

Essential Doctrines of the Bible

The Existence of God

The first verse of the Bible introduces God as the Creator of the universe. The Bible does not try to prove that God exists; it assumes His existence as fundamental. Creation itself bears witness that there is an intelligent, omnipotent, loving Creator (Romans 1:20).

There can be only one of three explanations for the existence of the universe: (1) it has always existed (eternal universe); (2) it came into existence by its own power (self-creating universe), or (3) God created it. Accepting any of these requires a faith that transcends scientific proof. It is more plausible to believe in an intelligent, eternal, omnipotent Creator than in the eternity or self-creative ability of nonrational matter.

The orderliness and design of the universe require the existence of a Designer. The incredible complexity of even the simplest forms of life shows that life did not begin by accident or blind chance. Man's moral nature reveals that he is more than an intelligent animal; he was created in the image of a rational, spiritual, moral Being. Every human child develops a conscience, and every human society has a sense of morality (Romans 2:15).

How could the finite human mind even conceive of an infinite, omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient, and perfect God unless God imparted that concept? Every society in history has expressed belief in a Supreme Being, and modern anthropological studies show that the earliest and most fundamental religious belief is not polytheism but monotheism.

The testimony of the Scriptures and the confirmation of personal experience assure us that God indeed lives and communicates with humanity. Ultimately, we accept the truth of His existence by faith (Hebrews 11:6).

The Bible

Since God exists, the Word of God must also, for would not the Creator communicate with His creation? Since God created us as rational beings and since He loves us enough to provide for us, surely He wishes to communicate with us and thereby fulfill His purpose for creation. All intelligent beings seek to communicate, and the Supreme Intelligence is no exception.

We would expect God to record His message in writing, the historic medium

best suited for precision, preservation, and propagation. And the following evidence convincingly demonstrates that the Bible is the unique written Word of God to man: (1) its unique claims, (2) self-justifying authority, (3) testimony of the apostles and prophets, (4) integrity of Jesus Christ, who endorsed the Old Testament and commissioned the writers of the New, (5) nature and quality of its content, (6) moral superiority, (7) unity, despite more than forty writers over 1,600 years, (8) lack of a credible alternative, (9) agreement with history, archeology, and science, (10) indestructibility, (11) universality, (12) influence on society, (13) witness of the Spirit, (14) life-changing power, (15) fulfilled promises and miracles, (16) fulfilled prophecies, and (17) lack of an alternative explanation for its origin.

We would certainly expect God's Word to identify itself as such, and each book of the Bible claims, either directly or indirectly, to be the Word of God. Of all the books of the world's great religions, only one other book boasts of equal authority—the Koran—and its fanciful, contradictory content does not support its claim. The world's most moral book, the Bible, would not proclaim the world's biggest lie. The world's noblest and wisest man, Jesus, would not perpetrate the world's greatest hoax. No one but God could have authored the Bible, for good beings would not falsely claim divine inspiration, and evil beings would not teach such high morality.

The Bible is inspired of God, literally "God-breathed." "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (II Timothy 3:16). Holy men wrote as the Holy Spirit moved them (II Peter 1:21). Inspiration extends to all parts of the Bible and to every word. While the human writers chose words that reflected their language, culture, personality, circumstances, and style, God guided the process so that each word would accurately convey His message. As a result, the Bible is infallible, inerrant, and the sole authority for doctrine and Christian living.

The thirty-nine Old Testament books were recognized as Scripture by the ancient Hebrews, and Jesus and the apostles quoted from or alluded to almost all of them. The twenty-seven New Testament books were accepted by Christians from the earliest times, including con-

temporaries of the writers in most cases (II Peter 3:15-16), and are recognized as Scripture by all Christendom.

Errors can sometimes arise in copying, translating, or printing the Scriptures, but God has kept His hand upon the transmission process to preserve His Word for all time (Psalm 100:5). The accuracy of the Old Testament Hebrew text was safeguarded by the extremely high quality of the scribal transmission process and has received dramatic verification by the recent discovery of the ancient Dead Sea scrolls. The accuracy of the New Testament Greek text is assured by the extremely large number of manuscripts—over 5,000—which cancel out copyists' errors.

