

## Introduction

What is 'doctrine'? How can we define it? What are the major tenets of our faith? This Article is introductory. Therefore, it attempts to present an all-round picture of doctrine as the whole word of God. The Christian faith is based on a relationship - the relationship a person has with God (a relationship he can have only if he has been saved by Grace). That a person can, after his salvation experience, then go on to study God's word systematically and in ever-growing, fascinating detail, is just a bonus!

We hope that the Holy Spirit will give the reader a measure of the author's own enthusiasm for the proper study of God's word. Such study should not be done for its own sake as an intellectual exercise, or merely to satisfy curiosity. The whole purpose of studying God's word is to learn more of Him and of what He requires of us. In so doing, we incidentally satisfy the intellect and our curiosity - but this should not be our sole or first reason to study God's word.

Because of the terrible spiritual state of our churches today, we begin with warnings on having a distorted view of doctrine. Then there is very brief advice on the interpretation of scripture. This is followed by Biblical meanings of 'doctrine' which, in themselves, provide Christian encouragement to Believers who are serious about their faith. Today, more than ever, Believers need to know the reality of God's word and the endless joy it has in store for the serious Christian.

The title of this Article is '**DOCTRINE**'. Usually, works dealing with this topic are entitled 'doctrines' (plural). But, God's word is ONE DOCTRINE. It is not a collection of diverse and separate 'doctrines'. The whole doctrine of God is made up of many, many teachings and this is how the student should view the Bible. Its variety of contents are inextricably linked but, more than that, the separate parts make one organic, dynamic whole. Each aspect is a vibrant fleeting snapshot of God in action! Here we see Him Creating all there is, there we see Him dealing with Sin; at another point He is giving salvation to His elect in a lost world...and at yet another point, He is speaking to us of the future.

Doctrine is dry as old bones? Don't you believe it! Doctrine is the stuff of life and of dynamic faith. It is our source of knowledge of God Himself and the beginning of wisdom; it is what we can turn to for comfort; it provides us with the only data we can ever have on what God has said to the world. Get to grips with doctrine and apply it to your life and your soul will soar heavenward! Doctrine, too, is the very basis of Christian love - love is not separate from, or

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superior to, doctrine, as so many claim today.

Christians who know little of doctrine are easily recognised - they are pale and anaemic and cannot resist the bacteria spread by Satan...they have no defences so they are easy prey to this stalking lion who wants only to rip them apart. They are weak-kneed and have no real spiritual backbone or argument against error. This is because, for the most part, they are usually **in error themselves**

, by reason of their ignorance - which, often, is self-imposed. (We must not feel smug... we are all like this at times).

A vast number of Christians are losing out on their life of faith. They do not know their doctrine; they do not know what makes their faith 'tick'. Therefore, they do not really know God. They knew just enough about salvation, but that was all.

Of course, knowing doctrine is not the entire remedy for our spiritual ills. We must first of all have the desire to learn God's word. Then, after learning we must apply it (all of it) to our own lives, with a profound sense of humility and expectation. To make matters more complicated (for those who are only onlookers), none of us can do this ourselves! Only the Holy Spirit can do it, from start to finish.

He gives us our first heart-felt stirring to learn the word of God for ourselves. Then He leads us in the right direction and gives us clues! As we hunger for the answers, He leads us to discover more and more until we are fully immersed in Living Waters. Like babes who realise the pleasures of bathing, we splash and enjoy the spiritual realm and ask to stay in the water! At that point, God takes us carefully and continuously by the hand, as He shows us the fabulous heights and depths of His word. When that happens we have a living faith, rather than a dead replica!

If you are reading this preface without the least flutter of excitement, then perhaps you have not yet been led by God to this moment of discovery. Remember - you cannot get even a glimmer of excitement unless He first gives it to you...but it is up to you to **seek** it, too! It is all of Grace and nothing of ourselves. If you do not feel such excitement and the urge to know more, then you ought to pray, right here and now, that the Holy Spirit will place His Light in your heart and mind.

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The true, saved Bible Christian will never end his ('his' referring to 'her' also!) excitement for study; he will never cease to want to put his learning into practice, such is the effect God has on those who sincerely and honestly seek after knowledge of Him. (This seeking is itself a gift of God and cannot be initiated by the Christian). Just when the Believer has imbibed of the deepest well of spiritual waters, he discovers something fascinating - he finds that the more he learns the less (relatively) he knows. Therefore, he wants **even more** from God. Yes, it is true! Knowledge of God is never-ending and ever-widening. Once you begin your search for His truths, you will not want to stop!

