

Honest Answers to Honest Questions: Question # 11

How is it that you Christians disagree so much among yourselves about what the Bible says? You can't even agree on the proper administration of your two Sacraments – Baptism and the Lord's Supper

So, "How do I know your church's interpretation of a given matter is right?"

In short, "Whom?" should I believe and "Why?" should I believe them?

All Good Questions!

We will give our Answer to these Questions in Four Parts ...

Part I: Why do we have disagreements in the first place and what does it mean that we disagree?

Part II: The different levels of disagreement – Mistakes and errors versus heresy.

Part III: Our Answer to the Question, "Whom?" should I believe and "Why?" should I believe them?"

Part IV: Show how to progress from being a Christian "*babe*" subsisting on "*milk*" to "*full age*" Christian maturity, subsisting on "*solid food*", and being able to "*by reason of use have [our] senses exercised to discern both good and evil.*"

Part I: Why do we have disagreements in the first place and what does it mean that we disagree?

Dr. R. C. Sproul in his book "*Now, That's a Good Question*", a book that "*answers more than 300 frequently asked questions about life and faith*", a book that we highly recommend, gives us great answers to both of these Questions ...

First, as to what disagreement does not mean ...

"The multiplicity and variety and even contradictory interpretations of Scripture really have little or nothing to do with the question of its origin. Let me give you an analogy.

We've seen all kinds of interpretations of the United States Constitution, but even though political parties and different judges have different views of what the Constitution says and means, and what it intended, none of that difference of opinion casts a shadow on the source of the Constitution. We know who wrote the Constitution. We know where it came from and what it is.”

*Dr. R. C. Sproul, “Now, That’s a Good Question”, Page 84,
Tyndale House Publishers*

Second, as to why there are disagreements in the first place, Dr. Sproul continues ...

“Not only do we find Christians disagreeing about what the Bible teaches, but some of the greatest minds in history disagree on some very significant points. I would say that there are three primary reasons great minds disagree on fundamental issues.

One is that we are prone to logical errors. We are given the capacity to reason, but we are not perfect in our reasoning powers. We will make illegitimate inferences. We will commit errors that violate the laws of logic. I remember when I studied the introduction to logic in college and was given examples of fallacies. The examples printed in our textbooks were not drawn from tabloid newspapers or comics but from the writings of some of the most brilliant people in history: Plato, John Stuart Mill, and David Hume. These men are universally recognized as some of the most brilliant people who ever walked the face of the earth. They made glaring logical errors that served as illustrations of how not to reason in an ‘*Introduction to Logic*’ textbook. Mental errors are the first reason.

The second reason is empirical errors. Every one of us is limited in our perspective and field of experience. Not one of us has been able to survey all of the data. Sometimes our eyesight or our hearing fails us. We are limited in the senses we use to perceive reality around us. Limitations of sense perception add to making mistakes.

And the third great cause for error, whether it's in understanding the Bible or in understanding science, is bias. We're prejudiced. Sometimes we come to a problem or to a study biased against the data. We don't want to believe what the data will tell us. When we become Christians, we are not cleansed of the ability to sin. We don't always want to believe what the Bible teaches, and so we will make errors of interpretation as a result of our clouded thinking because of the hardness of our own hearts or because we don't know the tools of biblical study. We haven't learned the language sufficiently, or we have not been skilled or trained in legitimate inferences or the laws of immediate inferences, and so on.

The main reason Christians disagree on what the Bible teaches is that we are sinners. It's a sin to misunderstand the Bible and to misinterpret the Bible because ultimately

it's a result of our being less than fully diligent in applying ourselves to seeking the truth of God's Word. We have the assistance of the Holy Spirit, and we're called to love God with all of our minds. The person who loves God with all of his mind is not casual in how he handles the Scriptures.”

*Dr. R. C. Sproul, “Now, That’s a Good Question”, Pages 85-87,
Tyndale House Publishers*

Editor’s note: It is noteworthy that while the main Protestant denominations might disagree over, say, the correct mode of baptism, they all clearly hold to the orthodox tenants and fundamentals of the faith as it concerns Jesus Christ and His atonement for our sins.

Which brings us to ...

Part II: The different levels of disagreement – Mistakes and errors versus heresy.

There are variations in the degrees of importance of conflicting doctrinal claims.

