

Are the beliefs of the Church today the same as the beliefs in the 1st Century?

As time passes by many things seem to evolve or change. If something about God or salvation is true today, shouldn't it be true for all time since God does not change? (Malachi 3:6) It is true that if you take a story and verbally pass it down through a hundred people or so the story will more than likely not be the same at the end as it was when it started. If the foundational doctrines of the church are not the same today as they were in the beginning, then we no longer possess the truth as Jesus and the Apostles taught. This is why we must constantly go to the Scriptures for answers. The Bible is our written record of the truth revealed to us by God. We are told in the Bible that we should study the Scriptures and that the Holy Spirit can teach us.

2 Timothy 2:15: "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." (KJV)

1 John 2:27: "And as for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him." (NAS)

John 16:13: "But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come." (NAS)

John 14:26: "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you." (NAS)

1 Corinthians 2:10: "For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God." (NAS)

This same Holy Spirit that will teach us as we study to rightly divide the word of truth has also taught the people in the beginning of the church. These people at the beginning of the church also had the advantage of being able to ask the Apostles what was meant in the letters they wrote that are now our New Testament. For example, Polycarp and Ignatius were both men who studied under the Apostle John, who wrote what we call the Gospel according to John, as well as 1st, 2nd and 3rd John, and the book of Revelation. We have records of what Polycarp and Ignatius wrote. When you review what was written by people who studied under the Apostles and then men who later studied under them, you can see how they interpreted the Scriptures. Here is where we find confirmation that the church today is indeed teaching the same basic truths that were taught in the beginning of the church. There are some minor doctrines taught in churches today that are not found in the writings of these men. For example, the teaching that the church will be raptured before the Great Tribulation is not confirmed in the writings of any of these men. However, the foundational doctrines which many Christian denominations hold in common are confirmed in their writings.

The foundational doctrines that I am referring to are:

1. The reliability of Scripture.
2. The doctrine of the Trinity, declaring that the Father is God, Jesus is God, and the Holy Spirit is God; and that these three persons are one singular God.
3. Jesus died for our sins on a cross.
4. Jesus was bodily raised from the dead, and He will return.
5. Salvation is a free gift that cannot be earned.
6. Satan and Hell are not a myth, but a reality.

I would like to share some quotes by early Christian writers concerning these foundational beliefs. The quotes are found in The Ante-Nicene Fathers; Translations of The Writings of the Fathers down to AD 325, The Rev. Alexander Roberts, D.D., James Donaldson, LL.D., Editors. These quotes are copied from the CD-ROM version put out by Logos Research Systems, Inc.

The information below regarding the people quoted can be found in A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs, editor, David W. Bercot.

The people quoted are:

1. **Clement of Rome:** 1st century, c. 95. Bishop of the church in Rome, believed to be a companion of Peter and Paul (Philippians.4:3).
2. **Clement of Alexandria:** c.150-215. Teacher at Alexandria, Egypt, who oversaw a school there.
3. **Hippolytus:** c. 170-236. A leading Presbyter in the Church of Rome.
4. **Hermas:** Origen believed this is who Paul mentioned in Romans 16:14, although some think he was the brother of Pius, a 2nd century Bishop of Rome.
5. **Ignatius:** c. 35-107. Bishop of the church of Antioch and a disciple of John.
6. **Irenaeus:** c.130-200. Bishop of the church of Lyons. He listened to Polycarp preach when he was young.
7. **Polycarp:** c.69-156. Bishop of the church at Smyrna and a disciple of John.
8. **Justin Martyr:** c. 100-165. Philosopher who converted to Christianity and became a strong evangelist and apologist.
9. **Tertullian:** c.160-230. Early apologist and once a presbyter in the church at Carthage.

1. The reliability of Scripture. (Adobe Vol. 1, pg.13, ch XLV)

Clement of Rome, Ante-Nicene Fathers: Volume I, The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians, Chapter XLV:

"Look carefully into the Scriptures, which are the true utterances of the Holy Spirit. Observe that nothing of an unjust or counterfeit character is written in them."

