

“Daily Dose of Doctrine” - an Introduction September 9, 2007

This fall, I am starting what I hope will become an ongoing resource for the church. ‘Daily Dose of Doctrine’ (the working title) will be an attempt to provide an overview of basic Christian beliefs in a daily devotional format similar to “Daily Bread” or “Today”.

Getting across the basic teachings of the Christian faith has always been a challenge. Memorizing doctrine via Catechisms was the popular means for several centuries. Communicants’ classes over a period of months or years used to be a prerequisite for participating in the Sacrament and were used to ‘indoctrinate’ the faithful. Hymns and art were also media for communicating essential truths.

The reality is that today, many adults have had little exposure to the basic ‘doctrines’ (teachings) of the faith. Few have the time or confidence to tackle the study of theology on their own. Sermons or classes can be useful, but busy schedules and high turnover mean that many are left out of the loop. I frequently have people express interest in a topic that we covered a year or so prior in a sermon series – but they missed it and we probably won’t revisit the subject for some time.

So, ‘Daily Dose of Doctrine’ will be *(by God’s grace!)*...

- **Biblical** – In matters of faith and life, Scripture has the ‘first word’ and the ‘last word’ on what we believe. In the Presbyterian-Reformed tradition (ours), every teaching ‘stands under’ Scripture. Any teaching/practice, ancient or modern should be carefully examined with Bible in hand...
- **Understandable** – the goal is to make the content of the faith accessible to everyone, not just those with a penchant for theology or philosophy...

- **Open to Your Input!** Christian teaching should take place in the context of ‘community’. We need to take into account what believers in the past have thought and the current body of Christ needs to have a role as well. Hopefully this will help to promote clarity and deeper insights and avoid error. *To that end, your input via Internet-bulletin board (to be set up soon), email or note-in-hanging-file is most welcome. If something seems unclear or oddly expressed, ask about it. Others may be wondering the same thing. If you have a thought, illustration or additional Scripture reference on the subject, put it forward. If you think the teaching is wonky – express it (politely, of course – this is not the 16th century ☺). Your submissions will help to shape future articles or editions of this resource!*
- **Accessible** - the format itself is designed to be ‘bite-sized’. The first two articles that follow are sort of introductory. From then on (in this first edition), the goal is to produce five per week. These will be available as bulletin inserts for the remainder of September. Starting in October they will be available in a monthly booklet at the Welcome desk or online via the website.
- **Ongoing** – My long range goal is to build something that will be available to newcomers and existing members with specific questions. If people want to know what our ‘stand’ is on infant baptism, the Trinity, tongues, tithing, etc., this will be an accessible resource that can be refined on an annual basis. ¹

Submitted with much trepidation....by Don McCallum

¹ (Perhaps this is another reason why God had Al Gore invent the Internet ☺?)

September 13, 2007 **“In the beginning, God...”¹**³

It has been said that “the existence of God is the great pre-supposition of theology”². Because theology is the quest to understand the nature and purposes of God, it begins with the premise that God exists. But it also reflects the reality that, for the Christian, accepting the existence of God is ultimately a matter of faith.

Without faith-engagement in the task, the study of ‘doctrine’ is merely an intellectual exercise. But most of us aren’t interested in Christian teaching for its own sake. We want to grow in our understanding of God so that our lives will be changed for the better.³ For that to happen, at least some faith is necessary.

“...without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”⁴

Christian ‘faith’ (“*being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see*”⁵) is not ‘blind’ faith. It is based on what God has revealed to us about himself, primarily through Scripture. The ‘amount’ or ‘strength’ of our faith is not really important.

At this point, your faith may be ‘great’ enough to start this quest by boldly claiming the promise that “*if any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.*”⁶

Or your faith may seem to you to be very ‘small’. Inside you may be saying: ‘God, (if there is a god!) show me more!’

Whether our faith is ‘great’, ‘small’ or somewhere in the middle, God can work with it!⁷

¹ Genesis 1:1 (TNIV)

² L. Berkof, Systematic Theology, p. 21

³ Romans 12:1 (TNIV)

⁴ Hebrews 11:6 (TNIV)

⁵ Hebrews 13:1 (TNIV)

⁶ James 1:5 (TNIV)

⁷ see Matthew 17:20 (TNIV)

September 14, 2007 **“Incomprehensible – but Knowable”**

Before beginning to discuss the nature and purposes of God, we need to recognize our limitations. As Zophar protests to Job, the task is beyond us: *“Can you fathom the mysteries of God? Can you probe the limits of the Almighty?”*¹

Without revelation, the task is hopeless. However, God has chosen to reveal himself to us in nature and in Scripture.

As Psalm 19 declares, “The heavens declare the glory of God;... Day after day they pour forth speech;...their voice goes out into all the earth.”² Nature itself reveals the existence of a purposeful, intelligent Designer. And something of the character of God is also revealed in the things that he has made.³

However, as we see in the world around us, in its state of alienation from God, fallen human reason has come to a variety of conflicting understandings of God based on the testimony of nature alone.⁴ Even the Psalmist feels compelled to move from focusing on God’s revelation in nature to the joy of discovering more about God in the Old Testament Law.⁵

God has graciously chosen to show himself to us by a supernatural act of self-communication: acting in human history, communicating through the ancient prophets and, most fully, through the life, teachings and passion of Christ.⁶ These self-disclosing words and deeds have been recorded for us in the Bible. With the assistance of the Holy Spirit as we read and study God’s word, we can gain an ever-increasing understanding of his nature and purposes. So we pray: ‘Lord! Reveal more of yourself to us!’

¹ Job 11:7 (TNIV); see also Isa. 40:18

² Psalm 19:1-6 (TNIV);

³ Romans 1:19-20

⁴ Romans

⁵ Psalm 19:7-14

⁶ See John 1:18; 17:3; 1 Cor. 2:11; 1 John 5:20

