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Sermon Summary

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Core Beliefs pt 1.

What is your reaction, the first word comes into your head when you hear the word theology? I suspect it might be something like boring! Or academic. This is a lie sown by the enemy, that somehow theology is anti spiritual. Surely people say, if you are filled with the Spirit, you don't need theology. (this idea came from the charismatic movement)

Theology means "study of God" or literally the "science of God." The reality is that we all are theologians. We have acquired bits and pieces from here and there that form our thoughts and beliefs about God.

Theology not for a few academics who like reading, debate. All theologians and we have the Bible to tell us about God, what he is like, what he wants of us. Who we are. If we are to love God with our minds, then we need to be the best theologians we can be. Why?

1. Beliefs about God / Christianity lead to our actions. Simple example Many cults teach that in order to be a Christian we must do certain things. Our salvation (i.e. sins forgiven, relationship with God, future when die) is based on us earning this by our actions. If this is our belief, it will lead to certain behaviours. We will go our door knocking, not out of love, but out of fear of losing our salvation. This is Why Paul, in his writings, always goes back theology, then what actions should result from this.
2. The No 1 recruiting ground for cults is from churches. Why. Because most Christians are very poor theologians. They are not sure what they believe or why and this means they are easily deceived. Our young people go to uni, and get blown away by secular arguments.
3. Important we understand what Christianity core beliefs are and what is not core. So much damage has been done by elevating non core beliefs to issues of essential importance. For the next 7 weeks I want to talk about 7 core beliefs of Christianity. Now you can always add more. Some people would have 10 or 12. But these are absolutely central. Remove any one of these, you don't have Christianity. I don't know what you do have, but it is not Christianity as has been understood historically over thousands of years.

By suggesting there are core beliefs, implies there are non core beliefs. Now this is controversial. Many of you might feel very strongly about some of these issues. But I want to suggest they are not core beliefs.

Spiritual gifts: are the supernatural gifts for today or not

Role of women: in marriage, what headship means, leadership in church.

Style of church government: congregational, hierarchical

Homosexuality: is its practice acceptable or not

Creation, interpretation of Genesis: was the world created in 7 days, how old is the earth, is evolution Biblical

Divorce/ remarriage: Is it OK for Christians to divorce and under what circumstances

End times: premillennial, amillennial, rapture, tribulation etc

Israel: how does the nation of Israel fit with God's plans

Baptism: infant or believers

Communion: how it should be celebrated and by whom.

Christians have a diversity of views on these. History would show God has worked mightily through people on all sides of each of these issues. Some people have very strong views of some of these issues. However they are not core issues. To make them so is divisive. Focus here at ICBC is not to get agreement by everyone on these issues. We recognize and accept diversity of views, and healthy discussion at times. This does not mean I will not teach on these subjects, or that the church has no view of many of these issues. It does. We encourage all the gifts, we believe in women in leadership, we practise congregational government, we believe homosexual practise (not orientation) is a sin, we practise believers baptism. But we recognize some of you have different views and this is fine. Our views on these issues change over time as well. These issues are important but not central. We want to focus on the core issues, our mission to love God and love others and our five priorities.

God, Church, Humanity Jesus, Cross, Scripture, Future. I want to briefly look at each of these and the implications over the next 7 weeks.

Core Belief 1. WE BELIEVE IN GOD :

who exists, and can be known

is One God, 3 persons, Father Son and Holy Spirit,

is glorious, sovereign, holy and loving

is Creator of all things and at work in all things

WE BELIEVE IN GOD: who exists, and can be known

Bible says we have no excuse to believe in his existence. Creation affirms who he is. The Bible starts with an assumption that God exists, "In the beginning God" It never tries to prove God but begins with the presupposition that he exists. However knowing God exists is not enough, we must believe we can know him. He is not a distant deity. Heb 11:6 says "It is impossible to please God without faith Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that there is a God and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him."