From the same book, Chapter XLVII: (PDF-vol. 1 pg. 14, CHAP. XLVII.)

"Take up the epistle of the blessed Apostle Paul. What did he write to you at the time when the Gospel first began to be preached? Truly, under the inspiration of the Spirit..."

Clement of Alexandria, Ante-Nicene Fathers: Volume II, The Stromata, or Miscellanies, Book IV, Chapter I:(PDF-vol. 2 pg. 376)

“...having demonstrated that the Scriptures which we believe are valid from their omnipotent authority, we shall be able to go over them consecutively, and to show thence to all the heresies one God and Omnipotent Lord to be truly preached by the law and the prophets, and besides by the blessed Gospel.”

From the same Volume in Book V, Chapter XIII: (PDF- vol. 2, pg. 431)

"Let him know that it was God Himself that promulgated the Scriptures by His Son. And he, who announces what is his own, is to be believed. ‘No one,’ says the Lord, ‘hath known the Father but the Son, and he to whom the Son shall reveal Him.’”

Tertullian, Ante-Nicene Fathers: Volume III, On Prayer, Chapter XXII: (PDF Vol. 3, pg. 1246)

"The apostle-guided, of course, by the same Spirit by whom, as all the divine Scripture, so that book Genesis, was drawn up-has used the selfsame word in writing"

2. The doctrine of the Trinity. (PDF vol.1, pg.98)

Ignatius, Ante-Nicene Fathers: Volume I, The Epistle of Ignatius to the Philippians, Chapter 2:

"Wherefore also the Lord, when He sent forth the apostles to make disciples of all nations, commanded them to "baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost," not unto one [person] having three names, nor into three [persons] who became incarnate, but into three possessed of equal honour."

Tertullian, Ante-Nicene Fathers: Volume III, Tertullian Against Praxeas, Chapter XXV” (PDF vol.3 pg. 1133-1134)

"What follows Philip's question, and the Lord's whole treatment of it, to the end of John's Gospel, continues to furnish us with statements of the same kind, distinguishing the Father and the Son, with the properties of each. Then there is the Paraclete or Comforter, also, which He promises to pray for to the Father, and to send from heaven after He had ascended to the Father. He is called ‘another Comforter,’ indeed; but in what way He is another we have already shown, ‘He shall receive of mine,’ says Christ, just as Christ Himself received of the Father's. Thus, the connection of the Father in the Son, and of the Son in the Paraclete, produces three coherent Persons, who are yet distinct One from Another. These Three are, one essence, not one Person, as it is said, ‘I and my Father are One,’ in respect of unity of substance not singularity of number."

The following definition of "Paraclete" is by Webster's Collegiate Dictionary Tenth Edition:

Par.a.clete n [ME Paraclyte, fr. LL Paracletus, Paraclitus, fr. Gk Parakletos, lit., **advocate**, **intercessor**, fr. parakalein to invoke, fr. para- + kalein to call--more at low] (15c): **holy spirit**

Tertullian here is referring to John 14: 9-16, where Jesus said He would ask of the Father and He would send the Holy Spirit (also referred to as another Comforter in the King James Version of the Bible). We see in this text that Tertullian referred to Paraclete as the Holy Spirit. Notice he stated that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit were three persons that were distinct from one another. He further stated that these three persons were one in essence. Tertullian just defined The Trinity. Compare what Tertullian said to the following from the dictionary below.

Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary:

“TRINITY: The coexistence of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in the unity of the Godhead (divine nature or essence). The doctrine of the trinity means that within the being and activity of the one God there are three distinct persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”

Hippolytus, Ante-Nicene Fathers: Volume V, Against the Heresy of One Noetus:

(PDF vol. 5, pg. 436)

"Acknowledge God the Father Almighty, and Christ Jesus the Son of God, who, being God, became man, to whom also the Father made all things subject, Himself excepted, and the Holy Spirit; and that these, therefore, are three. But if he desires to learn how it is shown still that there is one God, let him know that His power is one. As far as regards the power, therefore, God is one. But as far as regards the economy there is a threefold manifestation, as shall be proved afterwards when we give account of the true doctrine.

