

# “ALWAYS BEING PREPARED...”<sup>1</sup>

To explain our beliefs about the Bible, Jesus, and Us

*Luke 24:36-49*

Certain beliefs and practices define us as a religious group in our thinking and the thinking of other religious groups. Because we have a responsibility to be “prepared to make a defense” for the things we believe (*1 Peter 3:15*), we need to have a conversational understanding of our beliefs and practices that we can share with others. This lesson begins a series looking at some of the more obvious beliefs and practices that tend to define us, things like baptism, communion, and music in worship, and will offer a biblical explanation for them. We begin our series in an obvious and foundational place; we begin with our convictions about the Bible:

***We believe God composed the Bible to tell the sweeping story of His relationship with humanity, a story that centers on Jesus, and that provides the foundation for our beliefs and practices.***

God filled His Bible with many true, historical facts, which He uses to compose a carefully crafted story

- God’s story opens by describing His purposeful creation of humanity – He made humans to partner with Him in co-ruling His creation (*Genesis 1-2*).
- The Bible’s story quickly introduces the plot conflict – humans rebelled against God and His purposes for their lives (*Genesis 3-11*).
- The majority of the Bible’s story focuses on God’s plan to restore humanity to the purpose for which He created them (*cf. Genesis 1-2; Revelation 21-22*).
- Restoration focuses on (re)establishing humanity’s relationship with God, which the Bible always connects to individuals’ relationships with one another (*Deuteronomy 10:12-21; Matthew 22:34-40; Romans 13:8-10; 1 John 3:11, 16; 4:7-21*).
- God accomplishes restoration through Jesus (*Romans 8:28-30; 1 Corinthians 15:20-28*).

God focuses His story on Jesus

- Jesus believed the Hebrew Bible revolved around him (*Matthew 5:17-19; John 5:39-40; Luke 24:44-47*).
- Jesus additionally commissioned the Holy Spirit to inspire the similarly focused content of the New Testament (*John 14:25-26; 16:12-15; 1 Corinthians 2:6-16*).

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<sup>1</sup> *1 Peter 3:15*. All quotes from the Bible come from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV Permanent Text Edition, Crossway, 2016) unless otherwise noted.

- God not only revolves His Bible around Jesus but also asserts that one cannot properly understand it separate from Jesus (*Matthew 11:25-30; Luke 24:45*).

## Our beliefs and practices must trace themselves back to Jesus and root themselves in the Bible's story

- The Bible's story does not merely function as a historical record of what happened; it instead offers to its readers a metanarrative representatively describing humanity and its place in the world.
- The Bible expects its readers to come to understand themselves in light of its selective narrative. Consider, for example, the following two examples of how the New Testament roots itself in the story of God's relationship with Israel, reinterprets that relationship through Jesus, and then offers it to its readers as to understand their identity:
  - Exodus 19:5-6 and 1 Peter 2:9
  - Genesis 17:9-14 and Colossians 2:11-12

## Applications

- If we misunderstand the Bible's design or purposes, we will misunderstand and misapply its contents.
- While we believe in the truth of, and value of, things like the church and heaven, we are not, church-centered people nor heaven-centered people; we insist on being Jesus-centered people.
- Because God composed the Bible as a Jesus-centered story, we must be able to show how our beliefs and practices exist in continuity with the Bible's narrative and with the character and mission of Jesus.
- We must, therefore, define ourselves by how we are like Jesus in our thinking and in our behavior rather than how we differ from other religious groups around us.

We believe God composed the Bible to tell the sweeping story of His relationship with humanity, a story that centers on Jesus and that provides the foundation for our beliefs and practices. We must, therefore, ask ourselves whether God's Jesus-centered story defines our beliefs or lesser, corruptible things like culture, tradition, or personal preference define us.