

HARTFORD MEMORIAL BAPTIST CHURCH
MEMBERS ORIENTATION CLASS

SESSION II

WHAT DO WE BELIEVE ?

" And so from the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, to lead a life worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God."

Colossians 1:9 - 10 RSV

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HARTFORD MEMORIAL BAPTIST CHURCH
MEMBERS ORIENTATION CLASS
SESSION II

WHAT DO WE BELIEVE?

I. What Do We Believe About The Word of God?

We believe that the Word of God is God's initiative in setting up communication between Himself and his creatures. God speaks. God instructs. God challenges. God calls. We believe that He is the first speaker in the conversation between Heaven and Earth. God's word takes three basic forms.

- a. The First form of His Word is The Living Word which is Jesus Christ, flesh and blood, mind, body and spirit, living and working among men. (John 1:1-14)
- b. The Second form of His Word is the written Word which is the Holy Bible. It is history, law, proclamation, guidance, prophecy, worship, prayer, instruction, assurance, inspiration and truth. (2 Timothy 3:16, 17). We believe that both the Old and New Testaments are authoritative.
- c. The Third form of His Word is the spoken word which is the Gospel; the main subject of the Gospel is the Living Word. (Romans 1:16) The Gospel is preached from faith and is received in faith. It cannot be communicated save through connection with and commitment to the Living Word.

Regulative Principle: The Living Word is supreme. It is by the Living Word that we understand the written Word and both speak and hear the spoken word.

II. What Do We Believe About God!

- a. We believe that God is essentially Person not principle, impulse, urge or energy. There is no higher form of being in the universe than personality, therefore God must be Person -- any attempt to reduce God to something else distorts the true nature of God. The fact that God is Person means that he is related to His World and

HARTFORD MEMORIAL BAPTIST CHURCH
MEMBERS ORIENTATION CLASS
SESSION II

WHAT DO WE BELIEVE?

Page 2

to all the creatures of the earth as their creator, sustainer, redeemer and friend. He identifies himself as, "I Am". (Exodus 3:6)

"And he said, "I Am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob". (Exodus 3:14) "God said to Moses, "I Am Who I Am", meaning "I will be what I will be" or as one scholar interprets.

"Surely, I will be with you". God defines Himself by pledging Himself to man! He is authentic Person.

- b. We believe that God created the universe, and therefore no power, influence, spirit, wonderful delights, or ferocious terrors are greater than God. (See Genesis I and Romans 8:35-39). This belief should liberate us from astrology, superstition, self glorification, fear of evil or captivity to any authority that pretends to be supreme.

We believe that because God created the World, God alone is supreme. We believe that because God created the entire universe, we can be at home, safe and secure anywhere. We believe that because God created all people, that we are all as humans, equally related to God and therefore no race or group is either inferior or superior in His sight. (Acts 17:26) "And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth".

- c. We believe that God is a Personal Unity of Power, Love and Justice. He is therefore a Trinity in a Unity, a harmonious complexity of a three-in-one relationship. About his essential oneness read (Deuteronomy 6:4) "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might". His Oneness commands our total commitment. (See also Exodus 20:3; Isa. 44:6)

About his tri-unity or triune nature (Matthew 28:19 and 20). "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father

HARTFORD MEMORIAL BAPTIST CHURCH
MEMBERS ORIENTATION CLASS
SESSION II

WHAT DO WE BELIEVE?

Page 3

and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always even to the end of the age".

The doctrine of the Trinity is a knotty problem in theology. The words "three persons" confuses the issue in the modern mind. God is not three persons or three separate people like Peter, James and John.

Such a misunderstanding would destroy his unity. The Christian doctrine is not "tritheism" the belief in three Gods; but "monotheism", the belief in one God. On the other hand, the Trinity must not be reduced to three roles which God plays on the stage of revelation. He is not player exhibiting three dramatic modes or manifestations of behavior. The Trinity is essential to the nature and being of God in Himself.

"Thus, God makes himself known as one-in-three, three-in-one. He must be conceived as simultaneously Father (God as transcendent) Son (having a particular and definite character and being, as seen in the historical person-event Jesus Christ), and Holy Spirit (present in and to and with as in our world)."

