**Pastor Tim’s Message Notes From 12-3-2023
Essentials of the Faith #1 – The Authority of Scripture**

My daughter Mya is doing the book-it program for school this year. Are any of you familiar with it?

With this program, the student is supposed to read a certain number of books for the month and if they do that they are awarded with a free personal pan pizza from Pizza Hut.

So the day came for us to make our trip to Pizza Hut for a family night out. The only problem is that many of the Pizza Hut’s are now take out only, such as the one we went to, as we came to find out.

We decided to put in our order and then go to a nearby grocery store to pick up a few things before picking up the pizzas and then heading back home for dinner.

The thing that I definitely wanted to make sure to pick up were paper towels. We were about out. But while we were there, we decided to grab a few other items as well. And then, wouldn’t you know, we are in the line checking out and Kara and I realize that we forgot the paper towels – the one essential thing. Now, have you ever done something like that? I’m sure that we have all forgot the essential thing at some point or another. So after we checked out, I just turned around and grabbed the paper towels and checked out again.

Now I share this story today, not just because it is a little funny, but also because of the word essential. For that particular trip, the essential thing was picking up some paper towels. In reality, of course, they weren’t really essential. We could have gotten by without paper towels. We could always substitute them for napkins or tissues or toilet paper (or bathroom tissue, as the stores prefer to call it). We could even use towels if needed. In other words, the paper towels, although nice to have, are not a true essential.

But what about the Christian faith? Are there core essential beliefs that all Christians should hold? I would argue that there are a number of essential foundational beliefs that all Christians should hold dear.

And as we begin Advent today and mark the beginning of the new Christian calendar year, I believe this is a fitting time to unpack what I believe are the essential core beliefs that all Christians should hold.

The first belief is the authority of Scripture. Now what does that mean and why is it important?

To help us with these questions I invite you to turn with me to 2 Timothy 3:14-17. Paul writes these words to his spiritual son, Timothy. He says, **14But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, 15and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 16All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17so that the servant of God[**[**a**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+Timothy+3%3A14-17&version=NIV#fen-NIV-29871a)**] may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.**

What is Scripture? Scripture refers to the sacred books of the Bible. This collection of books is uniquely inspired by God. Together they form one unified story. One Book. In fact, the word Bible literally means ‘book.’

In this passage of Scripture, Paul tells Timothy that “all Scripture is God-breathed.” This means that all Scripture finds its ultimate origins in the heart and mind of God. This does not mean that God dictated the exact words that He wanted to include to the biblical writers. Rather, it means that God was preparing each of them for the unique task of recording a portion of God’s larger story in ways that are accurate and life-giving and that correctly reveal the character of God.

At the time of Paul’s letter to Timothy, Paul would have been referring to the Old Testament. He is telling Timothy that he needed to remember that every part of Scripture is important and is beneficial for teaching, rebuking, correction and training in righteousness. In order words, it is all reliable and trustworthy. It is all consistent. And it is all there to help someone be equipped for every good work.

**We need to remember that Jesus quoted the Old Testament time and time and time again**. He affirmed the authority of the Old Testament. We think of his resisting Satan’s temptations in the wilderness. Three times Jesus says, “It is written,” “It is written” “It is written.” And we can think of Jesus quoting Scripture to the religious leaders and to the disciples and even on the cross. These were all Old Testament verses from Scripture.

But what about the New Testament? Well, in the Apostle Peter’s second letter he refers to Paul’s writings as Scripture. This was near the end of Peter’s letter, as he is writing about the Lord’s patience in bringing about His return to earth in order that more people may be saved. In 2 Peter 3:14-16 the Apostle Peter writes:

**14So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. 15Bear in mind that our Lord’s patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. 16He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.**

There are a couple things to note here. First, Peter is clearly connecting Paul’s writings with being Scripture just as much as the writing of the Old Testament. This message reminds us that just as much as the Old Testament is Scripture, so are these recognized letters of Paul as well. And, of course, it became very clear within the early church that God had uniquely inspired the four gospel writers and the Book of Acts and the remaining New Testament letters were also recognized rather quickly by the early church as also inspired as well.

Second, Peter was sharing how ignorant and unstable people distort Scripture and it leads to their own destruction. This means that it is very possible to distort Scripture to try to make it say whatever one wants it to say. And doing this is highly destructive.