Many Christians do not like to drink pure spiritual water. They prefer polluted, dirty water. They become sick, but they still drink the same dirty water. Is that what you want? If you want something better then read this Article, which is simply calling you to see God for yourself. Not solely through the preaching of others (important though that is), or through books, but through your own personal study of **God's word to YOU** and, by putting what you learn into action. Only then will you grow and have a real love of God, as the Holy Spirit revives your soul and spurs you on to greater things.

It is the belief of this author that the Bible is the only source of Divine guidance - God's actual word - to mankind. It is also our belief that the Bible is accurate and without flaw or error and is therefore totally reliable. BTM uses only the 1611 Authorised Version (AV) - this being, in the view of BTM after much examination of the subject, the only good and sound version available.

We rarely quote the views of men, because the aim is to point Christians to the true and only source of knowledge of God - His word, the Bible. There are excellent writers amongst Christians today as there have been in the past. But, Christians are human beings and are not divine! They make mistakes and voice opinions, whereas God speaks only truth, undefiled. This writer is no exception to the 'error' rule and wishes to always point the way to God, rather than to himself. Check the author's words against scripture - if he is wrong, tell him!

Christians who use new Bible versions should do so with caution, for many of these versions contain great errors, or deliberately misleading translations. We would remind fellow Believers that the AV Bible is the product of struggle and persecution. Many died in its defence. Today's versions are the product mainly of greed (the income from a single new version is immense!), or of devilish desires to overthrow the true word of God. (Note the almost complete absence of AV's in Christian bookshops...a trend which must alert godly men everywhere).

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With all this in mind, BTM does not lightly cast aside the AV Bible! There are angry opponents in the world who say such an attitude is 'archaic' and 'unintellectual'. Well, so be it. Far better to be called a fool for Christ's sake than a mere fool at Christ's coming! The student should ask a simple question: if those who condemn us for using the trusted AV Bible are so angry and abusive, why is this so? Is personal abuse a sign of God's approval of modern versions? We think not. Nevertheless, the sincere Christian must follow his own conscience, as given by the Lord, after an examination of the facts concerning versions.

When you read this Article, do so with prayer and an honest heart. The Holy Spirit will not let you down if you throw yourself upon His mercy and leadership. And as you read and study, do not take this Article to be the final authority - it is merely a device, a pointer toward God, and nothing else. The author is as fallible as any other Christian! So, think carefully on what he says, but let the Bible be your first and final authority. Unlike human authors, it cannot give you mistakes or error of any kind.

## Preamble

In 2 Timothy 3:16 we are given the following statement:

"All scripture (is) given by inspiration of God, and (is) profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."

This is clarity itself, yet, an Anglican vicar once said to the author that "when it comes down to it, love is more important than doctrine, because doctrine tends to divide the brethren. I'd rather have love than doctrine!" It is significant that he attended an ecumenical, liberal, theological college...

In John 14:14, Jesus makes a plain, clear statement:

"If ye love me, keep my commandments."

The vicar missed something vital. Despite his theological training, he could not see that doctrine

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is important (or, rather, it is vital)...and it is important enough to divide certain brethren if the need arises. As Jesus Christ Himself tells us - the keeping of His doctrine (here called 'commandments') is proof that we actually love Him! Let us look at some basic facts:

**Firstly**, 'doctrine' is, literally, the whole word of God to Man. In other words, the entire Bible is 'doctrine'. Our first Bible quote (above) tells us this.

**Secondly**, no word from God is wasted, because God is perfect; He cannot make a mistake or change His mind; it is inconceivable that Almighty God would utter irrelevancies. Therefore, the whole Bible is important. To say that some of the Bible is doctrine and the rest is not, is simply absurd. It is all doctrine and cannot be differentiated!

**Thirdly**, 'love' is just one aspect of God's doctrine (or, teaching). So, to suggest that 'love' is 'more important than doctrine' is, to say the least, nonsensical...it is rather like saying that a car tyre is 'more important' than the whole car when, in fact, the tyre is a part of the whole machine called a 'car'.

**Fourthly**, and more importantly, Jesus Christ Himself made the keeping of His word a test of the love of a Christian for his Lord. Jesus Christ is God and God's word is perfect. All of God's word is doctrine and is "profitable for doctrine". Therefore, when Jesus said that keeping His commandments is proof of our love for Him, He was making a doctrinal statement! Love, then, is a doctrinal statement and should not be considered as being separate from 'doctrine'.

**Fifthly**, 'doctrine' is unified and total. It is in the singular (doctrine), not the plural (doctrines), because God's word cannot be split up into different parts. All teachings of God are ultimately part of one single 'doctrine'...that is, 'The Truth'. No one teaching should be thought of as being separate from any other teaching. Each is related and interdependent and nothing is contradictory.

