

BIBLICAL DOCTRINE

A Systematic Consideration of Christianity

GRACE COMMUNITY CHURCH OF BOWLING GREEN

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INTRODUCTION TO BIBLICAL DOCTRINE

SESSION ONE - WHERE WE GO

Psalm 119:18

18 Open my eyes, that I may behold Wonderful things from Your law.

Psalm 36:9

9 For with You is the fountain of life; In Your light we see light.

I Corinthians 13:9–10

9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part;

10 but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away.

In Scripture, three different words are used to speak of doctrine:

- Hebrew (Old Testament): *leqah* – teaching, instruction, what is received

Deuteronomy 32:2

2 “Let my *teaching* drop as the rain, My speech distill as the dew, As the droplets on the fresh grass And as the showers on the herb.

- Greek (New Testament): *didache* – instruction, teaching
- Greek (New Testament): *didaskalia* – the activity of teaching

Titus 1:9

9 holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the *teaching*, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound *doctrine* and to refute those who contradict.

The word itself is somewhat amorphous – it can be ‘true’ teaching, or it can be ‘false’ teaching. When we speak of Biblical Doctrine, we are referring to the teaching of Scripture in all its forms: proclamation, expositional, or thematic. If we speak of Systematic Biblical Doctrine (Systematic Theology), we are referring to the summation of biblical teaching that follows historical themes or categories.

“Why should Christians study Biblical Doctrine?”

1. The primary reason we study biblical doctrine stems from our Lord’s command:

Matthew 28:19–20

19 “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,

20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

2. The study of biblical doctrine brings blessing and benefits to the believer:

2 Timothy 3:16–17

16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;

17 so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

Revelation 1:3

3 Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.

JOHN MACARTHUR: BIBLICAL DOCTRINE (PAGE 41)

SOUND DOCTRINE EXPOSES AND CONFRONTS SIN AND FALSE DOCTRINE (1 TIMOTHY 1:8-11; 4:1-6)

SOUND DOCTRINE MARKS A GOOD SERVANT OF CHRIST JESUS (1 TIMOTHY 4:6; TITUS 2:1)

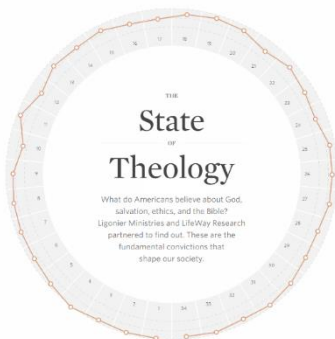
SOUND DOCTRINE IS REWARDED WITH DOUBLE HONOR FOR ELDERS (1 TIMOTHY 5:17)

SOUND DOCTRINE CONFORMS TO GODLINESS (1 TIMOTHY 6:3; TITUS 2:10)

SOUND DOCTRINE IS INCLUDED IN THE APOSTOLIC EXAMPLE TO FOLLOW (2 TIMOTHY 3:10)

SOUND DOCTRINE IS ESSENTIAL TO EQUIPPING PASTORS (2 TIMOTHY 3:16-17)

SOUND DOCTRINE IS THE CONTINUAL MANDATE FOR PREACHERS (2 TIMOTHY 4:2-4)



Ligonier Ministries 2018 State of Theology Survey

Statement NO. 11

Everyone sins a little, but most people are good by nature.

52% of Evangelicals Agree

Statement NO. 3

God accepts the worship of all religions, including Christianity, Judaism, and Islam.

51% of Evangelicals Agree

Statement NO. 6

Jesus is the First and Greatest being created by God.

78% of Evangelicals Agree

“How should Christians study Biblical Doctrine?”

I. We should study biblical doctrine with prayer.

“No matter how intelligent, if the student does not continue to pray for God to give him or her an understanding mind and a believing and humble heart, and the student does not maintain a personal walk with the Lord, then the teachings of Scripture will be misunderstood and disbelieved, doctrinal error will result, and the mind and heart of the student will not be changed for the better but for the worse. Students of systematic theology should resolve at the beginning to keep their lives free from any disobedience to God or any known sin that would disrupt their relationship with Him. They should resolve to maintain with great regularity their own personal devotional lives. They should continually pray for wisdom and understanding of Scripture.” **Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology**

JONATHAN EDWARDS' RESOLUTIONS, AUGUST 17, 1723

65. RESOLVED, VERY MUCH TO EXERCISE MYSELF IN THIS ALL MY LIFE LONG, VIZ. WITH THE GREATEST OPENNESS I AM CAPABLE OF, TO DECLARE MY WAYS TO GOD, AND LAY OPEN MY SOUL TO HIM: ALL MY SINS, TEMPTATIONS, DIFFICULTIES, SORROWS, FEARS, HOPES, DESIRES, AND EVERY THING, AND EVERY CIRCUMSTANCE.

2. We should study biblical doctrine with humility.

“Peter tells us, ‘Clothe yourself, all of you, with humility toward one another, for ‘God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble’ (1 Peter 5:5). Those who study systematic theology will learn many things about the teachings of Scripture that are perhaps not known or not known well by other Christians in their churches or by relatives who are older in the Lord than they are. They may also find that they understand things about Scripture that some of their church officers do not understand, and the even their pastor has perhaps forgotten or never learned well.” **Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology**

James 3:13, 17-18

13 Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom.

17 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy.

