

FUNDAMENTAL ARTICLES – WHAT TRULY MATTERS MOST

“Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me...”

2 Timothy 1:13-14

“In essentials, unity. In nonessentials, liberty. In all things, charity.” The saying is attractive, but it raises an important question: Which doctrines are essential, and which are not? Christians have long wrestled with this issue. Some treat nearly every doctrine as a hill worth dying on. Others reduce the faith to a handful of moral principles. Scripture calls us to something wiser.

Not all doctrines carry the same weight, even within Scripture itself. Jesus spoke of “the weightier matters of the law” (Matthew 23:23), showing that some truths are more central than others. Likewise, Paul reminded the Corinthians of what was “of first importance,” namely the death and resurrection of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:3–4). The New Testament repeatedly emphasizes guarding the core gospel while also allowing room for growth and maturity in other areas. Recognizing these distinctions does not weaken doctrine; it clarifies what must be believed, what must not be denied, and where faithful believers may differ without breaking fellowship.

While there is no simple formula, helpful distinctions guide us. Some doctrines are necessary for the *existence of faith*, others for its *maturity*. Some truths must be known and affirmed to be saved; others must not be denied, even if they are not fully understood at conversion. Over time, the church has carefully discerned and articulated essential doctrines, helping to clarify and defend the core truths of the gospel. While Scripture alone remains our final authority in matters of faith and practice, Christ has not left his church without a role in guarding the truth. The gathered wisdom and corporate discernment of the church, under the authority of Scripture, serve as a providential safeguard that helps preserve doctrinal faithfulness across generations.

Above all, we look to Scripture. In the Pastoral Epistles, Paul urges Timothy and Titus to guard the “good deposit” of faith. That deposit centers on the gospel: God is holy, we are sinners, and Jesus Christ is Savior and Lord, forming a redeemed people for his name. He is truly God and truly man, crucified, risen, ascended, and coming again. Salvation is by grace through faith, producing a life of holiness, hope, and faithful belonging within the body of Christ.

The fundamental articles may say more than this, but they must not say less. Unity in essentials protects the gospel; charity in disagreements protects the church.

How can distinguishing between essential and secondary doctrines help preserve both gospel clarity and Christian unity?

BIBLICAL TRUTHS FOR EVERYDAY FAITH by Paul Merideth **Lesson #6**