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Why We Believe What We Believe – Bible Part 1

[Easley:] The Holy Scripture is God's Word and says that is the way it is. I will live by what it says. Why you believe what you believe isn't important, it's crucial.

[Lepine:] This in *inContext* with Michael Easley, I'm Bob Lepine. And today we begin a series, Michael, where we're going to look at some of the key foundational doctrines of Scripture. Understanding what the Bible teaches on some essential, fundamental, foundational elements, right?

[Easley:] These messages were originally given in the Moody Bible Institute Torrey-Gray Chapel. The students at Moody have a mandatory President's Chapel every Tuesday and I went through the doctrinal statement for a number of reasons, Bob. Primarily, it's the, this is the football, the Vince Lombardi lecture, if you will. Why do we hold these truths?

And you and I both share a great concern, not only of the Biblical illiteracy, but the theological illiteracy of so many churches.

[Lepine:] Mm hmm.

[Easley:] And I was so pleased when we talked about redoing this series. Tremendous response from these series of messages, which surprises us to think about theology intriguing people. But it was a good exercise for me personally to go back and say, "Why is it important that the Bible is inerrant?"

[Lepine:] And if we don't spend time looking at these kinds of things, as we've seen, what happens is, these fundamental truths begin to erode.

[Easley:] Right. Drift.

[Lepine:] And when that happens, you lose the foundation.

[Easley:] Right. Right. So many of the churches today that have migrated away from the Biblical narrative, they're not really teaching the Scripture, the underpinnings of that are because their theology, their statements of faith are weak and this is an extraordinary opportunity to come back and ask some questions.

What about the Bible? What about the Trinity? What about inspiration, about the person and work of Christ? How do we know we're saved for sure and so forth? So, I believe it's going to be a great series for our friends who are listening to *inContext* and to remind us why we believe this stuff and it's so critical we understand it.

[Lepine:] And we kick it off by looking at the doctrine of Scripture. How we understand the authority, the inspiration, the infallibility of God's Word. Let's pick it up right there as we listen to part one of your message on the Bible.

[Easley:] A sailor once told me theory without practice is dangerous, but practice without theory is deadly. If you're going to handle a weapon, an aircraft, something that can harm someone, if you have theory but no practice, you're dangerous, but if you practice without theory you can be deadly.

The local church probably had a key role in many of our lives in helping us come to a basic knowledge of Jesus Christ. Many of us, either directly through a church or through someone in a local fellowship probably heard the Gospel. That Jesus Christ loved you, that you're a sinner, you're separated from God because of your sinfulness and that because Christ so loved and was so compelled and so obedient to the Father, that He left heaven and came to this earth. He lived, died, was buried and resurrected from the dead on account of your sins and mine. He calls us to Himself. In some point in your journey in your life, you came to a knowledge where you trusted Christ and Christ alone for your salvation.

I make no assumptions. I imagine there are men and women in this room who thought they have done all that, but maybe they have not quite figured it out yet. And that's great, fine, well and good, but you need to settle that once for all. You need a benchmark somewhere at the top of your mountain of your life that you've tapped into the ground that cannot be moved; that you put your trust in Christ and Christ alone for your salvation. That you have assurance of salvation, meaning you cannot lose this gift He gave you. You need to understand eternal security and the assurance of your salvation. And these are bedrock doctrines that you have to hammer into the ground of your life at some point.

Don't be embarrassed if you're here and you've never come to that place that you know that you know that you know that you know what you believe. Because there'll be a great celebration even here if we were to help one of us come to a clearer knowledge, a better understanding, a crisp comprehension of what it means to trust in Christ and Christ alone.

Now, let's just for a moment say that the church had some role in that process. Many of us could probably stand and give story and testimony to the fact that, "Okay, we got saved, but what next?"

Perhaps you were blessed to be discipled, to be mentored, to be coached, to be encouraged in your Christian faith. Perhaps someone came alongside you and helped you grow in knowledge and grace and taught you spiritual disciplines and how to study the Bible and how to pray and how to do some of the disciplines of the faith and to grow. Maybe you had a brother or sister who sharpened you and confronted you when you sinned and put your nose in the book. And maybe, just maybe, you got exposed to some theology.