18 And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

3. We should study biblical doctrine with reason.

“We find in the New Testament that Jesus and the New Testament authors will often quote a verse of Scripture and then draw logical conclusions from it. They **reason** from Scripture. It is therefore not wrong to use human understanding, human logic, and human reason to draw conclusions from the statements of Scripture. Nevertheless, when we reason and draw what we think to be correct logical deductions from Scripture, we sometimes make mistakes. The deductions we draw from the statements of Scripture are not equal to the statements of Scripture themselves in certainty or authority, for our ability to reason and draw conclusions is not the ultimate standard of truth – **only Scripture is.**” Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*

4. We should study biblical doctrine with help from others.

“We need to be thankful that God has put teachers in the church (“And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, and third teachers...” 1 Corinthians 12:28). We should allow those with gifts of teaching to help us understand Scripture. Also...our study of theology should include talking with other Christians about the things we study.”

Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*

5. We should study biblical doctrine by collecting and understanding all the relevant passages of Scripture on any topic.

6. We should study biblical doctrine with rejoicing and praise.

“The study of theology is not merely a theoretical exercise of the intellect. It is a study of the living God, and of the wonders of all His works in creation and redemption. We cannot study this subject dispassionately! We must love all that God is, all that He says and all that He does. Our response to the study of the theology of Scripture should be that of the Psalmist who said, ‘How precious to me are Your thoughts, O God!’ (Psalm 139:17).” Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*

“What are the subjects we will study in Biblical Doctrine?”

- **Prolegomena:** of truth and how we know it.
- **Bibliology:** of the divine revelation of God’s Word.
- **Theology Proper:** of God the Father.
- **Christology:** of God the Son.
- **Pneumatology:** of God the Holy Spirit.
- **Anthropology and Hamartiology:** of man and sin.
- **Soteriology:** of salvation.
- **Angelology:** of angels and demons.
- **Ecclesiology:** of the church.
- **Eschatology:** of the future.

“What are the limits of Biblical Doctrine (Systematic Theology)?”

1. The silence of the Bible on a particular topic (Deuteronomy 29:29, John 20:30, 21:25).
2. A student’s partial knowledge/understanding of the entire Bible (Luke 24:25-27; 2 Peter 3:16).
3. The inadequacy of human language (1 Corinthians 2:13-14; 2 Corinthians 12:4).
4. The finiteness of the human mind (Job 11:7-12; 38:1-39:30; Romans 11:33-35).
5. The lack of spiritual discernment and maturity (1 Corinthians 3:1-3; Hebrews 5:11-13).

BIBLICAL DOCTRINE

A SYSTEMATIC CONSIDERATION OF CHRISTIANITY

INTRODUCTION TO BIBLICAL DOCTRINE

SESSION TWO - PROLEGOMENA: HOW WE KNOW

prolegomena: “that which comes before”

Greek: (pro) “before” (lego) “I speak”



For us - - what comes before our digging into Biblical Doctrine are some thoughts on how we know what we know - - a lesson on thinking.

Any careful study, certainly one as important as the study of God, carries some preconditions: essentials that establish a common foundation, or approach, to the study at hand.

Logic: the Rational Precondition

Truth: the Epistemological Precondition

Interpretation: the Hermeneutical Precondition

LOGIC: THE RATIONAL PRECONDITION

Logic deals with the methods of valid thinking: it reveals how to draw proper conclusions from premises. It is a prerequisite of all thinking, including all theological thought. Logic is an inescapable tool that even those who deny it cannot avoid using it, for it is built into the very fabric of the rational universe.¹

Logic's Rules of Thought

1. The law of noncontradiction (A is not non-A)
2. The law of identity (A is A)
3. The law of excluded middle (either A or non-A)

THE LAW OF NONCONTRADICTION

Without the law of noncontradiction we could not say that this chair is not a non-chair. Or, to our focus, without the law of noncontradiction we could not say that God is not non-God. Thus, God could be the devil or whatever is anti-God.

¹ Normal L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, Page 61

THE LAW OF IDENTITY

Without the law of identity we could not say that this chair is a chair. Or, to our focus, without the law of identity we could not say that God is God. Therefore, God would not be identical to Himself; He could be something other than Himself, which is plainly absurd.

THE LAW OF EXCLUDED MIDDLE

Without the law of excluded middle we could not say that this chair is either a chair or a non-chair. In other words, when we use the term chair we could be referring to both a chair and a non-chair. Or, to our focus, when we use the term God, we could be referring to both God and not God. This is clearly meaningless.

Should we accept these rules of thought? Actually, the laws of thought are self-evident – they don't need any defense and to reject them is non-sensical and therefore not careful thought. For example, once one knows what "square" and "four-sided figure" mean, there is no need to prove or defend that a square is a four-sided figure. It is simply seen to be true (rational intuition).

Building on the Foundation

DEDUCTIVE THINKING is where one proposition is correctly deduced or drawn from others – precisely. (Syllogism)

1. All men are mortal. (If)
2. Socrates is a man. (And)
3. Socrates is mortal. (Therefore)

INDUCTIVE THINKING is where a proposition is probable when drawn from others – generally. (Hypothesis - Probability)

- | | |
|---------------------|--|
| 1. I exist. | 1. The teacher's quizzes have all been easy. |
| 2. I am a human. | 2. Tomorrow we are having a test. |
| 3. Rocks exist. | 3. The test will be easy. |
| 4. Rocks are human. | |

Sherlock Holmes upon first meeting Watson:



“Observation with me is second nature. You appeared to be surprised when I told you, on our first meeting, that you had come from Afghanistan.”

“You were told, no doubt.”

