

What Do You Believe? – “The Ologies”
Study Notes #1, January 17, 2016
Introduction

What do you believe? If asked about anything essential to your faith, do you have an answer? Not what your parents believe – your momma, your daddy, your grandmother; not what your church believes; not what your pastor believes; not what your favorite Bible teacher believes; but **what do YOU believe?** When life gets hard and trials come, you will ask yourself those questions and be challenged on what you really believe. Most importantly, what beliefs do you hold so firmly that you are willing to die for them?

This is a study to help us all ponder, study and learn what God Himself would have us to believe. We will look at many aspects of a systematic set of beliefs about God and His Word (Theology). Things like the “ology” of God, His Word, Man, Sin, Salvation, Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Church, and even End Times. This is not intended to be scholastic, but more life application, so that we not only have a “ready defense” and can share that with others, but that we have peace and a sure faith, resting securely in the “once for all delivered” Faith. **Everyone has a system of belief, whether stated or not, that they are living and betting their eternity on – what is yours?**

- **What Do You Believe?**

Watch Jack’sGap video clip of what young people said they believe in, featuring Skype clips from all over the world:

- *What did they say they believe in?*

“A lot of things”

God, Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddha, the Big Bang Theory

Diversity, gay marriage, feminism, equal rights, equality

Hard work, passion, what we love to do

LOVE

Humanity – human power

Hope & change

HOPE

ME

YOU

Believing in believing! (faith in faith!!??)

You may remember a song that was popular in the 60s and 70s, sung by Elvis and the Lettermen, entitled “*I Believe*”

I believe for every drop of rain that falls

A flower grows

I believe that somewhere in the darkest night

A candle glows

I believe for everyone who goes astray, someone will come

To show the way

I believe, I believe

I believe above a storm the smallest prayer
 Can still be heard
 I believe that someone in the great somewhere
 Hears every word

Every time I hear a new born baby cry,
 Or touch a leaf or see the sky
 Then I know why, I believe

What in the world did all that mean? What kind of faith is that? Yet, sadly, that is the substance of many peoples' faith, and many would tear up listening to it!

- What is better – **a lot of faith in a subjective or wrong object, or a little faith in a true and objective object?** (Illustration of a lot of faith in thin ice or a little faith in very thick ice over a lake. Which holds up up?)
- ***What Do You Believe?***

The great evangelist George Whitefield once asked a coal miner in Cornwall, England, what he believed.

“Oh, he said, “I believe what my church believes.”

Whitfield then inquired, “And what does you church believe?”

“Well,” he answered, “The church believes what I believe.”

Seeing that he was getting nowhere, Whitefield then asked, “What do you both believe?”

“We both believe the same thing!”

- **Illustrations – the Penny Jar and our Favorite Movies**

My penny jar is full of copper pennies. Pennies made before 1982 were solid copper (95%); today they are mostly zinc with a copper coating. There are a few other coins in it, like nickels, dimes and even a quarter.

So the first question is ***“How much money is in this jar?”*** *What is your answer?*

The second question is ***“What is your favorite movie of all time?”*** *What is your answer?*

(Poll the class for both questions. List them on the white board. Then start revealing some more information.)

Consider what the fundamental difference is between these two questions and how we go about deciding our answers to each. The first question is objective and should result in a specific correct answer.

First consider a volume approach to solving the problem and getting to the right answer. Like the fact that the jar is a $\frac{3}{4}$ liter jar by volume, or about 25 ounces. Then let them know that based on volume, there would be about 2053 pennies per liter. That (2053) multiplied by 0.75 is 1540 pennies, by volume in $\frac{3}{4}$ of a liter. But now consider that the volume number given is for perfectly stacked pennies. If randomly thrown in the jar, of course less pennies would fit. And you have the factor of the other coins to consider.

Or consider the weight approach. The weight of the jar is about 9.4 pounds. And there are about 145 (copper) pennies per pound. So if you guess the weight of the glass jar, subtract that, and then multiply the remainder by 145, that should be more accurate than the volume approach. ($9 \times 145 = 1305$ pennies) But you still have the unknown factor of the other coins. And the weight of the jar may be a little more or less.

*But, **there is a right answer!** And it is knowable, but it will take some time and effort. And what is the only way to know the answer for certain?*

Let's say the answer is \$13.57. Now who was the closest to the right answer?