The King James Version is the most popular English Bible. It was translated over a seven-year period by forty-seven theologians and linguists. Each was a noted scholar who was firmly committed to the inspiration and authority of the Scriptures. The New King James Version is a modern language revision that seeks to preserve accuracy and increase understandability.

Bible students should use the literal method of interpretation, which means following the natural or usual implication of an expression—the ordinary and apparent meaning of the words—rather than seeking a hidden, allegorical or “spiritual” meaning. It is important to use sound logic and to study words, grammar, background, context, literary genre (style), history, geography, culture, figures of speech, symbols, parables, and types. When studying the Bible, we should keep in mind several points: (1) illumination of the Spirit is necessary, (2) the Bible is basically plain and meant to be understood, (3) Scripture interprets Scripture, (4) truth is revealed progressively from Old to New Testament, (5) the Bible presents a unified theology, (6) no doctrine stands on one passage alone or is hidden in obscure passages, (7) the Bible is accommodated to the human mind (but not to error), and (8) each passage has one primary meaning but can have many applications.

We can have confidence that God has revealed, preserved, and transmitted His Word to us today and that we can understand it. His Word is the Bible.

The Doctrine of God

“God is a Spirit” (John 4:24). He is not made of flesh, blood, bones, or physical matter. He is invisible to the human eye unless He chooses to reveal Himself

in some way (John 1:18). God has individuality, rationality, and personality. He is self-existent, eternal, and unchanging. He is omnipresent (everywhere present), omniscient (all knowing and all wise), and omnipotent (all powerful).

God's moral nature includes holiness, justice and righteousness, mercy and grace, love, faithfulness, truth, and goodness. He is absolutely perfect in every way. I John 4:8 says, “God is love”; no other religion identifies God so totally with love.

Since God is holy He cannot have fellowship with sin. God's justice demands punishment for sin, but in His love and mercy He gave His Son to meet the requirements of His justice and yet provide salvation for repentant sinners. Those who reject His gracious provision of salvation will face His judgment. God loves the sinner, but His holy nature will not allow Him to love, condone, or ignore sin.

God is absolutely and indivisibly one. “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD” (Deuteronomy 6:4). His eternal nature contains no essential distinctions or divisions. All names and titles of the Deity such as God, Jehovah, Lord, Father, Word, and Holy Spirit refer to one and the same being. Any plurality associated with God is only a plurality of attributes, titles, roles, manifestations, modes of activity, or relationships to man. Many passages emphasize God's oneness (Isaiah 42:8; 43:10-11; 44:6-8, 24; 45:21-23; 46:6-9; Mark 12:28-30; Galatians 3:20; I Timothy 2:5; James 2:19).

The title of Father describes God's roles as father of all creation, father of the only begotten Son, and father of the born-again believer (Deuteronomy 32:6; Malachi 2:10). The title of Son refers to God coming in the flesh, for the baby Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, who was literally His Father (Matthew 1:18-20; Luke 1:35). The title of Holy Spirit identifies the fundamental character of God's nature. Holiness forms the basis of His moral attributes, while spirituality is the basis of His non-moral attributes. The Holy Spirit is specifically God in activity, particularly anointing, regenerating, and indwelling man—works that God can do because He is a Spirit (Genesis 1:2; Acts 1:5-8).

These terms can also be understood in God's revelation to man: Father refers to God in family relationship to man; Son refers to God incarnate; and Spirit refers to God in activity. For example, one man can have three significant relationships or functions—such as administrator, teacher, and counsellor—and yet be one person in every sense. God is not defined

by or limited to an essential threeness. The Bible nowhere speaks of God as a “trinity” or as “three persons” but often calls Him the Holy One.

The title of Word relates to God’s self-expression or self-revelation. The Word is God Himself (John 1:1), particularly His thought, mind, reasoning, or plan. In the person of Jesus Christ, “the Word was made flesh” (John 1:14). “God was manifest in the flesh” (I Timothy 3:16).

