

## Foundational Truths

One of the basic foundational truths of the Bible has to do with the condition of man. What we believe about many other things depends a great deal on our understanding of our sinful nature. As with any kind of building, a foundation that is not solid will affect everything built upon it. The fallen condition of man is a vital part of the foundation and a good starting point for studying the doctrines of the Bible.

When Adam fell, we all fell, we all died in him; **Rom.5:12**. We are sinners by nature and by practice. The penalty for sin is death. Death is a separation. Adam sinned and was immediately separated from God - the relationship he had before with God was now destroyed. Previously, Adam stood before God innocent, but now he stands guilty. He became dead in trespasses and sin; **Eph.2:1**. He also began to die naturally.

Our natural state is a state of death in sin. This is sometimes referred to as total depravity. What does it mean to be in a state of death in sin? The picture the Bible paints is much more bleak than what man wants to hear or admit. It means we are without strength, we are sinners, and we are enemies to God in our natural state; **Rom.5:6-10**. Also, our natural, corrupt state of death in sin means: we have no righteousness of our own, we have no understanding, we do not seek God, all of us together are unprofitable, and there is not one of us that does any good; **Rom.3:10-12**. It means we have no desire for the things of God and we can't receive the things of the Spirit; **1 Cor.2:11-16**. We consider those things to be foolishness. If a person is dead, that simply means the person is without life. Without life and the abilities that come with life, a person dead in sin cannot take a step toward God. Just as it is with someone who is dead physically, so it is with someone dead spiritually - there is nothing that the person in the grave can do to obtain life; there is nothing that the person dead in sin can do to obtain spiritual life. A great illustration of this truth is found in the **11<sup>th</sup> chapter of John** in the story of Lazarus, verses 1 thru 44. In verses 39 - 41, the fact that Lazarus was dead was emphasized by the stench coming from the grave. In verse 43, Jesus calls Lazarus by name and commands him to "come forth." He came forth, he came alive because he heard the life-giving voice of the Son of God (see **John 5:25**). After he was made alive at the command of Jesus, then those around him could "loose and let him go." If Lazarus had not been given life first, those around him could have loosed the grave clothes and attempted to let him go, but he would have simply fallen over and continued to stink.

Another great fundamental truth is this - life must precede action. The cry of a baby is the evidence that the baby is alive. The movement in the womb is evidence that the baby inside is alive. The evidence that proves a person is alive physically may include talking, walking, crying, and laughing, or it may be only eye movement, breathing, or heartbeat. In other words, some kind of physical action proves there is physical life. The same thing holds true about spiritual life. The evidence that shows a person is alive spiritually, in other words, born again, includes love, joy, peace, faith (**Gal.5:22**) and good works (**Eph.2:10**). The fruit on a tree is evidence that the tree is alive. The fruit of the Spirit is evidence that a person has spiritual life. We must have spiritual life before we can exercise faith and love towards God and approach Him. In other words, we don't believe (have faith), or love, or perform good works in order to *be* born again. We believe *because* we have faith (fruit of the Spirit); we love God *because* God first loved us; we do good works *because* we have been born again and now have the desire and ability to follow the Lord. Our faith, our love, and our good works must come *after* we are born again because of our condition by nature - dead in sin.

These two truths are very important. (1) We are dead in sin and have no ability or desire to approach God in order to obtain life. (2) There must already be life present before any action can take place. So, if we are dead and we can't get life, but we must

## Foundational Truths

have life before we can approach God, how can we “come to the Lord”? If the natural man cannot do anything to become a spiritual person, but we must be spiritual before we can follow the Lord, how will ever get there (eternal life) from here (dead in sin)?

Several passages from the book of John provide a better understanding of these and other truths. In **John 1: 11-13**, notice the order of things. Jesus came to his own people. He went first to the Jews, his people; he was a Jew. The vast majority of his own people, the Jews, did not accept him to be the Messiah they had been looking for. Some, however, did accept Him, and a great multitude of Gentiles received him to be the Son of God and the Savior. To say that there were some who received Jesus means that they accepted Jesus’ claim to be the Son of God; they acknowledged that he was indeed who he claimed to be. The people that received Jesus in this way were given power, or the right and privilege, to become the sons of God, or to call themselves children of God. In other words, those who received Jesus had the right to lay claim to being a child of God. Notice: their receiving Jesus did not *cause* them to be born again. Look at the next few phrases at the end of verse 12 and into verse 13. The ones who received Jesus were the ones who believed on his name. The ones who believed were also the ones “which *were* born” ... Now notice: three phrases that explain how these believers were *not* born. First, not of blood: not through their natural lineage; not because of who their parents were. Second, not of the will of the flesh: nothing in their flesh, nothing about their nature was responsible. Third, not of the will of man: not of their own will nor of anyone else’s persuasion or influence. But, the final phrase tells us how these believers *were* born: it was “of God.” The *first* action that took place was on God’s part. The *first* thing that happened was that God gave these people life. Then, they believed on the name of Jesus and received him to be the Savior; they accepted the *fact* that Jesus was their Savior, and none other. The *first* thing that *must* happen before a person *can* believe and receive: they must be born of God.