Now consider the **second question**. Which answer is the closest to being right – to be the correct answer? (When they protest, ask them why?) The second question is subjective and results in an answer that is based on our opinion or feelings or preferences! (Of course, there is a correct answer to that question also – *Ben Hur!*)

So the real question is *“How do most people decide what they believe?” “How do they choose their ‘faith’?” What is the right way to believe? What is the correct “Faith?”*

Sadly, most of us chose our faith like we do our movies, rather than taking the time and effort to find the right answer? And many of us think, even if subliminally, that the answer to the question is subjective, like our taste in movies. *“Well – for me, I think Ben Hur is the greatest movie of all time and it is my favorite!”*

“Well - for me, I think that a loving God would not send anyone to hell!” “Well – for me, I think that there is no heaven or hell, and that after we die, we just cease to exist.” “Well – for me, I think that somehow God will be fair and everyone who was more right than wrong, more loving than hateful, more good than bad – all those people will end up with Him in heaven.”

“Well – for me, I think that anyone who names the name of Jesus will be in heaven, regardless of anything else.” “Well – for me, I think that if you love Jesus and love others, then all the other doctrine or teaching doesn't matter.”

- ***But – there is a right answer to what we should believe? There is a correct “faith!” There is a “once for all delivered faith.” There is “one faith” that delivered “once” for “all” people!***
- ***Is that an arrogant statement to make or a wrong position to take? Why or why not?***

Jude 1:3 (ESV) ³ Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for **the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.**

Ephesians 4:4-6 (NASB) ⁴ ***There is one body and one Spirit***, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; ⁵ **one Lord, one faith, one baptism,** ⁶ **one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.**

1 Peter 3:15 (NASB) ¹⁵ but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, ***always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;***

- **So is there a right and a wrong belief about everything? YES!
(Even when we don't know which is correct or not, one belief is correct and ALL others are wrong!)**
- **We ALL believe in Something about Everything!**

We can bring up any subject, and we will have a belief in that matter. Now, **we may first say we do not know what we believe about something**, and we may even admit we don't know what we believe in a particular matter, but if the question is phrased correctly, we will normally jump out there with our "belief" or faith anyway!

And, even if we still admit we don't know what we believe, **our actions, attitudes and lives tell what we really believe.** It may take us being put in a specific situation, but we will be forced to take a position of belief or faith when put in the appropriate position.

For example, put an agnostic on an airplane that is crashing and he will probably reveal that he does believe in prayer or a god of some sort, or in himself.

Therefore, the SUMMARY is that -

- ***We ALL BELIEVE in SOMETHING about EVERYTHING!***

And for each item or issue of faith, we are either right or wrong, as revealed by our statement of faith, our words, our attitudes, our actions or our lives

Christians are not exempt from these mistakes of Faith. We all have wrong beliefs about something!

- Watch video of "What if the Bible Said What Christians (Actually) Believed?" (Illustrations of how 5 Bible verses would be rewritten to match the way many of us actually believe, based on our actions and attitudes.)
- **All Christians have a wrong belief about something! True or False?**
- ***What Do YOU Believe?***

Share **personal examples** and story of wrestling with issues of faith during cancer treatments, and the time focused on potential immediate death. Such struggles cause us to question almost everything and anything. Our faith is either weakened or destroyed, or it is strengthened and built up. Like steel, faith is tempered and strengthened by the extremes of heat and cold.

There are MANY Religions! There is ONE Faith! All the world's religions are easily questioned and challenged, as they all have elements that are irrational, contradictory or illogical. The Christian faith of the Bible has never been successfully challenged on a factual, historical, scientific or a rational matter.

- **However - All teachings of the Bible can be somewhat difficult.** We just don't see them as so, or we don't want to see them as so. Many are so comforting to us, or we have been exposed to them for all of our lives, so we accept things that are mysterious or paradoxical even as if they are not!
- **What is the difference between a contradiction, paradox and mystery?**

Contradiction – A statement or teaching containing parts that are logically incongruous or incompatible. Real contradictions cannot exist, especially in Biblical truth or the mind of God; they violate the laws of logic. Therefore contradictions are an impossibility!

Paradox – An apparent contradiction that upon closer scrutiny or with more information can be resolved. Paradoxes do not violate any laws of logic. They are merely “seeming contradictions.”

Mystery – Things which are true but we cannot understand. These things may be understood later with more information or examination, or after they are revealed to us.

It is easy to confuse mysteries and contradictions. But mysteries are capable of being understood, while contradictions are not. All contradictions are mysterious; not all mysteries are contradictions. Mysteries may be true; contradictions may never be true!

Deut. 29:29 (NASB)

"The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law.

