
Leader's Guide

Articles of Faith

What
Nazarenes
Believe

Copyright © 2021 by The Foundry Publishing
The Foundry Publishing
PO Box 419527
Kansas City, MO 64141
thefoundrypublishing.com

978-0-8341-3906-0

Printed in the
United States of America

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Cover design: Arthur Cherry
Interior design: Arthur Cherry

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LIVING OUR FAITH IN THE OPEN

The Articles of Faith are the official statements of doctrine of the Church of the Nazarene. Doctrine is a set of beliefs accepted by a group of people. What we believe is important and, therefore, must be grounded in more than just our personal opinions in order to have validity.

Doctrinal integrity (the willingness to give an honest account of what we believe and why) is primarily about living our faith in the open, first as praise to God and then as invitation to the world. When our personal faith is lived out, it needs doctrines (stated beliefs) in order to insure clarity and honesty. We have all had the experience of thinking we understood what we believe until we began to communicate it to another person. Doctrine, in many ways, saves us from being vague and unclear about our beliefs. Doctrinal integrity is about the capacity and willingness to give account for what we believe. Stating our beliefs in verbal or written form need not be a tug-of-war with others. The point of doctrine is not debate, but witness. Knowing what one believes is about the honesty and hard work of a faith that seeks understanding. The real point of doctrine is to sustain the spirituality that lies at the center of Christianity.

Solid doctrine makes no separation between Scripture and doctrine. In fact, such a separation is not borne out in the Bible. For example, as Moses is preparing the next generation to enter the promised land, he refers to “the statutes and the ordinances—that the LORD your God charged me to teach you to observe” (Deut. 6:1, NRSV). He goes on to urge the Hebrews: “Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates” (vv. 7–9, NRSV). To be sure, these statutes and ordinances are found within the stories Moses is telling, but it is the statutes that are to be written on the doorpost.

The New Testament epistles do not make much sense unless the importance of doctrine is assumed. For example, Jude says, “I find it necessary to write and appeal to you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints” (v. 3, NRSV). The next verse refers to “certain intruders . . . among you” (v. 4, NRSV). First John 4 links false prophets with those who fail to confess that Jesus Christ came in the flesh. The writer urges, then, that every spirit be tested against the belief that Jesus Christ was flesh. If you do not affirm the incarnation (Jesus coming to earth in the flesh, being fully God and fully human), then you are not thinking like a Christian. We also read, “From this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error” (v. 6, NRSV). Many more examples could be produced to further illustrate that those who believe in the authority of Scripture also must affirm the importance of doctrine.

When they are properly understood, doctrines are compressed faith stories. For example, there is little difference between reciting, “In the beginning God created” (Gen. 1:1) and affirming doctrinally that God is “Creator” (Article of Faith 1). Likewise, there is little difference between saying, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1) and affirming doctrinally that Jesus “was eternally one with the Father (Article of Faith 2). When we affirm with the Scripture, “For if the many died through the one man’s trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many” (Rom. 5:15, NRSV), we are saying doctrinally that Jesus “made a full atonement for all human sin” (Article of Faith 6). We gain little and lose much by allowing our faith to rest on

too sharp a distinction between doctrine and Scripture. Our doctrine must be based on the truths of Scripture. Given this fact, we study doctrine to affirm the faith with those who have gone before and in the presence of the great cloud of witnesses (see Heb. 12:1).

A faith characterized by integrity can ask honest questions and allow for honest answers. *Can I lose my salvation? Do I need to be baptized to go to heaven? Does the baptism with the Holy Spirit affect entire sanctification? Does God know the future? When I get to heaven, will I know my parents, my spouse, or my children? Can evolution be reconciled with creation?* These kinds of questions arise in the minds of thoughtful Christians, and doctrine is the church's answer. At the most basic level, this means that we must do the work of thinking through the faith in order to be in a position to express the faith to the world. *This requires that we think about what we believe and why.*

As we grow and mature in the faith, we must make the belief our own. An unexamined and untested faith is not really faith at all. For example, Moses knew that those who would enter Canaan would need to remember the stories of faith, but they also needed to make them their own as statutes and commandments. A clear understanding of doctrine leads to a life of integrity—a life grounded in the truths of God's Word.

Doctrines affirm scriptural truth. Put in its most unvarnished reality, where the doctrine contradicts Scripture, the doctrine is revised. Doctrine is a way to affirm the teaching of Scripture by making the Scripture accessible. Doctrine becomes the way to project to the world and to the church what is most essential about scriptural Christianity. When words are weighed carefully, tested scripturally, and offered plainly and in public, a Christian knows where to stand. Doctrine tests our judgments with those who have hammered out doctrine throughout history. We look to the doctrine of those who have walked the Christian path before us. We examine our beliefs through a historical lens and see if they align with our Christian brothers and sisters who preceded us.

It makes a great deal of difference, then, when we understand that Christian doctrine does not fall out of the sky into the open mouths of Christians. Rather, doctrine is hammered out in the context of a living faith so that what we believe might be articulated for every generation. When we think we understand what is essentially Christian, it is important to have the resource of a vigorous tradition (the beliefs of those who have

gone before us). While this is not an easy conversation, it is both essential and ultimately redemptive. What seems crystal clear to us in private must be tested against the scrutiny of public deliberation.

There is also a sense in which this kind of approach to doctrine affirms that the Holy Spirit is at work in the church, past and present. When Peter stands on the Day of Pentecost to account for this important event, he turns to the words of Joel, and he talks about the promises made to David. His appeal to Scripture (tradition) is a very revealing move because it shows how what appears on the scene must be coherent in light of the past. Doctrine is one of the ways we come to terms with the past while making room for the present.

