

DOCTRINE
FOR
DEVOTION
VOLUME 1: PERSONAL STUDY
EDITION

B. Jacob Fowler

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To my students: May your knowledge of God lead to your awe in him.

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PREFACE

Systematic Theologies are often dense in argumentation and technical language. This is certainly almost unavoidable. God is a complex topic. Assuming topics concerning him could be treated lightly would be sorely amiss. At the same time, the average Christian who stumbles upon a systematic theology or doctrine textbook would be intimidated or perhaps put off by the heftiness of the language and argumentation.

The goal of this work is to balance the same perplexing doctrine with accessibility. In other words, the doctrine will not be watered down or made into a one-size-fits-all. The doctrine expounded in this work will be as robust as ever. However, the same robust doctrine is explained in simpler terms.

Instead of pages of argumentation with a series of parenthetical verse references (which the reader may or may not look up), this book invites the reader to stop and open the Bible frequently. The reader should not just end up having a solid introduction to doctrine, but also know what the Bible says and teaches. There has been so much shallowness in Christian teaching. Oftentimes that shallowness simply means a lack of the Bible. A relevant series on marriage, parenting, finances, etc., may all be well and good; however, if the Christian does not know his Bible, he will starve his soul.

This edition has all the answers in the chapters filled in because it is designed for personal use rather than a classroom setting. Each chapter ends with Bible reading and questions to answer based on it. The answers for the questions are given at the end of this edition.

INTRODUCTION TO DOCTRINE

What is Doctrine?

Doctrine is simply another word for “teaching.” Anybody can give “doctrine” or “teaching” about any subject or topic. The Bible teaches certain things about certain topics as well. **Bible doctrine** is *what the Bible teaches about any given topic* contained therein. This does not mean that the Bible talks about *every possible* topic. For example, if you wanted to explore the topics of Arabic grammar, molecular protoplasm, or American pop culture, you wouldn’t open the Bible.

This does not mean that the Bible is unimportant to those topics which it does not cover. If you wanted to learn how to play the game of baseball, you would not use the Bible as your textbook. You couldn’t open to the book of Titus and learn, “Three strikes, you’re out!” However, the Bible does contain information that could help you become a better baseball player: working hard, avoiding pride, being respectful. A player could know all the rules and strategy of the game, but if he is not respectful, he could still be kicked out. Furthermore, if someone adopts a belief that rules don’t apply to them and decides he gets out in four strikes instead of three, he would also be kicked out of the game. The Bible teaches truths that show us the nature of reality and **morality** (*the understanding of right and wrong behaviors and attitudes*).

The Bible focuses on truths that cannot be made clear by human reasoning, intuition, and observation alone. We can learn about math through reasoning. We can know morality through intuition (Romans 2:14). We can understand the stars through observation. The Bible instead focuses on three main questions:

1. Who is God?
2. Who is mankind?

3. How do the two relate?

These questions are answered all throughout the Bible in various ways. The Biblical authors write stories, compose songs and poems, prescribe laws, and pen letters all to help us understand the answer to these questions. And the answer to all three questions culminates in Jesus Christ.

Underneath these three major questions, are a lot of other subtopics that are indicated. For example, look back to the first question. Understanding who God is involves the Trinity. Under this topic involves the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. There is an entire discipline devoted to studying the topic of the Holy Spirit called *Pneumatology*. This discipline asks, “What does the Bible teach about the Holy Spirit?” In the chart below, list the technical term for each various study.

Term	Topic	Question
<u>Bibliology</u>	Scripture	What does the Bible teach about itself?
<u>Theology Proper</u>	God	What does the Bible teach about God?
<u>Anthropology</u>	Humanity	What does the Bible teach about mankind?
<u>Hamartiology</u>	Sin	What does the Bible teach about sin?
<u>Soteriology</u>	Salvation	What does the Bible teach about salvation?
<u>Christology</u>	Jesus	What does the Bible teach about Jesus?
<u>Ecclesiology</u>	Church	What does the Bible teach about the church?
<u>Eschatology</u>	Last things	What does the Bible teach about the end times?

Bible doctrine is simply summarizing what the Bible teaches. A **summary** is *a short statement about the main points of something*. In this case, Bible doctrine is a summary of what the Bible teaches. Most Christians *already* affirm Bible doctrine. You might hear it at church or school when someone says, “All who believe in Jesus will be saved;” or, “The Bible says we should not judge.”