2. The Doctrine of the Trinity

(a) Jesus Is God

Ignatius, Ante-Nicene Fathers: Volume I, The Epistle of Ignatius to the Romans, Chapter 3:

(PDF vol. 1, pg. 60)

"For our God, Jesus Christ, now that He is with the Father, is all the more revealed [in His glory].

Clement of Alexandria, The Ante-Nicene Fathers Volume 2, Exhortation to the Heathen, The Instructor, Book 1, Chapter II: (PDF vol.2, pg. 177)

"Now, O you, my children, our Instructor is like His Father God, whose son He is, sinless, blameless, and with a soul devoid of passion; God in the form of man, stainless, the minister of His Father's will, the Word who is God, who is in the Father, who is at the Father's right hand, and with the form of God is God. He is to us a spotless image; to Him we are to try with all our might to assimilate our souls. He is wholly free from human passions; wherefore also He alone is judge, because He alone is sinless."

2. The Doctrine of the Trinity

(b) The Holy Spirit is God

Clement of Alexandria, Ante-Nicene Fathers: Volume II, Fragments of Clemens Alexandrinus, III.- From the Catena on Luke, Edited by Corderius: (PDF Vol. 2, pg. 543)

"Luke 3:22. God here assumed the 'likeness' not of a man, but 'of a dove,' because He wished, by a new apparition of the Spirit in the likeness of a dove, to declare His simplicity and majesty."

Luke 3:22: "and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came out of heaven, 'Thou art My beloved Son, in Thee I am well-pleased.'"

Tertullian, Ante-Nicene Fathers: Volume III, Against Praxeas, Chapter XXX: (PDF vol. 3, pg. 1145)

"He will come again on the clouds of heaven, just as He appeared when He ascended into heaven. Meanwhile He has received from the Father the promised gift, and has shed it forth, even the Holy Spirit-the Third Name in the Godhead, and the Third Degree of the Divine Majesty; the Declarer of the One Monarchy of God, but at the same time the Interpreter of the Economy, to everyone who hears and receives the words of the new prophecy; and 'the Leader into all truth,' such as is in the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost, according to the mystery of the doctrine of Christ."

3. Jesus died for our sins on a cross.

Polycarp, Ante-Nicene Fathers: Volume I, Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians, Chapter 1: (PDF vol. 1, pg. 24)

"Jesus Christ, who for our sins suffered even unto death, [but] 'whom God raised froth the dead, having loosed the bands of the grave. In whom, though now ye see Him not, ye believe, and believing, rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory;' into which joy many desire to enter, knowing that 'by grace ye are saved, not of works,' but by the will of God through Jesus Christ."

In this same section in Chapter VII Polycarp mentions the cross: (PDF vol. 1, pg. 25)

"For whosoever does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, is antichrist; and whosoever does not confess the testimony of the cross, is of the devil; and whosoever perverts the oracles of the Lord to his own lusts and says that there is neither a resurrection nor a judgment, he is the first-born of Satan." (To understand what is meant by "Christ has come in the flesh" read 1 John 4:2 and John 1:1 and 14.)

Ignatius, Ante-Nicene Fathers: Volume I, Epistle of Ignatius to the Smyrnaeans, Chapter VI: (PDF vol. 1, pg. 74)

"Let no man deceive himself. Unless he believes that Christ Jesus has lived in the flesh, and shall confess His cross and passion, and the blood which He shed for the salvation of the world, he shall not obtain eternal life, whether he be a king, or a priest, or a ruler, or a private person, a master or a servant, a man or a woman."

This salvation is through Christ alone.

