

BACKGROUND MATERIAL

(To be read)

**. . . the writing of many books is endless, and
excessive devotion to books is wearying to the body.**

(Ecclesiastes 12:12)

Why another book on Bible doctrine? Besides loving the subject, I believe it is important for the individual Christian and the church of Jesus Christ to be firmly founded in biblical truth. A missionary veteran, Dr. C. Gordon Olson has made the following observation:

[I]t is no overstatement to say that *biblical doctrine is foundational to the life, witness, and ministry of individual Christians, and to the life of the church*. Yet today, we see little concern for doctrine in most evangelical churches, and music is fast becoming doctrinally vapid. This situation is so serious that it must be called a crisis.¹

For thirty-two years Ruth and I served as missionaries in the interior of Brazil. When we came back to the States to retire in 1998, we suffered more cultural shock than we had experienced in 1966 when we arrived in Cuiabá, Mato Grosso, which at that time was called “the end of the world.” I fully agree with what Dr. Olson has said. We must teach the truths of the Bible to our youth and in the churches. (Deuteronomy 6:7)

In preparation for ordination at Palmcroft Baptist Church in Phoenix, Arizona and as my wife and I were making ready to serve the Lord as missionaries in Brazil, my first declaration of faith was written and copyrighted in 1964. It has been my continual desire to expand upon that original document, which I have done in the margins and in my teaching materials used in ministry during some forty years of teaching.

While a missionary in Brazil, I taught in a small Bible institute and did lay leadership training in local churches in Cuiabá, Mato Grosso. Over the years many books with varying theological positions were written in English. Some of them had been translated into Brazilian Portuguese, but most were from works that were published in the States forty or more years before the Portuguese translation. In my opinion, they did not communicate well and did not meet the needs of the Brazilian believers. While doing more research and study, I expanded my 1964 doctrinal booklet as I translated and taught it in Brazilian Portuguese. That work was privately published in 1996.

After retiring as a missionary, my youngest daughter, Kathleen, began telling me, “Dad, you need to get this published for Americans. Most Christians don’t know this stuff.”

¹ Olson, C. Gordon, *Getting the Gospel Right*, © 2001, Pub. Global Gospel Ministries, Cedar Knolls, NJ, page 4, emphasis his

Consequently, I began translating back into English; and while doing so, I have restudied and added still more to my original, ordination doctrinal statement.²

My objective has been to organize and communicate the teachings of Scripture so the average Christian can grasp and employ them. A careful study of this book will help the reader in his search to know and understand what the Bible teaches. I trust it will make the reader a strong believer, one who has constructed his house of faith on the Rock of Truth so that the winds of doubt, unbelief, confusion and false teachings cannot shake or disturb it. This book is not a Christian novel that one can rush through and be satisfied. This volume would not be practical on a CD that one rents at a Cracker Barrel and listens to while driving on the interstate. *To accomplish our goal, the reader must diligently read and re-read the text, including the footnotes and Bible references.* For those who desire more, I recommend materials at the end of each chapter, when possible.

It is my firm belief that God reveals Himself through His creation. Paul declares that since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they [mankind] are without excuse. (Romans 1:20)

For at least 2,500 years God's creation was the only book about God that man had. However, from the day of his birth until the end of time, each individual is held responsible for the truths revealed in *God's Book of Works*—what God created. Truth is out there inviting us to learn and to develop our knowledge and skills—about God, moral values, man, and our environment. Proverbs 1:20 and following, Proverbs 8:1 and following, and Proverbs 9:1-6 tell us that wisdom invites all to learn from her. The study of *God's Book of Works* has taught humankind many valuable lessons that have improved our earthly lives. God holds us accountable to learn truth from the Book of Works. Proverbs says that those who heed and learn from it obtain life. Those who are lazy and unwilling to learn truth will suffer loss—in this life and eternity.

God's Book of Words—the Bible—teaches us truths that are not well expressed in and easily learned from God's Book of Works. The Bible makes it clear that God loves us, has made a way for us to find peace and fellowship with Him, and has a wonderful plan for each person. This book on Bible doctrine is an effort to place in order the truths learned from God's Book of Words—the Holy Scriptures.

The Word of God is a book that transcends the centuries and all cultures. It is alive, because the One who created us wrote it and stands behind it to reveal Himself to the *seeking* heart. He desires for the people He created to know Him, love Him, fellowship with Him, and follow Him. The servant of God has a responsibility to communicate the truths of God in such a way that they are understood by the common person—my goal in ministry and in this book (Nehemiah 8:7-8; 1 Timothy 3:12 and 4:11-13). Because cultures change, there will always be a need to study and write new materials in order to

² The "Doctrine of Israel" and three of the 5 chapters in the appendix were not in that Portuguese edition.

communicate the message of the Bible in the language and culture of the current generation.