Key truth: If we affirm the Bible is true, we must live by what it teaches to be true

Summarizing is an important part of the process of learning. It shows that you have understood what you have read or listened to. Take some time and read the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37 and summarize its main point(s) below:

In the future, you may not be able to remember all the details in this parable; however, it is very likely you will remember the main point, or summary of what this parable teaches. You could then rightly say, “The Bible teaches. . .” based upon this parable.

This is how the process of Bible doctrine works. Students of the Bible pour over all the **biblical data** (*facts and information observable in the Bible*) in order to make summary statements about what the Bible teaches. It is important to look over *all* the information and not skip anything.

The Problem of Missing Data

Two teenagers burst through the front door and raced to the counter with an empty pillowcase.

"Put it in," they demanded of the clerk.

"Put what in?" the attendant asked.

"The money. Put it in and nobody'll get hurt," they barked.

The puzzled library attendant, who had less than \$1 in collected fines in the petty cash box, ducked out the door and called the police. They, too, were dumbfounded.

"It's the first attempted library robbery I ever heard of," said one cop, scratching his head.

The only plausible explanation was that the two careless crooks got the Grandon City, Kansas, bank mixed up with the library. The two buildings are a block apart on corner locations, and at the time, the bank's exterior was partially obstructed by scaffolding. The youths, believed to be runaways from Florida, were nabbed by police hours after the bungled heist. In keeping with their crime, the bonehead bandits were taken into custody and promptly "booked".

What data did these teenagers miss? What was the result of missing this data?

"Bonehead Bandits," Bible.org, last modified February 2, 2009, accessed May 26, 2022,

<https://bible.org/illustration/bonehead-bandits>.

Theological Triage

Dr. Albert Mohler orders doctrine in three levels. First order doctrine is what makes someone a Christian or not a Christian. For example, the resurrection of Jesus. If you deny that Jesus rose from the dead, you could not call yourself a Christian. A second order doctrine is a doctrine that Christians could disagree on, and it would separate fellowship. This is what creates new denominations. For example, the meaning and mode of baptism. Christians can disagree on the issue of baptism, but still be Christian. They may fellowship at different churches, but they are still Christian. A third order doctrine is one that Christians may disagree on, yet still remain in the same fellowship. For example, the end times. I may believe the rapture occurs then Jesus comes, you may believe Jesus comes at the same time as the rapture, but we could still go to the same church. The main difference between what makes up a “cult” and just another denomination is the order of doctrine that is disagreed upon. Jehovah’s Witnesses deny the full deity of Jesus. Mormons believe we too will become gods (and they believe in “Mother God”). These areas of doctrinal disagreement are “first order” and thus believing them would mean you could not be considered “Christian.”

Albert Mohler, “A Call for Theological Triage and Christian Maturity,” Albert Mohler (The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, July 12, 2005), last modified July 12, 2005, accessed May 26, 2022, <https://albertmohler.com/2005/07/12/a-call-for-theological-triage-and-christian-maturity>.

Have you ever wondered why there are so many *different* interpretations of the Bible? Or maybe, why are there so many denominations? A lot of this is based in these summaries of doctrine. This is not to say that *doctrine* itself is bad; but rather, that sometimes the process of data collection can be bad. False teachers either ignorantly (that is, they don’t know better), or purposefully ignore or misinterpret some biblical data in order to promote their false teaching. Different denominations, on the other hand, give more or less weight to certain biblical data for *secondary* issues (see side discussion “Theological Triage”).

When summarizing what the Bible teaches about any given topic, it’s important to analyze all the verses that deal with that topic. You might be wondering, “How in the world could I do that?” Well, it does not take a Bible degree. Here are some things you can do:

1. Read through your Bible on a regular basis- this allows you to get a big picture overview of what the whole Bible says.
2. Do a detailed study on a book of the Bible- pick one book of the Bible and study through it slowly, verse by verse, unpacking the meaning of each verse. Feel free to use a solid commentary or a study Bible.
3. Listen to Biblical preaching- A lot of us

are blessed to have a really good pastor who faithfully preaches the Bible every week. Listen in to what he says.

4. Don't be afraid to ask questions- Whenever you read the Bible or listen to sermons, if there's something that confuses you, ask. Know that the Bible invites questions (see Acts 17:11).

Who Has Dogma?

