

EQTH105 Basic Bible Doctrine

Unit 6d Conclusions About Studying

Presented by the



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Hello and welcome back. Here we are at the last lesson in our study of basic Bible doctrine, a study that is sometimes called systematic theology. And to conclude this course, I'd like to come full circle by examining a number of basic assumptions or foundations of our study. Maybe we should have started with this. But the point remains that over the course of our study, there are a number of assumptions that are woven through each of the lessons throughout the entire course. The first assumption in the course is that the God of the Bible exists. This is primary. We cannot properly study Christian doctrine or Christian teaching unless we assume that God actually exists. You will notice that nowhere in our lessons do we attempt to prove or persuade that God actually exists. You will notice the same thing throughout Scripture as well. Nowhere in the Bible does God attempt to prove he exists or present an argument for his existence. It is simply assumed. Now, there are courses or studies that do try to prove God's existence. That type of study is called apologetics. But for us, as I said, we simply assume that God is. I'm reminded of what God said to Moses from the burning bush. Moses asked, "What is your name?" God replied, "**I AM WHO I AM.** This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'" [Exd 3:14] God simply explained his name by saying, "I exist."

Now, the next thing that must be assumed is that he is the only God who exists. There is no other god either lesser or greater than he. So God is, and he is the only God that exists. As we progress through the course, we also touched on the assumption that God has spoken to humanity by means of a number of sacred writings. These writings have been collected into one book, the Bible. How do we know the things we know about God? Because he told us. Now, while we are on that subject, we should probably state the obvious belief that not only has God spoken to humanity, but that God has spoken truthfully to humanity. It's not enough to believe that God has spoken. You must also believe that everything God has said is truthful. He is not a God who would lie in his communication to mankind. So our assumptions are: (1) God is; (2) he is the only God who exists; and (3) he has revealed truth through Scripture.

Now, in this course, we have placed a great deal of emphasis on the biblical foundation of our knowledge. We have explored basic scriptural truths about the attributes and characteristics of God and Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. And as we worked through these studies, I hope it became clear that we are just scratching the surface of the Bible doctrine. There is a lot that is plain and clear in the Bible, but there is a lot that is confusing and murky as well. And certainly there's greater study in order to understand more completely. Any student who attempts to explore and understand God and comes across some of these confusing points, well, one basic rule of the interpretation of the Bible is that the Old Testament must be fully interpreted in light of the New Testament. The New Testament is the later, fuller revelation from God. It fulfills what the Old Testament predicts and anticipates. Consequently, the Old Testament must be viewed in the light of the New Testament to understand its complete meaning.

When establishing Christian doctrine, it is proper to cite individual verses. These are sometimes called proof texts. This is an acceptable practice. For example, in order for a human to go to heaven, they must accept Jesus Christ as their savior. This is a truth claim. A proof text that supports this claim is John 3:16. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” The idea is to collect all the passages that deal with a particular topic and then summarize the results. As we explore, as we study, as we attempt to discern truth, we use these proof texts to establish Christian doctrine. But as we do, a number of questions need to be asked as we study. So, as we are looking at Scripture, let’s walk through some of these questions. Remember, we are using the Bible, as we should, to learn more about God. So as we dig into Scripture and study, what are some of these questions?

Here’s one question as you study. Is God or one of his spokesmen doing the speaking? As you look at a particular passage, it must be determined if God is actually speaking or one of his handpicked spokesmen. The Bible contains the speech of hundreds of people, and not all of them were speaking God’s truth. Only certain individuals were chosen by the Lord to speak his truth. For example, in the Book of Job, the discussion between Job and his three friends was called by God “words without knowledge.” In fact, Scripture says, “Then the Lord spoke to Job out of the storm. He said: ‘Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge?’” [Job 38:1-2] So as you work through and study all the statements made in that part of the Book of Job, remember they can’t be used to derive doctrine about who God is and what he does. There is error mixed with truth in what these people said. The truth is that they said it, but their words must be evaluated in light of other portions of Scripture where we know that the Lord has spoken. So the first question that you look at is “Who is speaking?”

The next question to ask is “Is the person speaking actually speaking for the Lord?” We need to determine whether one of God’s prophets or spokesmen was actually speaking for the Lord when the statement was recorded. Now, one example of that question is when the prophet Nathan spoke presumptuously when he claimed to speak for the Lord. Now, Nathan was a prophet and he had been given a revelation from God. But here in this setting, King David asked Nathan if he could build a temple for the Lord, and Nathan told David the Lord wanted him to go ahead. That night, the Lord appeared to Nathan and told him that he did *not* want David to build a temple. [2Sa 7:4-5, 12-13] Therefore, the original word of the prophet was not divinely given. So we need to make sure the context supports whether the statements in any part of Scripture are to be accepted as God’s divine truth or merely the thoughts of humans.

