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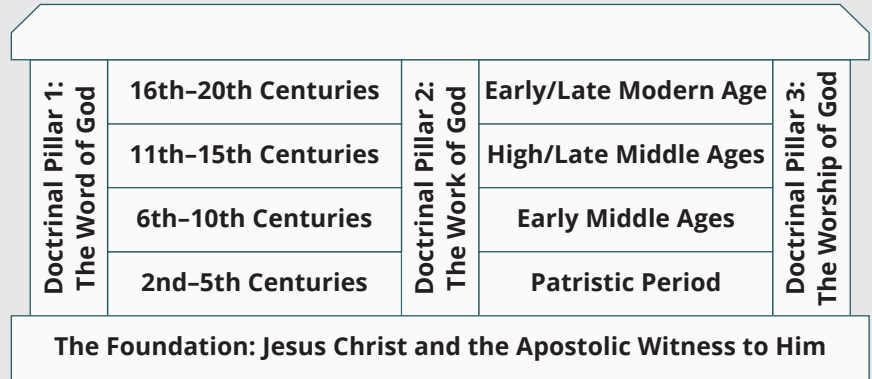
# Lesson 1

# THE BIBLICAL FRAMEWORK

Identifying the Pillars of the Faith

## KEY PASSAGE: 2 Timothy 1:13–14

*“Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you.”*



## I. PICTURING THE CHURCH AS A BUILDING

- ▶ One of the New Testament metaphors for the church is that of a building. Jesus Himself promised to build His church, and guaranteed that it would not fail (see Matt. 16:18).
- ▶ Scripture points to Christ (and the truth about Him) as the foundation on which the church is built.

**1 Corinthians 3:9–11**—“For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, God’s building . . . For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”

**Ephesians 2:19–22**—“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.”

**1 Peter 2:4–5**—“And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house.”

**Matthew 7:24–25**—“Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock.”

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❖ **For Discussion:** Read 1 Corinthians 3:16–17. How does Paul’s description of the Corinthian congregation fit with the metaphor of a building? What are the consequences for false teachers who would try to destroy the church?

## II. THREE DOCTRINAL PILLARS

- ▶ Following the metaphor of a building, we might ask: “What are the essential doctrinal pillars that define biblical orthodoxy and characterize the true church?”
- ▶ The New Testament identifies three of these doctrinal pillars.
- ▶ The true church is characterized by its commitment to:
  1. \_\_\_\_\_: The true church looks to Scripture as its final authority for doctrine (what to believe) and practice (how to live). Followers of Jesus submit to Him by submitting to His Word (John 10:27).
  2. \_\_\_\_\_: The true church understands that the redemptive work of Christ accomplished everything necessary for salvation. Sinners are justified by God’s grace through faith in Christ, apart from their own merits or works.
  3. \_\_\_\_\_: The true church worships the triune God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) in spirit (purity of devotion) and in truth (purity of doctrine). It rejects false forms of worship and repudiates anything that might distort or distract from its sincere devotion to God.

### A. The Supremacy of the Word of God

- ▶ The true church embraces and submits to the Word of God.

**2 Timothy 3:16–17**—“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”

**Mark 7:5–13**—“The Pharisees and the scribes asked Him, ‘Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands?’ And He said to them, ‘Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written:

“This people honors Me with their lips,  
But their heart is far away from Me.  
“But in vain do they worship Me,  
Teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.”

Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men.’

He was also saying to them, ‘You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition. . . . thus invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that.’”

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❖ **For Discussion:** Read John 10:27. According to that verse, what is one of the defining marks of the followers of Jesus? How should that reality apply to the church and its relationship to the Word of Christ (Col. 3:16–17)?

### ***What About Apostolic Tradition?***<sup>1</sup>

► To answer that question, consider the following four points:

1. The word “tradition” in the New Testament comes from a Greek word that means \_\_\_\_\_. The Latin word, *treditio*, means \_\_\_\_\_, and it is from that Latin word that we get the English word *tradition*.

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2. Apostolic tradition has been preserved for us in the writings of \_\_\_\_\_.

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
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3. Believers are instructed, by the New Testament, to evaluate all teachings and traditions in light of \_\_\_\_\_.

**Colossians 2:8**—“See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men.”

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4. The early church viewed the writings of the apostles as inherently \_\_\_\_\_. They understood that any non-biblical traditions must be evaluated against the standard of Scripture.

► Many examples from early church history could be given to illustrate this point. Consider the following two:

**Irenaeus (c. 130–202):** “We have learned from none others the plan of our salvation, than from those through whom the Gospel has come down to us [that’s a reference to the apostles], which they did at one time proclaim in public, and, at a later period, by the will of God, handed down to us [a verb form of the word ‘tradition’] in the Scriptures, to be the ground and pillar of our faith.”<sup>2</sup>

**Basil (330–379):** “I do not consider it fair that the custom [or tradition] which obtains among them should be regarded as a law and rule of orthodoxy. If custom is to be taken in proof of what is right, then it is certainly competent for me to put forward on my side the custom which obtains here. If they reject this, we are clearly not bound to follow them. Therefore let God-inspired Scripture decide between us; and on whichever side be found doctrines in harmony with the word of God, in favor of that side will be cast the vote of truth.”<sup>3</sup>

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► To sum up, the true church submits to the Word of God as its final authority, even over religious tradition.