2 Peter 3:16 (NASB)

as also in all *his* letters, speaking in them of these things, in **which are some things hard to understand**, which the untaught and unstable distort, as *they do* also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.

Dialectic - “Truths in Tension” – Parallel Truths. Dual truths from the Scriptures that often seem to us to oppose each other, but may actually serve to increase or emphasize each other all the more! Truth is often best and most accurately seen from the opposite viewpoints on an issue. The truth remains, whether stated from one position or the other, and the truth is actually strengthened and most “true” when stated

simultaneously from opposing positions. **These are usually Biblical doctrines that are so controversial, hated and rejected.**

Examples:

1. Election – God is totally Sovereign in salvation, but man is totally responsible; Election is the most pride crushing doctrine, so it is also the most hated; It should be the most motivating for evangelism, rather than discouraging it.
 2. The Trinity – three in one, one in three; both one (God) and three (Persons)
 3. The Hypostatic Union of Christ – both 100% man and 100% God
 4. Christ’s desire or will to both hide and reveal truth to His children: Luke 19:41-42 & Luke 10:21
 5. Justification through faith and by grace alone, but that faith is a faith that works: Romans 3:20, 4:1-25; James 2:18-26; Phil 2:12-13.
- ***What Do YOU Believe? A Challenge!***

If not other people, our lives will certainly challenge the faith of us all! We must be ready with a defense, and (more importantly for our own sakes) our faith must be grounded on objective truth, not a “hope,” or a feeling, or an assumption.

- ***Challenge someone*** about what they believe on any particular topic or doctrine to illustrate the importance of knowing what you believe and why. Play “devil’s advocate” and attack everything they say, questioning the basis for any faith or statement.
- **The “study” of “what do you believe” is a science called “Theology.”**
- **What is Theology?**

The English word **science** comes from a Latin word that means “knowledge.” There are many fields of *science* that end with the same suffix – “ology.” The suffix comes from the Greek root word *logo*, which means “word,” “idea,” or “logic.” So it refers to the concepts, the meaning, the idea or “word” on some subject. Examples:

Biology – the study of *bios* or life

Zoology – the study of animal life

Anthropology – the study of man

Theology likewise comes from a compound of two Greek roots. *Theos* meaning “God, and *logos* meaning “word,” “idea,” or “logic.” So Theology is the study or word or ideas about God. Theology is a very broad term, and covers not only God Himself, but all that God has revealed to us in His word, the Holy Scriptures. That covers His revelation about us, relationships with others, and many other subjects. It has drifted over the

years to be more synonymous with the word “religion.” But such has not always been the case. Many schools today have Departments of Religion, but in years gone by these would have been Departments of Theology!

And Theology used to be acknowledged as the “Queen of Sciences.” Obviously any study of God and His revelation to us would supersede and “trump” any other “ology” or science.

And note my use of the word “science.” Theology could not be rightly called a science if knowledge of God were impossible. But God and His revelation to us about ourselves and others can be known, it can be studied!

“Religion” is usually referring to the study of man’s attempts to reach God or some man-defined state by man’s own efforts. Traditionally and historically, Theology has been more specifically referring to the Christian Faith and God’s reaching man, revealing Himself and His word to us about both himself and ourselves.

So, “what we believe” can also be called “Theology,” as it covers all that we believe about all that God has revealed to us. What we believe is critically important to us all. In fact, nothing in life is more important!

- **What we believe is the most important thing about our life!**
- **What we believe – our Theology or doctrine – affects every area of our life, both now and forever!**

The most important thing about us is our Theology – what we believe!

Such are really like the “foundations” of our lives, our minds, our thoughts, our attitudes, our actions, our past, present and future in eternity, our relationships with God and with others – *everything is founded and built upon what we believe!*

That is why I choose the background you see in the PP slides – columns and pillars of a grand structure. Our Theology, our beliefs, our faith, our Theology is a Foundation for Life, the Pillars of our Faith, - our “Creed.” “Creed” from a Latin root meaning “believe.”