Hermas, Ante-Nicene Fathers: Volume II, Similitude Ninth, Chapter XII: (PDF vol. 2, pg. 40)

"A man cannot otherwise enter into the kingdom of God than by the name of His beloved Son."

4. Jesus was bodily raised from the dead and He will return.

Clement of Rome, Ante-Nicene Fathers: Volume I, The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians, Chapter XXIV: (PDF Vol. 1, pg. 7)

"Let us consider, beloved, how the Lord continually proves to us that there shall be a future resurrection, of which He has rendered the Lord Jesus Christ the first-fruits by raising Him from the dead."

Tertullian, Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 3, On the Resurrection of the Flesh, Chapter XLVIII: (PDF Vol. 3, pg. 1064)

"He 'died according to the Scriptures,' and 'that He was buried according to the Scriptures,' no otherwise than in the flesh, you will also allow that it was in the flesh that He was raised from the dead. For the very same body which fell in death, and which lay in the sepulchre, did also rise again;"

Justin Martyr, Ante-Nicene Fathers: Volume I, Fragments of the Lost Work of Justin on the Resurrection, Chapter IX: (PDF Vol. 1, pg. 266)

"Why did He rise in the flesh in which He suffered, unless to show the resurrection of the flesh?"

And wishing to confirm this, when His disciples did not know whether to believe He had truly risen in the body, and were looking upon Him and doubting, He said to them, 'Ye have not yet faith, see that it is I'; and He let them handle Him, and showed them the prints of the nails in His hands. And when they were by every kind of proof persuaded that it was Himself, and in the body, they asked Him to eat with them, that they might thus still more accurately ascertain that He had in verity risen bodily; and He did eat honey-comb and fish. And when He had thus shown them that there is truly a resurrection of the flesh, wishing to show them this also, that it is not impossible for flesh to ascend into heaven (as He had said that our dwelling-place is in heaven), 'He was taken up into heaven while they beheld,' as He was in the flesh.

Justin Martyr, Ante-Nicene Fathers: Volume I, Dialogue of Justin, Chapter CX: (PDF Vol. 1, pg. 221)

"O unreasoning men! understanding not what has been proved by all these passages, that two advents of Christ have been announced: the one, in which He is set forth as suffering, inglorious, dishonoured, and crucified; but the other, in which He shall come from heaven with glory..."

Irenaeus, Ante-Nicene Fathers: Volume I, Irenaeus Against Heresies, Book 4, Ch. XXXIII:
(PDF Vol. 1, pg. 464)

"All the prophets announced His two advents: the one, indeed, in which He became a man subject to stripes, and knowing what it is to bear infirmity, and sat upon the foal of an ass, and was a stone rejected by the builders, and was led as a sheep to the slaughter, and by the stretching forth of His hands destroyed Amalek; while He gathered from the ends of the earth into His Father's fold the children who were scattered abroad, and remembered His own dead ones who had formerly fallen asleep, and came down to them that He might deliver them: but the second in which He will come on the clouds, bringing on the day which burns as a furnace? and smiting the earth with the word of His mouth? and slaying the impious with the breath of His lips, and having a fan in His hands, and cleansing His floor, and gathering the wheat indeed into His barn, but burning the chaff with unquenchable fire."

(Christ is coming on clouds Matthew 24:30, Acts 1:9-11, Revelation 1:7.)

5. Salvation is a free gift that cannot be earned.

Ignatius, Ante-Nicene Fathers: Volume I, Epistle of Ignatius to the Magnesians, Ch.X:
(PDF Vol. 1, pg. 49)

"Let us not, therefore, be insensible to His kindness. For were He to reward us according to our works, we should cease to be. For 'if Thou, Lord, shalt mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?' Let us therefore prove ourselves worthy of that name which we have received."
(Psalm 130:3)

Irenaeus, Ante-Nicene Fathers: Volume I, Irenaeus Against Heresies, Book I, Chapter 2:
(PDF Vol. 1, pg. 486)

"As far as concerned the apostasy, indeed, He redeems us righteously from it by His own blood; but as regards us who have been redeemed, [He does this] graciously. For we have given nothing to Him previously, nor does He desire anything from us, as if He stood in need of it..."