Dogma is *another word for doctrine*. In our modern society the term can carry a negative **connotation** (*idea or feeling a word expresses alongside its literal meaning*) of believing something that is out-of-date or something that will hold you back from reaching your full potential. Sometimes, the word "doctrine" itself can carry this same negative connotation, as if holding to or believing in doctrine is a bad thing.

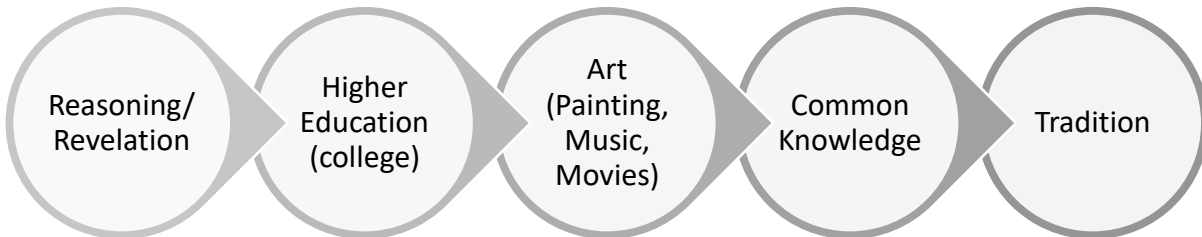
Even though doctrine and dogma have religious connotations, they both essentially mean "teachings." Or, to make it even simpler, we could call these things "beliefs." Everyone has beliefs about the nature of life and reality. If you wanted to boil down what someone believes about life you could ask them four questions:

1. Where did we (humanity) come from?
2. What's wrong with the world?
3. How can that wrong be made right?
4. Where are we (humanity) headed? Or, what happens after we die?

People may be unsure about their answers to these questions. Others may have inconsistent answers to these questions. Either way people have a set of beliefs on which they base their lives. Oftentimes, these beliefs arise from places which the believer is unaware. You have certain beliefs that come from places other than the Bible too? Have you ever considered where those beliefs come from?

Most beliefs come from our upbringing and our society. But these beliefs usually have a much longer history. *A belief that has been around for a while,*

being passed from one generation to another is a **tradition**. Traditions are usually formed out of a prior source. Reasoning, or human reasoning, is based on logic and observations. Sometimes traditions arise from some person's feelings which motivate them to a certain reasoning. Once a particular reasoning is formed, it's



then spread through books, usually through higher education where the idea can become common knowledge on college campuses (this is not always the case). Next the ideas are widely spread through cultural expression of art: paintings, poems, music, movies, and television shows. These artforms spread ideas to become accepted cultural dogmas. **Cultural doctrines** are *beliefs that most people have within a given culture*.

We have the freedom to reject or accept any doctrine whether it arises from the Bible or the culture.

The way we live our lives is based upon the doctrines we accept and reject. If we accept the cultural doctrine that human life has no more value than the life of a squirrel, we will have attitudes, feelings, and behaviors based upon that doctrine we accept. If, however, we accept the biblical doctrine that human life has value because we were made in God's image, we will then have attitudes, feelings, and behaviors based upon that doctrine we accept.

Everyone has a doctrinal system, but the real question is from where does that doctrinal system arise?

Christians must answer that their doctrinal system comes from the Bible and the reality the Bible conveys.

Think about some major things our modern Western culture assumes without really having a good basis to believe it:

- What's true for one person may not be true for another person
- We can teach neutral facts
- We can organize families however we like without fear of any consequences.
- Romantic love is an uncontrollable feeling
- Making more money will make you more happy
- All religions are the same
- We cannot really know the truth with certainty

All of these cultural assumptions affect how people believe and behave. It also affects people's desires. Take the last cultural doctrine for example: we cannot really know the truth with certainty. If you believed that cultural doctrine, would you want to go on a quest to discover the truth? Probably not. If you already believed that truth cannot be known, then you would never go and try to find it. If a pirate believed all the treasure had been taken off an island, he wouldn't continue digging.

But why would someone believe that truth cannot be known? Maybe some really

The Dogma Lives Loudly

During Judge Amy Coney Barrett's confirmation hearing in 2017 (not for the Supreme Court), Senator Dianne Feinstein questioned Barrett, "Dogma and law are two separate things. And whatever religion is, it has its own dogma. The law is totally different. And I think in your case, professor, when we read your speeches, the conclusion one draws is that the dogma lives loudly within you. And that's of concern when you come to big issues that large numbers of people have fought for years in this country." Analyze what Sen. Feinstein says. Does she have any dogmas? If so, what are they?