“Nothing of the sort. I knew you came from Afghanistan. From long habit the train of thoughts ran so swiftly through my mind, that I arrived at the conclusion without being conscious of intermediate steps. There were such steps, however. The train of reasoning ran, ‘Here is a gentleman of a medical type, but with the air of a military

man. Clearly an army doctor, then. He has just come from the tropics, for his face is dark, and that is not the natural tint of his skin, for his wrists are fair. He has undergone hardship and sickness, as his haggard face says clearly. His left arm has been injured. He holds it in a stiff and unnatural manner. Where in the tropics could an English army doctor have seen much hardship and got his arm wounded? Clearly in Afghanistan.' The whole train of thought did not occupy a second. I then remarked that you came from Afghanistan, and you were astonished."

Remember ... any logic applied (deductive or inductive) cannot violate the Laws of Logic.

TRUTH: THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL PRECONDITION

The nature of truth is crucial to the Christian faith. Not only does Christianity claim there is absolute truth (which is true for everyone, everywhere, always) but it also insists that truth is that which corresponds to the way things really are. Christian truth-claims actually correspond to the state of affairs about which they claim to inform us.²

A SHORT HISTORY OF TRUTH IN WESTERN CIVILIZATION

1. **Premodern** (400-1600 A.D.)
2. **Modern** (1600-1900 A.D.)
3. **Postmodern** (1960-Present)
 - a. **The Greatest Generation** (Born 1901-1924 ... Age 94-117)
 - i. The Great Depression and World War II
 - ii. Strong models of teamwork and progress
 - iii. Few modern conveniences as children
 - b. **The Silent Generation** (Born 1924-1945 ... Age 73-94)
 - i. Postwar happiness
 - ii. Pre-feminism, stay at home moms, men loyal to lifetime careers
 - iii. Work hard - - keep quiet ... "Children should be seen and not heard."
 - c. **Baby Boomers** (Born 1945-1965 ... Age 53-73)
 - i. "These are the men and women who tuned in, got high, dropped out, dodged the draft, swung in the Sixties and became hippies in the Seventies. Some, like Bill Clinton, even made it to the White House. Idealistic and uncynical, this was the generation that fought the cold war and smashed down the Berlin Wall"
 - ii. Rock and Roll, Elvis, Woodstock, Miniskirts, Barbie Dolls
 - iii. The first two-income households

² Norman L. Geisler, Systematic Theology, Page 81

- iv. The TV generation
- v. The divorce generation
- vi. The tolerant generation
- d. **Generation X** (Born 1965-1980 ... Age 38-53)
 - i. Latch-key kids, isolated and street smart
 - ii. PC kids
 - iii. Loyalty to self – average 7 careers in a lifetime
 - iv. MTV generation
 - v. They want what they want and they want it now
 - vi. Skeptics
 - vii. Deeply in debt
- e. **Generation Y** – Millennials (Born 1980-1995/2000 ... age 18-38)
 - i. Peter Pan generation - - delayed adulthood
 - ii. Yahoo, mobile phones, Google, Facebook, iPhones
 - iii. Unlimited access to information
 - iv. Strong opinions with weak convictions
- f. **Generation Z** (Born 1995 – Present ... to age 23)

Postmoderns have a varied view of truth:

- Relativism – the belief that all truth is relative, being determined by some group.
- Subjectivism – the belief that all truth is subjective, being defined by the perspective of the individual.
- Skepticism – the belief that truth cannot be known with certainty.
- Perspectivism – the belief that truth is found in the combined perspectives of many.
- Pragmatism – the belief that truth is ultimately defined by that which works to accomplish the best outcome. “The end justifies the means.”
- Objectivism – the belief that truth is an objective reality that exists whether someone believes it or not.

WHAT TRUTH IS NOT

Truth is Not “Whatever Works”

This is pragmatism ... a statement is known to be true if it brings the right results. Truth is what works.

Truth is Not “That Which is Consistent”

Empty statements and false statements can be consistent. A group who conspire together to present a false narrative can be consistent in their statements – that does not make their statements true. We might well say, something that is inconsistent is not true - - but we cannot at the same time say that something which is consistent must be true.

Truth Is Not “What is Intended”

This is the idea that a statement should be considered true if the author (speaker) intended it to be true. Many claims agree with the intention of the author (speaker), but they are mistaken nonetheless: they are not true. A slip of the tongue can occur which doesn't accurately reflect the intention of the author (speaker), and when they do they are false. This confusion between truth and intention simply makes sincerity the test of truth. The reality is that truly sincere people can be truly and sincerely wrong.

Truth is Not “That Which is Comprehensive”

This is the notion that a preponderance of data affirms what is true; being encyclopedic makes a thing true and the lack of data makes a thing false. This is plainly ridiculous – clearly one can have an exhaustive view of what is false and an incomplete view of what is true. A person can wax eloquently about what is false and another can briefly point out what is true.

Truth is Not “What Feels Good”

This is very popular - - it is subjectivism: what provides a satisfying feeling is truth and what feels bad is false. Thus, truth is found in our subjective feelings. Mystics and New Age philosophies tend toward this view. It is evident that bad news doesn't make us feel good – but that doesn't mean the bad news wasn't true. In fact, the truth of a bad thing is what produces the bad feeling. The truth is: the truth often hurts.

WHAT TRUTH IS

The Correspondence View of Truth: *truth is that which corresponds to its object.*

Truth is always found in correspondence. As applied to the world, truth is the way things really are. Truth is “telling it like it is”. By contrast, falsehood is that which does not correspond to its object. Falsehood does not “tell it like it is”; it is a misrepresentation of the way things are.