The next question we ask ourselves as we look at a verse is “Does the verse clearly teach the doctrine?” When looking at a particular verse as a proof text, it should be determined if the verse clearly teaches a particular truth. The verse that contains clear statements can and should be used to compile Christian doctrine. But if there is not a clear statement about a particular doctrine, is

there perhaps at least a clear inference when a passage, for example, clearly infers Christian truth that it can be used as a proof text? Now, after the categories of clear statements and clear inferences comes the category of general inferences. Does the text infer some type of Christian truth or part of Christian truth? Passages in this category do not lend as strong a support as those that have clear statements and clear inferences. And we must be careful about using these types of statements to compile Christian doctrine. We have to ask ourselves, “Does the passage really infer something, or is there some other possible way of understanding it?” Doctrines should therefore be compiled from clear statements and clear inferences. Inferences that may or may not be that clear should be used cautiously.

Now, I’d like to pause here and just stress the importance of this. Sometimes, as my old pastor said, when the plain sense of Scripture makes sense, seek no other sense for all other sense is nonsense. But what happens when it’s not plain sense? We have to be very careful calling something doctrine when God doesn’t feel the same way about it. So we really need to be sure when we use the word “God says.” I’ll give you an example. I have heard of an instance where a pastor at a developing nation, who wasn’t maybe very well-trained, read the account in Scripture where King Nebuchadnezzar went mad and was eating grass for seven years. And then at the end of the seven years, God restored him. So this particular pastor told his congregation that they needed to go out and eat grass and the Lord would restore them.

Now, unfortunately, this is a true story. But the point is this. When those poor folks discovered that their pastor was wrong about eating grass, would they then begin to question other things this pastor had taught, like salvation by faith and so on? So we need to be sure when we claim something to be God’s truth. When interpreting the Scripture to establish Christian doctrine, we must interpret the language in its normal sense. This has also been called the historical grammatical method. Simply stated, it means that we interpret the Bible as we would any other writing. We understand the words in their normal sense, unless something in the context tells us otherwise.

So let’s summarize where we’re at so far. First, we should assume that the God of the Bible exists. This is primary. In addition, he has spoken to humanity in one book alone: the Bible. Indeed, no other source, written or oral, can rightfully be called the word of God. Furthermore, he has spoken truthfully in Scripture. Everything he teaches is the truth. There should be no question about this. When examining the Bible to compile doctrine, the Old Testament should be interpreted in light of the New Testament. The Old Testament is incomplete, and the New Testament is based on the Old. They work together. In other words, we need both. Proof texts come from Scripture. They can and should be used to compile doctrine. They are statements in the Bible which we can trust. But these proof texts must come from statements of the Lord or from his chosen spokesmen. Statements of unbelievers have no divine authority. Doctrines should only be compiled from clear statements of Scripture or clear inferences. We should not attempt to compile doctrines out of obscure teachings.

So as we conclude this study, I'm tempted to ask the question, "So what?" We have been through 24 lessons of theology. And what is the point of studying all of this? In all of this intellectual knowledge, it's great, but what does it mean in my life? And I would say this. Having a correct knowledge of who God is and where we stand in relation to him gives us the best shot we have to have the best life we can have. That's basic, right? Everyone wants to live the best life possible. Well, how can a person find God's best for his life? The Bible tells us that God wants to give us our heart's desires. The psalmists said, "Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart." [Psa 37:4]

So to wrap up this study, let's look at the steps that are necessary to find God's best for our lives. And to do this, I will start with the most important. The first thing God expects from us is belief. We are to believe that he exists and that he has revealed himself in the person of Jesus Christ. It is only through faith in Jesus that a person can come to God. Acts 4:12 says, "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." Once we have made the step of faith by believing in Jesus Christ as savior, we then become a child of God and we begin to develop a personal relationship with God.

To do this, the believer must take time to study God's word. And that is what this course is all about. A careful study of the Scripture will help the person determine what it is that God expects from him. The Bible records God's command and the promises he makes to those who trust him. Once we are born again, the main thing that God is looking for in the believer is faith. He has promised to bless those who trust him. In Proverbs, we read, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your path." [Pro 3:5-6] As believers, we should continually acknowledge God and participate in his divine process to make us more like Christ. Our life will be enriched as we receive those good gifts the Lord has promised. Believing God, developing a personal relationship with him based on faith in Christ, these are the steps required for experiencing God's best for our life.