III. What Do We Believe About Jesus Christ?

- a. We Believe that Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man without compromise. He is God without ceasing to be man; and He is man without ceasing to be God. As man he is relevant to us in all conditions. As God, He is effective to save and to transform us. We Believe that he was baptized by John the Baptizer in the Jordan River. We Believe that he preached the sermon on the mount and gave other words of instruction which unlock the meaning of life and unveil the mystery of human destiny. We Believe that He was a non-conformist, moral revolutionary, who without army or sword challenged conventional religion, shook the Roman Empire and brought about a new world order. We Believe that he was crucified by both religious and political leaders since he was perceived as a threat to both. We Believe that he died and was buried. We Believe that he rose up

HARTFORD MEMORIAL BAPTIST CHURCH
MEMBERS ORIENTATION CLASS
SESSION II

WHAT DO WE BELIEVE?

Page 4

from the dead, having conquered both sin and death. We Believe that he still moves in the Church, which is his own peculiar servant and instrument, and that he still lives and works through people who love him and trust him. We Believe that He's coming back again to raise the dead, judge the world, liberate humanity and receive his own unto himself.

Because of our faith in Christ, we believe in the essential victory of right over wrong, good over evil, truth over falsehood and life over death. Justice, mercy and love shall prevail over slavery, oppression and destruction. War shall not destroy the earth. Crime shall not prevail over humanity. Dope is not the champion over its victims, who Christ shall make victors over all powers of evil.

IV. What Do We Believe About Man?

- a. We believe that man is mankind, both male and female, distinctive in sex and physical function but equal in status, dignity and ability. (Genesis I: 27) "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them". Both women's liberation and male empowerment are written into the creation by God himself.

We believe that God made man like Himself but not equal to Himself. We are made in God's image; but we are always to be dependent and not independent of God. Because we are like God, we are free, capable of love, intelligence, goodness and tremendous power. Any casual perusal of civilization's technological trophies will display the great power of man to shape space, to harness elemental forces and to control nature by understanding and intelligence. Any glance at a Mother, cuddling her baby or a Father, guiding his children or a Boy, defending his brother will proclaim man's capacity to love deeply and sincerely.

We believe that man is essentially free; he has free will and the capacity to choose right or wrong, good or evil and life or death. In His word God addresses man as a free agent. He calls us to hear, consider, reason, follow and answer.

HARTFORD MEMORIAL BAPTIST CHURCH
MEMBERS ORIENTATION CLASS
SESSION II

WHAT DO WE BELIEVE?

Page 5

We believe that Adam's downfall was based upon his unbridled ambition not merely to be like God, which he already was, but to be God, which he could never become. His will to ultimate power damaged the image of God in him, injured the whole creative order and introduced mortality into the world. Death came as a result of sin. By man came death through sin.

We believe that Adam's fall has done something to man. We are all contaminated by evil and injured by injustice. Our deepest love is imperfect. Our highest good is tainted by evil or selfish motives. Human motives are never entirely pure. In the words of Reinhold Niebuhr: "Nothing that is worth doing can be achieved in our lifetime; therefore we must be saved by hope. Nothing which is true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history; therefore we must be saved by faith.

Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore we are saved by love. No virtuous act is quite as virtuous from the standpoint of our friend or foe as it is from our standpoint. Therefore, we must be saved by the final form of love which is forgiveness". (quoted in the Detroit Free Press, May 4, 1976) We are also born to die and must die. Man is a fallen creature by means of and invalid exercise of his free will, or freedom of choice.

The root of sin is presumption, selfishness and the will to power. Adam and Eve ate the fruit that God had commanded consecrated to Him alone. We repeat this primary sin when we spend God's tithe, use God's time for our selfish ends and refuse to dedicate our talents to His glory. The end of all sin is futility and death.

We believe that the trend toward sin and death has been essentially reversed in the new head of creation, Jesus Christ, who is the Progenitor of a new humanity. "For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in

HARTFORD MEMORIAL BAPTIST CHURCH
MEMBERS ORIENTATION CLASS
SESSION II

WHAT DO WE BELIEVE?

