

LESSON 1

THE STUDY OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

Introduction

As you begin the study of the Christian Doctrine of God, consider the following questions:

- How do you know there is a God?
- What is God like?
- How can you know about God?
- What can you know about God?
- How does the Christian belief about God differ from that of other religions?
- What is religion?
- Why are you interested in religion?
- Is your religious experience real or imagined?
- How do you distinguish between the true and the false in your religious experience?

During this study of the Christian Doctrine of God, an attempt will be made to answer the above questions. Perfect or complete answers will not always be given, for man is limited in his understanding and cannot completely apprehend the nature and person of God. Actually, man does not fully understand himself—the motives for his actions and the reasons for his particular personality pattern. How can man understand God whom he has not seen if he is unable to understand himself whom he sees daily? The fact that God cannot be fully apprehended does not mean, however, that it is impossible to know anything about Him. It is the purpose of this course to help you gain fuller understanding about the nature and work of God and how He relates Himself to man.

In order to understand the nature and to know the limitations of the study of Christian doctrine, it is necessary to define terms, to describe the field of study, and to explain the relation of this discipline to other religious studies. Christian doctrine is a methodical interpretation and organization of the teachings of the Christian religion. This definition will be dealt with more fully in a later section of this lesson. First, we should attempt to understand the meaning and nature of religion and, more specifically, the distinctives of the Christian religion.

The purpose of this course is to help me understand more fully the _____ and _____ of God and how He relates Himself to _____.

(nature, work, man)

What is Christian doctrine? _____

(Compare your answer with the text.)

The meaning of religion

Regardless of its origin, nature, and purpose, religion is a reality in history. Men of different fields of study disagree, however, concerning the nature of religion. The orthodox psychoanalysis of Sigmund Freud found religion to be an illusion, a projection of subjective desires into the outer world. For Freud there was no God (objective reality) apart from the wish-thinking (subjective projection) of man in need; man was controlled by a pleasure principle which sought self-satisfaction. Freud wrote:

When the child grows up and finds that he is destined to remain a child forever, and that he can never do without protection against unknown and mighty powers, he invests these with the traits of the father-figure; he creates for himself the gods, of whom he is afraid, whom he seeks to propitiate, and to whom he nevertheless entrusts the task of protecting him. Thus the longing-for-the-father explanation is identical with the other, the need for protection against the consequences of human weakness; the child's defensive reaction to his helplessness gives the characteristic features to the adult's reaction to his own sense of helplessness, i. e., the formation of religion.¹

According to his view, the Christian Doctrine of God is an irrelevant subject because there is no God whom man can know. Religion is an illusion of the immature person.

Anthropologists and sociologists have related the origin of religion to a basic characteristic of man. One theory suggests that religion originated from a sense of fear. Primitive man believed that his universe was set against him. He was convinced that certain actions would appease the hostile forces about him and death could be avoided. According to this view, the basic nature of religion is self-preservation.

E. B. Tylor proposed the animistic theory in which early man conceived of the world about him as animated. The branches of the trees moved because a spirit dwelt within each tree much like the spirit or life within man. Invisible spirits caused all phenomena. Religion arose from man's attempt to appease the spirits. According to this theory, religion is related to the superstition of man. This view and the previous view (sense of fear) acknowledge at least that religion cannot be separated from the nature of man. Man's religious nature is a part of his being. Further references to other theories will be left to the study of comparative religions.

¹Sigmund Freud, The Future of an Illusion (London: Hogarth Press, 1943), p. 42.

Freud found religion to be an _____.

(illusion)

Some say religion originated from a sense of _____.

(fear)

The animistic theory relates religion to the _____ of man.

(superstition)

Many definitions have been given for religion. James H. Leuba, in The Psychological Study of Religion, lists no less than 48. Most definitions can be classified in one of three categories:

- those describing a mode of behaviour,
- those emphasizing an intellectual belief or opinion,
- those emphasizing a system of feelings.

