toward becoming the people God has designed us to be.

When you lose your curiosity you basically have started to give up on life [faith].
– John Maxwell

But curiosity begins with a willing confession of ignorance. It begins with humility. You have to admit that you don't know what you don't know.

In order to be truly curious, you have to be able to admit there are a lot of answers you don't have. Curiosity requires humility.

Unlike the humble person, an arrogant person will never grow beyond where they already are. That is why the Apostle James says ...

James 4:10

Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you. (lift you up)

I feel like the longer I walk with Jesus, the more often I am surprised and blown away by the things I learn about Him. You would think after 45 years there wouldn't be a lot of surprises, but, surprise.

So how do we go about that? How do we exercise curiosity and humility and figure out what we believe about God and what He has done?

By asking questions that lead to learning and developing **sound doctrine**?

Doctrine is a summation of what you believe the Bible says about a particular topic.

"Doctrine is teaching from God about God that directs us to the glory of God."

We develop sound doctrine when we take time to **study** who God is and what He has done.

There are lots of places you can look for answers about your faith.

The teachings of men -

In **Mark 7:6-8** Jesus is talking to the Pharisees and he quotes the prophet Isaiah 6 He answered them, "Isaiah prophesied correctly about you hypocrites, as it is written:

This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. 7 They worship me in vain, teaching as doctrines human commands., 8 Abandoning the command of God, you hold on to human tradition.”

We need to separate out all the crazy ideas we have added to what the Bible really says.

The teachings of demons -

1Tim 4:1-2

Now the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will depart from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and the teachings of demons, 2 through the hypocrisy of liars whose consciences are seared.

There are some who twist the scriptures and twist the truth and in doing so, lead lots of people astray.

The teachings of God -

Jn 6:68-69

Simon Peter answered, “Lord, to whom will we go? You have the words of eternal life. 69 We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.”,

It is the words of God and of His Son Jesus that bring us life.

2 Tim 3:16-17

All Scripture is inspired by God, and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Many voices are competing for your attention, claiming to speak the truth, so to keep from being led astray and deceived, it is important to have good doctrine.

God’s word is our source for sound doctrine, and sound doctrine keeps us from being led astray.

Eph 4:14

Then we will no longer be little children, tossed by the waves and blown around by every wind of teaching, by human cunning with cleverness in the techniques of deceit.

Inevitably we are going to disagree on some doctrines. There are intelligent, godly theologians that disagree on certain doctrines.

Do you have to agree on **every** doctrine in order to befriend or fellowship with someone?

No (maybe) Are you going to marry them or play pickleball with them? The answer to that question may determine how much agreement there needs to be on a topic.

If you're going to marry them, finding consensus on a majority of doctrinal issues is certainly more important than agreeing on those same issues with the person you're playing pickleball with. Unless you're playing pickleball with the person you're married to, then agreement is absolutely critical.

The point is that we **can** agree to disagree on some issues. In part because the Bible is not always crystal clear on every situation and every topic.

Is there a right and wrong answer to every doctrinal question? Yes

Is the Bible always clear on what that answer is? No

So, we have to understand what are **the most important doctrines** that God's word **is** clear on.

Are there some doctrines that are more important than others? Yes

Are there some issues that are "lines in the sand"? Yes

What are those issues and doctrines?

That is where we are going over the next five weeks. These are the topics that we will be covering.

What do we believe about:

1. The Bible

2. Jesus

3. Humanity and Sin

4. Salvation

5. Future Things

After I have spent all this time talking about how important it is to know what you believe, I will say this last thing. **Saying** you believe something and **really** believing something are two different things. It really doesn't matter what you say you believe unless you allow that knowledge to change you.

At the Pool of Bethesda Jesus heals a lame man but the Pharisees are unhappy with Jesus because He healed the man on the Sabbath.

Jn 5:39-40

39 You pore over the Scriptures because you think you have eternal life in them, and yet they testify about me. 40 But you are not willing to come to me so that you may have life.

It is possible to have all this knowledge but still not really believe it and allow it to change you.

I'm way more concerned about your heart than I am about your head, but the route to changing our heart is through our head, but if it stops at your head, it is all a waste of time.

The whole point of knowing the scriptures and having good doctrine is so that we can know Him.

Do you know Him, have you come to Him so that you may have life?

Rom 10:9

If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.