

“The Basics”
Psalm 37:1-9; 1 Timothy 1:1-14

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It’s hard to imagine now, when all we have are dusty ruins and broken monuments, but the world of Paul and Timothy was an exciting, vibrant place. The markets were jammed with people, speaking dozens of languages, buying food and goods from all over the Mediterranean basin. It was an exciting place to be.

Especially if you were interested in religion. There were state religions that everyone had to follow, but other than those you could pretty much do whatever you liked. You could worship as many gods as you wanted. Nobody cared.

And there were a lot of gods. Besides the Greek and Roman gods, there were local gods. Gods of your specific place. There were also mystery cults coming in from Persia and fertility cults spreading out of Egypt. If you were interested in religion, there was a lot going on.

That meant many people asking about Christianity had no clue. They might know something about Jesus, but most people did not grow up with Christianity and had to be taught everything from the beginning. They had to learn the basics.

That was important. Some new Christians got so excited about the faith they went down the rabbit hole. They got tied up in endless genealogies, and speculation about the end-times and trying to dissect the law. They knew a lot of trivia, but they didn’t know the basics.

In that respect, Paul and Timothy’s world was a lot like ours. The truth is, right now we have a whole generation who know very little about our faith. They know there’s something special about Christmas and Easter and maybe something about Jesus rising from the dead, but that’s about it.

Like the Ancient World, for them Christianity is just one option among many. There’s Islam and Judaism and Hinduism and Buddhism. There are nature gods and mysticism. It’s perfectly acceptable to have no religion at all and it’s perfectly acceptable to

make your own. One of my young cousins has constructed his own faith out of teachings from Hinduism and Buddhism.

Just like in the Ancient World, people today can basically do whatever they want. And some of them go down the Rabbit Hole. They get hung up on the Apocrypha and intertestamentalism. They learn about heresies but not orthodoxy. They watch radical preachers on television and research the gnostic gospels, thinking it will make them better Christians. They know a lot of trivia, but they don't know the basics.

Paul says what they need is not more trivia. What they need is instruction. What they need is sound doctrine. What they need are the basics.

There's plenty of time for trivia. There's plenty of time to explore genealogies. There's plenty of time to examine the differences between the Gospels, and the symbolism in Revelation, and to argue over which of the laws are still in effect for us today and which are not.

But in the beginning what they need, what we all need, is sound teaching. We need the basics.

So here they are. Remember these. Write them down. Share them with your friends. If someone asks you the basics of sound doctrine, this is what you can say.

There is a God, who made the heavens and the earth and everything good, and this God loves us. God loves us. Unreservedly, even if we do something horrible, God loves us.

Jesus, God's son, came to earth to teach us how to live rich, powerful, and meaningful lives in this world and the next. In his life, death and resurrection, Jesus taught us what it is to really be alive.

And finally, we can trust God is with us and for us and always on our side. "Trust in the Lord and do good; live in the land and enjoy security." Don't worry about the wicked. They will fade like grass. You just concentrate on trusting the Lord.

"Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for God." Don't fret over genealogies and arcane laws. Don't get caught up in how many angels can dance on the head of pin, or what if Jesus was really a space alien from another galaxy. Let that go. Trust that God is with you. Live the way Jesus taught us to live. Because God loves us, each and every one of us.

Maybe you're not sure about Christianity. Maybe you've fallen down the rabbit hole and gotten lost. Maybe you have a friend who's looked into Christianity and is so confused they don't know which way is up.

That's OK. There's an answer. Start with the basics. God loves us. Jesus taught us how to live meaningful lives in this world and the next. Trust God is with us. Everything else will come with time.

Thanks be to God. Amen.