Some conflicting claims rise to the level of Heresy and directly affect salvation itself.

One such claim would be whether salvation is by “*faith alone*” (*Protestant*) or by “*faith + works*” (*Roman Catholic*). Both Roman Catholic and Protestant churches recognize and officially claim the other’s belief in this matter to be damnable heresy.

[Note: Our Question # 9 addresses the great split between Protestants (who hold that Salvation is by “Faith Alone”) and Roman Catholics (who hold that Salvation by “Faith + Works”) in great depth. We would refer you to it for more information.]

Other conflicting claims, though very important in that they affect both our view and worship of God, are considered to be mistakes or errors of misinterpretation that do not rise to the level heresy, affecting the salvation of the individual believer.

Examples here would include: The time of baptism (whether as an infant or later at the time of belief) ... The manner of Christ’s presence in the Lord’s Supper (purely symbolic versus varying degrees of spiritual (but not physical) representation ... the degree of relationship between the Old Testament and New Testament (“Covenant Theology” versus “Dispensational Theology”) ... and other things like the use of choirs and musical instruments in worship.

One additional area of difference concerns what may or may not be permitted in worship – Should only things specifically permitted in the Bible be a part of worship (commonly called the “*Regulative Principle*”) or can anything that is not specifically prohibited in the Bible be used in worship?

For an example of an important conflicting claim that does not rise to “heresy” ...

We look back to *Question # 10* which addressed the disagreement between Reformed Calvinists and Arminians on the topic of “*Does ‘Man Choose God’ or Does ‘God Choose Man?’*”

As a Reformed (Calvinist) Christian, who has studied the matter a great deal ...

Though I simply cannot see any meaningful and clear Scriptural proof for either “*prevenient grace*” or that “*Man Chooses God*”, but rather see numerous very clear Biblical proofs that “*God Chooses Man*”,

Though I fully think and believe there is serious error and a great number of terrible implications arising from Arminian Theology,

Though I see much loss of comfort and assurance of salvation for the individual Christian in Arminian thought ...

I still fully consider my Arminian friends and relatives to be my brothers and sisters in Christ and believe that one day we will all stand together around God’s throne eternally praising Him for the grace and mercy that He has shown to us all.

[Note: If you wish to delve more deeply into the issue, we refer you back to our Question 10.]

A word on “Heresy”

There are certain orthodox doctrinal beliefs that one cannot deny and be a Christian.

Every organization has standards which must be held for one to be a member of that organization – medical, legal, accounting, etc. It is no different for being a member of the Christian church.

The church has throughout the centuries identified certain teachings as being heretical teachings and strictly warned against holding them, under pain of excommunication.

Now, we are well aware that the thief on the cross ...

... did not have a complex doctrinal theological system worked-out when he said to Jesus, “*Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom*” (Luke 23:42).

No, he made a very simple declaration of faith in Jesus as the Son of God dying for his sins and asked Jesus to accept him as a disciple. That was a simple and sincere expression of his faith that was sufficient for his salvation.

So, let’s be very clear about what we ARE and ARE NOT saying here concerning “heresy”

We ARE NOT saying that the list below are things that you have to have worked out and understand before you can be saved ...

We ARE saying that these are crucial fundamental truths that you cannot later come to deny and be a Christian.

Essential beliefs that one cannot come to deny and still be a Christian would include ...

A sound and firm belief in the Authority and Inspiration of the Bible

A Trinitarian view that there is but one God existing in three Persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, all three being eternal, co-equal and of the same substance.

The Virgin Conception and Birth of Jesus Christ

That Jesus Christ was both fully God and fully Man – and led a sinless life of perfect obedience to God’s law

That Jesus Christ made a perfect and complete atonement on the cross for the sins of His elect, an atonement to which nothing can be added in any way, shape or form

That our Justification/Salvation is by “faith alone” and not by any admixture of “faith and works”

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead

That all who have died and will die (together with those who will be taken up alive at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ) will face a final day of judgment after which they will either enter into heaven to be with the Lord or be eternally consigned to hell

If you hold any of the above beliefs to NOT be true, the church throughout the ages declares you to be guilty of heresy. You need to go to God and ask Him to help guide you into the truth of the matter. If you diligently seek His truth, you will, with His help, find it ...

