

Key Christian Beliefs

Essential **D**octrine Made Easy



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What Do Christians Believe?

What are the key doctrines of the Christian faith? The core teachings of the Bible have defined Christianity for 2,000 years. Virtually all Christians who seek to have a faith that is biblical hold to some form of these basic doctrines. Christians may not always agree on how they work out the details of their faith, but they should agree on the essential doctrines, these core truths.

In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty, and in all things, charity.¹

We can identify the essential doctrines of the Christian faith by looking at the core truth of the Gospel, which is the salvation of humanity through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Salvation, as God has revealed to us through his Holy Scriptures, is defined as forgiveness of sins and everlasting life with God by confessing that “Jesus is Lord” and believing that God raised Jesus from the dead (Romans 10:9). By examining the Gospel message, we can identify 14 doctrines that are necessary for salvation to be possible.

What Are the Essential Doctrines?

The essential doctrines of Christianity have to do with

- who God is,
- who Jesus Christ is,
- God’s love for people, and his desire to save them.

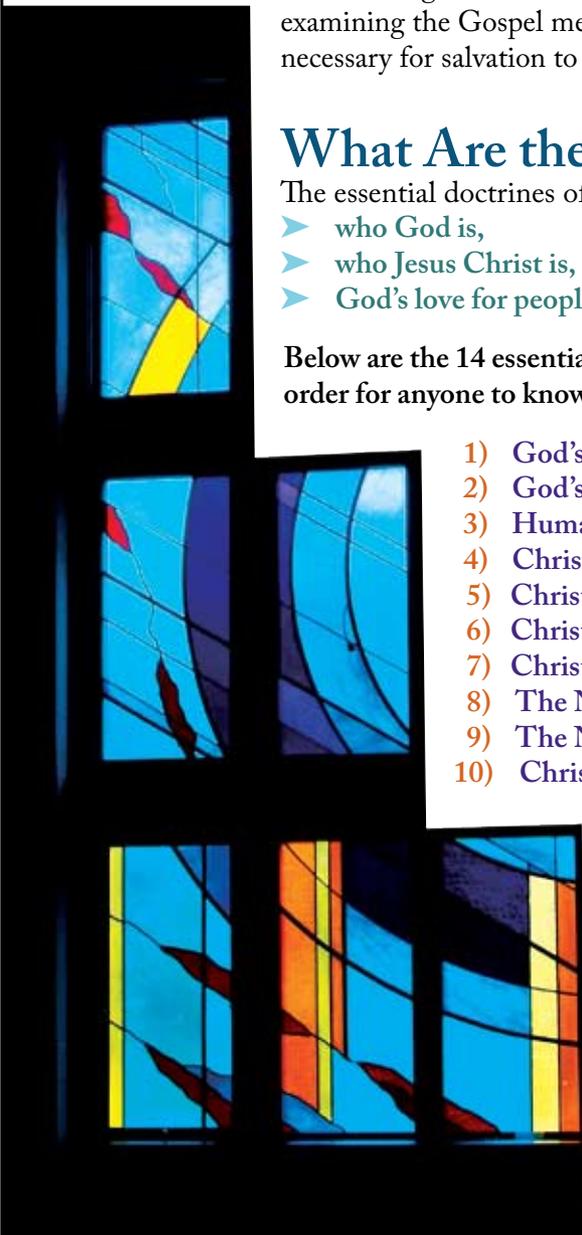
Below are the 14 essential salvation doctrines that have to be true in order for anyone to know God and be saved:

- 1) God’s Unity
- 2) God’s Tri-unity
- 3) Human Depravity
- 4) Christ’s Virgin Birth
- 5) Christ’s Sinlessness
- 6) Christ’s Deity
- 7) Christ’s Humanity
- 8) The Necessity of God’s Grace
- 9) The Necessity of Faith
- 10) Christ’s Atoning Death
- 11) Christ’s Bodily Resurrection
- 12) Christ’s Bodily Ascension
- 13) Christ’s Intercession
- 14) Christ’s Second Coming

In addition, two more essentials define how we know about salvation:

- 15) Inspiration of Scripture
- 16) Method of Interpretation

¹ Rupertus Meldeniuss (AD 1627)



The Essential Doctrines in the Creeds

The essential doctrines are reflected in the Church's ancient statements of faith called "creeds." Creeds are short summaries of what the Bible teaches.

