

A Firm Foundation for the Faith

1. There really is nothing more important than getting reality right. What you believe matters. It might be the only thing that matters. Your beliefs shape every decision you make from morning to night, from your career path, to your decision to marry, have or not have children, take a flight, buy a meal... Every choice you make is largely determined by the ideas that are rolling around in your head.
2. This is critically important to understand – well and truly – before we can advance. In our climate, people with different religious and political beliefs listen to different sources of information, watch different forms of entertainment, buy different products, drive different cars. More than ever before, we need to check our sources and see if what we believe mirrors reality.
3. I've told the story too many times already but, in brief, while walking up one of the Tetons in Wyoming, people assured me that the stream of water coming off the glacier was pure. Later, we found cattle standing in the water. They drank too soon. We do the same when we listen to gossip or a complainer and adopt their attitude and beliefs without checking them out. When we share a link or a meme on the internet. When we choose a side in any conflict and declare it the true and right side. (cheerleaders at Sunset)
4. The MMMs have all been about checking our sources and seeing if what we believe is valid...and we have found out all too often that they are not valid at all. It is unnerving. It is...deconstructing.
5. But it is necessary. Wise people sort through their ideas and change their minds their entire lives, adding, dropping, adopting as they go. Why is it, then, that Christian groups tend to grab certain ideas and hold on to them even when they are working any more?
6. Because their beliefs have become their identity and if they change their beliefs...what happens to their identity? One of the most frequent subjects I deal with in emails during the week is "I used to believe that but after your lesson...what can I believe in now?"

7. The answer is always and only: Jesus is the Son of God who came to us to show us the love of God and to defeat death on the cross. He came to save us, not to condemn us. His birth was announced with "Peace on earth and goodwill toward mankind" and his last act on the cross was to forgive the sins of those who were killing him. He is our center, our shepherd and our peace.
8. How do we know that that is true? We rely on revelation. To know God, you have to hear of Him or come into contact with Him. Generally speaking, Christians of all kinds believe in two kinds of revelation.
9. General Revelation is God showing Himself through His works such as creation. We see Paul making that argument in Romans 1. Special Revelation is God revealing Himself through the Bible, and through direct contact such as visions, prophecies, and the Advent of Christ.
10. General Revelation can also occur through the progress of time: the church, the movement of history, our own consciences.
11. Everything we know about the Father, Son and Holy Spirit we have learned through General and Special Revelation. We believe that God exists and that is why we exist. Jean Paul Sartre one said the basic philosophical question is "Why is there something rather than nothing?" Our answer to that question is "God will it and spoke it."
12. We get that from the very first chapter of the very first book in our Bibles. But have you noticed what is not there? There is no argument for the existence of God. There is simply the statement that before the universe existed, there was God. God shattered the nothingness and spoke all creation into existence. Everything that exists in the universe was spoken into existence except for mankind – they were formed by God's hands.
13. Christians who believe in six day creation take the "forming" literally. Those who believe in a much older universe do, too, but the forming is through genetic shifting and then through the direct contact with God and the creation of the human spirit.

14. The Bible tells the story of mankind choosing God and not choosing God. It is a narrative full of drama, lists, poetry, and a lot of arguing about God. Then...Jesus came. Hebrews 1:1-10. That is critically important. Time and again, God makes sure we hear and understand that the Word of God and the express likeness of His image is found only in Jesus.
15. We are going to spend a lot of time on what it means to focus on Jesus and how that changes everything – absolutely everything. But, for now, let's look at General Revelation for a moment.
16. When we see the complexity all around us and marvel at creation, we are engaging in something that has become known as "the argument from design." Atheists often dismiss the argument but I still think it is a valid one. There are millions of examples (literally), but let's just look at a few.
 - a. If the electromagnetic force of atoms were weakened by a mere 4%, then the sun would immediately explode (the diproton would have a bound state which would increase solar luminosity by a factor of 10 to the 12th power.)
 - b. If it were stronger, there would be fewer stable atoms. If the protons were 0.2% heavier, they would decay into neutrons unable to hold on to electrons so there would be no stable atoms around. Structures such as DNA would be unable to form.
 - c. Snakes use leaves to fake being rattlesnakes. Angler fish use bioluminescence to fish. Bones in birds differ according to whether they are raptors or non-raptors.
 - d. We see this and sing with the psalmist in Psalm 19:1-4.
17. We also see God in General Revelation in history with the survival of the Jews. We see Him in Natural Law (expressed most eloquently by CS Lewis in "Mere Christianity" and the basis of our laws and society until the Bork hearings when Senators Kennedy and Biden ridiculed it and set the precedent for mocking any judge who believed in it). Natural Law is that part of us that cries out for mercy and fairness. That springs from being made in the image of God.

18. When it comes to Special Revelation, we need to understand something about ourselves and our God. He is incredibly wise, far too wise to reveal Himself to us all at once. Moses could not have understood a scientific description of the creation of the universe. He COULD understand poetry, symmetry, and song.
19. We should rejoice that God did NOT just drop a bunch of facts on us. That would have fried our puny brains but, let's pretend that it wouldn't. What would be our view of God if He had decided to do a data dump on us? We would have seen Him as a force...but we would not have been drawn into a relationship with Him.
20. So, instead, God found close, personal ways to work with us (Isaiah 49:15,16) and reminds us often that "God is love."
21. When we see Jesus, we are told that THIS is God and THIS is what the book and the story have been about all along. That is why Jesus is called the Word, the Truth and the Life. Once we read Jesus, we can go back and read the Old Testament and see the hits and misses...which mirror our own...and see how God loved us through it all even when we got God all wrong.
22. Like the classic movie, "The Sixth Sense," once we see the end, it changes everything we've seen. And one of the things we see is that Jesus is not the Bible; he is far, far above it. He is the one the Bible leads us to. He can not be reduced to a golden calf, an exhaustive creed, canon law, a set tradition, or a five finger exercise.
23. We are led to a Living God...who loves us...and invites us to walk with Him and be his children. That is our foundation and there is none firmer than that.