“... for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.” (Hebrews 11:6)

[Note: In the “Pain, Suffering, Death and the ‘WHYS?’ Thereof” section of our website, in Paper # 8, “How Can I Know for Sure that I am a Christian?”, Appendix 3, pages 48-56, we have a section titled “Self-Deceived Groups Who Think Themselves to be Christians, but are Not”, that should be helpful to you in discerning heresy.]

Before closing out Part II, that are two things that we want to note again ...

First, the basic teachings of Scripture – those of man’s position before God, his need of a Savior, and how Jesus Christ fulfills this role are so very abundantly, simply, and clearly set forth in Scripture that even an uneducated man can easily read the Bible by himself or hear it preached and understand the basic tenets of salvation.

Second, that while the main Protestant denominations might disagree over such things as the correct mode and time of baptism, they all hold clearly to the orthodox tenants and fundamentals of the faith as it concerns Jesus Christ, His atonement for our sins, and salvation by “faith alone”. Again, there is a vast difference between “heresy” and “mistakes and errors”.

Let us now turn to ...

Part III: Our Answer to the Question, “‘Whom?’ should I believe and ‘Why?’ should I believe them?”

Our Answer is that you should not automatically believe what we say on the matter or what anyone else says on the matter. You should believe only what God’s word has to say on the matter.

Even the great Apostle Paul praised the Bereans for “*searching the Scriptures*” to find out whether the things he claimed and taught “*were so*” ...

“Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and

searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.” (Acts 17:10-11)

THAT is HOW you handle differing doctrinal claims ...

You ... “*search the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things are so*”

If even the great Apostle Paul praised the “*fair-minded*” Bereans for searching out the Scriptures to see whether the things that he said “*were so*”, neither we nor anyone else can or should expect or ask anything less from their readers.

So, again ... In answer to the Question ...

“Whom?” should I believe and “Why?” should I believe them?

... we would say ...

Don’t automatically believe us.

Don’t automatically believe the other fellow.

Believe rather what the Bible has to say on the matter.

**But sadly, our Answer does present somewhat of a problem
for way too many Christians ...**

... for in order to be able to properly “*search the Scriptures*” and “*discern*” the truth of a matter, you need to have advanced in spiritual maturity from a mere knowledge of the basic “*first principles*” of your faith to being “[*skilled*] in the word of righteousness” and having “*by reason of use ... [your] senses exercised to discern both good and evil*”.

How to do this is addressed directly below in Part IV.

Part IV: So, how do we progress from being a Christian “*babe*” subsisting on “*milk*” to “*full-age*” Christian maturity, subsisting on “*solid food*” and being able to “*by reason of use have [our] senses exercised to discern both good and evil*.”

Let's first note that this is not a matter to be taken lightly. In fact, the Apostles Paul and John and all three members of the Trinity actually *command* you to grow to “full age” maturity in your Christian walk and *admonish* those who do not.

This is clearly seen in that both the author of Hebrews and the Apostle Paul in I Corinthians sternly admonish believers for being content to remain unskilled “milk” or “baby” Christians that lack the spiritual maturity to discern between good and evil and not progressing on to “solid food” and “full age” maturity ...

“For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.” (Hebrews 5:12-14)

“And I, brethren, could not speak to you as spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal”. (I Corinthians 3:1-3)

Note well that both of these groups of Christians were admonished by the Apostles for remaining Christian “babes”, because they should “*by this time be teachers*”, but still need elementary instruction “*in the first principles*” all over again. They are also admonished for being “*unskilled in the word of righteousness*” and not being able to “*by reason of use have [their] senses exercised to discern both good and evil*”.

Both passages stress their need to get off of subsisting only on “milk” and move up to “solid food”, to move from being “babes” to “full age” maturity.

To do that, they need to partake of “solid food”.

And just what, we might ask, is “solid food”?

To partake of “solid food” is to grow in your wisdom, knowledge, and understanding of what the Bible says and teaches.

To eat “solid food” is to take in sound doctrine!

Now, before anyone “runs for the hills” at the mere mention of the word “doctrine”

... let's first make sure that we know exactly what we are talking about.

OK – What exactly is “doctrine”?

Well, “doctrine” is defined as ...

“That which is taught and believed to be true by a church.”