Hegel emphasized the intellectual side of religion. He defined religion as "the knowledge possessed by the finite mind of its nature as absolute." Another philosopher, Immanuel Kant, defined religion as "the recognition of all our duties as divine commands." He emphasized the moral nature of religion. The nineteenth century theologian Schleiermacher stated that the essence of the religious emotions consists in the feeling of an absolute dependence. He defined religion in terms of feelings.

There is the danger of over-emphasizing one aspect of man's religious experience. There is also the danger of focusing on man, the subject, and discounting the reality of God, the object. Religion involves the whole man—his life, intellect, emotion, and will; it is both individual and social; it centres in the relationship of man and God. Man expresses that relationship through worship. Religion is the life of man in relation to God.

The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary defines religion as (1) "Action or conduct indicating a belief in, reverence for, and desire to please, a divine ruling power;" (2) "A particular system of faith and worship."

The meaning of the Christian religion

Christianity has significant differences from other religions. Buddhism is described as "the Noble Eightfold Path." The emphasis is not on the personal relationship to a divine being but a way to live. The Japanese nationalist religion is called Shinto, "the way of the gods." Communism has rejected theism (the belief in God), but it teaches surrender to the Dialectical Process, which again is a way.

Christianity centres in a person.—The teachings of Christianity contain a way of life; in fact, the Christian movement was first described as "the Way." The emphasis in Christianity is not, however, on a way to live but on the relationship to a person, the Son of God. Apart from the person of Christ, there is no Christianity. The religion of the Hebrews was the fore-runner of Christianity, but Jesus Christ made the difference between Judaism and Christianity. Belief in Jesus as the Messiah is the one condition

Match the following by writing the number of the man beside the aspect of religion which he emphasized.

- | | |
|---------------|-------------------|
| ___ intellect | 1. Kant |
| ___ moral | 2. Schleiermacher |
| ___ feelings | 3. Hegel |

(3, 1, 2)

Three aspects of man's nature are involved in religion. List them.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

(intellect, emotion, will)

Christianity centres in a _____.

(person)

for entrance into the Kingdom of God through the new birth. Jesus is the anointed (Messiah or Christ) King who has established and rules over the eternal Kingdom. It is through Him that the believer comes to know God and to be accepted as a son of God. Jesus said, "I and my Father are one" (Jno. 10:30); "if ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also" (Jno. 8:19b); and, "no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (Jno. 14:6b).

Christianity offers forgiveness.—While other religions tell man how he ought to live but offer no power for accomplishing the righteous life, Christianity offers a new life which is available to every man through faith. Man's past life is cleansed through forgiveness. His present and future life is changed through the indwelling Christ. Man's life cannot be full and meaningful apart from forgiveness. Other religions teach one to make amends for his sins. Christianity teaches that God through Christ has removed man's sins.

Christianity promises resurrection and eternal life.—Hinduism promises reincarnation and finally reabsorption into the infinite. Christ made death the gateway to higher life in the presence of God for the believer. He took the sting out of the grave by removing sin which made death a punishment instead of a blessing. Paul believed that death was beneficial since to die was to be with Christ which is far better (Phil. 1:23). Christianity offers a victorious life in the present and a resurrected and eternal life with God in the future.

Christianity teaches that God seeks man.—Other religions teach a way of life which may eventually lead to the infinite. Christianity teaches that God came to man in the person of His Son "to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). Jesus is "the way, the truth, and the life," but He came to find lost and helpless man rather than waiting for man to find Him. Man does not have to "ascend into heaven" to bring Christ down from above (Rom. 10:6). God is love and He sent His only begotten Son in search of sinful man. The Son of God died on the cross to atone for man's sin and to reconcile lost man to his merciful and loving Creator.

The Need for a Study of the Teachings
of Christianity

The religious nature of man

Man has a religious nature. He may rebel against his religious cravings and deny the existence of God. He may spend a lifetime searching for spiritual happiness and fulfilment, but he cannot

Christianity offers _____.

(forgiveness)

Christianity promises _____
and _____.

(resurrection, eternal life)

Christianity teaches that _____ seeks
_____.

(God, man)

Now that you have finished reading about the four ways Christianity differs from other religions, can you list the four? Try it.

