



DocTALK

A Fairly Serious Survey of All That
Theological Stuff





“Whenever Larry Dixon writes about doctrine, it’s very understandable AND practical. He writes in a way that not only satisfies your intellect, but warms your heart and motivates you to action. This book is great for all who want to grow in their faith, whether formal students or interested lay people.”

**Dr. George W. Murray, President,
Columbia International University, South Carolina, USA**

“There is a widespread flight from theology in our churches. Some even think it a bad word, over against ‘good words’ like ‘experience’, ‘spirituality’ and ‘worship’. The result? – a merely ‘feel good’ Christianity, spiritually flabby, weak as water. The evidence for this is plain to see.

We must, must, must, get Christians, especially young Christians, to study Bible doctrine. Here is an excellent starter. This man, an able theologian, knows how to grab and hold such folk. We should work hard at getting it into the hands of young and even older Christians, buying it for family members, giving it to our youth group members, commending it from our pulpits.”

**Dr Geoffrey Grogan
Former Principal Emeritus, Glasgow Bible College**

“Larry Dixon has a marvelous facility with words, making profound concepts appear straightforward. Covering the entire scope of Christian theology as he does, the reader is teased along to richer territories effortlessly. For Christians who want a primer on the basics of Christian theology, this is the book to read. For those who may desire a refresher course — start here! He never seems to lose sight of his readers.”

**Derek W. H. Thomas
Reformed Theological Seminary, First Presbyterian Church,
Jackson, Mississippi**

“Dr. Dixon is a systematic theologian, and his material is well organized. Hence the ease with which a reader makes his way through the book.

Dixon organizes his material around 10 traditional categories, including Bibliology, theology proper, anthropology, etc. Surprisingly, perhaps, to some readers, as presented in *Back to the Basics* these 10 traditional categories are not dry and unrelated to life. In fact, one of the author’s strengths is his knack for relating profound truths to every day life and to compare them with popular notions of truth that cannot



endure scrutiny. For example, in a section about Biblical anthropology, Dixon lists 'alternative anthropologies' and identifies principal sponsors of those alternatives to the truth. A feature that deserves mention even in a brief review is the set of discussion questions at the end of each chapter. They were well prepared and are clearly intended to provoke thoughtful response to the subject matter.

I recommend the book to Christians who want to know what to believe, and to theologians too. The latter will benefit from a manual of truth that teaches them how to set forth great truths in plain English."

**C. Donald Cole, Moody Broadcasting Network, owned by the
Moody Bible Institute.**

"In today's sitcom-stupid society, wisecracking can sometimes still stab awake people, especially young people, whom anything else would send to sleep. So there is a real job for this jokey-sober workbook on Christian Foundations to do."

**Dr J. I. Packer, Author, Professor Emeritas,
Regent College, Vancouver**





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For further works by Larry Dixon, please check out his website at:
www.docdevos.com

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Larry Dixon

Christian Focus





Dedication

It is with tremendous gratitude to the Lord that I
dedicate this work to our children, Brian and Amy.
Your lives have impacted me more than all the theology
I have ever read – or will ever write! Stay strong in
“the faith” (Jude 3)





Introduction



If you're like me, you're greatly tempted to skip over this introduction. But don't! An introduction (as well as a "preface" which, thankfully, this book doesn't have) is meant to introduce. Introduce what? Well, introduce the author to the reader and what the author hopes to accomplish.



Imagine that you are at a significant social gathering, and one of your friends is beginning to introduce you to some rather important people. It would not be good to walk out of the room, saying, "You know, the Dallas Cowboys are playing the New York Giants right now. Would you please excuse me? By the way, where did you say your TV was?" You would allow yourself to be introduced, and you would ask polite questions of those who are being introduced to you.

May I introduce myself to you? As a teacher of doctrine* and theology* (terms with a * are defined in the glossary at the end of each chapter) for about fifteen years, I am passionate about knowing and enjoying the truths of God revealed in the Bible. I have often stood before groups of students (both undergrad and graduate) whose faces seemed to say, "Doctrine is so boring. Couldn't I just go out and



get a root canal instead?” I am on a mission (there are others on that mission as well) to convince the Christian world, one person at a time, of the fact that theology is not boring. (Theologians* are boring, yes! But that’s another subject we’ll pursue later.)