[The Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms by Donald K. McKim]

It's that simple. Nothing mysterious or deep at all.

It is through partaking the “*solid food*” of “*sound doctrine*” that we grow in wisdom, knowledge, and understanding of what the Bible says and teaches.

A crucial truth concerning “doctrine” that must be understood is that ...

Providing “doctrine” is one of the four reasons given, and the first listed, for which God gave us the Bible in the first place ...

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (II Timothy 3:16)

Again, very importantly ...

Doctrinal and Creedal statements are really nothing more than statements about what a church or denomination believes the Bible says and teaches.

So, all we are saying is that ...

IF you want to mature from a being a “*milk-fed*” Christian “*babe*” to “*full age*” Christian maturity

IF you want to learn “*discernment*”

IF you want to be “*complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work*”,

IF you want to avoid being “*unskilled in the word of righteousness*”

IF you desire to “*by reason of use have [your] senses exercised to discern both good and evil*”

THEN you need to immerse yourself in the great doctrines of the Bible and what they teach.

**But sadly, whenever anyone speaks of studying “doctrine”,
three common objections are raised**

1. “*I don’t like doctrine and I don’t believe I am required to pursue or study it!*”
2. “*Our church doesn’t believe in creeds.*”
3. “*We have no creed but Christ. All we need to know for our salvation is Jesus Christ and Him crucified!*” *I don’t want a bunch of side issues distracting me from Him.*

We will shortly show you “Ten Proofs” that all three of these objections are unbiblical, and, as we have seen, bring a fairly strong Biblical admonition on those who hold them.

We hope to prove to you that rather than hating “doctrine”, you are actually commanded to study it.

Again, always keep in mind, throughout our discussion, that ...

**Doctrinal and Creedal Statements are really nothing more than statements about
what a church or denomination believes the Bible says and teaches.**

Doctrinal statements strive to be faithful to Scripture and understandable to those who read them. They are always held under the Bible and *never over* it.

Doctrinal statements should, by their very nature, be “systematic”. Precisely because they are statements derived from God’s inspired word, all “*Doctrinal Statements*” should be internally consistent with each other and never contradictory in any way.

And, again, as stated earlier, we will shortly see that even churches and denominations that claim to have no creedal statements or doctrinal standards do, indeed, have very definite and very strict creedal statements and doctrinal beliefs – just try crossing them on any point of their “doctrine” and you will see that this is so. They most definitely do have doctrines and creedal statements of belief; they are just not written down and systematized.

One final note concerning “doctrine” ...

Just as ceremonial observances and rites do not save, “doctrine” by itself does not save.

A study of “doctrine” can most certainly draw you closer to God and bring you to “*full age*” Christian maturity, but, again, a mere knowledge of “doctrine” itself cannot save.

Paul tells us in Ephesians that it is “*by grace*” that Christians are “*saved through faith*” and that our saving “*faith*” itself was “*the gift of God*” to us ...

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9)

So, it is possible for a person to know “doctrine”, but not know God.

We think of the Pharisees, who were the most knowledgeable and scrupulous observers of the law in New Testament times, but who most certainly did not ‘know’ God.

A knowledge of doctrine, without a concurrent, regenerate heart, only puffs one up, gives false assurance of salvation, and is itself a “gate” against the penetration of the gospel.

For more study on the matter of salvation, we would recommend that you go to the ...

“Pain, Suffering, Death and the ‘WHYS?’ Thereof”

... section of our Website and read ...

Paper # 7: On Attaining a Full Assurance of your Salvation – Which is the Key Source of Comfort for a Christian Facing Long-Term Suffering and Death

Paper # 8: On “How Can I Know for Sure That I am a Christian?” – Which is the Vital Consideration in “Attaining an Assurance of Your Salvation” – And a “Consideration” which You are Commanded to Search Out by both Peter and Paul (Confirm - 2 Peter 1:10, 2 Corinthians 13:5)

This said ...

Let’s return to our three Objections ...

1. *"I don't like doctrine and I don't believe I am required to pursue or study it!"*
 2. *"Our church doesn't believe in creeds."*
 3. *"We have no creed but Christ. All we need to know for our salvation is Jesus Christ and Him crucified!" I don't want a bunch of side issues distracting me from Him.*
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Our first "Objection" is ...

