

Beginnings – ORIGIN *(Where did we come from?)*

- **Only Two Choices**
- **Realize the Significance**
- **Is it Faith or Science?**
 - LAB - Lookable, Accessible, Breakable
- **Guess at the Evidence**
- **Inspect the Evidence**
 - Universe = "Decay"
 - Age of the Earth = "Can't Say"
 - Origin of Life by Chance = "No Way"
 - Evolution of Species and Man = "Lacks Genes and Tweens"
- **No Compromise**

DON'T - Death, Orders of Creation, Names in genealogies, Ten Commandments refer to seven-day week

Intent of Life – LIFE *(Why are we here?)*

- **Love - GOD and MAN**
- **Increase - GROW**
- **Faithfulness - Time, Talent, Treasure**
- **Eternity – Past, Present, Future**

Authority – POWER *(Who's in charge?)* A God Who is:

- **Personal and Loving**
- **Omnipotent**
- **Wise and All-Knowing**
- **Everywhere and Eternal**
- **Righteous and Reliable**

Standards – RULES *(What are the rules?)* God's rules are:

- **Revealed supernaturally, not derived by reason**
- **Universal and apply to everyone, everywhere, all the time**
- **Loving**
- **Enforced**
- **Steadfast**

O - Obedience to God (right actions)

Loving God is directly related to obedience to Him. Jesus said, "Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him, and show myself to him." (John 14:21) Since Jesus said it, I can be confident in stating the following:

To love God, we MUST obey Him.

Most Christians would agree with the statement above, but I don't believe most of us have REALLY pondered the significance of that statement. Let me make two other statements to illustrate this point:

If we don't make the time to study God's Word to see what He commands, we don't love Him.

If we know something that God commands and we don't do it, we don't love Him.

Those statements are not pleasant to write or read, but I believe they are as true as the first statement. God can choose to forgive us for laziness and disobedience, but as we willfully continue in these sins we are certainly NOT loving God. To love God in the way He tells us to love Him we must strive to grow in our knowledge of His commands and in our practice of obedience.

Here are a few practical suggestions on ways to better love God through obedience:

- Periodically select a book of the Bible and make a list of commands. You might want to categorize them such as "commands I obey pretty well", "commands I disobey frequently", and "commands I didn't realize existed."
- Dedicate a time of prayer to ask God to reveal areas of disobedience in your life. Then ask for forgiveness, and ask for strength and wisdom in addressing those areas.
- Change your vocabulary about sin. I used to say "I struggle with that area" or "that's a weakness of mine." Now I try to say "I sin in that area, but I'm asking God to change me and trusting that He will."
- Honestly examine your heart and ask yourself why you DO obey God. Fear of punishment? Because you want others to think you are good? Ask God to increase your love for Him so that more of your motive is love and thankfulness.

D - Doctrines from God (right beliefs)

Right worship and right actions are dependent on right beliefs. The dictionary says doctrine is "a set of beliefs or principles held and taught by a Church, political party, or other group." To love God, we must hold to beliefs and principles that agree with what He has told us in His Word.

For example, what if we believe that people go to heaven because they do good things or because they go to church or because they are born into a Christian family? Our attitudes and actions related to the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18-19) will be affected by this belief. Our focus will be on getting people to "act good" or "go to church". If this is not what God says about salvation then we are not loving Him because we are living and teaching wrong beliefs.

Doctrines are often the basis for disagreements between Christians. We shouldn't want to have disagreements, and it is important for us to try to distinguish between the major issues and the minor issues. As much as possible we want to live in peace with others (Romans 12:18). But we must recognize that **unity among believers is the result of pursuing truth, not the goal of our doctrines**. God's Word is our standard, and on a given topic there is a true doctrine/belief. You and I will have unity when we both find that truth. If we disagree, our pursuit of unity should be conducted with an open, humble, honest study of the relevant passages in the Bible (because we might *both* be wrong). We will not always arrive at the truth at the same time, but we should never forsake God's truth for the sake of "getting along." As one of my friends says, we should be able "to disagree without being disagreeable."

The topic of having correct doctrine is well beyond the scope of this overview. But here are a few suggestions on steps that can improve our ability to love God through our beliefs:

- Get a book that discusses the basics of the Christian faith. We've used R.C. Sproul's book Essential Truths of the Christian Faith. It has a Reformed Theology, but even if you don't agree with some of it there is a good brief summary of most essential doctrines.
- Get a systematic theology book for more in-depth study
- Review the creeds (such as the Apostles' Creed or Nicene Creed) that have historically been used in the church to summarize what are considered the basics of the faith
- Develop a concise outline of doctrine that summarizes those concepts that are major, worth dying for. Here's an example:
 - **God's Creation** - That the Triune God of the Bible chose to create time, matter, and energy and spoke it into existence. His original creation was perfect.
 - **Man's Sin Nature** - That God created man to have a special relationship with Him and promised man eternal fellowship if man obeyed God, but death if man disobeyed God. The first man rebelled against God's commands, and the result was that all mankind has been condemned to death and creation itself is in decay. God's standard is perfect righteousness, and no man meets that standard.
 - **God's Mercy in Christ** - That the divine Son of God, Jesus Christ, took on flesh, was born of a virgin, lived a life of sinless obedience, died a substitutionary atoning death, was raised again for the justification (restored relationship with God) of the saints, and is seated at the right hand of God making intercession for our sanctification (growth in holiness).
 - **Christ's Return and Restoration** - That Christ will someday return for all the saints. He will judge and condemn His enemies to Hell forever. He will perfect the saints (glorification) and restore His creation to perfection for eternity.