But my fear is that most believers in Jesus Christ have no Biblical world theology. They have no clue what it means to live in a world with a Biblical grid. They have no concept what it means to follow Jesus Christ in a culture that's gone completely insane and we need a Biblical worldview and that is part of your program here and Moody and hopefully part of all our programs as we grow and mature in faith in Jesus Christ.

Now, what I want to do for the next few weeks is do a series on doctrine. And that sounds as dry as dirt to some of you. Years ago I started a set of personal developmental goals and each year I would write these goals and trade them with friends and we would hold each other accountable. And I saw a lot of personal discipline improve, I saw a lot of goals accomplished. One year I read a huge number of books because of that. Another year I studied subjects I had not studied before. But one of the things I seasoned in there over time was to take on one threatening goal each year;

something that stretched my thinking. Maybe it was studying an area of theology that I was loathe to, or just didn't want to get into; maybe it was going into a book of the Bible that I had reservations about the length or complexity of it. But each year I tried to tackle some new thing that threatened me.

Well, I'm here being transparent today. It threatens me to teach doctrine from this place. We have a bunch of doctrinaire experts over to my right, your left, I might add. Sorry, only a few understood that. But I value them, they are far better trained in many of these areas than I will ever be and I know that. But I also know not to oversimplify. It helps all of us to think Biblically not just from an exegetical and expositional grid, which is my bread and butter, and what I prefer.

This summer I've been studying this whole issue of doctrine and why we believe what we believe and if you know anything of your history in this country, if you're an American, every Ivy League school, Harvard, Princeton, Yale, Andover, began as a theological institution that taught Greek and Hebrew and German and French and the Bible was the Word of God. Every one of them. And they moved along a different path. Perhaps not the end of the world, perhaps not a terrible thing, the universities became liberal.

And if you track it, as in Andover, the best case to have ever researched, Andover Theological Seminary's demise. It was linked to presidents and faculty who pushed against the doctrine; that simple. And if that's the lesson of history, there's no institute that's above losing its mooring to the Bible that calls itself Bible College, a Christian university, a Christian College; there's no guarantees.

Each and every year the trustees sit in the boardroom and we pass around a statement. One of us reads it, we sign it, we date it, we put it in a folder saying, "We are committed to the doctrines of this institute."

The first time I did this, I was asked to read it aloud by the chairman. I literally wept as I read these words. I had a hard time reading them. Why you believe what you believe must govern all that you do. Why you believe what you believe must govern all that you do. "No fact of contemporary western life is more evident than its growing distrust of final truth and its implacable," that is an unyielding or a resistant, "its implacable questioning of any sure word."

Listen again; a cumbersome quote. "No fact of contemporary western life is more evident than its growing distrust of a final truth and its implacable questioning of any sure word." So begins Carl Henry in his *God, Revelation and Authority* in the section called "The Crisis of Truth and The Word."

We fight fact. We fight truth is what he's saying. And the western mind bows its back in rebellion and says, "No, you can't tell me something's truthful." Now, you and I live in this cultural context. Let me give you some seasoning. I'm not a philosopher. I know a little bit about time periods like "Enlightenment" and this type of thing, but these are the experts in that category. They can correct all that I'm going to tell you and I'm sure they will. [laughter]

Let's begin with theism. Theism was the belief that there was a vertical Sovereign, that the European churches pointed up, that we revered the Bible as the very Word of God. And there was even, at the worst, a Deistic view of theism. There is a Sovereign. There

is a God. There is a Creator. We may differ on the particulars, but there was a theistic view, a vertical view, that yes, there was a God.

Replaced, hard to track it to a time and date, but replaced by humanism. Before, God was the vertical measure, now humanism, man is the horizontal measure. Man really makes himself to be god. Man does not acknowledge a theistic or deistic concept. Man says, "Oh, we can figure this out."

If you're old enough or astute enough to have read one of the most difficult books to swallow, Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind*, a very tedious piece, crucial for the academics of the world to understand. You may not agree with all he says, but one thing Bloom tracks is the shift in the university from what he calls classics to liberal arts and how when you walk away from the classic concept of education, and he talks about studies and "isms" and you introduce departments that take on a whole life, and they, because of the nature of coursework, take away from other required classes.