**Lastly**, yes, at times, doctrine will and must divide the brethren. This is why Paul speaks of discipline and even of the shunning of brethren for a season. 'Doctrine' is the very word of God and must be obeyed; it is Holy and pure; it cannot be played with. When a brother distorts certain vital aspects of doctrine (for example, if he insists that Christ is less than God), or if his behaviour brings certain commands of God into disrepute (for example, commits adultery), then

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we have no option but to shun the man, until and if he returns to his senses. This is Biblical teaching, not human theory.

**(Note: Of course, shunning is an extreme act, which is executed only after the brother has been counselled several times, has clearly indicated his refusal to repent and continues his publicly-known act of sin).**

Thus, at times, doctrine will and must divide the brethren; it is God's own command, not human arbitration based on whim.

**Doctrine is the essence of our faith.** Love is not **greater** than doctrine - it is a **part** of it. A Christian who says he is mature cannot be mature, if he does not understand what doctrine really is. Doctrine is important - it is vital. It is the very word of God! That is why every Christian must bend his spiritual back to hard work. He must learn what God has said until what God says is part of his thinking process; until doctrine surges through his veins...doctrine is the life-blood of faith. Without it, there can be no faith, for 'faith' can only be based on what God has shown us!

This applies to Christians of all ages. Once a person becomes a Believer, his responsibility to God begins immediately. Thus, for example, the idea that those in the Young People's Fellowship 'cannot be expected' to show any spiritual responsibility, is wrong. Youngsters who are Christians must be expected to act responsibly at all times, in accord with their level of understanding.

If we suggest that a teenager cannot be responsible, then it does not say much for the teenager! Nor for those who lead him. Earlier generations of Jews expected a fully responsible attitude and careful actions from their youngsters. Boys became men at age 13! We may indeed understand when there are various youthful errors or misplaced actions, but that is not an excuse to allow young Believers to do as they wish, or for them to avoid Biblical knowledge and responsibility.

What about the Holy Spirit? He does not teach us anything which contradicts the declared word of God, and does **not** give 'fresh' revelation extra to Biblical text. He elucidates what has been **given already**

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so that we can make it a part of our personal lives.

What about theology? All it does is to study God's word in a systematic and detailed way, expanding upon declared truth. Theology which is not rooted in declared truth, or which moves outside it, is not Christian theology but is either a lie or is speculation (and speculation is of no use to Believers).

We cannot get away from doctrine. It is the fabric of Christian life and the test of our love for God. To learn doctrine takes effort and time. It takes dedication and a willingness to subject oneself to the learning process...something many Christians think is far below them! Too many Believers think they know it all. They disregard parts of teaching which they do not want to hear and cling to those parts they love! And they readily ignore those teachers and pastors who dare to question or remove their favourite pseudo-theological trinkets. They prefer their own ideas to God's word. Their faith is found wanting, for their deliberate avoidance of doctrinal understanding is a mark of self-love, which is itself a mark of degeneration (or lack) of individual faith.

The saddest fact of all, is that we are all guilty of allowing such a condition to continue. We are so familiar with spiritual decline in others and in ourselves, that we all slide into the same pit of selfism, without so much as a word of protest. **BUT NOW IS THE TIME FOR US ALL TO CHANGE.**

## Doctrines of Men

The word 'doctrines' is used in the New Testament and nowhere else. It is in the plural and refers only to falsity and lies. God's word is an unified whole and He requires no special reasoning to knit-together the Bible's various teachings. If God said only one word today, we can know (because He is God) with complete confidence that whatever He says tomorrow will be in perfect accord with His first revealed word. He is incapable of making a mistake of any kind. Whatever He says must be totally integrated at all times, or He cannot be God.

Men, on the other hand, must think hard about what they say; they must develop ways to integrate their own teachings, so that all errors and differences are harmonised. And even after that process, there are often glaring problems, inadequacies and incongruities. Not so with God! He does not have to think, or harmonise, or alter. Immediately He says something it is perfect and totally integrated.

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The teachings of men, whether they are popes or peasants, are worth nothing if what they say is not based on God's word! That is why we read that:

"In vain they do worship me, teaching (for) doctrines the commandments of men." Matthew 15:9

In the twentieth century, many teachings are advanced by ecumenical churchmen (or by people infected by ecumenical thinking). They teach a corrupt or a social gospel. Thus, they teach the 'commandments of men' and not the doctrine of God, Who says that any other 'gospel' is actually 'no gospel'. We were warned that this would be the case...

"Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils." 1 Timothy 4:1

Christians who are outraged by the use of this text to describe ecumenical folk, would do well to examine the proceedings of recent World Council of Churches conferences....activities that are nothing short of demonic, as observers have noted. Remember - this was predicted by the Holy Spirit.

