

Ground Rules

Week 1 - Theology

Ice Breaker Questions

How long have you been coming to EVBC?

How did you hear about the church?

How long have you been in Vegas? Where were you living prior to Vegas?

What is your brief history in connection with church?

Introduction

For the next 4 weeks, we will discuss the theology, identity, vision and ownership of East Valley Bible Church. *Our goal is to understand what a biblical, healthy church looks like and give an invitation to participate in God's mission.*

As a part of this class, would you read the article in preparation for each week? This will streamline the class so we can hit major topics and answer questions you may have. I would also encourage you to open your Bibles as you read through. There are references to different points that are made. I want you to see what the Bible says for itself.

I want to thank you for taking your valuable time and investing it into asking the question, "What does God want for my life in connection with East Valley Bible Church?"

Theology

Theology, the study of God. In this first week together, I believe it is important to lay down a ground rule of what a church believes and what it doesn't. Obviously with the amount of information in the Bible we will not be able to exhaustively cover any significant amount of information. But I find this starting point to be necessary because of the sheer amount of churches, information and presuppositions who base their information on the Bible. We must define what makes a church a biblical Christian church and what disqualifies a church from being a Christian church. The following 5 areas of "God-study" are what separates orthodox, Biblical Christianity with every other religion, cult, worldview and opinion.

1. The Authority of the Bible

We believe the Bible is the Word of God, supernaturally and inerrantly revealed in its original documents, and is the supreme, final authority in faith and life.

We believe the entire Bible is "God-breathed". The message and the truth it contains all came from God. Every part of it is valuable and priceless. The Bible is God's revelation of himself to us. **2 Timothy 3:16-17**

2 Peter 1:20-21 describes the process by which God communicated the Bible. God chose at least 40 men and used their styles of writing, experiences and occupations to write his thoughts. The Bible was not initiated or given by the authority of a human person.

We believe the 66 books of the Bible, 39 in the Old and 27 in the New Testament, make up the revealed word of God. Any other writings, books or so-called "revelation" are not and should not

be accepted as authoritative. We are not expecting more to be written, and we have no right to change or take away from what is in the Bible.

The Bible confirms the presupposition that if God desired to communicate with humanity, he would initiate it and he would do so in a way humanity would be able to receive it.

The Bible confirms its reliability because it always matches reality. Although the Bible is not an academic book, it stays truthful in predictions of future events, philosophy and wisdom, science, history, math and sociology.

Many people doubt the Bible because it has been translated so many times. The Bible is a unique book in ancient literature. We have the ability to perform a science called "textual criticism". Thousands of manuscripts have been discovered in archeology. These manuscripts (copies of the originals) are so numerous that we can piece the entire Bible together with confidence and surety our English translations are trustworthy to what was written down originally.

2. The Trinity

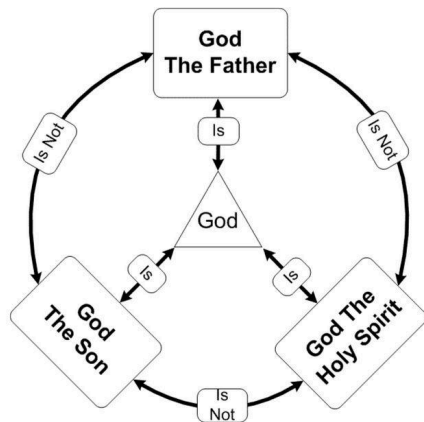
The following is an excerpt from the "Athanasian Creed". It is traditionally believed to have been written by Athanasius, archbishop of Alexandria, who lived in the 4th century A.D. While the Athanasian Creed is a good summary of Christian doctrine on the subjects of the Trinity, there are a couple of issues that must be dealt with. First, in regards to the phrase "catholic church," this does not refer to the Roman Catholic Church. The word *catholic* means "universal." The true "catholic" church is all those who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ for salvation. Second, the Athanasian Creed demands belief in all of its tenets for salvation. While we agree with the tenets, we do not believe that all of them are mandatory for salvation. We will address salvation specifically under section 4, "*Justification by Faith*".