1. **"I don't like doctrine and I don't believe I am required to pursue or study it!"**

In answering Objection 1, we will give "Ten Proofs" that that you are actually commanded by the Apostles Paul and John, by all three members of the Holy Trinity, and by the Bible itself, to grow in your understanding of Biblical "doctrine".

[Note: Not growing by "solid food" to the "full age" of Christian maturity, nor ever even having attempted to do so, will not affect your salvation at all, but it will deprive you of much comfort, assurance, and "joy in the Lord" as well as incurring the admonition of the Apostles and the Bible itself.]

Our "Ten Proofs" are ...

Proof # 1: "Doctrine" was one of the four reasons given by God, and the first listed, for which the Bible was written in the first place...

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." (II Timothy 3:16)

Note well that "doctrine" is held to be a "profitable" thing for you to pursue if you want to be "thoroughly equipped for every good work".

Proof # 2: As we saw earlier, both the author of Hebrews and the Apostle Paul in I Corinthians sternly admonish believers for being content to remain unskilled "milk" or "baby" Christians that lack the spiritual maturity "to discern both good and evil" by not progressing to the "solid food" of sound doctrine

“For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.” (Hebrews 5:12-14)

Paul in a similar vein writes to the Corinthians ...

“And I, brethren, could not speak to you as spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal”. (I Corinthians 3:1-3)

These Christians were admonished because they should “*by this time be teachers*”, but still need elementary instruction “*in the first principles*” all over again. They are admonished for being “*unskilled in the word of righteousness*” and of not being able to “*by reason of use have [their] senses exercised to discern both good and evil*”. You can only come to that level of spiritual maturity by partaking of the “*solid food*” of sound doctrine.

So if you want to avoid being “*unskilled in the word of righteousness*” and “*by reason of use have [your] senses exercised to discern both good and evil*”, you must grow into and partake of the “*solid food*” of the deeper things of God and gain understanding of His Biblical (doctrinal) truths.

Again, “doctrine” is nothing more than a statement (whether oral or written) of what a denomination believes that the Bible says.

“*Doctrine*” is “*solid food*”.

Proof # 3: Studying “*doctrine*” is God’s “*will*” for your life.

God is very clear in the Bible about His “*will*” for your life.

He tells you in I Thessalonians

“For this is the will of God, your sanctification” (I Thessalonians 4:3)

God's will for your life is for you to grow in "*sanctification*".

And how does one grow in *sanctification*?

Our Lord tells us how to grow in "*sanctification*" in His High Priestly prayer, wherein He prays to the Father for those who believe in Him ...

"Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth." (John 17:17)

God's will for your life is that you are to immerse yourself in His word, the "*truth*", and grow in the knowledge of what it says and teaches (i.e., grow in knowledge of its "doctrine").

Proof # 4: Very importantly, our Lord Himself spoke of His own "doctrine", the origin of His doctrine, and the importance of studying doctrine in the Christian's life ...

"Jesus answered them and said, 'My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me. If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority.'" (John 7:16-17)

Note well that "*If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine*".

In short, through a study of "doctrine" the Christian will gain "*discernment*" of "*His will*".

Proof # 5: The Apostles taught "doctrine" from the very beginning of the New Testament church.

Immediately after Peter's great sermon at Pentecost, we are told ...

"Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers." (Acts 2:41-42)

Studying sound doctrine is not just an option for the Christian to consider, but is something that was ingrained in their discipleship from the very beginning of the New Testament church.

Proof # 6: Paul refers to the gospel and its teachings as “*that form of doctrine to which you were delivered*” and which we are to obey from the heart, by complying with and conforming ourselves unto it. To do that, we must first know and understand it, i.e., we must study it.

“But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered.” (Romans 6:17)

Proof # 7: Consider that Paul repeatedly instructed both Timothy and Titus on the critical importance of studying and acquiring “*doctrine*” for both themselves and their hearers ...

“Till I come give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.” (I Timothy 4:13)

“Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.” (I Timothy 4:16)

“For a bishop must be blameless ... holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.” (Titus 1: 1,9)

Proof # 8: Good and worthy elders in the church are described as those who “*labor in the word and doctrine*” ...

“Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine.” (I Timothy 5:17)

Proof # 9: Both Peter and Paul have commanded us to be “*diligent*” in testing and examining ourselves so as to “*make our call and election sure*” and discern “*whether you are in the faith*” ...

“Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure” (2 Peter 1:10)

“Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves.” (2 Corinthians 13:5)

To do our Christian duty as set forth by both Peter and Paul, i.e., to be “*diligent to make your call and election sure*” and to “*examine*” and “*test*” yourself “*as to whether you are in the faith*”, you will have to progress in knowledge from the “*milk*” of “*babes*” to the “*solid food*” of sound doctrine.

Last, but most important of all ...

Proof # 10: In direct opposition to the anti-intellectualism of our day, all three members of the Holy Trinity tell us to use our minds to pursue wisdom and get understanding, i.e., to use our minds to pursue the “*solid food*” of “*sound doctrine*”.

Consider that ...

... our Lord Jesus Christ in responding to the question, “*Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?*”, said ...

“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment.” (Matthew 22:37-38)

So, very importantly, according to our Lord Jesus Christ, among the requirements of “*the first and great commandment*” is that the Christian is to love God “*with all your mind*”.

So, do it! Use your mind to learn more about Him and about His “*doctrine*”.

Consider that ...

God the Holy Spirit tells us in Proverbs to ...

“Get wisdom! Get understanding!” (Proverbs 4:5)

Indeed, the book of Proverbs itself personifies “*Wisdom*” as a woman calling “*simple ones*” unto herself for instruction and tells us that it was specifically written to help us

“To know wisdom and instruction,

*To perceive the words of understanding,
To receive the instruction of wisdom,
Justice, judgment, and equity” (Proverbs 1:2-3)*

Consider that ...

God the Father, bids us, through the prophet Isaiah, to ...

“Come now, and let us reason together” (Isaiah 1:18).

Consider also that ...

God the Holy Spirit has given us in His Bible a large section of what is commonly referred to as “*Wisdom Literature*” – the books of *Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon* –

... all of which are majestic in their scope, and which, along with the grand and eloquent exhortations of the great Prophets of Israel and the uplifting and awe-inspiring sayings and teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ, stand far above the great literature of the world and very far above all other so-called “holy” books.

These five “*wisdom*” books were put there by God to help you grow in wisdom, understanding, and knowledge – i.e., to grow in “*doctrine*”. So, use them!

Finally, consider once again that the entire Bible itself was given to us ...

“... for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16).

So, use the Bible to develop the “*solid food*” of “*doctrine*”, so that you might be ...

“... complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” and “by reason of use have [your] senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”

Clearly, all three members of the Christian Trinity, the Apostles Paul and John, and the Bible itself call us to the pursuit of wisdom, reason, understanding and discernment. We are to use, not set aside, our minds for the glory of God and for our own personal advancement in sanctification. The Christian should always be growing in *knowledge* and *sound doctrine*.

We are, as Paul says, to advance from “*milk*” to “*solid food*”.

**But, how do we do that? How do we advance
from “milk” to “solid food?”**

**We advance from “milk” to “solid food” by immersing ourselves
in the “means of Grace”**

The “*means of Grace*” are the means by which God imparts His grace to us and by which we receive it from Him. The chief means of grace, the chief means by which we communicate with God and He communicates back with us, are prayer and our use of the Bible. We communicate with God through prayer and He communicates back to us through His Bible.

So, the “means of grace” would include, but are not limited to ... Bible reading, meditation, and study ... prayer ... worship (individual, family, and corporate) ... participation in the Sacraments ... and so on.

**Let’s take our own personal use of the Bible as an example of what we mean
by advancing FROM “milk” TO “solid food” ...**

There are different levels in our use of the Bible, such as *reading*, *meditating on*, and *studying*, which can take us from “milk” to “solid food”. If you want to advance from “milk” to “solid food” in your Christian life, if you want to attain to the “full age” of Christian maturity, if you want to “*by reason of use have [your] senses exercised to discern both good and evil*”, then you must move beyond merely “reading” the Bible to *immersing* yourself in it.

Your use of your Bible is your key to growth in Christian maturity and sanctification.

Indeed, we saw that our Lord, in His high priestly prayer, on the night He was betrayed, asked God the Father, concerning His disciples, to ...

“Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.” (John 17:17)

Thus does our Lord instruct us that the best way for us to advance in our sanctification, knowledge, wisdom, discernment, and Christian maturity, the best way to grow from living

on “*milk*” to living on “*solid food*”, is through a disciplined, progressive, and increased reading, meditating on, and studying of the Bible.

The Bible is a treasure trove of gold just waiting to be picked up and discovered.

We can, *simply by reading* the Bible, find many gold nuggets just lying on the surface. For example, all the truths that we need to know for salvation are easily found by a simple reading or preaching of the word. These are the “*first principles*” that Paul speaks of in his Hebrews quote. This is our golden “*milk*” that saves, sustains, and strengthens us.

Other golden truths lie just under the surface and can, with a little more effort on our part and the aid of the Holy Spirit, be unearthed by surface “*strip*” mining (i.e., by meditation).

But there are also a number of really deep truths of gold that have to have to be found by sinking mine shafts into the earth. These are found by Bible “study”, which, again, requires some time and effort on our part.

But the “*time and effort*” spent are worthwhile because they move us beyond being Christian “*babes*” to being Christian “*teachers*” and move us beyond being “*unskilled in the word of righteousness*” to “*by reason of use having [our] senses exercised to discern both good and evil*”.

The only way to come to spiritual maturity is by immersing ourselves in the Bible and partaking of the “*solid food*” of sound doctrine.

Again, “doctrine” is nothing more than statements of what we believe the Bible teaches.

And we must always remember, whether reading, meditating on, or studying the Bible, to always pray for the Holy Spirit’s aid and “wisdom” in doing so.

Rest assured that by spending “time and effort”, we are not talking about spending hours a day in deep study or attending Seminary.

No, we ARE talking about fairly simple things like –

Getting a good Study Bible and reading some of its introductions and notes.

[I personally like the New Geneva Study Bible (NKJV) and the Reformation Study Bible (ESV). Both can be found at the Ligonier Ministries website.]

Joining a good Bible Study group at your church or with neighbors

Attending your Church's Sunday School classes which often teach books of the Bible

Watching a Bible Study teaching series by streaming or DVD – The Ligonier Ministries Store is a great resource source for both adults and children. [Note: This would be a great family activity for Sunday afternoon.]

Getting a good daily devotional guide – We highly recommend *Tabletalk* magazine, a monthly day-by-day devotional magazine put out by Ligonier Ministries

If your denomination has written Creeds or Standards to which they adhere, get a copy of them and perhaps also a good companion Study Guide to them.

[I personally love and highly recommend G. I. Williamson's Study Guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith.]

Lastly, to help you advance from “milk” to “solid food” we would refer you to our website's section on ...

“Pain, Suffering, Death and the ‘WHY’s’ Thereof”

Paper # 9: Christians – “Weak” and “Strong”

Why is there one? How to become the other!

The Joyous and Glorious Road to “Full Age” Christian Maturity

... a Paper that you will find very helpful in transitioning from “milk” to “solid food”.

Let's now turn to the *Second Objection* people raise to Studying Doctrine ...

Objection 2: “Our church doesn't believe in creeds.”

To this we would respond that churches that so boldly proclaim “*We don't believe in creeds*”, may sound very pious, but it is simply not true.

As we said earlier, all churches have doctrinal beliefs, whether written down or not. They may deny having a creed, but just wait until you or someone else crosses them on one of

their unwritten doctrinal points and you will see just how real and how strong their creedal beliefs really are.

In truth, they cannot avoid having creedal beliefs, whether written or unwritten.

Let's ask them, for example, what they believe about "Jesus Christ" Himself ...

How did He get here? Did He exist before He was born? What exactly is He? Is He God? Is He man? Is He both God and man at the same time? If so, does that mean that His person is a compound mixture of both? What about His nature – Is it of God or man? Are they amalgamated together? How can He possibly save us? What does He represent to the Christian? Can we make drawings of Him? How did He perform His miracles? Does the Holy Spirit proceed from Him as well as from the Father? Is He subordinate to the Father? What exactly is His relationship to the Holy Spirit?

Giving answers to these and many other questions concerning the Person and Offices of Jesus Christ will set any church pretty well on their way to having a sizeable set of creedal statements or doctrinal beliefs concerning Christ, whether written down or not. And this is only one issue.

Let's now turn to our *Third Objection* to Studying Doctrine, which is ...

