

Formation of Biblical Doctrine – Outline

I. Preconditions to Studying

- A. *The Lack of 'Theological Instant Coffee'* – There is no fail-proof method that guarantees 100% correct doctrine in one step.
- B. *The Need for Spiritual Sensitivity*
 - 1. Acknowledgment of the Spirit's Centrality
 - 2. Preparation of the Heart to Receive the Things of God
 - 3. Illumination from the Spirit of God
- C. *The Need for Method and Tact* (2 Tim. 2:15)
- D. *The Need for Whole Commitment* (1 Tim. 4:15-16)

II. The Goals We Aim For

- A. *Spiritual Transformation* (1 Tim. 1:5-6)
- B. *A Higher View of God* (Romans 11:33-36)
 - 1. In Terms of Knowledge
 - 2. In Terms of Obedience
 - 3. In Terms of Relationship
- C. *Accounting for All the Truth*
 - 1. Inclusive of the Entire Truth (1 Tim. 4:11)
 - a. Breadth and Comprehensiveness
 - b. Depth and Attention
 - 2. Exclusive Toward Every Error (1 Tim. 1:3)

III. The Tools We Use

- A. *Didactic Tools – Resources that Teach Doctrine*
- B. *Linguistic Tools – Resources that Help with Words*
 - 1. Concordances
 - 2. Dictionaries
 - 3. Greek and Hebrew Study Tools
- C. *Textual Tools – Resources that Explain the Bible*
 - 1. An Accurate Bible Translation
 - 2. Topical Bibles
 - 3. Commentaries
 - 4. Study Bibles

IV. The Scripture We Handle

- A. *The Big Picture We Acknowledge* – In formulating a Bible doctrine, we must understand, or at least try to identify, where it belongs in the big picture of Biblical history. God is working out His purpose through the ages, and the more we understand this purpose, the more coherent our understanding of doctrine will be.

- B. *The Books We Survey* – Sometimes an entire book will cover a main theme in Scripture, which we can go to as a primary source for the development of doctrine. For the High Priesthood of Christ, we go to Hebrews. For redemption, we go to Ruth. For the Church, we go to Ephesians. For Reconciliation, we go to Philemon. For the rapture, we go to 1 Thessalonians.
- C. *The Texts We Exposit* – Many times, though it may be covered by a book or perhaps sporadic verses, doctrine will be developed specifically in a set of verses in Scripture. These passages are essential to grasp and exegete properly. For instance, Philippians 2:5-11 is an essential text concerning the humiliation and exaltation of Christ. John 1:1-18 is another vital passage surrounding Christ's incarnation.
- D. *The Verses We Cite* – Even when we have a book or a chapter that explain or illustrate a doctrine, there will always be verses that contribute to a greater theme, and they must be applied with consciousness of their context but also their relation to other verses on the same subject.
- E. *The Implications We Derive* – Sometimes a verse will give an indirect reference or implication to a truth. An illustration of this can be seen in Hebrews, where the writer says “In that he says, 'a new covenant,' he has made the first old.” (Heb. 8:13). Obviously the text didn't say the foregoing covenant was old, but embedded in its statement was the implication which the writer to the Hebrews could legitimately capitalize on. Now, we must be careful when finding implications, but when true implications are found they are certainly legitimate.
- F. *The Presuppositions We Identify* – Sometimes, similar to an implication in a verse, there will be an assumption embedded in the text made by the author that gives legitimacy to what he is saying. For instance, in Matthew 9:3, the Lord forgave a man's sins. The Pharisees responded by saying “This man is blaspheming.” The Lord did not directly claim to be God, but His statement assumed it, meaning two things: (1) True forgiveness of sins can only be granted by God (2) In that the Lord forgave sins, He acknowledged His deity. Learning to identify a text's presuppositions will give a richer understanding of its force.
- G. *The Comparisons We Make*
 - 1. Practical Illustrations: Often in studying a doctrine, illustrations will need to be made for the sake of clarification. These illustrations are usually embedded in an event recorded in Scripture. To shine light on the force of a doctrine, comparing it with a practical illustration will help greatly.
 - 2. Similar Texts: Many texts have counterparts that express the same truth with a different emphasis or approach. This is very helpful to appreciate the many-faceted nature of God's truth and to have a clearer picture of the doctrine's implications.
 - 3. Comparison and Contrast With Similar Topics: Because Scripture has one Author ultimately, there is a beautiful and deliberate design to the interrelation

of its teachings. To be faithful to this principle, we must learn to compare similar topics so their light can shine on one another, but also to contrast topics so their intricate distinctions and design can be appreciated.

- H. *The Words We Define* – Every text is made up of words that must be exactly defined and understood. Otherwise, an entire concept could be maligned due to sloppy definitions. This will require an accurate translation as well as a knowledge of how to do word studies and study translation issues in a passage.