That's an illustration of moving away from doctrine. When other things crowd out the main thing, we're starting to shift away. A more modern book, some of you perhaps have read, Nancy Pearcey's *Total Truth*. I know you have nothing to read and plenty of time, so just put it down for later. But it's a book you should become familiar with at some course in your life. Nancy's pulls a, just erase the marker board and start over about what truth is and how our culture and media and our thinking has been impacted that there is no such thing as truth.

Humanism, we might season in evolution teaching, these type of things. The dismantle of vertical view, then perhaps at some time followed by modernity. Modernity best defined as subjective, as individual. The secular word starts to take traction in the vocabulary of the time. It's a rational time. It's a time to prove things by science and reason and logic and observation. So we might look at it this way: as you are discontinuous from the past, you say, "Oh, well they thought the world was flat. We know better, it's round." And so the modernist says, "We can ignore the past because they lived in a flat world thinking. They actually thought there was a God. They actually prayed. We know better now."

So it's secular, it's rational. Of course, today I have to smile at the nine planets we've had. [laughter] Poor Pluto. So modernity ignores the past, is discontinuous and it says, "No, we know better."

Now, there's certain value in that, no question, but the loss is tragic. The loss of modernity, forgetting the past, breeds all sorts of potential disasters in the near future.

Post-modernity would be the next level and we've talked about post-modernity till we're tired about post-modernity. It's become so much a part of the language, lingua franca, it really is quite frightening. Terms like "skepticism", "culture", "experience", "individuality" yet "pluralistic" exist in the same literature vein of post-modernity. Words like "tolerance", "relativism", "inclusion", "diversity" and "equality" have spawned from a post-modern mindset. Listen to me very carefully. Diversity, relativism, inclusion and equality are not Biblical constructs, they are world constructs. Now, there's value in having these discussions. Don't hear me wrong.

One of the things I'll say over and over and over and I've said for twenty years: Don't let

the world teach you theology. Do not build a doctrine of diversity or inclusion or equality the way the world thinks. You will be in error. You must look at a Biblical theology to talk about the injustice of not accepting other racial differences. You must look at what the Bible says about equality, not what the world sells as equality. You must look at tolerance entirely differently than the world defines it.

Listen to me very carefully: When you use those words as a believer in Jesus Christ, the world is not hearing what you're hearing. Let me say it again. When you use equality and relativism and tolerance and inclusiveness and diversity, the world is not hearing what you may be meaning. I'm not saying you don't use the words. I'm not saying we're not sensitive and very aware of these terms, men and women. This is where Biblical theology must be the center of your thinking and your processing and your emotions and your training or you will be led astray. You will find yourself subtly believing something that you never intended to believe. The way the world uses these terms is very different.

Now, many of us here who are godly love Starbucks. [laughter] And Joe's. [Woos from the crowd] Think about this illustratively for just a moment. When you – it used to be coffee was hot, strong and black. And if you put cream and sugar in it, you were a wimp. [laughter] You were a sissy. [laughter] When I was a kid we called that baby coffee. That much milk, four or five spoons of sugar, that much coffee. That's baby coffee where I come from. [laughter] Now when you go to a store, a Starbucks or Caribou's or Joe's, you can have it short, tall, grande, venti. You can have it hot or cold. You can have it extra hot or warm. You can have skim milk, two percent, whole milk or half and half. You can have it sweet with real sugar, raw sugar, Splenda, Equal and Sweet 'N Low. If you can't handle milk, we have soy. [laughter, woos and clapping] If you really want to change the whole dynamic of coffee, you can put flavor in it: chocolate, vanilla, hazelnut [laughter] and the seasonal favorite, pumpkin. I can almost say as dogma, God never intended pumpkin and coffee to go together. [laughter and clapping] You can have non-coffee drinks that never got near a coffee bean or caffeine in a Starbucks. In other words, you can have any beverage you want, any size, shape, color. I read a little metric in their brochure one time. They've calculated fourteen thousand iterations of a beverage. And when you order that beverage and pay five dollars for that thing, you have just exhibited tolerance in a non-judgmental environment that exemplifies post-modernity perfectly.