(Compare your answer with the text.)

ignore the question of religion in relation to his life. Religion concerns the meaning of man's existence and the question of his destiny. As a religious being, man needs answers to his questions concerning—

his origin,
the purpose of his few years on earth,
his future hope.

Sociologists, anthropologists, and psychologists may explain that man's religious nature arises from his environmental circumstances; nevertheless, they must recognize that man is a religious being. Helpless man in the face of overpowering forces of nature, such as storms and death, reaches out in an effort to relate to a powerful being who can deliver him. Man has a moral nature which has only partial control of his actions, but he perceives that God requires purity of life. When he reaches out to God for help, he becomes aware of his unworthiness. Man's ultimate concern is to know how to relate to the God who controls his present and future existence.

Religion is concerned with the relation of man to his God. Various religions propose different ways of relating to God. Christianity maintains that sinful man becomes redemptively related to God through the person of Christ. Christian doctrine is needed in order that man may know how to reach the goal of his ultimate concern.

The rational nature of man

"Christian doctrine deals with the thought side of religion."² It has been stated previously that the religious experience involves the total man—mind, emotion, will, and rational affection. Man as an intelligent or rational being desires to know and understand religious teachings. Since religion deals with his ultimate concern in life, his most urgent quest for knowledge and understanding is in the realm of religion. Christian doctrine is a study of the teachings of the Christian religion for the purpose of understanding the nature of God and His relation to man.

The divine commission to man

Communication is the transference of the thoughts or concepts of one person to the understanding of another. It is usually by verbal expression. Jesus commanded His disciples to share their faith

²W. T. Conner, Revelation and God (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1936), p. 18.

<p><i>Religion concerns the meaning of man's _____ and the question of his _____.</i></p> <p><i>(existence, destiny)</i></p>
<p><i>Man is a _____ being.</i></p> <p><i>(religious)</i></p>
<p><i>What is man's ultimate concern? _____</i></p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p><i>(to know how to relate to God who controls his present and future existence.)</i></p>
<p><i>Man is an intelligent and rational being who desires to know and understand _____.</i></p> <p><i>(religious truths or teachings)</i></p>

and the teachings of Christianity. The communication of faith and teachings requires the expression of Christian beliefs in clear statements. These statements should accurately convey the concepts of God, man, and redemption. The teachings must be understood before they can be communicated clearly. Christian doctrine is necessary for the qualifying of man to carry out the Great Commission.

The inclination to pervert religion

Because of his sinful nature or self-interest, man perverts religious teachings to conform with his desired actions. Paul Tillich suggested that Christianity is always in need of correction and renewal because it constantly becomes distorted. When man has a genuine religious experience, he attempts to communicate it to others. He has to reduce the experience to a statement or doctrine to convey it. Sometimes he is successful and others are able to take his teachings or statements as their guide to a genuine religious experience. On other occasions, man's teachings merely lead to a substitute for or an imitation of the genuine experience.

When a person has a genuine religious experience which brings satisfaction, he attempts to repeat the experience. He analyses the conditions which led to the original experience and repeats them. The approach he tries may bring the desired experience; therefore, he adopts this approach as a method for attaining a genuine religious experience. Others are invited to follow the same method. The method becomes a customary way of worship, and man's conservative nature tends to preserve customs once they have become established. The method may eventually cease to be effective and need revising or discarding. The purpose of Christian doctrine is to critically examine doctrinal statements to determine if they adequately communicate the teachings of Christianity and to review the religious methods of the Church to determine if they continue to be effective.

The Nature of the Study

Possible titles for the study

Christian doctrine. — Doctrine refers to the act of teaching certain precepts. The word 'doctrine' may also be used to designate the body of truth which is taught. Christian doctrine has reference to the body of truth which is known primarily through the revelation of Christ. It includes knowledge of the nature and relation of God and man as revealed

In order to communicate one's faith in God and Christian teachings, a person must understand _____.

(Christian doctrine)

Because of man's inclination to make religious teachings conform to his actions, doctrinal statements need to be _____ critically.

(examined)

Christian doctrine includes knowledge of the nature and relation of _____ and _____ as revealed in _____.