V. The Principles We Apply

- A. *We Employ Spiritual Intelligence and Discernment*
- B. *We Handle Scripture With Precision and Carefulness*
 - 1. We Distinguish Things that Differ
 - 2. We Pay Attention to Exact Words
- C. *We Avoid the Tendencies of Human Pride*
 - 1. Novelty for Novelty's Sake
 - 2. Speculation Outside of Scripture
 - 3. System-Based Defense
- D. *We Maintain Balance, While Avoiding Compromise*
 - 1. We Let God Speak
 - 2. We Avoid Underemphasis
 - 3. We Avoid Overemphasis
- E. *There is No Substitute for Being Thoroughly Biblical*

VI. 5 Practical Steps We Follow

- A. *Consideration – Preparing the Heart*
 - 1. Examination
 - 2. Prayer
 - 3. A Right Approach
- B. *Collection – Deriving the Data*
 - 1. Determining Relevant Words
 - 2. Determining Key Passages (Keeping in mind the context, setting, and audience)
 - 3. Determining Applicable References
 - a. By Theme
 - b. By Word Usage
 - 4. We Determine the Factors of the Subject
 - a. Parties Involved
 - b. Actions Involved
 - c. Purposes Involved
 - d. Things Involved
- C. *Compilation – Organizing the Material*
- D. *Clarification – Describing and Defining the Doctrine*
 - 1. Level 1 – Terms: these give us a word to denote a certain doctrine or concept.

These must be carefully defined and carefully distinguished.

2. Level 2 – Facts
 - a. Explanation: Facts can be determined by explicit statements or obvious connections in Scripture. Facts must not contradict each other when studying a Bible topic. A contradiction is a literal, irreconcilable conflict between two claims.
 - b. Example: The sentence “A is B” and the sentence “A is not B” cannot simultaneously be true, providing each component of the second sentence maintains the same sense as its counterpart in the first. Or, Biblically, “Jesus is God” is a fact. To say “Jesus is not God” would be a contradiction. Scripture does not contain contradictions.
 3. Level 3 – Texts: Finding, not only key doctrinal statements, but key sections of development of a certain doctrine in Scripture.
 4. Level 4 – Concepts
 - a. Explanation: A concept is the categorizing, harmonizing, and describing of a set of facts which have definite interrelation to each other. In formulating concepts, there must be comparison of Scripture with Scripture. Because our minds are limited, seeming paradoxes may arise. Paradoxes expose our limitation of understanding, not necessarily the incoherence of two ideas.
 - b. Example: “Jesus is God” is a fact. “Jesus is man” is a fact. Though these two facts may be difficult to reconcile in our minds, the actual reality of them can be true simultaneously.
 5. Level 5 – Coherent Doctrines
- E. *Conclusion – Understanding the Implications*
1. Determining the “Why” or the Purpose of the Doctrine
 2. Applying the Subject to Practical Life
 3. Using the Subject as a Basis for Worship

APPENDIX: A Template to Studying Doctrine

ESTABLISHING YOUR GOALS

In This Study I Must...

Aim for spiritual transformation

Strive for a higher view of God

Account for all the truth on this subject

STUDYING THE MATERIAL – 10 QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

1. What Is The Big Picture This Doctrine/Passage Fits Into?
2. Is This A Major Theme In An Entire Book of the Bible? If So, How Does That Book Contribute To The Whole Topic?
3. What Are The Major Passages About This Doctrine? How Should They Be Interpreted?
4. What Are All The Relevant Verses About This Topic? What Do They Mean? How Do They Fit Together?
5. What Are The Implications Of These Verses?
6. What Are The Presuppositions These Verses Are Built Upon?
7. Are There Any Practical Illustrations That Would Make This Topic Clearer?
8. Are There Similar/Parallel Texts Which Would Complement The Text I'm Considering?
9. Are There Similar Topics That Need To Be Compared/Contrasted With This One?
10. What Are The Exact Definitions of Main Words Related to This Scripture/Dctrine?

FORMULATING THE DOCTRINE

Step 1: Prepare Your Heart

Examine Yourself And Your Approach

Pray About The Study

Step 2: Collect The Material

What Are The Relevant Words?

What Are The Key Passages?

What Are The Relevant Verses?

What Are The Factors Of This Subject? (Who, What, Where, When, Why, How?)

Step 3: Organize The Material

Step 4: Describe And Define The Doctrine

Level 1: Define Your Terms Carefully

Level 2: Establish Blatant Facts

Level 3: Interpret The Main Passages You Found

Level 4: Connect The Facts, Terms, And Passages Into A Concept

Level 5: Present The Doctrine With The Concepts Coherently Connected

Step 5: Reflect On Your Findings

Why Does This Doctrine Exist? How Can I Appreciate It?

How Does This Doctrine Apply To My Life?

How Can I Use This In Worshipping God?