The Identity of Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ is both God and man. He is the one God incarnate. “For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (Colossians 2:9). “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself” (II Corinthians 5:19). Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God, God manifest in flesh, our God and Savior, and the express image of God’s own person (substance) (II Corinthians 4:4; Colossians 1:15; I Timothy 3:16; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 1:3; II Peter 1:1). He is not the incarnation of one person of a trinity, but the incarnation of all the character, quality, and personality of the one God.

Acknowledging the deity of Jesus Christ is essential to salvation. Jesus said, “If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins,” making reference to God’s name of I Am (John 8:24, 58). Only if Jesus is truly God does He have power to save from sin, for only God is the Savior and only He can forgive sin (Isaiah 43:25; 45:21-22; Mark 2:7).

All names and titles of the Deity properly apply to Jesus. He is God (John 20:28), Lord (Acts 9:5), Jehovah (Isaiah 45:23 with Philippians 2:10-11), I Am (John 8:58), Father (Isaiah 9:6; Revelation 21:6-7), Word (John 1:14), and Holy Spirit (John 14:17-18).

God the Father dwelt in the man Christ. Jesus said, “I and my Father are one” (John 10:30). “The Father is in me, and I in him” (John 10:38). “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father . . . the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works” (John 14:9-10). The divine nature of Jesus Christ is the Holy Spirit (Galatians 4:6; Philippians 1:19), which is the Spirit of the Father (Matthew 1:18-20; 10:20). “The Lord is that Spirit” (II Corinthians 3:17). Jesus is the One on the heavenly throne, as we see by comparing the description of Jesus in Revelation 1 with that of the One on the throne in Revelation 4 and by noting that “God and the Lamb” is one being in Revelation 22:3-4.

Jesus is also the Son of God. The term *Son* can mean the human nature of Christ alone (as in “the Son died”) or the union of deity and humanity (as in “the Son shall return to earth in glory”), but it is never used apart from God’s incarnation. It never refers to deity alone. The terms “God the Son” and “eternal Son” are non-biblical. The role of the Son began when Jesus was conceived miraculously in the womb of a virgin by the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35; Galatians 4:4; Hebrews 1:5).

The Scriptures emphatically proclaim Christ’s genuine and complete humanity (Romans 1:3; Hebrews 2:14-17; 5:7-8). He had a human body, soul, spirit, mind, and will (Luke 22:42; 23:46; Acts 2:31; Philippians 2:5; Hebrews 10:5, 10). Jesus was a perfect human, with everything genuine humanity includes. Christ’s true humanity does not mean He had a sinful nature. He was without sin, He did no sin, and sin was not in Him (Hebrews 4:15; I Peter 2:22; I John 3:5). He came with the kind of innocent human nature that Adam and Eve had in the beginning.

Belief in Christ’s true humanity is essential to salvation (I John 4:3). If God did not truly come in the flesh, then there is no blood for remission of sin, no sacrifice of atonement. The very purpose of the Incarnation was to provide a holy man to mediate between holy God and sinful mankind.

It is necessary to distinguish clearly between the deity and the humanity of Christ. While Jesus was both God and man at the same time, sometimes He acted from the human viewpoint and sometimes from the divine viewpoint. As Father, He sometimes spoke from His divine self-consciousness; as Son He sometimes spoke from His human self-consciousness. Only as a man could Jesus be born, grow, be tempted by the devil, hunger, thirst, become weary, sleep, pray, be beaten, die, not know all things, not have all power, be inferior to God, and be a servant. Only as God could He exist from eternity, be unchanging, cast out devils by His own authority, be the bread of life, give living water, give spiritual rest, calm the storm, answer prayer, heal the sick, raise His body from death, forgive sin, know all things, have all power, be identified as God, and be King of kings. In an ordinary person, these two contrasting lists would be mutually exclusive, yet the Scriptures attribute all of them to Jesus, revealing His dual nature.

Although we must *distinguish* between Christ’s deity and humanity, it is impossible to *separate* the two in Christ (John