"We worship one God in trinity and the Trinity in unity, neither confusing the persons nor dividing the divine being. For the Father is one person, the Son is another, and the Spirit is still another. But the deity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is one, equal in glory, coeternal in majesty. What the Father is, the Son is, and so is the Holy Spirit. Uncreated is the Father; uncreated is the Son; uncreated is the Spirit. The Father is infinite; the Son is infinite; the Holy Spirit is infinite. Eternal is the Father; eternal is the Son; eternal is the Spirit: And yet there are not three eternal beings, but one who is eternal; as there are not three uncreated and unlimited beings, but one who is uncreated and unlimited. Almighty is the Father; almighty is the Son; almighty is the Spirit: And yet there are not three almighty beings, but one who is almighty. Thus the Father is God; the Son is God; the Holy Spirit is God: And yet there are not three gods, but one God. Thus the Father is Lord; the Son is Lord; the Holy Spirit is Lord: And yet there are not three lords, but one Lord.

"As Christian truth compels us to acknowledge each distinct person as God and Lord, so catholic religion forbids us to say that there are three gods or lords. The Father was neither made nor created nor begotten; the Son was neither made nor created, but was alone begotten of the Father; the Spirit was neither made nor created, but is proceeding from the Father and the Son. Thus there is one Father, not three fathers; one Son, not three sons; one Holy Spirit, not three spirits. And in this Trinity, no one is before or after, greater or less than the other; but all

three persons are in themselves, coeternal and coequal; and so we must worship the Trinity in unity and the one God in three persons.” (Excerpts from the Athanasian Creed)

If you are confused, that’s okay. Here is a summary of the Bible’s teaching regarding the trinity.



- There is one God: Deut. 6:4; Isa. 44:6, 24
- The Father is God: John 17:3; 1 Cor. 8:6
- The Son (Jesus) is God: Jn. 20:28; Heb. 1:8; Col. 2:9
- The Holy Spirit is God: Ac. 5:3-4; Heb. 3:7-11
- The Father is Eternal: 1 Cor. 8:6, Mal. 3:6
- The Son is Eternal: Heb. 1:2, 10-12; Col. 1:15-17
- The Holy Spirit is Eternal: Heb. 9:14; Job 33:4; Ps. 104:30
- The Father is NOT the Holy Spirit: Jn. 14:26; 15:26
- The Holy Spirit is NOT the Son: Ac. 10:38; Jn. 16:13-15
- The Son is NOT the Father: Jn. 6:38, 8:16, 8:38, 17:5
- Three DISTINCT Persons: Mt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 4:4-6

3. Humanity

a. Who we are *Apart from Christ*

The Bible clearly tells us who we are. We are valuable and bear the image of God. **(Genesis 1:27/Matthew 6:30)** Adam’s sin at the beginning has been passed on to us along with our sinful thoughts, words, actions and inactions. **(Romans 5:12)** Sin is missing the mark of God’s holy and perfect character. **(Romans 3:23)** The image of God in our life has not been destroyed, but it has been marred by sin. We are now separated from God and enemies because of our rebellion against his standard. **(Romans 5:10)** No attempt to do good through religious rituals or moral effort changes our standing and relationship with God.

If you take a 10 question test and get the first question wrong, it will not matter if you get the next 9 questions correct. You will still have an imperfect score. God’s requirement is for each of us to be perfect just as God is perfect. **(Isaiah 64:6)**

b. Who we are *In Christ*

The phrase “in Christ” is used frequently throughout the New Testament. Ephesians chapter 1 uses it over and over again. The phrase’s significance is because “in Christ” we are a new creation. **(2 Corinthians 5:17)** “In Christ” we are transferred from the domain of darkness into Jesus’ kingdom. **(Colossians 1:13-14)** “In Christ” we have been adopted into the family of



God. (**Galatians 4:6**) And “in Christ” means we have eternal life and an inheritance. (**Philippians 3:20-21 & Romans 8:16-17**)

We are no longer defined by what we do, but by who and *whose* we are. God the Father no longer sees you as a sinner but as a saint. (**2 Corinthians 5:21**) We are no longer slaves to sin, but free from sin’s penalty, power, and in the future, presence. (**Romans 8:29-30**)

It is often said the most important word to anyone is their own name. Our name makes us who we are. And our identity matters! In a world full of people who are searching to find who they are, the Christian must remember, we are Christ’s. Our identity, our purpose, our value, our past, and our future hopes and dreams all must be viewed through the eyes of Jesus.