Clement of Alexandria, Ante-Nicene Fathers: Volume II, The Stromata, or Miscellanies, Book I, Chapter VII: (PDF Vol. 2, pg. 275)

"But Abraham was not justified by works, but by faith. It is therefore of no advantage to them after the end of life, even if they do good works now, if they have not faith."

Polycarp, Ante-Nicene Fathers: Volume I, Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians, Chapter 1:
(PDF Vol. 1, pg. 24)

"Our Lord Jesus Christ, who for our sins suffered even unto death, [but] 'whom God raised froth the dead, having loosed the bands of the grave. In whom, though now ye see Him not, ye believe, and believing, rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory;' into which joy many desire to enter, knowing that 'by grace ye are saved, not of works,' but by the will of God through Jesus Christ."(Ephesians 2:8-9.)

6. Satan and Hell are not a myth, but a reality.

Hermas, Ante-Nicene Fathers: Volume II, Book Second, Commandments, Commandment Twelfth, Chapter V: (PDF Vol. 2, pg. 21)

"The devil is hard, and holds sway over them. 'He cannot,' says he, 'hold sway over the servants of God, who with all their heart place their hopes in Him. The devil can wrestle against these, overthrow them he cannot. If, then, ye resist him, he will be conquered, and flee in disgrace from you. As many, therefore,' says he, 'as are empty, fear the devil, as possessing power.'" (James 4:7.)

Irenaeus, Ante-Nicene Fathers: Volume I, Irenaeus Against Heresies, Book 3, Ch.XXIII: (PDF Vol. 1, pg. 414)

"And this same thing does the Lord also say in the Gospel, to those who are found upon the left hand: 'Depart from me, ye cursed, into ever: lasting fire, which my Father hath prepared for the devil and his angels;' indicating that eternal fire was not originally prepared for man, but for him who beguiled man, and caused him to offend." (Matthew 25:41.)

So, we see that the church does indeed still teach the same foundational doctrines as the early church did. The next key factor is, do we really believe these doctrines? Lots of people may believe these truths intellectually, but do they truly live in our hearts? Men of strong faith, such as the original disciples and others after them, were willing to die — martyrs for their faith. They believed these truths to be more than doctrinal, but rather as an absolute reality.

MORE INTERESTING QUOTATIONS

"Evaluating our faith: How shall I depend on Him for raising my body from the dust; and saving my soul at last; if I distrust Him for a crust of bread, towards my preservation?"

JOSEPH HALL (From The Golden Treasury of Puritan Quotations)

"There are many great truths which we do not deny, and which nevertheless we do not fully believe."

J. W. Alexander

"Belief is a wise wager. Granted that faith cannot be proved, what harm will come to you if you gamble on its truth and it proves false? If you gain, you gain all; if you lose, you lose nothing. Wager, then, without hesitation, that He exists."

Blaise Pascal

"All I have seen teaches me to trust the Creator for all I have not seen."

Ralph Waldo Emerson

"Feed your faith and your doubts will starve to death."

Author Unknown

"I believe in Christ as I believe in the rising sun — not that I can see it, but that by it I can see everything."

Author Unknown

“He that will believe only what he can fully comprehend, must have a very long head or a very short creed.”

Colton

“I am not afraid of those tender and scrupulous consciences who are ever cautious of professing and believing too much; if they are sincerely wrong, I forgive their errors and respect their integrity. The men I am afraid of are those who believe everything, subscribe to everything, and vote for everything.”

Shipley

“Some believe all that parents, tutors, and kindred believe. They take their principles by inheritance, and defend them as they would their estates, because they are born heirs to them.”

Watts

The PDF references are for those who downloaded the free Christian Library. They can go to that PDF page number and read the quote in full context.

Written by Robert Kiser – ReasonableAnswers.com