TRUE STATEMENTS ARE THOSE WHICH CORRESPOND TO OBJECTIVE REALITY.

FALSE STATEMENTS ARE THOSE WHICH DO NOT CORRESPOND TO OBJECTIVE REALITY.

POSTMODERN IMPACT ON RELIGION

Universalism: the belief that all people, good or bad, will eventually make it to Heaven.

Pluralism: the belief that there are many ways to God that are equally valid.

Syncretism: the assimilation of differing beliefs and practices.

Inclusivism: the belief that salvation is only through Christ, but Christ may be revealed in other religions.

These aren't just reflected outside of Christianity - - but within as well: a result of the influence of postmodernism.

VATICAN II (1962-1965) AND INCLUSIVISM

“But the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the creator. In the first place among these there are the Moslems, whom professing to hold the faith of Abraham, along with us adore the one and merciful God, who on the last day will judge mankind. Those also can attain salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the gospel of Christ or his church, yet sincerely seek god and, moved by grace, strive by their deeds to do his will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience.”

BILLY GRAHAM AND INCLUSIVISM

Dr. Robert Schuller: Tell me, what do you think is the future of Christianity?

Billy Graham: Well, Christianity and being a true believer—you know, I think there’s the Body of Christ. This comes from all the Christian groups around the world, outside the Christian groups. I think everybody that loves Christ, or knows Christ, whether they’re conscious of it or not, they’re members of the Body of Christ. And I don’t think that we’re going to see a great sweeping revival, that will turn the whole world to Christ at any time. I think James answered that, the Apostle James in the first council in Jerusalem, when he said that God’s purpose for this age is to call out a people for His name. And that’s what God is doing today, He’s calling people out of the world for His name, whether they come from the Muslim world, or the Buddhist world, or the Christian world or the non-believing world, they are members of the Body of Christ because they’ve been called by God. They may not even know the name of Jesus but they know in their hearts that they need something that they don’t have, and they turn to the only light that they have, and I think that they are saved, and that they’re going to be with us in heaven.

Schuller: What, what I hear you saying that it’s possible for Jesus Christ to come into human hearts and soul and life, even if they’ve been born in darkness and have never had exposure to the Bible. Is that a correct interpretation of what you’re saying?

Graham: Yes, it is, because I believe that. I’ve met people in various parts of the world in tribal situations, that they have never seen a Bible or heard about a Bible, and never heard of Jesus, but they’ve believed in their hearts that there was a God, and they’ve tried to live a life that was quite apart from the surrounding community in which they lived.

Schuller: I’m so thrilled to hear you say this. There’s a wideness in God’s mercy.

Graham: There is. There definitely is.

CHALLENGES: WHAT ABOUT THE ‘MYSTERIES’ OF THE FAITH?

Challenges come against reason and truth from within Christianity itself. We will in this course consider most of these at some length – for now, a brief look at two.

THE TRINITY

The orthodox Christian view of the Trinity posits that there is only one God and yet three different persons make up that one God. This appears to some to violate the law of noncontradiction: how can God be only one and yet three at the same time and in the same sense?

When the question is put that way the answer can only be, “He cannot.” However, this question misstates the doctrine of the Trinity. In evangelical theology, God is not both three and only one *in the same sense*. He is only one *in nature* (essence) but three in a different sense – *in persons*.

Three persons in one essence is no more a contradiction than are the three corners on one triangle. God has one *what* (*nature*) with three *whos* (*persons*). This is a mystery, but it is no contradiction. A true contradiction would be if God were three persons and one person at the same time and in the same sense. Or, He would have to be three natures and only one nature at the same time and in the same sense. But this is not what we believe.



THE INCARNATION OF THE SON

Here is another great mystery. But it doesn't present a contradiction as many claim. The Incarnation of the Son affirms that in Christ God became man, and this is impossible, since God is infinite and man is finite – an infinite cannot become finite. The Eternal cannot become temporal any more than the Uncreated can become creature.

The answer to this apparent contradiction lies in the misstatement of what the Incarnation of the Son really is. It was not God *becoming* man, but the second person of the Godhead *adding* humanity. In other words, the Son of God did not stop being divine in order to become human, but rather He embraced another nature – humanity – in addition to His divinity. In the Incarnation, the infinite nature of God did not become finite; the second person of the Godhead, who retained His infinite nature, also assumed another nature, and it was finite.

Remember, in the Trinity, there is one *WHAT* and three *WHOS*. One essence and three persons. In the Incarnation, *Who* took on *What*, a human nature, in addition to the *What* He retained (His divine nature). This is not a contradiction because the infinite did not become finite, nor the Uncreated become the created.

Mystery of mysteries: in the Trinity there is one What and three Whos. In Christ, there is one Who and two Whats. In the Incarnation, one Who in God assumed another What, so that there were two Whats (natures) in one Who (person).

Biblical Doctrine (Systematic Theology) is dependent on logic in many ways. All of its claims are subject to the basic laws of thought. Contradictions cannot be both true and false. Truth is objective; it must always correspond to reality. And, next week, we will see that Biblical Doctrine requires a consistent approach to interpreting truth: **the Hermeneutical Precondition**.

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A SYSTEMATIC CONSIDERATION OF CHRISTIANITY

INTRODUCTION TO BIBLICAL DOCTRINE

SESSION THREE - PROLEGOMENA: HOW WE KNOW, PART TWO

prolegomena: “that which comes before”

Greek: (*pro*) “before” (*lego*) “I speak”

Logic: the Rational Precondition

Truth: the Epistemological Precondition

Interpretation: the Hermeneutical Precondition

INTERPRETATION: THE HERMENEUTICAL PRECONDITION

Logic and truth are bound up, without contradiction, in the very nature of God himself. Men and women, made in His image, have the capacity to reason and come to truth. The question is pressed: can a finite being (man) meaningfully express the nature of the infinite God of Christianity? Can we have God-talk?