As for Believers, we are warned not to mix truth with fake beliefs (or with fake believers and teachers. Today charismaticism is very much to the fore):

"Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines." Hebrews 13:9

Those drawn into the ecumenical net of deceit (whether through ignorance or otherwise) are not the only culprits! In almost every local church, we can find followers of men or of Satan, mingling with godly men and women. Remember that in the ultimate sense, those who follow men are really following Satan anyway, for what is not of God must be of the devil (another Biblical maxim!).

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In every denomination, there are groups of modernists, liberals and believers-of-strange-doctrines, who are incapable of recognising the Truth of God even if it was given to them on a plate! Many are sincere Believers...but error is error and it must be removed. We must not allow a person's general Christian status to deflect us from the truth of his particular state...thus, a Christian who refuses to follow the whole counsel of God is in poor spiritual health. Some errors are more swift in their degenerative process than others, but any error has the effect of causing harm to faith, including the flattening of spiritual life and the loss of love of truth, of God and of the brethren. Indeed, there is a general loss of love of life itself.

### Led To Ruin...

So - the doctrines of men are worthless and lead us to ruin. Tampering with doctrine is a way to lose faith, for that is the purpose of the devil's lies - to take men and women away from the Truth and to destroy the faith they once had. True faith involves trust in God. If Satan can get us to believe in what other men teach, then what he has done is to take our trust from God and replace it with trust in men's ideas. Thus we no longer have true, rock-solid faith and we have been seduced by demonic wiles. As we read in Hebrews, this cuts our spiritual moorings and we drift in a sea of diversity, never finding rest and never having real faith. In its place we have put trust in men - trust in the creature, the created, rather than in the Creator.

It is error to think that we can 'interpret' texts and doctrine as we wish. This author is often appalled to hear Christian men and women claim the 'right' to 'interpret' scripture as they wish...and who even boast of their novel beliefs.

**(Note: Strictly, 'scripture' in the Bible refers primarily to the Old Testament. However, the New Testament writings are of the same source and calibre - Jesus Himself referring to His words as 'commandments' ; therefore, the New Testament may readily be referred to as 'scripture', too).**

### Hypothesis in the Guise of 'Interpretation'

What is this 'interpretation' the boastful speak of? It is nothing more glorious than men and women devising their own whims! They neither know, or wish to know, the whole counsel of God. Instead, they pick what they will and ignore what they do not want to hear. That is not interpretation - it is prejudice and sin.

These men and women, to various degrees, are unteachable and stiff-necked. Such folk place

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literal meanings on figurative texts and vice versa. They 'spiritualise' what is self-evident and will not listen to sound, theological reasoning. No doubt these same Believers heartily and sincerely wish to avoid the 'doctrines of men'...but, by their own actions they are guilty of being carried away by the 'divers and strange doctrines' they wish to avoid! Unfortunately, their pride (often unintentional) rules their spirit and they sin when they do not really wish to.

The reality of what such ignorance can mean made its impact upon this author when an adherent of a certain Christian sect (accepted in many circles) spoke at length of speaking in tongues, but admitted that he did not recognise the phrase "ye must be born again"; nor did he have even a small clue that it was a text in the New Testament. Yet, like others in his sect, he claims to be a Christian!

Shocked by such a fact? You need not be. This author has, in the past, asked many 'orthodox' Believers to define their own faith. Many could not...all they could do was to repeat, parrot-fashion, what they had read in the Bible. Nothing wrong with that, except that we should expect greater Biblical and spiritual insight from men and women who claim to mature Believers. How can we teach when we do not know the most basic definitions of our own faith? God expects much of those who call themselves pastors. But He expects a great deal from others, too. This author does not expect every pastor or Believer to know everything - but he does expect that all Believers (and especially pastors, including himself) should have an attitude of learning and of the humility to accept teaching from others.

## Interpretation

How, then, should we interpret? A full answer cannot be given here, so let us be content with a mere outline...

1.

The rule of interpretation has always been to read a text exactly as it is and to assume that it has a literal meaning unless it says otherwise. That is, the context determines the way we ought to read and understand the text.

2.

If a text obviously has a figurative meaning and context, then that is how we must read it and understand it. There is no excuse for those folk who deliberately place an obtuse figurative meaning on an obviously literal text, or vice versa.

3.

Where we are unable to determine an exact literal/figurative context, then we must leave the matter as it is and must not tamper with it. Perhaps we will find the answer later in life - or maybe not at all.

4.

