

The Five Fundamentals of Christianity

Beginning in the late nineteenth century, the increasing liberalization and modernization of Christian theology tended more and more to devalue what had long been considered the bedrock truths of Scripture. Many in conservative Christian sectors stepped up to meet the attack. They eventually came to see the need for making a definite list of the fundamentals of Christianity, the truths absolutely needed to be accepted in order to be truly considered a Christian. Through the first 20 years or so of the twentieth century this list of fundamental truths had different numbers of fundamentals listed. But the list that has become the most accepted and most respected list was the list of five fundamentals put together by the 1910 Presbyterian General Assembly. Here is the still-valued list of five fundamentals:

1. The Inerrancy of Scripture

This fundamental states that the Bible is completely without error and fully truthful in all of its writings in the original manuscripts. The debate over this actually gave birth to both liberal Christianity in the late nineteenth century and fundamentalism in the early twentieth century. Liberal theologians claimed that modern science proved that some of the Bible was probably not true and that therefore the Christian world needed to update itself to these scientific findings. Conservative Christians who were alive at the time correctly realized that not believing any one thing that God said, made all of it suspect. Full acceptance of this fundamental led to full acceptance of all of the others. That is, if biblical inerrancy is true and the Bible is fully accurate, then all of these other central points of the Bible are true as well.

2. The Virgin Birth of Christ

Jesus was not conceived in Mary by a human man but by God the Holy Spirit. This doctrine has been one of the most controversial in the church. And it was one of issues that caused such angst between fundamentalists and liberal Christians. This doctrine is imperative because 1) a belief in the full inerrancy of Scripture demands that we accept this as true, 2) we needed a savior both fully man and fully divine in order for Him to completely and efficiently finalize the sacrifice, and 3) a savior born of a human father would himself have inherited the curse of original sin.

3. The Substitutionary Atonement of Christ

This is the doctrine that Jesus died in our place to pay the penalty of sin. Because of original sin which was the transgression of God's law and our resulting sin nature, all mankind was deservedly under God's wrath and justly condemned to eternal death. Scripture is full of examples of how Jesus was the ultimate sacrificial lamb who was offered up as a blood offering in our stead. To this day there continue to be among fundamentalist Christians varying theories about how exactly substitutionary atonement works.

4. The Bodily Resurrection of Christ

This doctrine states that three days after he died for our sins He rose again. But it wasn't just His spirit that resurrected; it was His entire human body. After the inerrancy of Scripture, this is the most controversial and debated Christian doctrine in history. It has been so strongly defended by fundamentalists because it is possibly the most important part of Jesus' saving work. In fact, it is widely considered to be the cornerstone of Christianity itself.

5. The Reality of the Miracles of Christ

In light of the new modern science knowledge emphasis of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, believing that Jesus' could have actually performed miracles came to be seen as irrational. This was particularly the case when all of these miracles were "proven" to be scientifically impossibilities. The liberal theologians, therefore, began to come up with scientific explanations that in reality questioned the deity of Jesus, the truthful recollections of the eyewitnesses, and the integrity of God's Word.