GOD-TALK: ALTERNATIVES

1. it is equivocal (totally different from the way God actually is)
2. it is univocal (totally the same as God actually is)
3. it is analogous (similar to the way God actually is)

THE ONLY VIABLE ALTERNATIVE TO AVOID SELF-DEFEATING SKEPTICISM ON THE ONE HAND AND SELF-DEIFYING DOGMATISM ON THE OTHER IS TO DEMONSTRATE THAT LEGITIMATE GOD-TALK IS ANALOGOUS TO THE WAY GOD ACTUALLY IS. THAT IS TO SAY, LANGUAGE ABOUT GOD IS NEITHER EQUIVOCAL (TOTALLY DIFFERENT) NOR UNIVOCAL (TOTALLY THE SAME), BUT IS SIMILAR (ANALOGOUS) TO THE WAY GOD TRULY EXISTS.³

Biblical doctrine affirms that God has two great revelations: **special revelation** in the Bible and **general revelation** in nature. Both involve an analogous understanding of God.

³ Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, Page 102

SPECIAL REVELATION (SCRIPTURE)

God is beyond our thoughts and concepts...

Romans 11:33

33 Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

Human language is adequate for expressing the attributes of God...

Yet, an adequate expression of God in human language will nonetheless be limited – at best it can only be analogous. No term taken from human experience (and all biblical terms come from human experience) can do any more than tell us what God is like. None can express comprehensively what God really is.

GENERAL REVELATION (NATURE)

All created beings have actuality because they actually exist, and they have potentiality because they have the potential to not exist. God is Pure Actuality with no potential: He cannot cease to exist. Thus, there must be a difference between the Creator and the creation. Created beings have limitations, God does not. Yet, it can be said that the creation is an expression of the actuality of God – for it comes from Him. We can, therefore, speak of God as He has revealed Himself in creation with one big proviso: He is not like His creation in its potentialities, but only in its actuality.

Romans 1:20

20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made.

INTERPRETING THE REVELATION

Since the general revelation and special revelation are the bases for all we can know about God, it is essential that we understand them correctly. We must seek to understand them objectively. If we cannot, or do not, then we cannot say our understanding of God is logical or truthful.

TOWARD AN OBJECTIVE HERMENEUTIC

- I. the existence of an absolute Mind (God)
 - a. at least one finite mind exists (me)
 - b. I think therefore I am
 - c. I am limited in my thought – I doubt and I discover new thoughts
 - d. any finite thing demands a cause
 - e. there must be an infinite Mind, an uncaused Cause, that caused my finite mind
2. the absolute nature of meaning
 - a. if there is an absolute (infinite) Mind, there must be absolute meaning
 - b. whatever an infinite Mind means by something is what it means objectively, infinitely, and absolutely
3. the analogy of infinite meaning and finite understanding
 - a. the infinite Mind has infinite knowledge (omniscience)
 - b. the infinite Mind also has all power (omnipotent)

- c. the infinite Mind cannot act contrary to reason – He cannot act in a contradictory way.
 - d. it is not contradictory for an infinite Mind to convey meaning to a finite mind.
 - e. an infinite Mind knows things in a much higher way than finite minds do, yet what He reveals is the same as what He knows: *the things signified is the same as the thing.*
4. it is not impossible for an infinite Mind to communicate with finite minds because there is a common (analogous) ground between them.
- a. it is possible to know
 - b. whether one actually knows depends on meeting the necessary conditions for understanding (interpreting) the objective meaning

SPECIAL REVELATION OBJECTIVELY UNDERSTOOD

1. look for the author's meaning, not the reader's meaning
2. look for the author's meaning (what?), not the author's purpose (why?)
3. look for meaning in the text, not beyond the text
4. look for meaning in affirmation, not in implication

GENERAL REVELATION OBJECTIVELY UNDERSTOOD

1. the law of noncontradiction
2. the law of identity
3. the law of excluded middle
4. the principle of causality
5. the principle of consistency
6. the principle of uniformity
7. the principle of teleology

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

God, the infinite Mind, the uncaused Cause, has two great revelations; general and special, natural and supernatural. Both are objective and clear. Both are capable of distortion by depraved human beings. There are proper and improper ways to interpret each of them.

For general revelation, these include the basic rules of logic, as well as the principles of causality, consistency, uniformity, and teleology. When used properly, the finite mind can reach an objective understanding.

For special revelation, these include looking for the author's meaning, in the text, and what it affirms. When used properly, the finite mind can reach an objective understanding.

The revelation of God is not distorted – it is our understanding of it that is distorted – and this comes from our unwillingness to obey the truth it reveals.

Romans 1:18–19

18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.