In no way should we 'spiritualise' texts! This author has heard absurd 'revelations' and horrific 'interpretations' (which offend the intellect as well as the spirit) made by preachers who invent 'spiritual' meanings for texts. It is wrong and dangerous to spiritualise. What God says is what He says and no Christian has the right to change that. Making-up 'spiritual' meanings is the same as lying. Listeners to this kind of chatter (it is certainly not preaching) must beware, for it holds nothing of value. It is just human poetic musing, 'easy-listening', no matter how 'good' the preacher might be.

Certain beliefs seem to invoke spiritualising from their adherents. Many preachers 'specialise' in the latter-days (even though scripture says next to nothing about them). Whole films have been made, depicting the 'rapture' as seen through the eyes of preacher-producers. Like the 'Gap' theorists who tamper with Genesis chapter 1, these good folk write and speak millions of words on a subject hardly spoken of in the Bible.

Because of a sore lack of solid Biblical facts, there is usually a surfeit of flowery words and decorative statements, few of which are related to proper Biblico-theological thinking! This is not, of course, how these folk see it; in their own minds, what they believe and teach is solid Biblical 'truth' and everyone else is wrong or they are sadly deficient in spiritual understanding. The 'proof' texts they offer are often dubiously applied, incorrect, outrageously spiritualised or taken out of context. Christians they are - but true to Biblical theology they are not!

## Types of Texts

Texts can be roughly divided into several types:

- Those with obvious (direct) meaning when first read
- Those which have obvious meaning when combined with similar texts (indirect)

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- Those which have a weight-of-evidence meaning after all similar texts have been read (that is, all the indications suggest a certain meaning).

Very few texts fall outside these types and so very few of them can legitimately be said to be capable of alternative interpretations. Where texts cannot yield a concrete meaning, or even a suggested meaning, the answer is simple - leave it alone! We must not be tempted to 'spiritualise'.

Spiritualising is the act of adding ornament to what is plain but, worse than that, it is to provide ornamentation where none should exist. It is when a preacher invents a long flowery speech which, when analysed, means nothing at all. Many spiritualised texts are unrecognisable from their actual, given meaning and they therefore become irrelevant. In any other context, such speech would be called 'waffling' or 'padding'...the product of a speaker who has nothing concrete to say. In a Christian context, it is not just 'padding' - it is disastrous. And - let us be blunt about it - if a preacher always fills his preaching with padding, then it cannot be of God. All who preach - including this author - must beware of this flaw.

This sounds hard on certain preachers whose eloquence is renowned - but God does not need our help! When the Holy Spirit speaks, He does not use flowery language - He is direct and plain. A man may speak in wondrous and flowery terms if he is speaking of his own feelings, etc., but he has no right at all to 'spiritualise' God's given text as found in scripture. It is a truism that the Bible has its own interpretation.

**(Note: Hard words only offend those who should hear them! There are many good and true preachers throughout the world, to whom the above general statements do not apply and to whom the Lord will honour. Nevertheless, at a time of departure from the faith, there is need to remind ourselves of our duties and of the warnings of God upon those who claim an office but who abuse it. To those faithful preachers of God's word go our fullest support and prayers).**

## What the Bible Says About Doctrine

Perhaps some Believers think it is ridiculous to claim that every word of the Bible is doctrine. It is usual, after all, to say that only certain parts are doctrine. For example, the direct sayings of Jesus, or, say, the Ten Commandments. Other parts are said to be 'history' or 'narrative' and so on. As we briefly outline what the Bible itself says about doctrine and as we see the actual

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meanings of the word in its different settings, we will see that the claim is not ridiculous at all, but is accurate.

Look at it this way - if God inspired scriptures, as we are told, and if all scriptures are for our edification, then the logical and reasonable claim is that it must all be 'doctrine'. God does not speak except to say something important, so all that He says is, in some way or another, 'teaching'.

How? For example, take historical statements found in the Bible - these teach us on several levels. They illustrate accounts of events and characters; they provide a background which, in many cases, has been verified by historians, archaeologists, etc.; their detail, given without trying to persuade, gives us confidence that what we are reading is indeed true and solidly based in reality. Thus, in both a general and in a particular way, Bible history teaches us physical and spiritual things, which also satisfy the intellect. This author has been delighted, many times, with what seem to be minor historical details, but which prove to contain huge quantities of information and spiritual food! Often, these minor details lead on to new avenues of study and discovery. Furthermore, it is usually the minor details which show us how real it all is. And as each little detail is shown, it is added to the growing picture we have in our minds of actual people living in an actual land, doing actual things.