So what does it mean when I refer to ‘the authority of Scripture’? This speaks to this collection of books revealing God in such as well that to heed the message of Scripture is the same as to submit to God. And to reject the message of Scripture is to reject God.

Now certainly, there are several non-essential beliefs found within Scripture – Christians debate these things. These would be things like how water baptism is understood and practiced, should women be considered for leadership within the church, and views of Holy Communion and details surrounding the return of Jesus Christ. These subjects should be lovingly debated between Christians. They are all important, but also all non-essential.

The Authority of Scripture is an essential part of the faith because it gives a clear plumbline for sound instruction. The Bible is infallible. This means that it communicates absolute truth and is 100% reliable. That it rightly reveals God and rightly reveals human nature and our need for God.

Because Scripture is breathed forth from God, it is right to say that it is infallible.

This is critically important! It is essential for anyone claiming to be a Christian that they agree that the Bible is infallible. Because if the Bible is fallible, meaning that it is unsound and not-trustworthy, then those believing this would be of a very different framework than those that are grounded in this truth.

In other words, if one does not agree on the authority and infallibility of Scripture, they are on very shaky ground. In fact, this will undoubtedly lead to people putting themselves in authority over and above the Scriptures, rather than under the Scriptures choosing to put yourself below the Bible.

Why is all this so important? It is because failure to submit to the unique authority of Scripture given by God will lead people away from submission to God and His Word.

There are so many stories of people that fail to submit to the authority of God’s Word and their faith becomes shipwrecked. They begin to pick and choose the stories that they like and to reject the other biblical stories as being unimportant or even contrary to God’s heart and will.

And this is not anything new. Way back in the days of the early church there was a man named Marcion. He rejected the Old Testament and most of the New Testament because he did not think that God’s character was consistent in the Bible. There are many people who believe this today. But this is a very dangerous view to hold. God’s character is consistent throughout all of Scripture.

But this type of thinking is still around today. There are people that seek to twist the Bible in ways that make it more politically correct and less offensive.

There are others that add to Scripture, such as the Mormon Church. They place the Book of Mormon as more important than the Bible. And then there are groups like the Jehovah’s Witnesses. They came up with their own translation of Scripture to try to force their distorted understanding onto the biblical text.

So it is important not only to love and value the Bible as God’s Book, carrying His authority, but it is also important to not put any other books on par with it or to intentionally distort the Bible through poor translations. Instead, it is to be our goal and desire to grasp God’s Word soundly and to apply the truths of God’s Word to our daily living.

Finally, I would like to highlight one more thing about the importance of the authority of Scripture. Hebrews 4:12-13 state:

**12For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. 13Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.**

The word of God is not just letters on a page. It is not just a collection of good and interesting stories. Rather, the Bible is a living and active book. It is not a dead, unactive book. The Holy Spirit has inspired it and although it was not originally written to us, it was written for us and for all humanity. And God uses His Word to comfort and to convict. He uses His Word to reveal truth and to bring clear understanding.

Truly, everyone will one day give an account to God. And God has revealed Himself outside of His Word, through nature and the human conscience that He has given us. But what we do with His Word matters.

God’s Word is life-giving and is described as a *sword*. Getting God’s Word in our hearts and minds will help us to fight the good fight of faith.

In speaking of the Bible, John Wesley claimed that he wanted to be a man of one book, yet he read lots of books. Like Wesley, we are called to be people of One Book – The Bible. And we can and should read many books as well. But the Bible must always be at the center and forefront of our minds and hearts as we seek to get to know our God better and better.

And as we chose to rightly live under the authority of God by living under the authority of Scripture, the Lord will be primed to transform us to be more and more like Jesus Christ. We must recognize that the Bible is uniquely inspired and infallible and carries God’s authority.

We are told to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. This is impossible without God’s Word getting in us. And the more we get in God’s Word, the more that God’s Word will get in us.

Resources: [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com)

<https://www.christianity.com/wiki/bible/did-paul-know-that-his-letters-would-be-scripture.html#:~:text=The%20Apostle%20Peter%20regarded%20Paul%27s%20writings%20as%20Scripture.&text=With%20knowledge%20of%20the%20Savior%27s,2%20Peter%203%3A15>).