❖ **For Discussion:** Can you think of an example of a non-biblical religious tradition? If you were to evaluate that traditional belief or practice from a biblical perspective, what would you say about it?

## B. The Sufficiency of the Work of God

► The biblical gospel asserts that sinners are justified before God on the basis of \_\_\_\_\_ (Luke 18:14). Salvation is the gift of God received through faith, apart from our works, based solely on the finished work of Christ.

**Galatians 1:6–8**—“I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!”

**Romans 11:6**—“If it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace.”

**Ephesians 2:8–9**—“For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

**Philippians 3:8–9**—“. . . not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith.”

**Titus 3:4–7**—“But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to

His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”

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❖ **For Discussion:** Given the importance of the gospel, how would you explain it to someone? What verses would you include in presenting the good news that sinners can be saved through faith in Christ?

### C. The Sanctity of the Worship of God

- ▶ The true church worships the triune God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) in both purity of \_\_\_\_\_ and purity of \_\_\_\_\_.

**John 4:23**—“An hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.”

- ▶ In this verse, we see that the worship that pleases God is worship that is pure both in spirit (devotion) and truth (doctrine). Let’s consider these two facets of acceptable worship in more detail.

**1. Purity of Devotion:** Undefined worship is reserved for God alone. It removes \_\_\_\_\_ and rejects \_\_\_\_\_.

**1 John 5:21**—“Little children, guard yourselves from idols.”

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**2. Purity of Doctrine:** Undefined worship requires an accurate view of \_\_\_\_\_.

**1 John 2:22**—“Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son.”

**1 John 4:2-3**—“By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.”

**1 John 5:20**—“And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.”

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
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**John 1:1—Jesus’ Deity**—“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

**John 1:14—Jesus’ Humanity**—“And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

**John 1:17—Jesus’ Messiahship**—“For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ [the Messiah].”

❖ **For Discussion:** Review John 4:23. What can you do to make sure your worship is characterized by both purity of devotion (“spirit”) and purity of doctrine (“truth”)? What are some potential obstacles to that kind of God-honoring worship?

### III. APPLYING THESE PRINCIPLES TO CHURCH HISTORY

- ▶ As we’ve seen in this lesson, the true church is like a building—established on the foundation of Jesus Christ—and defined by its commitment to several core doctrinal pillars:
  1. **The Supremacy of the Word of God:** Scripture alone is our authority.
  2. **The Sufficiency of the Work of God:** We are saved by grace alone through faith apart from works, based solely on the finished work of Christ.
  3. **The Sanctity of the Worship of God:** We are called to worship God in purity of devotion and purity of doctrine.
- ▶ If we extend the building metaphor to the whole of church history, we might picture the centuries after the apostolic age as the superstructure of the church—which rests on the foundation of Christ and continues to be defined by the pillars of biblical orthodoxy.
- ▶ The chart on the next page provides an illustration of this idea. For some people, learning church history with a chart like this is easier than an extended timeline.

❖ **For Discussion:** How can Christians today practically apply the three doctrinal pillars highlighted in this lesson? What can you do to put the authority of Scripture, the accuracy of the gospel, and the authenticity of worship into practice in your life?

# AN OVERVIEW OF CHURCH HISTORY

Over time, these pillars of biblical orthodoxy are corrupted by the elevation of man-made traditions and philosophies.

<b>Pillar: The WORD of God</b>	<b>Emphasis on Tradition</b>	<b>Sola Scriptura</b>	<b>Age of Reason</b>
<b>Pillar: The WORK of God</b>	<b>Sacramental Works</b>	<b>Sola Fide Sola Gratia</b>	<b>Age of Reason</b>
<b>Pillar: The WORSHIP of God</b>	<b>Veneration of Saints</b>	<b>Solus Christus Soli Deo Gloria</b>	<b>Age of Reason</b>

<b>Reformation</b>				
16th Century Luther Calvin Knox Anabaptists	17th Century Puritanism New England	18th Century Edwards Whitefield Great Awakening	19th Century Carey Judson Spurgeon	20th Century Modernists vs. Fundamentalists Evangelicals
<b>Modern Era</b>				
<b>High Middle Ages</b>				
11th Century East/West Schism 1st Crusade	12th Century Anselm Bernard 2nd & 3rd Crusades	13th Century 4th Crusade Thomas Aquinas Peter Waldo	14th Century Papal Schism John Wycliffe	15th Century Jan Hus Council of Constance Humanism
<b>Pre-Reformers</b>				
<b>Early Middle Ages</b>				
6th Century 2nd Council of Constantinople	7th Century Rise of Islam 3rd Council of Constantinople	8th Century 2nd Council of Nicaea <i>Donation of Constantine</i>	9th Century Charlemagne Holy Roman Empire	10th Century Papal Corruption Russia Christianized
<b>Rise of Feudalism</b>				
<b>Ante-Nicene Fathers</b>				
1st Century Pentecost Apostles Clement of Rome	2nd Century Ignatius Polycarp Justin Irenaeus	3rd Century Tertullian Origen Cyprian	4th Century Nicaea Athanasius 1st Council of Constantinople	5th Century Chrysostom Augustine Chalcedon
<b>Post-Nicene Fathers</b>				

MODERN AGE  
  
MIDDLE AGES  
  
PATRISTIC AGE

**The Foundation: The Lord Jesus Christ and the Apostolic Witness to Him**  
(1 Cor. 3:11; Eph. 2:20; 1 Peter 2:4-6; see also Matt. 16:16-18)