In the Old Testament we see the comfortable mingling of physical and supernatural reports. There is no attempt to explain-away events which modern men cast aside as impossible or as mythical. Suddenly, two angels and Jesus Himself, walk up to Abraham's tent in the desert! Jacob chats with an angel! Adam walks with God, literally! This is repeated in the New Testament, when Jesus and His disciples walk the earth...so many supernatural events that the writers of the Testament did not have enough books in which to write them! Yet, these supernatural incidents took place in a real, physical setting. They were not mere figments of the imagination.

Then there are figurative texts - texts which use poetic language. Are these doctrinal, too? Yes, they are. Often, poetic or figurative language is better suited to explain spiritual truths. (No, we are not referring to the activity known as 'spiritualising', but to words given by God). They serve to instruct by way of a different Holy 'style' or approach.

As for so-called 'contradictions' - there are none. With an ease wrought of supreme self confidence (to which God is entitled, by reason of His perfection and Almightyness), the word of

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God contains portions which no man can ever fathom or fully understand. No attempt is made to link these disparate statements. There are no invented intellectual theories to explain them away. They just stare at us from the pages of the Bible, defying us to find the answers. Now if the Bible were simply human theory, its writers would have made sure that, somehow, they linked seemingly impossible teachings. Indeed, they would not have included seemingly impossible teachings in the first place!

God, however, does not need to explain Himself to anybody! He has no need to provide definitions. He has no obligation to mankind. He is in full control of all things and His 'mind' is supreme and perfect. He knows all and can do all. But Man? How can mere Man understand, say, the twin truths of salvation and predestination? There is no way our finite minds can ever link these two great teachings. Yet, there they are in the pages of the Bible! To the thinking mind, the fact that such teachings are glaring yet unexplained, suggests strongly that either the Bible was written by illiterate idiots, or it was inspired by a God Whose power is so beyond that of Man, that He does not need to explain. What is missing is our ability to understand, because of our limited abilities.

We could go on and on about doctrine and the way it is written, its contents, its 'style', its meaning and so on! The task would be endless...so let us here offer a simple outline.

### Old Testament Witness to Doctrine

Moses said to the assembled people;

"My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew and as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass.

Because I will publish the name of the Lord: ascribe ye greatness unto our God. (He is) the Rock, his work (is) perfect: for all his ways (are) judgment: a God of truth without iniquity just and right (is) he." Deuteronomy 32:2

Notice that Moses was confident that his teaching (doctrine) was good, because he was repeating what God said (**Note: All pro-papists should read the above verse carefully! Verse 4 says, categorically and plainly, that "[God is] the Rock". NOT Peter.**)

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Without hesitation, Moses tells us that God's work (including His word) is perfect and that everything He says is judgement...that is, the first and final authority. Being perfect, when it is uttered His word has the effect of refreshing the soul and encouraging spiritual growth.

Before Solomon wrote down his wise sayings, God commended him to all the people of the known world. Such was his wisdom, both mighty men and the humble came to him. His wisdom was commended by God because he spoke what God commanded. Thus, what Solomon wrote was what God wanted to say to men. In Proverbs 4, verses 1 to 13, Solomon said:

1. "Hear ye children, the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding.
  
2. For I give you good doctrine, forsake ye not my law.
  
- 4b. ...keep my commandments, and live.
  
5. Get wisdom, get understanding: forget (it) not; neither decline from the words of my mouth.
  
6. Forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee: love her, and she shall keep thee.
  
7. Wisdom (is) the principal thing; (therefore) get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding.
  
8. Exalt her, and she shall promote thee: she shall bring thee to honour, when thou dost embrace her.
  
9. She shall give to thine head an ornament of grace: a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee.

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11. I have taught thee in the way of wisdom; I have led thee in right paths.

13. Take fast hold of instruction; let (her) not go; keep her; for she (is) thy life."

God gives good doctrine, because He is our Father. He expects us to listen and to put what he says into practice. His doctrine/teaching is 'law' or commandment and it is life-giving/life-preserving. To understand God's word is to get wisdom and, as we are told in Psalm 111:10:

"The fear of the Lord (is) the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do (his commandments)..."

This is why Solomon, in Proverbs 4, verse 7, goes on to say that 'Wisdom is the principal thing'. Nothing else can supersede it...fear of the Lord is wisdom and this wisdom gives us life. We must exalt the wisdom of God and promote it. When we do so we will receive honour and it shall be like a crown of grace and glory.

How different from the way churchmen with humanly-devised status dishonour God and His word, by deviating from His wisdom! What these men say is filth and dung by comparison. We need only think of the Bishop of Durham in the late 20th century and the blood runs cold, such is his arrogance and lack of godly fear. He teaches fable and puts lies in the place of God's truth. He leads men and women away from God and salvation. His reward will be of his own doing, for it will not come from God!

