



BIBLICAL TRAINING CENTER

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Essentials vs. Non-Essentials – The Essentials Part 1

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1. Overview

Christian denominations might not agree on everything. But we do agree on the essentials.

Areas of Agreement (Essentials)

- Belief in **one God** (God's unity)
- **Trinity** (Father, Son, Holy Spirit)
- Full **deity** and full **humanity** of Christ.
- Man is a **sinner** in need of **salvation** (depravity).
- **Miracles** like the Virgin Birth & Resurrection.
- **Salvation by grace/faith** in finished work of Christ.
- **Second coming** of Christ.
- **Bible** is Word of God.

Areas of Disagreements (Non-Essentials)

- Forms of **Church Government** (Congregational, Presbyterian, Episcopal).
- **Women pastors** (Complementarian vs. Egalitarian).
- **Baptism**: Child vs. Adult baptism.
- **Charismatic gifts** continue today or ceased?
- Man's part in salvation (**predestination** vs. **free-will**).
- View of **End Times**.
- **Values** (topical vs. expository preaching, seeker sensitive, etc.).
- Style of **Worship** (modern, hymn, no instruments, etc.).

Areas of Agreement – The Essentials

1. Shared Christian Beliefs on the Bible

All Christians believe the Bible is **special revelation** from God. It tells us things that we simply would not know apart from God directly revealing it to us.

Scripture is inspired (“**from God**”).

- Inspiration deals with the **source of the Bible**: it is from God.
- 2 Timothy 3:16 – “All Scripture is **breathed out by God** and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness...” (2 Tim. 3:16).
- **Prophets were mouthpieces** for God (2 Sam. 23:2; Heb. 1:1; Dt. 18:18; “thus says the Lord” x 1700).

Scripture is infallible (“cannot **fail** or be broken”).

- Jesus said it has **divine authority** (three times he said during his temptation, “it is written,” Mt. 4:7).
- Jesus said it **cannot perish** – “not one jot or tittle will pass away until all fulfilled” (Mt. 5:17-18)
- Jesus said it **cannot be broken** (Jn. 10:35).

Scripture is inerrant (“without **error**”).

- Jesus called it **true** – “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.” (John 17:17)
- Jesus implied it’s **scientifically accurate** by affirming creation account and Adam/Eve (Matt. 19:4-6)
- Jesus implied it’s **historically reliable** by also affirming people like Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Moses, etc.

Different Views:

- There is a debate today about to what extent the Bible is revelation. All Christians believe the Bible contains **special revelation**.
 - **Full-inerrantists** believe the Bible is reliable on every area it touches, including **science** and **history**.
 - **Partial-inerrantists** believe the Bible is accurate concerning **salvation** but not necessarily science and history.

2. Shared Christian Beliefs on God

Most Christian groups have the same view of God.¹

God's nature: Trinity.

- Most affirm **the Trinity**: there's one essence in three distinct persons (Father, Son, Holy Spirit).

Scriptures

There is one God.

Isaiah 44:6 – Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: “I am the first and I am the last; **besides me there is no god**.”

Isaiah 43:10 – “**Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me.**”

Mark 12:29 – Jesus answered, “The most important [command] is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, **the Lord is one.**’”

1 Timothy 2:5 – For **there is one God**, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus

The Father is God.

“Our **Father**, who are in heaven...” (Matt. 6:9)

“Grace, mercy, and peace from **God the Father**...” (1 Tim. 1:2)

The Son is God.

Hebrews 1:3 – He [Jesus] is the **radiance of the glory of God** and the **exact imprint of his nature**, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power...

Colossians 2:9 – For in him [Jesus] the whole **fullness of deity dwells** bodily...

¹ One exception is Oneness Pentecostalism which believes in modalism (they say the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are the *same* person). There are about 24 million adherents today.

Titus 2:13 – waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great **God and Savior Jesus Christ**

The Holy Spirit is God.

Acts 5:3,4 – But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to **lie to the Holy Spirit...** You have not lied to man but **to God.**”

*Father, Son and Holy Spirit are **distinct** persons.*

Matthew 3:16, 17 – And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the **Spirit of God** descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; 17 and behold, a **voice from heaven** [the Father] said, “This is my beloved **Son**, with whom I am well pleased.”

John 14:16 – And I [**the Son**] will ask the **Father**, and he will give you another Helper [**the Spirit**], to be with you forever

God’s qualities.

- All Christians believe God has two broad categories of qualities. He has qualities that only belong to Him (**called incommunicable, metaphysical**) and He has qualities that He gives to his creatures (**communicable, moral**).