This is not the first thing I’ve written. I’ve had several articles published in “Moody” magazine. My book *The Other Side of the Good News* (Victor Books, 1992) was written to defend the traditional doctrine of hell (really). I’ve also published a three-month devotional on doctrine called *DocDEVOS* (Christian Publications, 2002). A study on heaven is also due out in 2002 from the same publisher.

So what about this text? This text will be an overview of Christian theology, including the purpose and value of studying the Bible thematically. We will study doctrines such as God, Creation, Revelation, Humanity, Sin, Jesus Christ, salvation, the Holy Spirit, spirit beings, the church, and future things. You will be exposed to key biblical texts which are foundational to each doctrine. So, let’s get going!

Some Questions to Ponder:

1. List five reasons you think doctrine is boring or irrelevant.

How would you address each of those if you were writing this text?

2. What one theological question do you hope we will pursue or answer in this book? Why is that question important to you?



1

First Things First



Cartoon







Section One

Developing a Distaste for Doctrine



“Everyone is ignorant, only on different subjects.” (Will Rogers)



“I would not have you to be ignorant, brothers ...” (The Apostle Paul)

“Your karma ran over my dogma”. (bumper sticker)

“How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! I gain understanding from your precepts; therefore I hate every wrong path.” (Psalm 119:103-104)

When I was about twenty years old, I applied to a missionary agency for its short-term team to Germany. A complete physical exam was part of the application process. Several hours before the physical, I had to refrain from eating – and in the place of food take two huge gulps of castor oil, what seemed to me to be of the 10W-40 variety. I took them –



straight! Someone asked me later, “Why didn’t you mix the castor oil with orange juice?” Good question. I guess I didn’t think of it.

Many Christians feel exactly that way about learning the doctrines of their faith. The very idea is as appealing as gulping down a mouthful of castor oil – *straight!* We do not need to prove that doctrine is already distasteful to many Christians, but we do need to ask why. Why has doctrine become so distasteful?

The “So What?” Factor

Many reasons may be given. Let me list three that come to my mind. First of all, *doctrine is seen to be irrelevant to everyday life*. The sheer impracticality of the theological concepts and debates for which ivory-towers are erected (and populated) causes the average Christian to yawn, and then turn away. However, not all ideas are equally worthy of dismissal, are they? In the film *Dead Poets’ Society*, Robin Williams plays a teacher of English literature to a group of young men. In one particularly inspiring scene, Williams says to those wide-eyed students: “Men, no matter what anyone tells you, words and ideas can change the world!”

Words and ideas have changed the world – and continue to do so. The problem is probably not the words and ideas of the biblical faith, but the way those words and ideas are used – and the ones who use those words and ideas! The words and ideas which make up the doctrines of the Christian faith* have set prisoners free, brought cleansing to the spiritually polluted, and rescued many from the power of sin and despair. But those who unimaginatively pour those words and ideas, like so much castor oil, down the gullets of the godly need to consider the doctrinal damage which they are doing.

Dorothy Sayers, an insightful defender of the Christian faith of the early twentieth-century wrote:

It is not true at all that dogma* is “hopelessly irrelevant” to the life and thought of the average man. What is true is that ministers ... often assert that it is, present it for consideration as though it were, and, in fact, by their faulty exposition* of it make it so.¹

Doctrine is not irrelevant to everyday life. Truth (and that is what doctrine must be, or else it is simply brain-washing) is always relevant because it tells us not only what is, but also what ought to be. Christianity is both genuine realism (because it depicts this lost world as it truly is) and authentic futurism (because it describes how things will be eternally).

I have often told my students in theology class that the problem is not the impracticality of doctrine, but the frequent incomprehensibility of the theologians.* Theology, doctrine, is not boring – but theologians often are.

Biblical doctrine is not disconnected from contemporary interests. As a case in point, have you noticed how our society has become captivated by the subject of angels? There are literally dozens of books on angels, often marketed as leading features in book stores and supermarkets! An area which many Christians have given little thought to has become a major aspect of the New Age spiritual quest for meaning and significance. Without a knowledge of the biblical doctrine of angels, how will Christians sort out truth from error, accurate information about genuine angels versus propaganda from the one who “masquerades as an angel of light” (2 Corinthians 11:14)? Arguing how many angels can dance on the head of a pin is one thing; swallowing all that contemporary writers say about such spirit beings is quite another!

¹ Dorothy L. Sayers, “The Shattering Dogmas of the Christian Tradition”, in *Christian Letters to a Post-Christian World* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1969), p. 34.