Objection 3:* *"We have no creed but Christ. All we need to know for our salvation is Jesus Christ and Him crucified!"

It is most certainly true that a correct knowledge "of Jesus Christ" and exercising saving faith in "Him crucified" for our sin is all that we need for our salvation. We saw this clearly set forth in the case of the thief on the cross.

But, as we have also seen throughout this paper, God does not want you to just rest there, stagnate, and never grow and mature in your knowledge and understanding of the Bible.

No! If you are a Christian, God very plainly tells you that it is His "will" for you is for you to grow in your sanctification ...

"For this is the will of God, your sanctification." (1 Thessalonians 4:3)

And, as we have already seen, both the authors of Hebrews and I Corinthians tell you very plainly that you need to strive to progress on past “*milk*” to “*solid food*” – and admonish you if you do not.

As a Christian, you need to mature to “*full age*” and be among “*those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.*”

In closing out our look at Doctrinal Statements and Creeds, we would comment on two areas concerning the proper use of them ...

1. Your own Personal Use of Doctrinal Statements and Creeds
2. A Church’s Proper Use of Doctrinal Statements and Creeds

First, Concerning Your Own Personal Use of Doctrinal Statements and Creeds

All creedal statements and doctrinal beliefs, whether made by individuals, by individual churches, or by entire denominations, should be fully supported and thoroughly backed up by numerous Biblical references to help the reader distinguish Biblical truth from the mere opinions of men.

Always be very wary of believing those that do not, or cannot, thoroughly back-up what they claim the Bible says with numerous and very clear Biblical references.

You should always pray to God for “*wisdom*” in your growth into “*solid food*”, for He has promised it to you ...

“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.” (James 1:5)

All pursuit of “solid food” should always be approached with prayer for the Holy Spirit’s guidance.

Lastly, always remember that Scripture is to be your guiding light to “discerning” the truth and to ‘thoroughly equipping you for every good work’ ...

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God

may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (II Timothy 3:16)

It is SCRIPTURE ...

NOT high-sounding and clever words,

NOT intellectual or philosophical reasoning (standing by themselves),

NOT TV evangelists, sports figures, popular TV personalities, or college professors ...

... that should be your final guide in discerning the truth of any matter.

Again, even the great Apostle Paul praised people for “*searching the Scriptures daily*” to see if even the things that he said “*were so*” ...

“Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.” (Acts 17:10-11)

You will never find a Bible commentator greater than the Apostle Paul, who himself wrote much of the New Testament. You also should strive to merit his praise “*by searching the Scriptures daily*” to find out if the things you are reading and people are telling you are “so”.

Scripture itself should always be your final and deciding guide to discerning the truth.

Second, Concerning a Church’s Proper Use of Doctrinal Statements and Creeds

Churches usually do not require people to subscribe to a Church’s Creeds and Doctrinal Statements to become members of the church.

This is at it should be.

The Creeds and Doctrinal Statements of a Church are statements used to guide members and any other interested parties as to what the church believes the Bible teaches. But belief in them should never be a requirement for church membership.

I will use my own denomination, the Presbyterian Church in America, as an example of the correct usage of Doctrinal Statements and Creeds

My denomination, the Presbyterian Church in America, subscribes to the *Westminster Confession of Faith* and the *Larger and Shorter Catechisms* as our doctrinal Standards. But one does not have to subscribe to belief in our Standards to join our church.

No, we have only five simple Questions for membership in our church and denomination – Questions which any Christian should be able to answer affirmatively. *We put no restriction on entry into God's church, beyond those which God Himself has set.*

The Questions are ...

1. *Do you acknowledge yourselves to be sinners in the sight of God, justly deserving His displeasure, and without hope save in His sovereign mercy?*
2. *Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and Savior of sinners, and do you receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation as He is offered in the gospel?*
3. *Do you now resolve and promise, in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, that you will endeavor to live as becomes the followers of Christ?*
4. *Do you promise to support the Church in its worship and work to the best of your ability?*
5. *Do you submit yourselves to the government and discipline of the Church, and promise to study its purity and peace?*

These are the only Five Questions for membership that we have or require.

One would, of course, have to subscribe to our Standards to hold the Office of Elder or Deacon in our church. Still, even in this case, the Standards are always held under the Bible and not over it.