(God, man, Christ)

in Christ. This course concerns the doctrine of God—

how God has made Himself known to man;
what He has made known about Himself.

The study focuses on God's revelation and nature. The redemptive relation of God and man will be discussed in the next course.

Systematic theology.—This term is often employed to describe the study and organization of the doctrines of Christianity. 'Theology' comes from two Greek words: *Theos* which means God and *logos* which means word, statement, or rational thought. Theology is a rational thought or truth about God. 'God' may be defined as Ultimate Being, the Source of everything else, the Highest Value, or the Supreme Being. Although 'theology' refers specifically to God and His nature, the term has been employed to include the whole range of Christian doctrine.

During the Middle Ages, theology referred to the doctrine of God in the narrower sense. The term gradually came to be identified with dogmatics or all the beliefs of the Church. Later, theology was related to other areas of religious studies, such as church history and practical theology. The term 'theology' is now the all-inclusive term for the intellectual work which deals with the Bible and the Church.³ When 'systematic' is joined to the word 'theology', the area of study is limited. Systematic theology refers to the study of the doctrines of Christianity which have been organized on the basis of their relation to one another and their particular significance. Christian doctrine, systematic theology, and dogmatics are interchangeable terms; however, Christian doctrine is a more suitable term for this course.

Dogmatics.—Some Christian groups refer to the systematic study of their beliefs (dogmas) with the traditional title 'dogmatics'. In public usage, 'dogma' meant ordinance or enactment for the government of a city, a decree enforced with the support of the law. In the language of the philosophers, it meant the common tenets (beliefs) of a school which served as a basis for further teaching and research. Josephus used the expression 'dogmata of God' to describe the content of the Old Testament writings. Dogma was eventually used to describe the fundamental Christian truths which the Church had laid down as religious laws. The ecclesiastical authorities of the Church in the Middle Ages laid down definite doctrines as valid and binding for faith. Those who diverged from these valid doctrines were explicitly

³See Emil Brunner, Dogmatics, Vol. I: The Christian Doctrine of God, trans. by Olive Wyon (London: Lutterworth Press, 1949), pp. 89ff.

<p><i>Systematic theology is the study and organization of the _____ of Christianity.</i></p> <p><i>Theology is a rational _____ or _____ about _____.</i></p> <p><i>(doctrines, thought, truth, God)</i></p>
<p><i>Name three terms used interchangeably which refer to the study of Christian beliefs. Draw a circle around the term which is more suited for this course.</i></p> <p>1. _____</p> <p>2. _____</p> <p>3. _____</p> <p><i>(Christian doctrine, systematic theology, dogmatics; Christian doctrine should be circled)</i></p>
<p><i>Dogma has come to mean the fundamental Christian truths which the _____ has laid down as religious _____.</i></p> <p><i>(Church, laws)</i></p>

judged and condemned as heretics. Dogma has come to refer to the infallible teachings of the Catholic Church which must be believed. Every doctrine which contradicts Church Dogma is forbidden and suppressed by the Church authorities.⁴

Selection of a title

Dogmatic theology is an appropriate title for the study of the beliefs of those churches which have binding creeds. Since Baptists have common beliefs based on the Bible but no list of creeds which must be subscribed to, it seems wise not to use the term 'dogmatics' in referring to the study of Christian teachings. Systematic theology is frequently used, but the term often denotes the study of apologetics, philosophy of religion, and Christian ethics in addition to the study of teachings concerning the nature and relation of God and man. A study of the teachings of Christianity includes these three areas, but the main emphasis of this course is placed on setting forth what Christians believe about God.

Apologetics and Christian evidences seek to prove that God exists and Christianity is true. The Bible does not attempt to prove the existence of God but presupposes that God is. Christians have already accepted that presupposition; therefore, the need is not to prove the existence of God but to set forth in an organized manner what is known about God. Christian evidence is intended to convince unbelievers that Christianity is true. Christian doctrine is intended to instruct Christians with regard to the meaning of their faith which is the purpose of this course.