"The Dogma Lives Loudly within You: Revisiting Barrett's Confirmation Hearing." The New York Times. The New York Times, September 26, 2020. Last modified September 26, 2020. Accessed May 26, 2022.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/26/us/politics/the-dogma-lives-loudly-within-you-revisiting-barretts-confirmation-hearing.html>.

smart college professor told them that (faulty appeal to authority). Maybe a really popular television show character believed contradictory truths. Maybe this person failed before trying to find truth. Maybe the rest of the culture believes this cultural doctrine, so this individual decides to believe it too (bandwagon fallacy).

If a person believes truth cannot be known, he will not *want* to try to find truth. Furthermore, he will also believe that people who are trying to find truth are wasting their time. He may even make fun of people trying to seek truth.

Doctrine, whether it's from the Bible or from the culture changes what people want and what people do. In the following examples think about what someone might want or do incorrectly based on the wrong doctrinal belief.

Someone believes the Bible is not God's Word:

What would he or she want that's wrong? _____

What would he or she do that's wrong? _____

Someone believes God is like Santa Claus or a genie.

What would he or she want that's wrong? _____

What would he or she do that's wrong? _____

The Summarizing Process



Read Matthew 22:23-33

In this story, the Sadducees come to Jesus to try and trap him. The Sadducees do not believe in the resurrection like the Pharisees do. They had probably used this question against the Pharisees several times with the results they wanted: silence. If the Sadducees could silence Jesus on something complex in front of

crowd, they would be pleased. So, they try to trap Jesus with a question about someone who had been married several times. They ask Jesus who she would be married to in the resurrection.

Jesus's answer is astounding. He says, "You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God." Scripture is a vast topic. It was common practice of Jesus's day for Jewish boys to memorize the entire Torah (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). When Jesus says these Sadducees don't "know" scripture, he's not only talking about the *content* of scripture, but also the *meaning* of scripture. While the Sadducees memorized the contents of the Torah, they did not understand what it taught. In other words, they were unable to correctly summarize its meaning.

Jesus, on the other hand, summarizes the meaning of some contents within the Torah. Jesus quotes God from the Torah, "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Jesus further summarizes the meaning of this statement about the topic of the resurrection, "He is not God of the dead, but of the living."

The verse that Jesus references is Exodus 3:6. Exodus 3 is the story about God meeting Moses in the burning bush. God made this statement to Moses several centuries after the lives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God does not say, "I was the God . . ." but, "I *am* the God . . ." Jesus summarizes the teaching of this passage as, "He is not the God of the dead, but of the living." A **Bible reference** is *a passage location in the Bible including the book, chapter(s), and sometimes verses*. An example of this is Exodus 3:6. Exodus is a book in the Bible, "3" refers to the third chapter in Exodus, and "6" refers to the sixth verse in the third chapter.

In Jesus's day, there were no chapters or verses in the Bible. They were added much later. The chapters and verses make it much easier to find specific content within the Bible. Instead of your Bible teacher having you turn to the middle of the Torah and flip back and forth to find the right place to read, he can simply say,

“turn to Exodus 3:6.” If verses were in place in Jesus’s day, he also could have said, “Exodus 3:6 teaches that God is not God of the dead, but of the living.”

Correctly summarizing what the scripture teaches is pivotal for having orthodox doctrine. **Orthodox** means *correct doctrine*. This is the opposite of **heresy** which is *false doctrine*. Throughout this book you will be memorizing *Bible Reference and Summaries*. Sometimes these summaries essentially give you a title for what’s going on in the passage. For example, Genesis 6 is the flood. Memorizing this will allow you to know where to go to read about the flood account.

Other times, these summaries will give you what the passage teaches. For example, Luke 2:52 is Jesus has a human body and mind. Now the verse says, “And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.” Luke does not mention this to deny Jesus’s omniscience (that he has *all* knowledge). Rather, Luke mentions this to prove that Jesus was fully human. If a being does not *increase* in wisdom, could that person be truly human? No. This verse teaches us that Jesus has a human body and mind. There are other scriptures which teach that Jesus has knowledge in his divine nature beyond that of the human nature alone (cf. Mark 2:6-8).