Page 6

Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive". (I Corinthians 15:21 and 22)

V. What Do We Believe About Regeneration?

- a. We believe that man can receive a new birth, a new nature. (John 3:3 and John 3:6)
- b. We believe that man is regenerated, remade in Christ.

I Corinthians 5:17
Ephesians 4:24
Colossians 2:13
Romans 6:13
Colossians 1:13
I Corinthians 6:11

VI. What Do We Believe About Justification?

We believe that justification is pardon from sin and forgiveness of sin. It is also the promise of eternal life. It is not bestowed in any consideration of the good we have done but solely on the merits of Christ's sacrifice on Calvary and through our faith in him.

VII. What Do We Believe About Sanctification?

We believe the Scriptures teach that sanctification is the process by which, according to the will of God, we are made partakers of His holiness; that it is a progressive work; that it is begun in regeneration; that it is carried on in the hearts of believers by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, the Sealer and Comforter, in the continual use of the appointed means --especially the Word of God, self-examination, self-denial, watchfulness and prayer; and in the practice of all godly exercises and duties.

"For this is the will of God, even your sanctification". (I Thess. 4:3) "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly". (I Thess. 5:23; 2 Cor. 7:1; 12: 9; Eph. 1:4)

HARTFORD MEMORIAL BAPTIST CHURCH
MEMBERS ORIENTATION CLASS
SESSION II

WHAT DO WE BELIEVE?

Page 7

"The path of the just is as the shining light, which shineth more and more, unto the perfect day".
(Prov. 4:18; 2 Cor. 3:18; Heb. 6:1; 2 Pet. 1:5-8; Phile. 12-16)

"Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do, of His good pleasure".
(Phil. 2:12, 13; Eph. 4:11, 12; 1 Pet. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:18; 2 Cor. 12:5)

"Exercise thyself unto godliness".
(1 Tim. 4:7)

VIII. What Do We Believe About Baptism?

We believe that as Christ was baptized of John, we ought be baptized by immersion into a body of water which symbolizes the body of Christ. It is through baptism that we die in Christ and are raised to walk and live in a newness of life. (Romans 6:4, Col. 2:12, 1 Peter 3:20 and 21, Acts 22:16)

IX. What Do We Believe About The Holy Communion?

We believe that Christ commanded us to receive tokens of bread and wine regularly in proclamation of his death, in commemoration of his teaching and in participation in his resurrection with hope and confidence that His victory over sin and death is ultimate.

X. What Do We Believe About The Sabbath?

We believe that Scriptures teach that the first day of the week is the Lord's Day; and is to be kept sacred to religious purpose, by abstaining from all secular labor, except works of mercy and necessity, by the devout observance of all the means of grace, both private and public; and by preparation for the rest that remaineth for the people of God. On the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached to them". (Acts 20:7; Gen. 2:3; Col. 2:16 and 17; Mark 2:27; John 20:19, 1 Cor. 16:1 and 2)

HARTFORD MEMORIAL BAPTIST CHURCH
MEMBERS ORIENTATION CLASS
SESSION II

WHAT DO WE BELIEVE?

Page 8

"Remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it holy". (Ex. 20:8)
"I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day". (Rev. 1:10;
Ps. 118:24)

"If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honorable; and shalt honor Him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words; then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord, and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob". (Isa. 58:13 and 14; Isa. 56: 2-8)

"Not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is". (Heb. 10:25) "The next Sabbath Day came almost the whole city came together to hear the Word of God". (Acts 13:44) "Let us labor, therefore, to enter into that rest."

HARTFORD MEMORIAL BAPTIST CHURCH
MEMBERS ORIENTATION CLASS
SESSION II

WHAT DO WE BELIEVE?

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY

1. Who is God by His own definition?
2. What is the difference between the Trinity and a belief in three gods?
3. Why go to Church?
4. Why do Christians worship on Sunday?
5. What is?
 - 1) regeneration
 - 2) justification
 - 3) sanctification
6. What are three forms of the Word God?
 - 1)
 - 2)
 - 3)
7. What is baptism?
8. What are the effects of Adam's sin on modern man?