Christian doctrine and science

A. H. Strong defines theology as the science of God and of the relation between God and the universe.⁵ Whether theology is considered a science or not depends on one's definition of science. The word originally meant 'to know'. Science later referred to knowledge acquired by study. It now refers to the branch of study which is concerned either with the connected body of demonstrated truth or with the systematic classification of observed facts.

⁴Emil Brunner, Christian Doctrine of God, pp. 89ff.

⁵A. H. Strong, Systematic Theology, Vol. I: The Doctrine of God (Valley Forge, Pa.: The Judson Press, 1907), p. 1.

Dogma has come to refer to the infallible teachings of the _____ Church which must be _____.

(Catholic, believed)

Baptists do not use the term 'dogmatic theology' because _____.

(they have no list of creeds which must be subscribed to)

Christian doctrine is intended to instruct Christians with regard to the _____.

(meaning of their faith)

What is A. H. Strong's definition of theology? _____

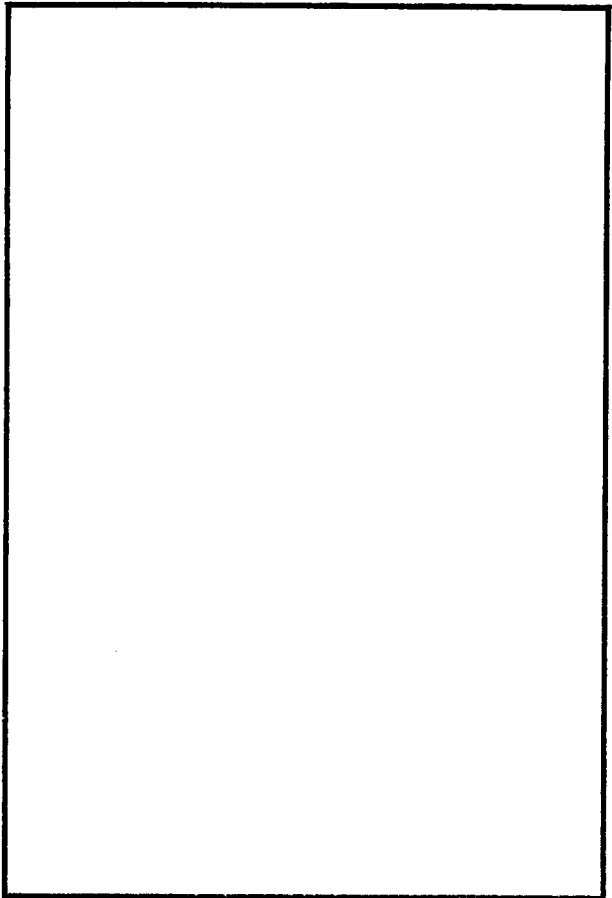
(Compare your answer with the text.)

The scientific method employs the observation of phenomena, the formulation of hypotheses, the investigation by experiments, and the organization of conclusions into theories which eventually become known as laws of nature. Many insist that true science be limited to fields which permit investigation by experiments, that is, material reality. Since theology is concerned with the immaterial or spiritual and the thought side of existence, it cannot be investigated as the natural or material world. Thoughts do not have weight nor occupy space; however, they are real.

It is unscientific to limit reality to material existence. To claim that material existence is superior to immaterial existence is questionable because the immaterial controls the material. What a man believes determines what he does in relation to the material world about him. It is true that his economic and material environmental influences are not the final determining factors which control his life. Communism claims that man's economic environment controls his personal life and society. Determinists believe that man's life is controlled by the experiences of his early environment. Although man is influenced by his environment, the ultimate controlling factor in his life is spiritual. Christians claim that a divine Power has invaded their lives and changed their pattern of living.

As a science, Christian doctrine investigates the claims of Christians with regard to truth which comes through experience and revelation and organizes those truths into a system. The truths of Christianity cannot be investigated, however, in the same manner as truths of physical existence. Spiritual truth comes through revelation and is not discovered by research. Theology is a science in that it is a study of truth and an organization of the results into a system. It is not a science in the sense of discovering truth through research, investigation, and experimentation. As a science, theology must be judged by its own criteria and not by the standards of physical or natural science.