Again, in order to be able to summarize *correctly* what a verse teaches, all the biblical data must be taken into account. For an example of an *incorrect* Bible reference and summary, we could say Philippians 4:13 teaches we can do anything. Philippians 4:13 says, “I can do all things through him who strengthens me.” Does this mean we can hit a grand slam or make a slam dunk? Does this mean we can fly (without technology)? When Paul says, “all things,” is that limited in some way? How could we know?

We know what Paul means by *context*. In Philippians 4:12, Paul speaks of being able to endure any circumstance he faces because he found the secret. What is the secret? Christ strengthens him. So, we could more correctly summarize the teaching of Philippians 4:13 as believers can endure any circumstance because their strength comes from Christ (and not from their circumstances).



Read Proverbs 26:4-5

When making Bible reference and summaries, it's important to note all the biblical data. Did you notice how the Proverbs you just read seemed to contradict one another? But think about the Proverbs again. They are put right next to each other on purpose. And both are generally true principles of life. There are times when both principles are applicable. In certain situations, answering a fool is good, and in others, it can be bad. Knowing both principles are true and applicable is good. It would be detrimental to only know one because you would apply only one every time you interact with a fool.

Cults (false religions that often try to validate their beliefs using the Bible) thrive on ignoring certain biblical data in favor of other biblical data. For example, Psalm 46:10 says, "Be still, and know that I am God." One false teacher says this verse means we humans can become gods if only we be still and recognize we are gods. This heretical teaching ignores the plain teaching of scripture that there is only one God (as taught in the *Shema*, Deuteronomy 6:4-5). Obviously, the Psalmist is calling the reader to be still and recognize that the one and true God is God, not us. Cults thrive on people not knowing what the Bible actually teaches.

Throughout volume 1, the memorization goal for the reader is 50 Bible reference and summary. Each chapter will conclude with five new Bible reference and summary to memorize. The reader should strive to study them a few minutes each night to commit them to long-term memory. Also, read the scriptures corresponding to the related summaries. Ask yourself, "Are the summaries reflective of the content and appropriate meaning of the scriptures?"

The overall goal for the student of *Doctrine for Devotion* is not just be able to memorize a plethora of Bible passages. Nor is it just to learn some doctrine from a Protestant perspective. Rather, the goal is *through* learning scripture and doctrine, the student will grow closer and more devoted to God.

Bible Reference and Summary

1. Matthew 1-2 The birth of Jesus (sad account w/ the Magi)
2. Matthew 5-7 The Sermon on the Mount
3. Matthew 5:3-13 The beatitudes (blessed are the. . .)
4. Matthew 6:9-13 The Lord's Prayer
5. Matthew 6:25-34 Do not worry

Terms to Know

1. **Bible doctrine** – *what the Bible teaches about any given topic*
2. **Morality** – *the understanding of right and wrong behaviors and attitudes*
3. **Summary** – *a short statement about the main points of something*
4. **Biblical data** – *facts and information observable in the Bible*
5. **Dogma** – *another word for doctrine*
6. **Connotation** – *idea or feeling a word expresses alongside its literal meaning*
7. **Tradition** – *a belief that has been around for a while, being passed from one generation to another*
8. **Cultural doctrines** – *beliefs that most people have within a given culture*
9. **Bible reference** – *a passage location in the Bible including the book, chapter(s), and sometimes verses*
10. **Orthodox** – *correct doctrine*
11. **Heresy** – *false doctrine*

Discussion Questions

1. Before reading this chapter, what would you say the Bible is *primarily* about? Do you agree with the author's threefold thesis of the Bible (who is God, who is man, how do the two relate)? Do you think there is a better way to summarize what the Bible is all about?
2. What is a topic in the Bible that you are most interested in learning more about? What is a topic in the Bible that you think you've never studied?

3. Why is summarizing the Bible so important? What do you think are some important tools for summarizing the Bible? What are some dangers in summarizing the Bible?
5. Think about the four major worldview questions. (Where did we (humanity) come from? What's wrong with the world? How can that wrong be made right? Where are we (humanity) headed? Or, what happens after we die?). Do you think these questions could be effective in getting to know someone? Do you think these questions could be used in sharing the gospel with someone?
6. One thesis in this chapter is that everyone has a dogma or doctrine by which they live. How could you prove that to someone (perhaps a secular person) who believes he does not have any doctrine?
7. Read Matthew 6:25-34. Do you think the summary "Do not worry" correctly goes with this passage? According to Jesus why should a Christian not worry? Try to summarize the passage concisely in your own words.