

BIBLICAL DOCTRINE

A Systematic Consideration of Christianity

GRACE COMMUNITY CHURCH OF BOWLING GREEN

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INTRODUCTION: 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.

1 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)

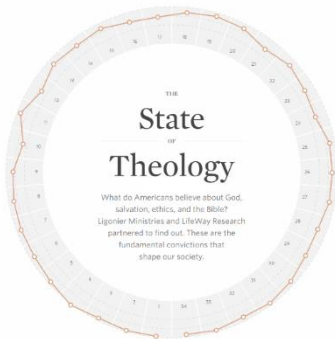
SOUND DOCTRINE IS REWARDED WITH DOUBLE HONOR FOR ELDERS (1 TIMOTHY 5:17)

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*..." I 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

SESSION TWO

PROLEGOMENA: HOW WE KNOW

Tonight - - let's start with a definition ...

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"

² Norman L. Geisler, Systematic Theology, Page 81

- ii. Rock and Roll, Elvis, Woodstock, Miniskirts, Barbie Dolls
- iii. The first two-income households
- 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**.