The object of investigation is the Christian religion which is a fact of history and experience. Christianity grew out of the historical life and work of Christ. Its antecedent is the Hebrew religion of the Old Testament, but apart from the person of Christ there is no Christianity. Christian doctrine is not concerned with the objective investigation of a Person who once lived, but it is concerned with establishing a relation to that Person through the attitude of faith. The ultimate purpose of Christian doctrine is not to learn objective facts about a Person but to study the teachings which guide to a proper relationship to that Person. There is always the danger that theology will degenerate to an



Theology is a science in that it is a study of _____ and an _____ of the results into a system.

(truth, organization)

Is this statement true or false?

The ultimate purpose of Christian doctrine is not to learn objective facts about a Person but to study the teachings which guide to a proper relationship to that Person.

(true)

accumulation of facts instead of serving as a guide to the establishment of a redemptive relationship with Christ. The goal of theology is not to know about God but to know God through faith in Christ.

The relation of theology and reason

Doctrine is concerned with the intellectual aspect of religion. Knowledge and understanding are the skeleton of religion. Christian experience and feelings must be structured into thoughts before they can be shared with others.

Faith has often been contrasted to knowledge and reason. Faith is defined sometimes as "belief in that which cannot be known but which is hoped to be true." Christian beliefs are based on faith; therefore, their veracity may be questioned. Those who accept as truth only that which can be scientifically proven may conclude that it is unreasonable to believe that which is beyond empirical knowledge. Reason becomes the ultimate authority in determining truth and faith is relegated to the realm of 'wish-thinking' of the immature. The validity of theology is challenged.

Actually, all knowledge begins with presuppositions based on faith. The scientist believes that his senses are dependable for relating his mind to objective material reality, but he cannot prove that presupposition. Since his work based on that presupposition brings satisfactory results in his scientific investigations, his belief seems reasonable and leads to knowledge. The theologian follows the same pattern. He accepts his sense experiences as reliable sources for knowing creation. Creation suggests a creator. It is reasonable, on the basis of the cause and effect methodology of scientists, to conclude that a creator caused the existence of the world. This conclusion cannot be proved—it must be accepted by faith. It is reasonable since reason points to such a probability. When the existence of a creator is accepted as truth, this belief provides the foundation for structuring a philosophy which gives meaning and purpose to one's existence. Faith and reason are not antagonistic but complementary and interdependent.

The intellectual element of man is concerned with the question, "What does this mean?" Doctrine attempts to explain the meaning of each significant teaching of Christianity. God has made Himself and His works known to man, but man must understand the nature of God and His works in relation to his own situation. Christian doctrine is the process by which a person reflects on the teachings of Christianity and determines their relation to his daily life.

What is the goal of theology? _____

(Compare your answer with the text.)

Christian experience and feeling must be structured into _____ before they can be _____ with others.

(thoughts, shared)

All knowledge begins with presuppositions based on _____.

(faith)

Christian doctrine is the _____ by which a person _____ on the teachings of Christianity and _____ their relation to his _____.

(process, reflects, determines, daily life)

Man's reason is utilized not only to define the teachings of the Christian faith, but to examine those teachings. Not everything that is taught in the name of Christ is true. It is the task of man's reason to examine each teaching and to judge whether it is consistent with the larger deposit of faith.

Man's reason can lead him astray if it is not joined to the attitude of faith and guided by revelation. Sinful and perverted man can use reason to rationalize or justify his actions. If pride and self-interest dominate a person, his life is characterized by unbelief or refusal to submit to the control of Christ. He will probably use his reason to justify actions which bring selfish benefits. The rational faculties of the man who by faith desires to honour Christ instead of self are employed to understand the Word and Will of God. The attitude and purpose for which one uses his reason determine its value.

Christian doctrine or theology clarifies the teachings of the Church by giving them a rational structure. It makes them more intelligible for communication, arranges the teachings in their proper relationship to one another, and purges the errors which creep into Christian beliefs.

The Sources of Doctrine

Since the task of doctrine is to explain the contents of the Christian faith, the question immediately arises: "What are the sources for the beliefs of Christianity?" The primary source is the Bible, although it is not the only source for a knowledge of God.

