

Cutting Through the Confusion of Christianity

by

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(Drawn from the authors newly released book *The Unshakable Truth*)

Imagine an auditorium full of church attendees. You ask them this question: “What defines the Christian faith?” You would probably expect to get a myriad of answers. But what you might not expect is that the answers would be far from what defines true biblical Christianity.

A recent study among Christians revealed that 81 percent said the essence of the Christian faith was “trying harder to follow the rules described in the Bible.” Even pastors struggle with this issue. Amazingly, 75 percent of Christian leaders were not able to define clearly the core of Christianity and the process of spiritual maturity.¹ Polls and our own experience tell us that there is a lot of confusion among Christians about what the essence of Christianity actually is. Is Christianity a set of biblical teachings we are to follow? Is it a relationship with God? Is it a philosophical viewpoint? Is it a set of beliefs we should adopt? Just what is the Christian faith, which makes up a biblical worldview?

Embracing the Biblical Worldview

The Christian faith is more than a set of teachings or laws to govern our actions. In his book entitled *The Faith*, author and speaker Chuck Colson said that the Christian faith is “a complete view of the world and humankind’s place in it. Christianity is a worldview that speaks to every area of life, and its foundational doctrines define its content.”² Yet this faith that forms our biblical worldview is not to be understood simply as an idea, a philosophical viewpoint, or a construct. It is about a relationship—a relationship lost in early human history and a relationship re-established by God’s intervention. And in experiencing this reconnected God-human relationship, one sees the whole of life illuminated through a new lens that clarifies and defines everything we know and experience.

The core of Christianity is in fact about relationships. It is about who we are and how we relate to God, what we believe about him, how we gain a relationship with him, and how living in relationship with him defines all our other relationships. This is the way God designed us from the beginning—for relationship with him. Therefore, it is crucial that we know how God intends for us to relate to him.

When we enter this relationship with God, we begin to embrace our biblical worldview – how we see life and live in this world. We begin to truly understand ourselves (who we are, why we’re here, and where we’re going), how we are to relate to others, and how we are to interact with the natural world God gave us. To put a succinct definition to the Christian faith that forms our worldview, we could say it is *a way of knowing and being and living in right relationship with God, ourselves, others, and the world around us*. It is Christ’s “way” that we must regain and recapture; and when we live in that “way,” our lives take on purpose and meaning.

Recapturing the Living Story

To understand the true faith and form a biblical worldview we must begin with Scripture. The Bible provides us a clear picture, through many stories, of how God has related to us throughout human history—to the first human family, to the children of Israel in the Old Testament, and to the people who came to know Jesus and his “way” in the New Testament. These stories are God’s means of conveying to us who he is.

It is these living stories that provide the basis of our biblical worldview. What we have today in the 66 books of the Bible is “inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It straightens us out and teaches us to do what is right. It is God’s way of preparing us in every way, fully equipped for every good thing God wants us to do” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Far too many Christians see Scripture as merely a set of rules and teachings. They fail to see the Bible as an expression of who we are as God’s creation, and our purpose for existence. Unlock the Scripture, and it provides a depiction of a specific way of life, a way of knowing what is true, a picture of being what God meant us to be, and a pattern of living based on the revelation of who God is in relationship to us. Or, to put it another way, Scripture reveals everything we need to know to see the truth about what the world was meant to be, what it is now, and how it can be restored to his original intention. Scripture shows us that we were originally designed to be in relationship with God, what caused us to lose that relationship, and how it can be reclaimed. It is in fact the sweeping story of *creation, incarnation, and re-creation*. Understanding what Scripture reveals about those three foundational truths will give us our panoramic, all-encompassing, biblical worldview.

Discovering Truth that Clears the Confusion

God’s original creation, his incarnation in our world, and his plan for a re-creation is in fact the foundational truths of the Christian faith. In researching for our recently published book *The Unshakable Truth*, of which this article was derived, we uncovered the historical nature of these truths and how they were used effectively in the early church. These three overarching truths were first clearly delineated in the teachings of second-century theologians such as Tertullian and Irenaeus. The early church used these three truths as the foundation for building a set of core beliefs that captured the heart of the biblical worldview. And it worked. Incredibly well! These early Christians were so intensely disciplined in their beliefs that not only did they experience a relationship with God, they also successfully passed the baton of the Christian faith from one generation to the next in a movement that expanded like wildfire. Alan Hirsch, founder of Forge Mission Training Network, says that by AD 100, about 65 years after Jesus was on earth, there were as few as 25,000 Christians. Within 200 years their numbers exploded to 20 million.³ That is an increase of 800 times!

By the third century there was a focused consensus within the Christian community as to what the truths of the Christian faith were all about, and there existed a defined worldview that governed how they would live. In order to retain this consensus and prevent a drifting of truth, 300 Church Fathers met in the city of Nicaea in Asia Minor in AD 325 to affirm in writing the essential truths of the Christian faith. The result is what we know as the Nicene Creed. These men produced what is now the most widely used statement of faith ever written. It has been

endorsed and accepted by practically every major Christian community in history. In this succinct statement the Nicene council captured the truth of who God is and who we are (the creation), what God did and our purpose in life (the incarnation), and what God's mission is and where we are going (re-creation).

The Nicene Creed identifies at least 12 basic truths from the three foundational truths that when believed and lived out form our biblical worldview. They are:

1. The truth that God exists.
2. The truth about God's Word.
3. The truth about original sin.
4. The truth about God becoming human.
5. The truth about Christ's atonement for sin.
6. The truth about justification through faith in Christ.
7. The truth about living the transformed life.
8. The truth about Jesus' bodily resurrection.
9. The truth about the Trinity.
10. The truth about God's kingdom.
11. The truth about the church.
12. The truth about the return of Christ.

These 12 truths encapsulate the Christian life and message. They are the core of what the gospel is all about. These unshakable truths of the Christian faith provide for us a worldview that defines what we believe, who we are in relationship with God, and how we should behave. They give us the answers to who we are, why we are here, and where we are going—our identity, our purpose, and our destiny. However, these are not dry theological concepts for discussion and debate. Rather, this is the true and gripping story proclaimed from Genesis to Revelation, the story that gets to the very heart of what life, relationships, human happiness, and joy are all about.

If true followers of Jesus are to become “children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation” (Philippians 2:15, NIV), then they must get past the notion that the Christian faith is “trying harder to follow biblical rules.” We must get back to the basics and both understand, experience and live out the foundations of the Christian faith. By doing so each of us can embrace and grow in God's revealed way of knowing, being, and living in the world to the point that it becomes unmistakably clear to those around us as to what Christianity really means. This will bring pleasure to God, true joy and happiness to our lives, and pass on to the next generation the true meaning of Christianity.

¹ Barna Research Group, Barna.org Web site article #264, “Many Churchgoers and Faith Leaders Struggle to Define Spiritual Maturity” (Ventura, CA: The Barna Research Group, Ltd., 2008), 1, 3.

² Chuck Colson, *The Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 28.

³ Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006), 18.