

THE DOCTRINES OF THE BIBLE: SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY



A CLOSER LOOK AT THE MAJOR THEMES OF THE BIBLE

We are not always aware of it, but the Bible consists of a number of themes, called doctrines. These doctrines form the core of our belief system. Doctrine has been the cause of many (unnecessary) arguments. One can argue that our doctrines may differ because we approach the subject from different angles, depending on our denominational background. This is wrong. There is only one angle to view it from and that is from the point of view of God, who is the author of the Word. All other views are irrelevant. When we read the Word of God and try to argue over who is wrong and who is right, let us allow the Author of the Word to be the final authority. For this we need the leading of the Holy Spirit.

According to Henry Thiessen (Thiessen, 1949) the core doctrines of the Bible are the following:

1. Theism, the existence of God
2. Bibliology, the revelation of God to man
3. Theology, the nature of God
4. Angelology, the purpose and work of the angels
5. Anthropology, the creation of man
6. Soteriology, God's plan for man
7. Ecclesiology, the founding and mission of the Church
8. Eschatology, the study of future events, focussing on the Coming of Jesus Christ

For us as born-again believers, the doctrine of **Soteriology** is where the basis of our faith is found. Jesus Christ and His redemptive work on the cross are critical to our salvation and as such He is the focus of this study.

MILK AND MEAT

The apostle Paul refers to taking in the Word of God as drinking milk and eating meat. First, take some time now to take your Bible and read the first three chapters of Paul's first letter to the church in Corinth. This will be the background against which we will explain what Paul means by milk and meat.

Now that you have finished reading the first three chapters, look at a key verse:

I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. – **1 Corinthians 3:2**

Paul mentions three types of people in the second and third chapters of this letter:

But the **natural** man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. – **1 Corinthians 2:14**

But he that is **spiritual** judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. – **1 Corinthians 2:15**

And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto **carnal**, even as unto babes in Christ. – **1 Corinthians 3:1**

Paul classifies people as either natural, spiritual, or carnal. He says the natural man, an unbeliever, cannot understand the things of God because these things are spiritually discerned or understood. The spiritual man on the other hand, understands and judges all things (in the Word) and because of his spiritual maturity does not need anyone else to judge him. The problem lies with the group in the middle – the carnal man. Paul says to them that because of their carnal nature, he cannot discuss with them the important aspects of growing in Jesus Christ as believers. He says this of them:

I have fed you with **milk**, and not with **meat**: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. – **1 Corinthians 3:2**

Milk and meat are the metaphors used to describe the level and time of teaching Biblical truth. For the immature believer, feeding them meat just does not work as they have to drink milk first. A baby does not start eating meat right after birth – the child's digestive system is not yet ready to manage a substance like meat. The mother feeds it milk for a period and then slowly the child is introduced to solid food and then to meat. There is a time for milk. We feed the new-born in Jesus Christ with the basics of the Word because that is what they understand at that time, irrespective of their age. A new-born in Jesus Christ starts at Day 1. Their physical age is not a yardstick by which to measure their spiritual ability. Then there is a time for meat. We have to progress from milk to meat.

The problem with the members of the church in Corinth is that they are not natural anymore as they have accepted Jesus Christ as their Saviour. However, Paul finds that they have not grown spiritually as he expected. By now they should have been able to understand the more complex aspects of their faith and have laid off the old life. (Corinth was a city with a dubious reputation.) He thus says that he cannot speak to them as spiritually mature people but ones that are carnal, even as babies. They are in a precarious position in that it seems like Paul has to teach them the basics again before he can continue.

The themes covered in the next articles are meant to be meat. From time to time we may assume a prior understanding of some aspects that are mentioned in order to fully understand what we are teaching now.

THE DOCTRINE OF SOTERIOLOGY

The following areas of Soteriology will be studied during successive articles:

1. The purpose, plan and method of God
2. The person of Jesus Christ
 - a. The preincarnate state
 - b. The humiliation of Jesus Christ
 - c. The two natures and the character of Jesus Christ
 - d. The work of Jesus Christ:
 - i. His death
 - ii. His resurrection, ascension and exaltation
3. The work of the Holy Spirit
4. Election and calling

5. Conversion
6. Justification
7. Regeneration
8. Union with Jesus Christ
9. Sanctification
10. Perseverance

What do all of these terms mean? Since much of the Bible is about God's plan of salvation for man, let us have a basic look at the most important doctrinal themes. Why did God send Jesus Christ, the second Person in the Trinity, to Earth? He did this for the following reasons:

1. We had to **experience the Godly nature of Jesus Christ** as perfectly God and perfectly man. Jesus came to demonstrate the nature of God to us.
2. We had to see Him **die on the cross at Calvary** for us. Those who lived before this time read about it in the prophetic scriptures; those who lived at the time saw it or heard of it; and those who lived after this read about it through the teaching of the books of the New Testament.
3. We had to be **converted** from the old life to a new life in Jesus Christ.
4. We had to be **justified** in Him and His death.
5. We had to be **regenerated** in Him as new beings.
6. We had to be **connected** to Him as a perfect union between man and God.
7. We had to be **sanctified** (made holy) in Him through the work of the Holy Spirit.
8. We had to be **taught perseverance** to endure to the end and our ultimate position in Him as the Church, the Bride of Jesus Christ.

Please note that while the structure of the quoted work, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* by Henry Thiessen, has been used, the study will extend to include the views of other students of systematic theology as well.

Bibliography

Thiessen, H. C., 1949. *Lectures in Systematic Theology*. 3rd Edition ed. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company.