WE BELIEVE IN God : who is One God, 3 persons, Father Son and Holy Spirit

This is often called the Trinity. It is hinted at in the Old Testament but the main focus was on God as One. Deut 6:4 the Lord our God is one. But we read of the Spirit of God, and of God in plural terms, and the coming Messiah. In the New Testament it is very clear. Matt 28:19 "baptize in the name of the Father, Son and Spirit. : Jesus talked about Father and him being one, then Spirit coming - the very presence of God. It is very hard for us to get our heads around this. It is really what we should expect. . If we could fully understand God, then we would be equal to God. Why should we be surprised that God is complex. The Holy Spirit not a force. Jesus is not just a man. If he was, his work on the cross would be meaningless. The early church took a long time to work this through. But this belief is a key test to use to distinguish a cult - they will not teach a triune God, all are equal, one and yet distinguishable.

WE BELIEVE IN GOD; who is glorious, sovereign, holy and loving.

Glorious (glory) beyond anything else. All vision of God talk of His Glory; of Him being beyond description. He depends on nothing else, is without limit is unchangeable. Calvin says It is for God above all things that we are born, and not for ourselves.

Sovereign. Translated Lord this is the most common description. He rules in the world, and his will reigns over all things. He rules over Human government, our lives, life and death, suffering I am God and there is no other. Is 45:6

He is All powerful; nothing too hard

He is All present; present everywhere including past future, outer space, darkest places of this world

He is All knowing. At the Judgement to come, the books will be open from past, and all that has been hidden will be revealed.

Holy that is he is utterly pure, and perfect, without sin or evil. His very being is one of goodness, purity, truth, justice. Related to this is the wrath of god, his steadfast opposition to all that is not holy, the righteousness of God, the justice of God, and goodness of God. God is both holy and loving, fused together.

Loving. God is love. 1 John 4:8 is the well known definition of God. And Love is defined. Love is shown by sending his Son in to the world. It is a Love for that which is not worthy. eros speaks of love towards someone who is worthy. Agape word used for God's love in Greek is love towards that which is not worthy. Related to this is God's grace, love is not earned but given freely and God's mercy towards our sin.

WE BELIEVE IN GOD; who is Creator of all things and at work in all things

Who is creator of all things. Out of nothing he made everything. Gen 1. This is Important because some have said matter was not created by God, but someone else or that Matter is evil. God created this world and it is Good. This Gets rid of the dualism which says the Spirit is good, and the physical is bad. He continues to sustain. Our existence is ongoing work of God's hand. All of creation was created by him including the spiritual realm of which we are given little detail but glimpses.

At work in all things. Joseph said to his brothers who sold him into slavery. "Don't be angry with yourselves that you did this, to me for God did it. God has sent me here to keep you and your families alive so that you will become a great nation." Gen 45 "God turned into good what you meant for evil." Gen 50:20

"Even a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without your Father knowing it." Matthew 10:30

"all things happen just as he decided long ago." Eph 1:11

"in all things God works for the good of his people" Rom 8:28

Our struggle with his doctrine is understanding why God allows evil and suffering. But in faith we believe that even through evil and suffering God is working out his purposes. Cross classic example Even evil ultimately comes under God's hand. He will work out his purposes and deal with evil and injustice

Conclusion

A W Tozer said these words. "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us." The convictions we have about God affect everything about us and what we do. To believe in such a God will result in worship and praise and thanks How can it not when we truly see who God is; His love, beauty, holiness, perfection

To believe in such a God can only result in us serving him and putting him first above all us. To do things other than for God would be crazy; to set up our lives in opposition to him would make no sense.

To believe a God of providence gives us confidence. If God is involved life cycle of a sparrow, then he is involved in our lives. Every aspect of our lives. Not only our lives but the world around us; and issues of politics, justice, and suffering. It gives us hope for the future, and certainty that evil will be defeated.

Some years ago I bought a book about the character of God that I used it as my devotional for the first part of the year. It was immensely helpful to focus on God afresh. It helped build my faith and confidence in God. Why after being Christian so many years would I need to do that? Because God is so vast, so complex, so multidimensional, we can never focus too much on him. We need to continually remind ourselves of the truths of who he is.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

- # Are there issues in the non core list that you think should not be there. Or others that you can add?
- # Where have you seen division in church over non core issues? What was the result?
- # What have been the key shapers of your theology. ie your beliefs about God, Jesus, Church etc
- # What are the implications of each statement to our daily lives and actions. Take time over each, and slowly ponder each. If this is what I believe, how does this affect my life day by day. (the danger is we can get so used to hearing these we don't think them through carefully)

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is One God, 3 persons, Father Son and Holy Spirit,

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- # Take some time to worship God as a group or personally.