Because it doesn't matter what you drink. Your truth is fine. My truth is a French press or espresso or strong coffee. Once in a while a little half and half if the French press is too strong, that's all the better, but never anything sweet in coffee. That's like putting ketchup on ice cream, for goodness sakes. [laughter]

The point is there are limits, right? You just identified a limit. We can say there's tolerance in all way shape and form. We can say, "Do your own thing. Your truth, my truth."

No, there is a time when the truth has gone over. It's no longer true. Starbucks is a great illustration of our culture. Its success has been linked to this concept of, "Whatever you want, doesn't matter. No one's going to judge you. Just pay for it and sit in a very uncomfortable chair as long as you'd like." [laughter]

Now, you season these kinds of thoughts with the idea of secularism. Secularism is the notion of removing. In fact, if you read secularists, they want to free us from the idea of

rational and spiritual.

They don't approach it as a, "No, you have to take it away and get rid of it."

"We want to free spiritual, religious, faith language from the culture."

Ergo the secular society. So we talk about secularism.

Now, I don't know what's going to give way to post-modernity. I have a theory. I also believe that revisionists are the only ones who claim to have clairvoyance. When men and women write historically, they always know the truth about everything. God bless them. We lose history when we approach it this way and when we lose a Biblical, theological foundation, it's not merely dangerous, it's deadly. So it's important to know why we believe what we believe.

[Lepine:] Michael, when we look at the doctrine of Scripture, most of the errors that begin to creep into the church are not overt. You don't see people standing up and saying, "We don't need this book anymore, we can look other places."

They're more subtle than that. As you look at what you see as the erosion of the authority of Scripture in the church today, where do you see it manifesting itself most regularly?

[Easley:] Well, I do think it is authority. I believe people are looking at the Bible narrative. "It doesn't apply to me. It was in an ancient context and we can't make that applicational bridge because of all these cultural modernity, post-modernity, barriers."

And to me, when we moved away from the concept that the Bible was the authoritative Word of God, that doesn't mean the counsel of Scripture tells us how to repair our lawnmower.

[Lepine:] Right.

[Easley:] It does mean the counsel of Scripture has all we need to live the life that Christ wants us to live in the spiritual realm, in the relational realm. And once we move from that, then the erosion takes place. And you're right, it's subtle, it's little bites, but before long, "Well that doesn't really apply."

I heard an evangelical name that many would know say, "The church has become too Pauline."

[Lepine:] Hmm.

[Easley:] Well, that's like saying the church has become too Christ-oriented. I mean, if the Word of God was given to Paul, if he then wrote it to Timothy and Titus and to the Thessalonians, that is Jesus speaking to you and me in 2009.

[Lepine:] So those who would call themselves Red Letter Christians –

[Easley:] [laughter] Yeah.

[Lepine:] And there are some today who go by that name.

[Easley:] Right. Right.

[Lepine:] You're saying, that's the wrong way to look at Scripture.

[Easley:] Absolutely. It is the whole counsel of God. We need to have red letter in the Old Testament every time Yahweh spoke.

[Lepine:] Hmm.

[Easley:] So, the whole counsel of God has to be embraced and this is why theology is important. Because you have to look at what the Scripture says in total, not just in one or two selected passages.

[Lepine:] And, you know, some of our listeners may say, this is pretty basic stuff, isn't it? And I would say, yes it is and it's important for us to get back to basics because this is where things do start to erode, at the foundational level, and that's why this series on why we believe what we believe is important for every one of us.

We're going to be going through why we believe what we believe about the Bible and about the Trinity and about the doctrine of inspiration. Why we believe what we believe about Jesus or salvation, the Holy Spirit, about Satan. These are key concepts. In fact, we've set up a "Why We Believe What We Believe" Bible study where together with the Moody Handbook of Theology, you can receive an MP3 CD of this whole sermon series. You can review Michael's sermon notes, that's included on the CD, we'll point you to portions of the Moody Handbook of Theology and we define theological terms for you. The "Why We Believe What We Believe" Bible study is available to any of our listeners.

Go to our website, incontextradio.org for more information about how you can receive this Bible study or call us at 877-3CONTEXT. Again, the website is incontextradio.org and our toll free number is 877-326-6839. That's 877-3CONTEXT. Ask about the "Why We Believe What We Believe" Bible study.

And be sure to join us back tomorrow as we're going continue looking at why we believe what we believe about the Bible on *inContext* with Michael Easley.