The primary source: the Bible

The Bible is divided into two parts: the Old and New Covenants. The Old Testament is a record of Israel's knowledge of God which was revealed through her experiences in history. God's actions in Israel's history revealed His nature and purpose to His chosen people.

The doctrine of God is highly developed in the Old Testament. He made Himself known to Israel as a God of justice who required righteousness on the part of His people and who would show mercy if His people repented.

The New Testament contains the highest revelation of God. Since God is a person, the most complete revelation of His nature and will were given in the person of His Son Jesus Christ. The New Testament contains the primary and final teachings concerning the nature of God, His work,

List two ways man's reason is used in theology.

1. _____
2. _____

(Compare your answer with the text.)

The primary source of Christian doctrine is the _____.

(Bible)

and His will for man. Christ came from the Father and made Him known to the disciples (Jno. 14:9). The character, work, and teachings of Christ are the norm for Christian doctrine. Any doctrine which conflicts with the teachings and life of Jesus must be rejected.

Secondary sources

The knowledge of God is not limited to the Bible even though its teachings serve as the norm for other sources of doctrine. Secondary sources must relate to the Bible. The world of nature is a secondary source which speaks to man about an immaterial Power in and beyond nature. Man can become aware of the goodness and power of God as well as His justice through the observation of natural events. An awareness of the world about us results in the conclusion that it had an origin and an Originator. The more man understands about the magnitude of this universe, the more he realizes the greatness of the One who created it. Although nature speaks to man about the existence of God, it does not give a final or complete word concerning His nature. The existence of nature implies a supernatural cause of great power. Man might learn from nature that he is responsible to God and is condemned by God because of his sin. Man cannot learn about God's redeeming love and mercy through nature. Because man's reason has been perverted by sin, he misreads the revelation of God in nature if he is not guided by the Bible (cf. Rom. 1:18ff.).

Church history is also a source of Christian doctrine. The doctrine of the Trinity is implicit in the New Testament, but it is not explicitly stated in any New Testament book. The triune nature of God was defined by the early Christians as they met in councils and were guided by the Holy Spirit. Problems which appeared in the life of the early Church forced the leaders to define and clarify their beliefs. The doctrines of the Church today are based on the Bible, but they were explicated (to develop the implications of) in early Church history.

The reason of man is another secondary source of Christian doctrine. The teachings set forth in the Bible and the truths learnt from historical experience must be understood and explained. Doctrine involves the intellectual activity of interpreting Christian teachings and organizing them into a system which is clear and can be communicated. Although the human mind does not know God directly, nor can it discover God through rational processes, it is necessary for receiving and understanding revealed truths from God.

What is one secondary source of Christian doctrine? _____
(the world of nature)

Are the following statements true or false?
Man can know about the existence of God through nature. _____
Man can learn about God's redeeming love and mercy through nature. _____
(true, false)

Give another secondary source of Christian doctrine. _____
(Church history)

_____ is a secondary source of Christian doctrine.
(man's reason)

Christian experience is an important source of Christian doctrine. A rational study of Christianity does not guarantee a perception of spiritual truths. Those who encounter God in an experience of forgiveness through faith in Jesus Christ understand the nature of God better than those who spend many years in trying to know Him through reading theology. The experiences of answered prayer and the power of the Holy Spirit in daily life give deeper understanding of the nature of God than many lectures or books about Him. Without the experience of a personal relationship with God, it is impossible to interpret New Testament doctrine correctly.

The Structure of the Subject

There are three basic methods employed in studying doctrines. Biblical theology is concerned with the exposition of the teachings of the Bible. It is closely related to Biblical interpretation or exegesis (to dig out the meaning). It collects, correlates, and organizes the teachings of the Old and New Testaments on various subjects. One approach may be to select a word or concept and trace the teachings which relate to it in both the Old and New Testaments. An example would be to select words such as 'grace', 'spirit', or 'king' and examine the meaning of each word as it is used in different passages in the Bible. A second approach to organization is to study the key teachings of specific writers. For example, the Johannine meaning of 'belief' or the Pauline meaning of 'flesh'. A third approach is to follow the rubrics (key thoughts) of systematic theology but limit the study to what the Bible teaches concerning God, man, salvation, the Christian life, the Church, and eternity.

