

Di223 We Believe

Lesson Di223-1 Foundations for Faith

Have you thought about the legacy you will be passing on to the next generation? Many parents prepare legacies of land, money, or family treasures to be given to sons and daughters when they die. These legacies, however, are of temporal value. They won't last forever. The most important legacy that we can pass on to others is a godly example of faith. Faith in God has eternal value.

Before we can pass on the legacy of faith to others, we must have a foundation for faith ourselves. We must know what we believe. This "We Believe" course is designed to build a solid base for you to understand what you believe and why. These foundations for faith are built upon the Word of God, the Bible. Each lesson in this course will begin with a title, a Bible story, and a statement of faith. This will provide the focus for the lesson.

Bible stories always sound more interesting than, say, a list of the attributes of God or the kinds of sin. So each lesson will be based on a story you can learn and remember. Every story or parable will teach a doctrinal truth that is important to Christian living. For example, we love to relive the story of David the shepherd boy, killing the giant Goliath. However, until we understand the doctrinal truth about David's faith in his God, we have merely been entertained by the story.

In Matthew 23, Jesus was teaching his disciples and the crowds. He warned them, "The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. Be careful to do what they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. They put heavy burdens on the people to do things that they are unwilling to do themselves. Everything they do is done for people to see."

Jesus continued, "They love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the place of worship. They love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and to be called 'Rabbi' by others" (Matt 23:1-7).

Then he addressed the offenders directly, "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—but you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy, and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel" (Matt 23:23-24).

They tried to impress people with their piety. They appeared righteous, but were full of wickedness. Jesus even compared the Pharisees and teachers of the law to whitewashed tombs which look beautiful on the outside, but are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean on the inside. Jesus called them hypocrites and snakes! Jesus was teaching that true Christian living is an important test in determining whether a teacher is teaching truth or falsehood. Does the teacher practice what they teach others to do?

Doctrine—the Bible's teaching—can come alive, as we study stories and parables that give us real truth for living. The Bible is the standard for our faith and the guideline for how we should live.

What is the difference between Bible doctrine and other creeds or dogma? ‘Dogma’ is based on man’s opinion and attempts to make man’s opinion equal to biblical truth. The Bible predicts in Matthew 24:11 that in the last days there will be false teachers and many people will be deceived by their false teaching. That is why the apostle Paul warns Timothy, “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth” (2Tim 2:15). A ‘creed’ may be just someone’s high-sounding words or a tradition passed down by a respected person. ‘Doctrine’ is based on the Bible—not on man’s opinion or tradition. Doctrine is the Bible’s teaching for how we should live. Bible doctrine is living truth.

Three tests will help us determine if a teaching or a teacher is true or false. The **first test** is for doctrine. Does the teaching deny the truth of Scripture at any point? To apply this test, we must first know true doctrine so we can recognize error. The **second test** is for prophecy. If a teacher or prophet predicts a future event, did the prophecy come true? Unfulfilled prophecy may indicate a false teacher or prophet, if the predicted time frame has passed. The **third test** is holy living. Does the teaching promote holy living or encourage people to continue living in sin? Is the teacher living a truly holy lifestyle or just acting religiously in public and wickedly in private?

This lesson is **important** because it contrasts the teachings and lifestyle of a true teacher and a false one. Jesus himself is the best example of someone who lived exactly the way he taught others to live.

The **main truth** of this lesson is that we must know what we believe and why. What we believe must be based on God’s Word, the Bible. It must be sound doctrine, not just opinion or a memorized creed.

Let’s **review** this lesson—

1. Who was Jesus warning his disciples about? [Pause]
A. If you said, “The Pharisees and teachers of the law who were hypocrites,” you are right.
2. What is the most important legacy we can pass on to the next generation? [Pause 5 seconds]
A. If you answered, “The legacy of faith,” you are correct.
3. What is the difference between doctrine and dogma? [Pause]
A. If you answered that doctrine is based on God’s Word and dogma is based on man’s opinion, you are right.
4. What are the 3 tests that help us determine whether a teacher and his teaching are true or false? [Pause]
A. If you answered: “The first test is for doctrine—does the teaching deny the truth of Scripture at any point; the second test is fulfilled prophecy—did the prophecy come true; and the third test is holy living—does the teaching and teacher promote holy living,” then you answered correctly.

Your **assignment** is to memorize Paul’s words to Timothy: “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). Share with two other persons the tests for determining whether a teacher and his teaching are true or false.