BIBLICAL DOCTRINE

A SYSTEMATIC CONSIDERATION OF CHRISTIANITY

INTRODUCTION TO BIBLICAL DOCTRINE

SESSION FOUR – CERTAINTY: ESSENTIALS AND NON-ESSENTIALS

certainty: “Certainty is a lack of doubt about some state of affairs. For example, if I have no doubt that the earth is the third planet from the sun, then I can be said to be certain of that fact. Certainty admits of degrees, just as doubt admits of degrees. Absolute certainty is the lack of any doubt at all. Short of that, there are various levels of relative certainty.⁴”

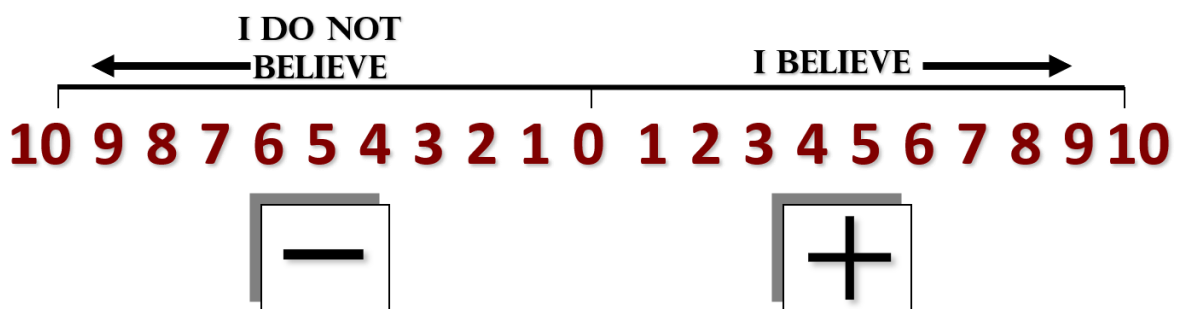
IS IT POSSIBLE TO BE ABSOLUTELY CERTAIN ABOUT ANYTHING?

Types of Certainty

1. Emotional Certainty: assurance based upon subjective emotional conviction of the truth of something, thereby producing commitment to that truth.
2. Intellectual Certainty: assurance based on objective, measurable, examined or tested conclusions.
 - a. Mathematical Certainty (scientific method)
 - b. Analytical Certainty (true by analysis)
 - c. Empirical Certainty (weight of evidence)
 - d. Logical Certainty (what is reasonable)
3. Moral Certainty (beyond a reasonable doubt)

Degrees of Certainty

Chart of Certainty



⁴ John M. Frame, “Certainty”, *IVP Dictionary of Apologetics*

How certain are you?

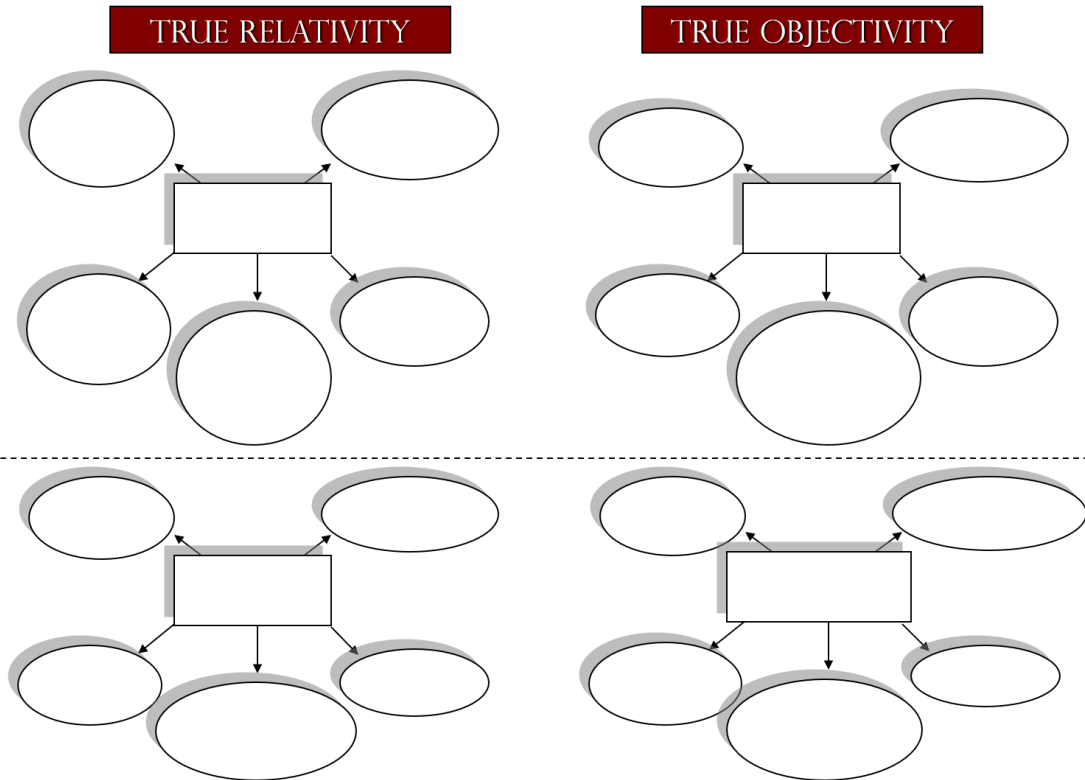
1. There is a God?
2. That Christ rose from the grave?
3. That God loves you?
4. That Christ is coming back?
5. That Christ is going to come and Rapture the Church before the Great Tribulation?
6. That Christ is coming back to reign on the earth for a thousand years?
7. That God wants you to trust that He will protect you from all physical harm?
8. That God wants you to trust that He will protect you from all emotional harm?
9. That God wants you to trust in Him in every circumstance?
10. That the Bible does not have any historical errors?
11. That Adam and Eve were real people?
12. That there was really a snake in the garden?
13. That God created the earth in six literal days?
14. The God created the earth?
15. That Christ paid for the sins of all mankind?
16. That Christ died for you?
17. That the Apocrypha (15 books in the Roman Catholic Bible) should not be included in Scripture?
18. That the book of 3 John should be included in Scripture?
19. That the book of Genesis should be included in Scripture?
20. That the gift of tongues ceased in the first century?