At the age of twelve, I repented of my sins and trusted Jesus as my Savior at College Park Baptist Church in Orlando, Florida. I was married to Ruth Lundy at First Baptist Church when it was in downtown Orlando, and I obtained my formal education in a Conservative Baptist college in Phoenix.³ My background, training, and personal studies have caused me to believe in a Baptist history that goes back to the earlier centuries of this present age and in the historic Baptist distinctives that have been obtained from a study of those early and later persecuted churches. Though I have sought to overcome any biases, I admit that the above and my American cultural background have impacted my view of Christianity and my conclusions about what the Bible teaches. Though 32 years in cross-cultural communication have helped me to recognize and correct some of these false concepts, I confess that these biases are difficult to shed.

This is a doctrinal study, not a discourse in apologetics.⁴ Presuppositions to this work are:

- 1) God exists and is the eternal Spirit that transcends all time.
- 2) God created matter and all life from nothing, not including Himself. (1 and 2 are clearly revealed in *God's Book of Works*.⁵)
- 3) *God's Book of Words*, the Holy Scriptures are a divinely inspired revelation from God through which man can learn about his Creator and the truths that are essential for living at peace and in fellowship with his neighbors and with God.

Over the centuries, church leaders have united to write declarations of the Christian faith. Usually these meetings were called to correct error, so the creeds they inspired did not touch on every aspect of theology. The Apostles' Creed is the first that we know of, though it probably was not written by the Apostles but was composed by the churches from various earlier creeds.

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ his only begotten Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit [Ghost], born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried. He descended into Hell [Hades]; the third day he rose from the dead; He ascended into heaven; and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit [Ghost]; the holy catholic church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. [Represents words in Received Text.]⁶

³ Southwestern Baptist Bible College, known as Southwestern College, on Cactus Road in northern Phoenix, Arizona

⁴ Apologetics is concerned with proving the truths of Christianity from extra-biblical materials.

⁵ Defined at close of this chapter.

⁶ Schaff, Philip, *The Creeds of Christendom*, reprinted in 1998 by Baker Books, Vol. 1, page 21-22, actual quote is from electronic edition and is un-edited. Catholic means universal.

In this declaration some of the foundational and essential biblical truths are set forth. The following are what I believe to be nine essential doctrines that are basic to true, biblical Christianity:

1. The eternal God created the heavens and the earth from nothing, and all plant life, all living creatures, and man.
2. The eternal God is three persons in one: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
3. The Bible, with thirty-nine Old Testament books and twenty-seven New Testament books,⁷ is inspired by God and is the infallible Word of God.
4. Man is a sinner, and the just penalty for his disobedience is death and eternal suffering.
5. Jesus Christ, the Son of God incarnate, was born of a Jewish woman named Mary who was a virgin.
6. Jesus died for the sins of mankind, to save men from the penalty of their disobedience, arose bodily from the grave, and ascended to heaven to His Father's side where He intercedes for the saved.
7. Salvation is credited to men through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.⁸
8. Jesus shall return to earth.
9. Jesus shall judge the living and the dead and shall reward the believers with eternal blessings and condemn to eternal suffering those who have continued in rebellion and rejected God's work for their salvation.

Though differences exist in the teachings of Christian denominations, it is generally accepted that the above nine points are biblically sound and are fundamental rocks of the true Christian faith. One should make every effort to avoid expressing criticism to the point of a condemnation of those who affirm their belief in the points of the above articles of faith but believe differently on details of these and other doctrines (Luke 6:37; Romans 14:1 to 15:12; and James 4:11-12). Experience has taught me that loving the brethren and having fellowship with them are different from working with a brother on a mutual ministry project with an agreed upon objective. The ministry will determine the level of details in belief required for those involved.

The cults, such as the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses, do not believe in some of the above doctrines. They usually degrade Jesus, do not believe that He is God, deny the Holy Spirit and the Trinity, and teach something other than eternal punishment for sin.

⁷ The Roman Catholic Church officially added the Apocrypha during the Council of Trent in the fifteen hundreds. The Catholic Church has three fountains of authority: 1. The church with her Pope, Cardinals, and Bishops. 2. Tradition. 3. The Bible. It is the belief of the Catholic Church that only she can properly interpret the Bible. Church history reveals that this interpretation is controlled and formed by tradition and the opinions of the church hierarchy.

⁸ The doctrines of the authority of the Scriptures and justification by faith were the flames of the Reformation. Until today the Catholic Church has failed to recognize her error. She mixes sanctification and justification and teaches that man cooperates with God in the work of salvation.

They reject faith alone as necessary for salvation (Matthew 7:13-14; 2 John 7; and 1 Peter 5:8).

The Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Galatia that, “If we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!” (Galatians 1:8-9). What we believe makes the difference between eternal bliss with God and eternal damnation and suffering in a place of eternal separation from God.