The Apostles' Creed

The Apostles' Creed was one of the earliest statements of faith crafted by Christian leaders to clarify basic beliefs. All 14 essential salvation doctrines are contained in it. Each doctrine is indicated by bracketed numbers: [9] = Essential Doctrine #9.

I believe [9] in God [1], the Father Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord [6]: Who was conceived of the Holy Spirit [2], born of the Virgin Mary [4, 5], suffered [10] under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died [7], and was buried. (He descended into hell.) The third day he arose again from the dead [11]. He ascended into heaven [12] and sits at the right hand of God the Father [13] Almighty, from whence he shall come to judge the living and the dead [14]. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic [universal] church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness [8] of sins [3], the resurrection of the flesh, and life everlasting [14]. Amen.

—The Apostles Creed

The Nicene Creed

In addition to the 14 essential salvation doctrines, the Nicene Creed makes reference to Scripture as the basis for the Creeds. Scripture is the method through which essential doctrines are revealed.

Athanasian Creed

The Athanasian Creed emphasizes the deity of Christ and the Trinity. In addition, the Athanasian Creed was directed against many heresies such as Tritheism (belief in three Gods), Monophysitism (belief in the "confusion" or co-mingling of the two natures), Nestorianism (belief that the two natures are independent or loosely united), Arianism (belief that Jesus is created and not divine), Adoptionism (belief that Jesus was merely a man who was adopted into the Godhead as Son), Apollinarianism (belief that Jesus is partially human), Annihilationism (belief that some souls are destroyed), and Universalism (belief that everyone will be saved).

The Creed of Chalcedon

In addition to the other essentials, the Chalcedonian Creed stresses the Triune Godhead, the Virgin Birth of Christ, Jesus' humanity and deity, as well as the eternity of the Son before all time.



GOD'S UNITY

There is only one God. He has always existed and will always exist. There is one—and only one—God, Creator of the universe.

What Do I Actually Need to Believe?

There is only one God.

What's at Stake Here?

Knowing the only true God (John 17:3).



Hear O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one!

—Deuteronomy 6:4

I am the Lord your God.... You shall have no other gods before Me.

—Exodus 20:2-3

Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me. I, even I, am the Lord and apart from me there is no savior.

—Isaiah 43:10-11



GOD'S TRI-UNITY

While there is only one God, he exists eternally in three Persons.
In the Bible —

- **the Father is called God,**
(2 Thessalonians 1:2)
- **the Son (Jesus) is called God,**
(John 1:1-5; John 10:30-33; John 20:28; Hebrews 1:8; Philippians 2:9-11)
- **the Holy Spirit is called God.**
(Acts 5:3-4, 2 Corinthians 3:17)

He is one substance but three Persons in relationship.
There are more than 60 passages in the Bible that mention the three Persons together.

What Do I Actually Need to Believe?

God is one essence, but three Persons.

What's at Stake Here?

The unity and relational nature of God.

As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased'."

—Matthew 3:16, 17

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit....

—Matthew 28:19

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. —2 Corinthians 13:14



HUMAN DEPRAVITY

Since God is a personal Being, he wants personal relationships with human beings. Human depravity means that every human is spiritually separated from God, totally incapable of saving himself. When Adam sinned, he died spiritually and his relationship with God was severed. Additionally, all of Adam's descendants are "dead in trespasses" (Ephesians 2:1). Without a new birth (being created anew) no one can enter life (John 3:3).