Do not follow such men but stay close to the Lord for your instruction (doctrine), for 'she is thy life'. Stay close to these false teachers and you will be called a fool by God:

"The fear of the Lord (is) the beginning of knowledge: (but) fools despise wisdom and instruction."

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False teachers, whether so-called 'laymen' or 'bishops' or 'popes', are fools in God's eyes. They offer nothing of value and they despise truth. If wisdom is like gentle rain feeding the most delicate of plants, then the falsity of fools is like sewage drowning the hardiest of vegetation, choking it to death.

The learning of wisdom or doctrine takes much time and effort. It must be built up carefully:

"For precept (must be) upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, (and) there a little..." Isaiah 28:10

Note that there is order and procedure here...precept upon precept. This is perfectly good sense, for even the component parts of human theories must be built one upon another, like building blocks. If the foundation is wrong, then the whole edifice will be wrong; if some of the blocks are askew or mislaid, the error will be magnified more and more, the larger and higher the building becomes; a small difference at the bottom will become a huge one by the time the top is reached.

When it comes to doctrine, we cannot rush it or be content with samples or with brief outlines. As babes in Christ, we may at first drink spiritual milk - but not for long! We are then instructed to eat strong meat. The milk starts us off, but the meat gives us muscle! In physical life, a baby which is always weaned will receive less and less nutrition, the longer it remains at the breast. Its tiny stomach knows nothing of solid food and there is the danger of the stomach being unable to cope with solid food when it comes, if it is weaned for too long a time. If a baby is kept in darkness for the first years of its life, then the eyes will not develop properly and will become partly blind and unable to see adequately. Likewise, the soul which does not feed on the solid doctrine of God will fail and fall, because it lacks spiritual strength, nutrition and a mature understanding.

## **New Testament Witness to Doctrine**

The New Testament is as adamant as the Old in its doctrinal requirements. Also, it gives us more clues as to the nature of and need for 'doctrine'. The word itself can refer to the thing taught, the act of teaching, the act of learning or the teacher... we should never be recklessly zealous when it comes to interpretation of scripture.

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**(Note: Many Christians with good intentions make words 'fit' their own particular denominational or personal views. For example, 'word' [or 'logos'] is usually given the single meaning by some - particularly those within charismatic circles - of 'the Lord Jesus Christ'. It is true that 'logos' can refer to Christ - but there are a number of other meanings, too! It is as wrong to add as it is to take away. Every word is used in its own textual setting and thus has its own context. We cannot ignore context, just to enhance our own ideas or beliefs).**

### **So, what does the New Testament tell us about doctrine?**

Doctrine is 'teaching' (in this case, concerning the things of God and what He says) and also the act of teaching by Christians who are given the gift and office to do so. (Any other teaching is erroneously applied, even if the content is true).

**(Note: A brief explanation is necessary here. A Christian may have an 'office' given him by God, but this is not necessarily the same as a 'gift'. For example, 'teacher' or 'pastor' is an office, not a gift - the office describes his function. However, the true\* teacher or pastor will always be given gifts which enable him to function in his office...gifts such as spiritual discernment, wisdom etc. These gifts are not the same as natural talents, but are given by God as a special spiritual 'extra' for the sole purpose of building up the Body of Christ, the Church.**

**\* There are also *false* teachers and pastors and others with so-called 'offices'. These are not called by God and do not have gifts associated with the offices. Many within churches today are false because they hold an office not given to them by God, even though they may be genuine Christians).**

The act of teaching in the New Testament is not the same as the act of teaching a non-Christian body of people. Thus, the teaching is peculiar to Christians, and is different in its quality, aim and effect. The teaching can be delivered in a manner that is similar to a lecture, or in a less formal way. The teacher is expected to maintain the attitude of a teacher...he cannot have the human luxury of offering his own meagre opinions! The Bible teacher must only offer what God says; he may offer views, but only if the scripture being dealt with does not have a clear interpretation. Even then, he must state without ambiguity that what he is offering is a view and is not a definite, defined teaching without alternative meaning.

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It is sad to note that the shoddy preaching of some can mislead many. Linked with this is the immature way that listeners treat their speakers as gods who are incapable of teaching error. It has been well-said to this author that Protestantism has its own popes and idols! Teaching is either of God or it is not. If it is not, but it is men's views, then it cannot (by definition) be of God. Therefore, it is useless and is the product of sin. One who assumes the office of teacher/pastor has no choice but to speak the word/doctrine/teachings of God. He is free to interpret as a man ONLY when the text is capable of sustaining an alternative meaning. When he gives an alternative meaning, he must also give any other meanings he knows of. In this way he will not be guilty of misleading his listeners into error or into a potentially sect-making/idol-loving situation.