An example of these “pillars” or “foundations” for our church, Grace Fellowship, as found in our doctrinal statement, are the **5 Sola Statements** of the Reformation:

Sola Scriptura, sola gratia, soli fide, solus Christus, soli Deo Gloria:

Scripture Alone

Grace Alone

Faith Alone

Christ Alone

For God’s Glory Alone

Theology, or the study of God and His revelation to us, has **many sources**. Those include the broad categories of:

1. **Biblical Theology** – Studying theology from the perspective of the Bible, taking passages one by one, usually in a progressive manner from the Old Testament forward, showing how each one develops God’s revelation until it culminates in Jesus Christ in the NT. Can tend to focus on examining doctrine in each passage independently from other scriptures.
2. **Historical Theology** – Studying theology from its development over time and history, primarily throughout the history of the church period. It often focuses on the creeds and confessions throughout history and how they display the changes and development of theology.
3. **Systematic Theology** – Studying theology from a systematic and organized approach, examining what the Scriptures as a whole, and the church over all of history has revealed about any given subject. “Systematic” refers to something being put into a system. Systematic theology is, therefore, the division of theology into systems that explain its various areas. For example, many books of the Bible give information about the angels. No one book gives all the information about the angels. Systematic theology takes all the information about angels from all the books of the Bible and organizes it into a system called **angelology**. That is what systematic theology is all about—organizing the teachings of the Bible into categorical systems.

Theology Proper or **Paterology** is the study of God the Father. **Christology** is the study of God the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. **Pneumatology** is the study of God the Holy Spirit. **Bibliology** is the study of the Bible. **Soteriology** is the study of salvation. **Ecclesiology** is the study of the church. **Eschatology** is the study of the end times. **Angelology** is the study of angels. Christian **Demonology** is the study of demons from a Christian perspective. Christian **Anthropology** is the study of humanity. Hamartiology is the study of sin. Systematic theology is an important tool in helping us to understand and teach the Bible in an organized manner.

Of course, the most important and the most clear and concise information and “science” can be gathered from God’s Word, His Holy Scriptures, the Bible! God has revealed Himself and what he wants us to know and believe through various sources of “revelation.”

Sources of Revelation about God

----- <u>General Revelation</u> -----	<u>Special Revelation</u>
<p><u>Inner Revelation</u></p> <p>Conscience</p> <p>Internal to us Internal</p>	<p><u>Natural Revelation</u></p> <p>Creation</p> <p>External to us</p>
	<p>Christ (The Word)</p> <p>Both External &</p>

Given to All, Effective for Few	Given to All, Effective for All	Given to Few, Effective for All
Sufficient for Accountability	Sufficient for Condemnation	Sufficient for Salvation
Declares God's Goodness	Declares God's Greatness	Declares God's Grace
Revealed in our Spirit	Revealed in our Body	Revealed in our Soul
Revealed to our Conscience, Intuition, Communion	Revealed to our Consciousness, Flesh, Senses	Revealed to our Mind, Will, Emotions
Revealed through Moral Impulse Existence Intuition Desire for Purpose Incarnation	Revealed through Man Universe History	Revealed through Law & Prophets Apostles The
Examples -	Examples -	Examples -
Rom. 1:19 Rom. 2:14-15 Acts 24:16 Adam & Eve	Rom. 1:20 Psa. 19:1 Psa. 8:3-5 Israel	Heb. 1:1-4 John 1:1-4 1Pet. 1:10-12 The Scriptures

Notice how specific God speaks to the purpose, power and profitability of the truth of His Scriptures in

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NASB): ¹⁶ **All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;** ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be adequate, **equipped for every good work.**

Consider also that "theology" or a personal "faith" is not only desirable, it is expected of us. And such expectations are not supposed to take a very long time. We should be studying and growing from the day we are born again! If from the book of acts we estimate that the growth of the church receiving the letter to the Hebrews started around 45AD, and the letter was written around 60AD, then the congregation had a median age of about 7 or 8 years in Christ.

Hebrews 5:11-14 (NASB) ¹¹ Concerning him we have much to say, and *it is* hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. ¹² For though **by this time you ought to be teachers,** you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary

principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. ¹³ For everyone who partakes *only* of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. ¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

- **Doctrinal Statement** – a set of ideas that are taught or believed to be true.
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- **Assignment** – Consider or write a personal doctrinal statement that you feel expresses your beliefs about the most important areas of your faith.
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- **Goal** – at the end of this class, I hope that all of us would be able to express, defend and write a doctrinal statement that we truly believe, staking our very lives and eternity on its truths.

Quotes:

The more we know of God, the more unreservedly we will trust him; the greater our progress in theology, the simpler and more childlike will be our faith.

J. G. Machen

Faith is to believe what we do not see; and the reward of this faith is to see what we believe.

Augustine.

Little faith will bring your soul to heaven, but great faith will bring heaven to your soul.

Unknown.

May God bless our study. May we see the glory of God and hear the Word of God, and may our faith grow strong in the grace of God!