Communicating Certainty: Modal Verbs

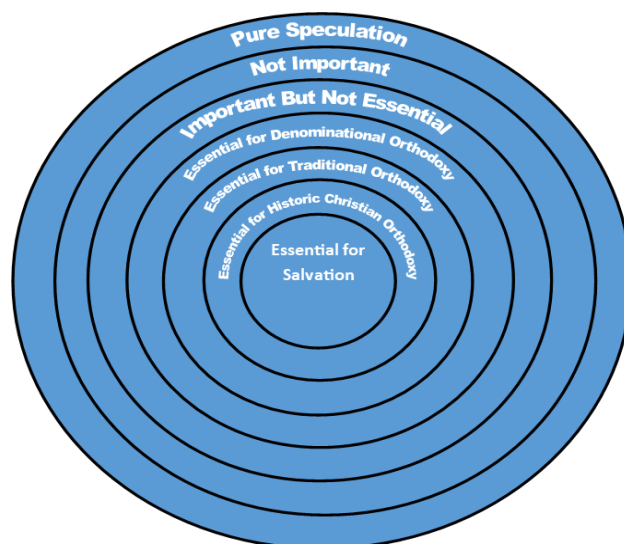
- **Complete certainty: will, can, shall, must**
 - He will be finished tomorrow.
 - You can take my car.
 - She shall cook the dinner.
 - They must be together.
- **Probability and possibility: should, may, ought (to)**
 - She should be here soon.
 - They may drink the Kool-Aid
 - He ought to apply for that job.
- **Weak probability: might, could**
 - He might win.
 - You could win the Lottery.

Objectivity and Relativity

- **Situational Relativity:** *dependent upon the culture, time, situation or some other variable.*
- **Autonomous Relativity:** *truly relative in all situations.*
- **Non-Essential Objectivity:** *truths not related to salvation.*
- **Essential Objectivity:** *truths necessary for salvation.*



The Matter of Essentials and Non-Essentials



Essential for Salvation: These are the most essential doctrines of all essentials. This includes what every Christian should always be willing to die for. In essence, if someone does not believe the doctrines that are “essential for salvation,” they are not saved. Hence, it is at the center of the circle.

What we include:

Belief in God (there is no such thing as an atheistic Christian)

Belief that you are a sinner in need of God’s mercy (1 John 1:10)

Issues pertaining to the person and work of Christ:

Belief in Christ’s deity and humanity (1 John 4:2-3; Rom. 10:9)

Belief that Christ died on the cross and rose bodily from the grave for our sins (1 Cor 15:3-4)

Belief that faith in Christ is necessary (John 3:16)

Without these, you simply don’t have any sense of what it means to be a Christian.

Romans 10:3

3 For not knowing about God’s righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God.

Galatians 1:8–9

8 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!

9 As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981)

We are living in an age that dislikes precision and definitions. It is an age that is anti-theological, anti-doctrinal and which dislikes propositions and exact knowledge. It is a lazy age in every respect, a sentimental, sloppy age, an age that wants entertainment and dislikes effort. In the whole of life today the principle is ‘something for nothing’. We are ready to take but we are not ready to work; we are not ready to give ourselves. It is true all round and it accounts for most of our problems. It is particularly true in the realm of the Christian church.

People say you might as well try to dissect beauty, or an aroma, as to define the Christian faith. It cannot be done, they say. You experience it marvelous and wonderful! But if you try to analyze it, then you destroy it, there is nothing left. You must not bring the rude hands of analysis here.

Another way in which it is put is this: that Christianity is only a matter of one’s spirit. What makes us Christians is our spirit, and if we have an appropriate spirit, then we are Christians. Christianity is an attitude, a view of life, a general statement concerning our personality and our being. There was a slogan not so long ago which said, ‘Christianity is caught, not taught’. You catch the spirit. You feel it in the meeting and you get it. But what is it? Well, you do not know, but that does not matter. You have got it! That is the great thing and you feel much happier and much better than you did before.

Then a third way in which it is put is this: that after all what matters is our general reaction to the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now this is one of the most popular views of all. People say, ‘You read the Gospels and there you see this portrait of Him and, as it were, you meet Him. Now what decides whether you are a Christian or not is this: Do you like Him? Do you want to be like Him? Do you try to imitate Him? What is your reaction to Him?’ You must not come and dissect, and bring your propositions and your theology and say you have got to believe this and not believe that. What matters is your total response to Him, and if you react favorably to Him, then you are a Christian.

The fourth way is the approach that describes Christianity in terms of living. What does it matter what people believe as long as they are living good, Christ like lives, as long as they are generous, ready to make sacrifices, ready to help others, and concerned about the uplift of the race? That is what makes people Christians.

Now this dangerous attitude takes one other form. I put this in a category on its own because I am beginning to think that in some ways it is the most subtle form of all among evangelical people. It is the tendency to estimate whether or not people are Christians, not by what they actually say about their beliefs but by what you feel about them.

So what do we say about this modern tendency? Here is the answer.

First, that Christian people are mistaking natural qualities, niceness, a cultural veneer or politeness, for true Christian grace. It seems that we are no longer capable of differentiating between the two. How often today is affability mistaken for saintliness! 'What a gracious man he is,' they say. What they really mean is this: he never criticizes and he agrees with everybody and everything. I know of nothing more dangerous than that.