James wrote, “What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? . . . Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself” (James 2:14-17). It is not sufficient to say, “I believe” (James 2:18-20). Belief that follows through with acts that prove its sincerity is the kind of faith that believes in God and His revealed truth with obedience to the Scriptures and those truths written on the conscience and revealed through God’s Book of Works. This is the kind of faith that leads to personal salvation and an eternal, growing relationship with the Creator.⁹

I once heard a pastor use a tall tree to illustrate theology. He said that the trunk represents the truths about God. The large portions of the first limbs represent the other essential doctrines of Christian beliefs. This pastor remembered his childhood years when he climbed trees and would go as high as possible without falling. The higher he climbed, the smaller the limbs became and the less secure he felt. The trunk and the lower, larger branches were strong and would not move, whereas the farther away from them he climbed the more he could swing and sway in the breeze. He related his tree climbing experiences to Bible doctrine. The essentials are clearly revealed and are firm—the trunk and lower branches. The farther out one goes in the tree of theology, the more danger there is of falling into error. He said, “It is easy to fall from the extremities when you depend on a limb that offers little support.”

In this study some of the doctrines of the Word of God will be carried into the higher parts of the tree. We strive not to fall into error. We will go there because I believe that what we have learned is scriptural; but this does not mean that those with differing views are not our brothers in Christ. Their belief in the nine above essentials should determine that.

It is important that an interpreter of the Scriptures have an established habit of reading the Bible through. This will give one a better understanding of God, His love, and His plan for man. It will also protect one from interpreting out of context because he will gain an overall view of divinely revealed truth.¹⁰ He must also be a good observer of the things around him, a truth emphasized in the book of Proverbs.

⁹ Hebrews 11 is the faith chapter. Every person in that Hall of Faith showed his faith through his obedience to God’s words.

¹⁰ For over 40 years I have had the habit of reading 1 to 2 chapters at night on my way through the New Testament and 1 to 2 chapters in the morning on my way through the Old Testament.

This book on Bible doctrine begins with a chapter on hermeneutics—the science of Bible interpretation. One’s views about the Bible and how he interprets it will determine his beliefs, behavior, and teaching. In past centuries the Catholic Church prohibited the common people from possessing a copy of the Bible, from reading it, and from interpreting it. This was because men like Origen, Jerome, Augustine, and their predecessors believed that the Bible was to be interpreted allegorically, that it had hidden meanings that only the educated, super-spiritual, and experienced could uncover and understand.

It is my firm belief that God, the eternal Spirit and Creator, in order to communicate with man stooped down and used human culture and language. The original languages of the Bible were those of the common person, not the educated elite. God’s purpose in giving man the Holy Scriptures was so that those created in His image could understand their Creator-God. God longs for man to know Him and to have fellowship with Him. He did not communicate through riddles and mysteries. If a person will honestly seek God and truth and he is willing to study and work, God the Holy Spirit will illuminate and teach that person His ways.

The Bible is like an instruction manual that comes with a microwave oven. If we read it and follow the instructions, we are less likely to have problems. Too often we read the manual after something seriously wrong has developed.

The words of Azariah to Asa, recorded in 2 Chronicles 15:2, are true to all:

The Lord is with you when you are with Him. And if you seek Him,

He will let you find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you.¹¹

Man is admonished to seek God and truth. The Lord honors and blesses the seeking heart.

¹¹ See also Proverbs 8:7; 15:14; 18:15; 28:5; Amos 5:4-14; and Acts 17:26-28.

General Items of Note

- 1) A word to the reader with a Catholic background: I love you and desire for you to know truth. I believe there are some fine believers in the Catholic Church. I am not against you. I desire to speak the truth in love.¹² A study of church history and theology plus thirty-two years of ministry in a Catholic country, have taught me much about Catholicism. The Catholic Church adapts itself to the people. It is very accommodating. The Latin American Catholic Church is very different from the church in America where Protestantism has been strong. No church is perfect. They are composed of sinful people, hopefully saved by grace though not always. Men tend to get in the way of God's hand and mess things up. I request that you prayerfully consider the doctrines presented herein and what I write about the Catholic Church. I have honestly revealed my background and biases and how I desire to be free from them. Please recognize yours and try to be understanding and free. Let's walk together in Truth.
- 2) The words "man," "men," and the masculine pronouns must be interpreted within the context. Often herein the masculine is used as generic for the human race and for both male and female persons.
- 3) In this work, "God's Book of Words" refers to the Bible—the written Word of God. "God's Book of Works" refers to truth revealed through God's creation, in the human conscience, and by the process used by man to gain dominion over his environment. Until God gave the *Book of Words*, the *Book of Works* was all man had for learning truth. This was all the men in the book of Job had, and they were very wise. It is where the book of Proverbs tells us to gain wisdom. (Wisdom is skills for living.) We need both books. More said later.
- 4) This work is divided into two major sections. The first is the *Doctrinal* section. The second is an *Appendix*, which contains chapters that address issues facing the church today.
- 5) Over the years it has been my desire to better help the common person understand divine truth as revealed in the Holy Scriptures. My prayer is for God to guide and illuminate us.

¹² Ephesians 4:15