Doctrine provides a language capable of bearing our faith. Most can remember the challenge of learning a language. When a parent points to a red object, it is not ultimately acceptable for a child to say that object is green. The point is to convince the child that it is best to think of a red object as red. If we are to understand the world and each other, we must do the work of learning the language. The person who teaches us to speak also teaches us how the world is to be understood. Therefore, language is not a neutral activity. We tend to think that language is just about communication, but this position is a serious misunderstanding. Language is about how the world is put together and how it is to be appropriated personally and for the next generation. There is no genuine faith apart from vigorous or thoughtful language/dctrine. We study doctrine because it is important to understand the complex constellation of Christian beliefs.

Amid the shifting sands of our time, doctrinal integrity is essential. As Christians, we need to know what we believe and why. Yet, it is even more important for the Christian to be focused on what is important as life is lived out. Doctrinal integrity does not just happen; it must be consciously sought and nurtured. It is with the Bible in one hand and doctrine in the other, in the presence of the Holy Spirit and the traditions of the church, that we are called to live with doctrinal and spiritual integrity.

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Article of Faith I:

The Triune God



“ We believe in one eternally existent, infinite God, Sovereign Creator and Sustainer of the universe; that He only is God, holy in nature, attributes, and purpose. The God who is holy love and light is Triune in essential being, revealed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. ”

*Genesis 1; Leviticus 19:2;
Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Isaiah 5:16; 6:1-7;
40:18-31; Matthew 3:16-17;
28:19-20; John 14:6-27;
1 Corinthians 8:6; 2 Corinthians 13:14;
Galatians 4:4-6; Ephesians 2:13-18;
1 John 1:5; 4:8*

SESSION TARGET:

To understand how and why the Trinity is one of the most foundational beliefs in Christianity.

FOCUS SCRIPTURES:

Genesis 1:1; Matthew 28:19-20;
John 1:1-3, 14:6-27; Galatians 4:4-6;
Colossians 1:15-20; Hebrews 1:1-2

CONNECTING TO LIFE

Option 1

To start this session, ask your group the following questions:

- Can you think of ways that others may have tried to teach you the concept of the Trinity? Did you find these helpful or confusing?
- What kinds of images may come to mind when we say, “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit”?
- Take a look at fifteenth-century Russian artist Andrei Rublev’s painting *The Trinity* (a Google search will bring up this icon for you). What does this image say to you about the Christian idea of Trinity?

Option 2

If you are able, consider showing one of these videos to your students:

- “What Is the Trinity?” by Three Minute Theology: <https://youtu.be/0HMryr1ZlxQ>
- “God” by BibleProject: <https://youtu.be/eAvYmE2YYIU>

Then, offer these questions for reflection:

- What in this video *confirmed* your understanding of the Trinity?
- Was anything in this video a *new idea* for you about the Trinity? If so, explain.
- Why do you think it matters that we think accurately about the doctrine of our triune God?

Transition: The doctrine of the triune God is our foundational Christian belief. Today we will discuss why it is so important.

CONNECTING TO THE WORD

Option 1

Divide your class into three groups. On an index card, write the group number (1, 2, or 3), passage, and questions for that group. Distribute each group’s card. Then instruct each group to read their passage and answer the questions.

Group 1—Read Colossians 1:15-20.

- What does this passage say about Jesus as God?
- What does this passage teach us about God the Father (note v. 19)?

Group 2—Read John 1:1-3, 14, 18.

- What can we learn from these verses about the identity of “the Word” of which John speaks?
- Why did Jesus come to earth as a human being?

Group 3—Read John 14:15-21; 25-27.

- What do these verses say about the Holy Spirit?
- What is the purpose of the Holy Spirit?

When everyone has finished, bring the groups together and ask each group to share their findings. Then say, “We believe that God exists as God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. We call this the Trinity.” As a group, read Article I and Galatians 4:4-6. Then ask the following questions:

- Do you have a hard time believing in the concept of the Trinity? Why or why not?
- According to Galatians 4:4-6, how does the Trinity function?

CONNECTING TO OUR WORLD

Option 2

Say, “We believe that God exists as God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. We call this the Trinity.”

Read Article 1 and Matthew 28:19-20. Then ask your students:

- How does this passage relate to the Trinity?

Read John 14:6-27. Then ask your students:

- How does this passage describe the function of the Trinity?

Read Galatians 4:4-6. Then ask your students:

- What are the functions of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

Transition: God exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This belief is important to our everyday lives.

Show the image of Andrei Rublev’s painting *The Trinity* from fifteenth-century Russia. This painting tells the story of the three angelic visitors who come to Abraham in Genesis 18. It has long been appreciated in the church as a way of contemplating the Holy Trinity.

Ask the following questions about the painting:

- What do you notice about how the three are relating to one another?
- What do you think and feel about the idea of being invited to join into this fellowship?
- If the very nature of God is self-giving love, what does this say to us about our relationship with God?
- What does this say to us about our relationship as the body of Christ to the people around us and to the world in which we live?

Read or sing the verses to the hymn “Come, Thou Almighty King” as a closing prayer.

*Come, thou Almighty King,
help us thy name to sing,
help us to praise.
Father, all glorious,
o’er all victorious,
come and reign over us,
Ancient of Days.*

*Come, Holy Comforter,
thy sacred witness bear
in this glad hour.
Thou who almighty art,
now rule in ev’ry heart,
and ne’er from us depart,
Spirit of power.*

*Come, thou Incarnate Word,
gird on thy mighty sword,
scatter thy foes.
Let thine almighty aid
our sure defense be made,
our souls on thee be stayed;
thy wonders show.*

*To the great One in Three
eternal praises be,
hence evermore.
His sov’reign majesty
may we in glory see,
and to eternity
love and adore.*

(Sing to the Lord, No. 3)