Colossians 3:11-12 and have put on the new self. You are being renewed in knowledge according to the image of your Creator. 11 In Christ there is not Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all.

4. Justification by Faith

a. Justification

To be justified in a response or action feels good. We don’t want to have the IRS, a boss, or even a family member question our why and how we did something. Justification gives sweet freedom from judgment and guilt.

When the Bible uses the word justification, we must remember this definition: “*to be declared righteous*”. Justification is the announcement by God that a person is perfectly right in everything!

We need this declaration over our lives. It doesn’t matter what a pastor, priest, family member or friend says. (**Romans 3:20**) God must say you and I are righteous. (**Romans 8:30**)

Based on what the Bible says about our sinful nature and on what we know of ourselves, being declared perfect seems like a long shot. Therefore, billions of people every single day *do their best* to be the best they can be. The problem is, we will never be justified by working harder, better, more effectively or being the best us we can be. (**Galatians 2:15-16**)

b. By Faith

How can we be justified if we will never be good enough? In a word, faith. (**Ephesians 2:8-9**) Faith, trust and belief are all synonyms for the same idea. (**John 6:47 & Acts 16:31**) Faith is counting on another for something we cannot accomplish on our own. The Bible is straightforward with us. We will be punished for our sin unless a savior takes our place. The hero of our lives is not us; the hero is Jesus. (**Titus 3:4-7**) Jesus died on the cross, was buried and rose from the dead. (**1 Corinthians 15:1-4**) And when we trust Jesus, we are declared righteous! (**Romans 5:1**) Faith in Jesus, no more and no less justifies. (**John 3:16-18**)

5. Abiding in Jesus

Monopoly offers a deal that is hard to pass up. It is called a “Get Out of Jail Free” card. In the game of Monopoly, you play the card when you are in jail and then you go free. You shuffle the card back into the deck and most likely you never see that little man with the top hat again. Justification is nothing like that. Instead we are told “Just as you have received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to walk in him.” (**Colossians 2:6**)

How did we receive Jesus? By faith. How are we to live our lives since we received him? You got it, by faith. Here are 3 important motivators to keep depending on Jesus.

1. We can do “nothing” without Jesus. (**John 15:4-8**) Let the word *nothing* sink in. Nothing. In contrast to nothing, daily dependence on Jesus offers us a life of love, peace, joy, satisfaction, self-control, purpose, and hope. Our lives depend on abiding in Jesus. Will we stay dependent on Jesus, or will we cut the cord? Each day we choose nothing or abundance. (**John 10:10**)
2. Our sin nature will destroy us. (**Galatians 5:16-25**) Toddlers model this truth perfectly. Sometimes they run into the arms of their parents. Other times they run into the road. Our sin no longer has power over us. True statement. But it is only because Jesus conquered sin and death. As soon as we stop walking with Jesus, we make ourselves vulnerable to the destructive nature within us.
3. Faith without works is worthless. (**James 2:20**) This passage can be confusing, but here is the essence of what is being taught. Faith in Jesus is not merely for show. The more time we spend around other Christians, the easier it is to talk the language and blend in. When we talk about abiding, walking and having faith, these are not merely for religious show. Faith is a deep seeded understanding, *I need Jesus*. Out of genuine faith springs an authentic love for Jesus. Faith as a religious ritual is worthless.

Conclusion

These are not the only topics we feel strongly about as a church. But we feel the Bible, the Trinity, Humanity, Justification by Faith, and Abiding in Jesus are what eventually shapes every other teaching and belief. Therefore, these are vital for unity and offer a good starting place for all other areas of teaching.

As you think about what you just read, here are a few questions we will be addressing in our first time together.

- Is any of this new information to you?
- Have you trusted Jesus to justify you? What is holding you back from trusting Jesus today?
- Is there anything you would like to share in response to what you read?
- Would you disagree with any of what you have read?
- Any other questions or concerns based on this first class?