Secondly, the fact that people are devout tells us nothing about the truth of what they believe. There are very devout Jews, devout Muslims, devout followers of Buddha, Confucius, and so on. A devout attitude in and of itself tells us nothing.

Thirdly, the moment we begin to talk in these terms, it means that we have abandoned all objective standards. We are now judging only by our own subjective feelings, by our impressions and reactions. Is there anything so dangerous?

Fourthly, and much more important, it is a complete denial of what the Apostle is teaching at this very point, and indeed in the whole of his Epistle. The Jews, he says, are lost and they need to be saved. Why? Because they are lacking in exact knowledge of the truth. This is the reason for their condemnation. So we must never put anything before exact knowledge. It is the most important thing of all.

I am not saying, of course, that a Christian is someone who has a complete understanding about the whole of the Christian faith. Of course not! Nobody has that. We are all still learning.

All that I am saying is that there must be a clear understanding about an irreducible minimum. You cannot be a Christian at all unless you have that.

Essential for Historic Christian Orthodoxy: These include beliefs “essential for salvation” but are broader in that they express what has been believed by the historic Christian church for the last two thousand years, no matter which tradition. This is expressed by the Vincentian Canon (434 A.D.): “that which has been believed everywhere, always and by all.” It is simply asking, “What have all Christians everywhere always believed?”

Some of what we include:

The doctrine of the Trinity as expressed at Nicea

The doctrine of the Hypostatic Union (Christ is fully man and fully God) as expressed at Chalcedon

The belief in the future second coming of Christ

A belief in the inspiration and authority of Scripture

A belief in God’s transcendence (his metaphysical distinction from the universe)

A belief in God’s immanence (his present activity in the world and our lives)

A belief in God’s sovereignty (while there are different ways to define sovereignty, this basically purports that God is in control)

Belief that Christ is the only way to a right relationship with God

Belief in eternal punishment of the unredeemed

Please notice that these are essential, even if they are not as essential as those expressed in the previous category. In other words, these do not represent negotiables. These are still cardinal doctrines.

Essential for Traditional Orthodoxy: Again, these will necessarily include all of those from the two previous categories, and add some distinctives of their own. Essentials here will include all of those that are foundational to one of the three main Christian traditions: Protestantism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Roman Catholicism. These are beliefs that distinguish one tradition from the next, but are not absolutely essential from the broader Christian worldview expressed above.

Some Protestant distinctives would include:

- General belief in the major pronouncements of the first seven ecumenical councils (325-787 AD)
- Belief in the necessity for a personal relationship with Jesus Christ
- Belief that justification is through faith alone on the basis of Christ alone
- Belief that Scripture alone has ultimate and final authority on all matters of faith and practice
- The canon of Scripture made up of 66 books (excluding the Deuterocanonical books)

Some Roman Catholic distinctives would include:

- Belief in transubstantiation (the bread and wine turn into the actual body and blood of Christ)
- Belief that justification is through faith and works
- Belief that both Scripture and unwritten tradition have ultimate authority as they are interpreted by the Magisterium
- Belief in the authority of twenty-one ecumenical councils
- Belief that the Pope is the infallible vicar of Christ
- Belief in the Marian dogmas
- Belief that the canon includes the Deuterocanonical books

Some Eastern Orthodox distinctives would include:

- Belief in the infallibility of the first seven ecumenical councils (325-787 AD)
- Belief that the liturgy of the Church is part of the Gospel
- Rejection of substitutionary atonement and the imputation of Adam's sin
- Salvation by grace through faith as God works these out through our unification with Him (theosis)
- Traditional inclusion of the Deuterocanonical book (although there is some debate about this)

Again, for each one of these traditions, these represent essential distinctions which, while not as cardinal as those in the previous two categories, are important nonetheless.

Essential for Denominational Orthodoxy: This will be similar to the above, but one step down in importance, dealing as it does with the particular and peculiar denominational expressions by the various Protestant traditions.

Some examples:

- Credo-baptism, i.e., Baptism is only for believers (Baptists)
- Infant baptism (Presbyterians, Methodists, Anglicans)
- Unconditional election (Reformed and Presbyterians)
- Arminian theology (Methodists, Nazarenes)
- Belief in the continuation of the Charismatic gifts (Pentecostals, Church of God)

While these might be considered worthy of breaking local fellowship in practice, they are not important enough to break ultimate fellowship. In other words, these represent legitimate debates that should not affect our unity.

Important but Not-Essential: These are those beliefs that do not describe any particular tradition necessarily. They are important, but not that important.

Some examples:

- Beliefs about particulars in the creation debate
- Belief whether the books of Jonah and Job are historical accounts
- Beliefs about the authorship of 2 Peter
- Belief about particular end-time schemes (i.e. premillennial, amillennial, post-millennial)
- The order of books in the canon
- Which translation of the Bible to use from the pulpit
- Which Gospel was written first
- How often one should celebrate the Lord's supper
- Whether or not Christ taught in Greek or Aramaic

Not Important: These are beliefs that people have concerning Christian doctrine that are not important for any expression and do not affect Christian devotion or spirituality.

Some examples:

- The date of Christ's birth (Christmas)
- What kind of music to play at church
- Whether to use real wine or grape juice at communion
- Whether to hold Saturday night services

Pure Speculation: That is just what these are – speculation. We just don't know one way or another, nor does it matter.

Some examples:

- Did Adam have a belly-button?
- Belief in the eternal destiny of pets.
- What was God doing "before" creation?
- Will there be meat to eat in heaven?
- How long was it before Adam and Eve fell?