The teacher who consistently misleads or always gives his own views, must be removed from speaking, for his continuous error is possibly a signal that he is either not a Believer, or that his office has not been given by God. It could also indicate that he is abusing a true office, or that he is acting in ignorance. The true office-bearer will gladly accept reproof or correction and will then change accordingly. The false office-bearer will continue to act as he does and will usually increase his error, becoming proud and arrogant as he does so.

As the Greek '**didache**' suggests, the teacher may teach doctrine by rote (memorisation), by explanation, or by discussion/questions and answers.

That such can also be done by false teachers is found in the New Testament use of the related word '**heterodidaskaleo**', which refers to false teaching. (Some false teachers are known for their thoroughness and systematic methods...Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons are just two examples. There are also examples within what is known as Protestantism).

The word (in one of its root forms - **heteros**) tells us that the teaching is false because it teaches what the 'former' (original) teaching did not intend; it is an invalid alternative; it is different in quality, nature, kind, form and class.

'**Heterodidaskaleo**' combines the words '**heteros**' and '**didaskolos**'. We have already seen that heteros refers to false teachers. That is 'heteros' is 'opposed to didaskolos'...and didaskolos refers to the Master (Jesus), the true teacher or 'doctor'; one who is fitted to teach. It also refers to those teachers who by their great spiritual power can draw people to them (teachers such as John the Baptist, Jesus, Stephen, Paul etc). The word is used at times to refer to Jesus as the One Who leads men to salvation. It is used of the Apostles, including Paul, and of all teachers

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who teach in Christian assemblies by reason of offices and gifts given by the Holy Spirit. (There are other meanings, too, but the above are the main examples).

We can see, then, what is involved in the teaching of doctrine. We have also previously noted that '**logos**' is used in the New Testament with reference to doctrine. 'Logos' is used only seven times when referring to Jesus Christ (The Word). Mainly it refers to the word or teaching of God, to sayings, to speech, to accounts or to 'things'. In two cases the word cannot be translated and in 32 cases it has miscellaneous usage. The purpose for pointing all this out to the reader is to show that it is wrong to say 'logos' always refers to Jesus Christ, or to say that Biblical references to 'the word of God' speak only and exclusively of Jesus Christ. It must be emphasised again, that meanings of words are determined by their context (and given translation). Such a ruling is part of proper and honest teaching of doctrine.

Taking various aspects of 'logos' we can say the word/doctrine of God is:

1.

Given by a 'living voice'. That is, the teaching of God is given by the One Who is 'Living Waters'; in Him is Life everlasting. His word is the very embodiment of Who He is....His word to men cannot be separated from Who He is. Thus all he says is pure, true and incapable of alteration, by men or by God.

2.

The sayings of God are mandates, decrees or orders to His creation. This relates to both Old and New Testament teachings or sayings, to Old Testament prophets as well as to New Testament apostles etc. They include God's moral teachings, too. What God says are always "weighty sayings". Each saying is a dictum or maxim...a law to be obeyed and the measure of all things.

3.

'logos' also refers to the narrative portions of scriptures. Thus, they are not merely 'links' between 'important sections', but are themselves important.

4.

It refers to the mind, too, and its ability (given by God) to reason, to consider matters, to make

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answer and to explain (bear in mind that a false teacher does not explain - he gives human ideas; an 'explanation' in the Christian sense is the proper and only interpretation - anything else is worthless).

In John the Word is Jesus Christ Himself and all He stands for.

**(Note: 'Logos' was first used by a Greek philosopher [Heraclitus] about 600 BC to speak of the divine reason or plan which coordinates the entire universe. Of course, Heraclitus was not referring to the God of the Bible, but in the New Testament it is used of Jesus Christ, Who Himself created all things and keeps them in order).**

## And Finally

In this introduction to Doctrine the Believer has been shown that 'doctrine' is the whole counsel of God. It includes every word of the Christian Bible, which is all useful for teaching - as 2 Timothy 3:16 tells us - without exception and without alteration.

John 14:14 tells us that the identifying mark of a Christian is that he keeps the commandments of God/Jesus Christ. As we have seen, these commandments are made up of the entire Bible. Thus the true Christian will keep the word of God/doctrine; he will allow every text to explain/interpret itself.

Now that the Believer understands something about 'doctrine' he/she is in a position to examine those aspects of doctrine shown to us in scripture which can, for human study purposes, be referred to as various 'teachings', ie the teaching on Salvation, the teaching on Creation and so on. Each teaching is a part of the whole doctrine of God and cannot be separated or removed from it. Remember - there is no such thing as 'fashion' in God's word; theological fashions are whims of men, but God's word is enduring, unalterable and timeless in meaning.

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