A very familiar place in the Bible is **John 3:1-8**, but there are some things in this passage often overlooked. Nicodemus comes to Jesus and confesses that God must be with Him. Nicodemus confesses this because of the miracles he had witnessed and because of Jesus’ teaching. In verse 3, Jesus explains to Nicodemus that a person must be born again *before* he can see the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God refers to that place in our hearts and lives where God is the King and we are blessed to see Jesus Christ as our Savior. The kingdom of God is within us; it is manifest in our personal lives; believers collectively make up the kingdom here in the world as seen through the Church; ultimately, every one of God’s children will experience the fullness of the kingdom in heaven. We have the Church here in the world to worship God and to acknowledge that Jesus is our Savior. We will do this perfectly in heaven one day. But, this is specifically referring to the kingdom of God within us (**Luke 17:21**). We cannot *see* the kingdom (recognize it) and we cannot *enter* into the kingdom (experience it) until *after* we are born again. Then, Jesus explains being born again in verse 5 by the phrase “born of water and of the Spirit.” Jesus is simply talking about the washing of regeneration (born of water) and renewing of the Holy Ghost (of the Spirit). See **Titus 3:5**. These two are actually one. The Spirit is sent into our hearts by God Himself, gives us life, borns us from above, and it causes us to cry out (**Gal.4:4-6**). Jesus says in verses 7 and 8 that we should not marvel at this if it sounds impossible because the Spirit is like the wind. It blows wherever it pleases. We cannot control it neither can we see it, but we can see the evidence of it. And, this is the way that every person is born of the Spirit. There is not one method for one group of people, another method for adults, a different method for children, another method for the mentally handicapped, etc. Jesus says we are all born again the same way – by the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit.

## Foundational Truths

Probably the most well-known verse in all the Bible is **John 3:16**. It is also one of the most misquoted and misunderstood verses in the entire Bible. If this verse is examined in its context, it will be seen that Jesus is *not* making a proposition but is making a declaration of fact. In actuality, Jesus is *not* saying that *if* we believe on Him, we will *have* everlasting life. He is declaring the fact that any person who *does* believe, who *is* a believer, *has* everlasting life. The fact that a person believes in Jesus is evidence that he *is* a child of God and *has* eternal life. Belief is not the cause, but it is the evidence of life. Faith does not produce life, but it is the fruit of life; the Spirit produces faith. Verses 14 and 15 are vital to an understanding of verse 16. The reference Jesus makes to Moses lifting up the serpent is found in Numbers 21, particularly verses 7-9. But, even without considering the two previous verses, compare verse 16 with **John 5:21-25**. A study of these passages shows that the work of God and of the Son is a sovereign work: the Lord working as He pleases in the hearts of those whom He loved, chose, and predestinated before the world began; a great multitude of people out of every nation. Although it is somewhat a mystery and to some degree difficult to understand, the truth of predestination and election is plainly declared in such passages as **Romans 8:28-30, 9:11-16, Ephesians 1:4-12, 2Timothy 1:8-11, 1Peter 1:1-2**, and others.

In **John 5:21-25**, Jesus says that He quickens, brings to life, makes alive, whom he will (v.21). The giving of life takes place according to the will of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Verse 24 makes a plain declaration. Jesus said the person “that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.” The emphasis should be placed on the words “hath” and “is”; both present tenses of the verbs. This plainly indicates that the ability to hear (spiritual ears) and the ability to believe (exercise of faith) are the evidences that a person *has* everlasting life and *is* passed from death (dead in trespasses and sin) unto life (born again, the new birth, regeneration). In verse 25, Jesus tells us that the dead (in trespasses and sin) shall (not maybe or hopefully) hear the voice of the Son of God (the Son himself, not the voice of a preacher) and they that hear shall (not maybe or hopefully) live.

These basic truths are foundational in understanding the Scriptures and the purpose of God in salvation. With these truths in mind, the idea that there is a plan of salvation that may or may not come about, or that depends on the effectiveness of preaching and the sinner’s appropriate response, will soon be seen as just that – an idea, a man-made doctrine, which the Bible does not support. For the person who has been made aware of their sinful condition, no greater comfort or joy can be received than that which comes through the truth of God’s sovereignty and the finished work of Jesus Christ.