Who God is – only **God has these qualities**

God is...

One	Self-existent
Infinite	Simple
Immutable	Eternal
Omnipresent	Omniscient
Omnipotent	

What God does – God can give these to **us**

God is and can make us...

Holy	Righteous
Just	Perfect
Truthful	Loving
Merciful	Righteously Jealous

3. Shared Christian Beliefs on Creation

Creation out of **nothing**.

- God created the universe from nothing—the universe did not exist before. Another way of saying this is that he created the universe *ex nihilo*, “out of nothing” (Gen. 1:1).
- Creation “from nothing” is different from *creation ex deo* (“from God,” pantheism) and *creation ex materia* (“from matter,” atheism).

Genesis describes **real** events.

- Conservative Christians have historically believed the Bible is a **narrative of real events** (no myths, allegories or legends).
- Some conservatives are comfortable with **evolution** today.²

Creation was originally **good**.

- Christians believe the **world was created good**.
- God created something, called it “good.” (**light**, Gen. 1:4; **land/seas**, v. 10; **plants/trees**, v. 12; **sun**, v. 18; **sea life**, v. 21; **animals**, v.25; everything “very good,” v. 31)
- And **evil** came as result of the **Fall** (Genesis 3).

Scriptures

God as Creator. Genesis 1:1 – In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

God as source of life. Isaiah 42:5 – Thus says God, the LORD, who **created the heavens** and stretched them out, who **spread out the earth** and what comes from it, who **gives breath** to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it.

Everything created for him. Colossians 1:16 – by him [Jesus] all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were **created through him and for him**.

² For more info on how this is being done and some warnings, see Shawn Nelson, “Important Safety Rails in the Creation Debate,” Nelson.ink, 2018, <https://nelson.ink/important-safety-rails-in-the-creation-debate/>.

4. Shared Christian Beliefs on Humanity

Historicity of Adam and **Eve**.

- Christians have historically believed the **Genesis account** of the origin of mankind.³
- This includes the belief that the **entire human race** has descended from a **first human pair** (Adam & Eve).

Image of God.

- Humans were created in the **image of God** (Gen. 1:26).
- This “image” includes our **rationality**, sense of right/wrong (moral awareness), **eternal-mindedness** (Eccl. 3:11), our **creativity**, God-given **stewardship** of the earth—as well as our use of **abstract language**, complexity of **emotions** that make us **relational** creatures.

The Fall.

- All Christians believe in **the Fall** of mankind because of sin.
- **Death is the punishment** for sin.
- We all agree the **Fall affected all areas of man**: spiritual, physical, social and intellectual.

Sin.

- Christians believe **all people are sinners**.
- Because they are born in sin (original sin, Rom. 5:12).
- And they have personally sinned (Rom. 3:23).

Scriptures

Everything was “very good” before the Fall.

Genesis 1:26 – “Then God said, “**Let us make mankind in our image**, in our likeness, so that **they may rule** over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

Genesis 1:27 – “So God created mankind **in his own image**, in **the image of God** he created them...”

³ However, some today are treating Genesis as more of an allegory rather than a historical account (e.g., John Walton of Wheaton College).

Genesis 1:31 – “God saw all that he had made, and **it was very good.**”

*The decision to **disobey** God.*

Genesis 2:15-17 – “The Lord God took the man and put him in the **Garden of Eden** to work it and take care of it. And the Lord God commanded the man, “You are **free to eat from any tree** in the garden; but **you must not eat** from the **tree of the knowledge of good and evil**, for **when you eat from it you will certainly die.**”

Genesis 3:6-7 – “When **the woman** saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also **gave some to her husband**, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the **eyes of both of them were opened**, and they **realized they were naked**; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

Results of the Fall.

Eventual physical death. They were expelled from the garden “lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever” (Gen. 3:22). Romans 5:15 says, “many **died** through one man’s [Adam’s] trespass...”

Spiritual death and condemnation. Genesis 2:17 – in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die (lit., “dying, you shall die”). Romans 5:16 says, “the judgment following one trespass brought **condemnation...**” Ephesians 2:1 says apart from Christ’s salvation, we all would be “**dead in trespasses and sins...**”

Evil and pain. Genesis 3:17 – **cursed is the ground** because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life.

Next Week – The Essentials Part 2

Next week we’ll cover shared Christian beliefs about **Christ, salvation, the church** and **end-times**. Then, in weeks 4 and 5, we will talk about some areas of disagreement (non-essentials). Christians denominations have more to unite them than divide them.

Bibliography & Resources

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