Historical theology sets out the various Christian doctrines as they developed during the various periods of Christian history. Christian history is often organized around the development of doctrines such as the Trinity, the nature and person of Christ, the sacraments, church hierarchy, and predestination. Christian history and historical theology cannot be strictly separated.

Christian doctrine or systematic theology uses the results of Biblical interpretation, Biblical theology, and historical theology as well as philosophy of religion in setting forth the beliefs about God. W. T. Conner's system of doctrine emphasizes Biblical teachings.

Karl Barth denied that a valid knowledge of God comes through nature. Man knows God only through the Word, Christ. Emil Brunner believed that nature reveals something about God which man can know, but man in his sinful condition cannot construct a valid system of doctrine of God based

List the four secondary sources of Christian doctrine which you have just read about on page 11 and the top of this page.

(Compare your answer with the text.)

There are how many basic methods used in teaching doctrines? ____

Name one method. _____

(3, Biblical theology)

Another method used in teaching doctrines is _____.

(historical theology)

_____ or systematic theology is another method.

(Christian doctrine)

on nature (a natural theology). The theological structures of different men vary according to their beliefs about the sources and nature of doctrine.

How should a system of Christian doctrine be organized? Should the system begin with God who is unknown or man and his need of God? Should the knowledge of God begin with the Father who sent the Son or with the Son who revealed the Father? W. T. Conner's system of theology is—

How man knows God (revelation);
What man knows about God: His nature, His attributes, and the relation of the Persons of the Godhead.

Give two possible approaches to beginning a system of Christian doctrine.

(begin with God who is unknown, begin with man and his need of God)

Home Study Exercises

Basic activity (Levels 1, 2, and 3). The following questions are based on the study guide material.

1. What is the purpose of this course? _____

2. Give a definition of Christian doctrine. _____

3. What was Freud's concept of religion? _____

4. What is the animistic theory? _____

5. Name three aspects of man's nature which are involved in the religious experience.

6. List four ways Christianity differs from other religions. (1) _____
_____ (2) _____
(3) _____
(4) _____
7. List four reasons for the doctrinal study of Christianity.
(1) _____
(2) _____

(3) _____

(4) _____

8. Define theology. _____

9. Why do Baptists not use the term 'dogmatic theology'? _____

10. In what sense can Christian doctrine be called a science? _____

11. What is the ultimate purpose of Christian doctrine? _____

12. Name two ways reason serves theology.

(1) _____

(2) _____

13. What is the primary source of Christian doctrine? _____

14. List four secondary sources of Christian doctrine. _____

15. What can and cannot man learn about God from nature? _____

16. What other disciplines does Christian doctrine depend upon? _____

Supplementary activity (Levels 2 and 3):

1. Explain the differences between Christian doctrine, systematic theology, and dogmatic theology.
2. What is the relation of the Bible to the secondary sources of knowledge about God?
3. Read pages 13-27 in Christian Doctrine by Shirley C. Guthrie and answer the following questions:
 - (1) To what areas of life does Christian theology relate?
 - (2) What criteria guide in the study of doctrine and what should be remembered in using them?

Advanced activity (Level 3):

Read pages 17-36 in Shaping Your Faith by C. W. Christian and answer the following questions:

1. What is the purpose of doctrine or theology?
2. What does Dr. Christian mean by the statement that theology must be existential?

3. Why is theology complex?
4. State the spiritual dangers faced by a trained theologian and a non-theologian.
5. Does a knowledge of doctrine make one more spiritual?

Optional reading: Revelation and God by Conner, pages 15-33.
The Christian Doctrine of God, Vol. 1 of Dogmatics by Brunner, pages 3-101.

Seminar Discussion

1. Is Christian doctrine a science?
2. What is the relation of faith and reason, or theology and reason?
3. Why study Christian doctrine?
4. What is religion and how did it originate?
5. What are the important differences between Christianity and other religions?
6. What is the best title for a course on the study of the beliefs of Christianity? Be prepared to give reasons for your answer.