

## **Examining Christian Doctrine**

### **Lesson 2: The History of the Development of Christian Doctrine Part 2**

#### **The Formation of Doctrine in Church History**

#### **Introduction to the Lesson**

In Lesson One we discussed the formation of Doctrine in Ancient Israel History, today we will pick up where that left off and discuss the formation of Doctrine in Church History.

We said in Lesson One that man's revelation of God and the things of God are progressive. So it is with the development and adoption of Christian beliefs by the church. Many of the doctrinal beliefs were developed, discussed, debated and finally adopted as dogma through much and careful consideration.

Many well-meaning Christians may say, "we just get our doctrine from the Bible", while this is true, it still raises several issues. **First**, the Bible must still be interpreted and those interpretations can be many. There was much discussion and debate about *what* the Bible actually teaches, which makes the phrase "we just get our doctrine from the Bible" more complex than it seems. **Secondly**, the Bible took a long time to come into the form that we have it today. Many books were considered, added, removed, debated, and disagreed upon, and still, different segments of the church adopted different books for their canon. **Thirdly**, the books of the Bible were not widely accessible to many average Christians for the first few centuries of the church. There was no mass printing and distribution of the texts, therefore many churches and Christians had only partial texts. For the majority of the first century the accounts of Jesus' life and teachings as well as the apostle's doctrine were passed down orally.

#### **Defining Key Terms**

Before we begin to examine these doctrines of the Christian faith, it's important to understand a few key terms as it relates to our study.

**Theology** - The study of the nature of God and religious beliefs, typically informed by scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. It encompasses various disciplines such as biblical theology, systematic theology, historical theology, and practical theology.

**Doctrine** - A set of beliefs or teachings, often foundational to a religious tradition, that outlines its core principles and interpretations of scripture. Doctrines serve as authoritative guides for faith and practice within a religious community.

**Orthodoxy** - The accepted or standard beliefs, practices, and teachings within a religious tradition, recognized as conforming to established norms and doctrines. Orthodox beliefs are considered authoritative and in line with the tradition's doctrinal standards.

**Heresy** - A belief or teaching that deviates from orthodox or established doctrine within a religious tradition. Heretical beliefs are often considered false or misleading and may be condemned by religious authorities as contrary to the faith.

**Canonization** - The process by which certain writings, known as canonical books, are recognized as inspired and authoritative Scripture within the biblical canon.

**Councils** - A formal assembly or gathering of church authorities, leaders, and representatives convened to address theological, doctrinal, or disciplinary issues within the Christian community. These councils played a significant role in the development and affirmation of Christian doctrine, the resolution of theological controversies, and the establishment of ecclesiastical norms and practices.

**Creed** - A formal statement of Christian faith that summarizes key beliefs and doctrines, often recited as a declaration of faith in communal worship. Creeds, such as the Nicene Creed and the Apostles' Creed, serve as foundational statements of Christian belief.

**Dogma** - A central or essential doctrine within a religious tradition that is considered authoritative and binding for all believers. Dogmas are often formally defined and upheld by religious authorities as essential truths of the faith.

## **Eras of Doctrinal Development: The New Testament and Church History** **Eras of Christian/Church History**

**The Apostolic Era (30-100AD):** During the time we have the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the commissioning of the apostles, and the formation of early Christian communities. Stories, teachings, and beliefs were transmitted orally while the original manuscripts of the earliest Christian doctrines were being written.

**The Patristic Era (100-451 AD):** Is the period from the closing of the New Testament writings (c.100) to the definitive Council of Chalcedon (451). The term "patristic" comes from the Latin word pater, "father," and designates the period of the early church fathers who helped form the Christian beliefs through their influence and writings.

There was a division during these year between the 'Eastern Church' in the eastern Roman Empire influenced by the Greek culture and language, and the 'Western Church' in the western Roman Empire, centered around Rome, and influenced by Latin culture and language. Each division would have their own theological and liturgical traditions as well as their own theologians. Out of these would come what would be known as the 'Eastern Orthodox Church' and the 'Roman Catholic Church'.

**The Middle Ages (500-1500 AD):** Also known as the medieval period, refers to the historical period in Europe after fall of the Western Roman Empire up to the time of the Renaissance. During the Middle Ages, the Catholic Church played a central role in European society, wielding significant influence over religious, political, social, and cultural affairs. The Church provided spiritual guidance, social services, and moral authority, while also exercising political power through its control of land, wealth, and institutions.

**The Reformation and Post-Reformation Era (1500-1750AD):** A movement within Western Christianity that sought to reform the Catholic Church and resulted in the establishment of Protestantism. It was sparked by Martin Luther's publication of his Ninety-five Theses in 1517, which criticized various practices and doctrines of the Catholic Church, particularly the sale of indulgences. The Reformation led to widespread religious, social, and political upheaval across Europe, as reformers challenged the authority of the Pope, advocated for the priesthood of all believers, and promoted the primacy of Scripture over tradition.

The Post-Reformation period was characterized by the rise of new Protestant movements such as such as Anglicanism, Puritanism, and Anabaptists. This period marked continued theological, ecclesiastical, and political developments within Western Christianity.

**The Modern and Contemporary Era (1750 - Present):** During this period, Christianity underwent significant transformation and expansion outside its traditional European homelands to become a global phenomenon. The colonization of North America by western Europeans led to the various schools of Protestant theology – Lutheran, Reformed, and Anabaptist – becoming firmly settled in a North American context. The establishment of seminaries by various denominations grew during this time. Christianity became more 'individualized' as opposed to institutionalized (centered around one authority such as the Roman Catholic Church). This time period also gave rise of evangelicals and Pentecostal denominations.

## Influential Individuals During the Patristic Period

There are several influential 'Early Church Fathers' that are of particular importance during the Patristic Era that deserve to be singled out for special mention.

- Ignatius of Antioch (35–108 AD)
- Clement of Rome (fl. late 1st century AD)
- Polycarp of Smyrna (69–155 AD)
- Justin Martyr (100–165)
- Irenaeus of Lyons (130–200)
- Origen (185–254)
- Tertullian (160–225)
- Athanasius (296–373)
- Augustine of Hippo (354–430)

## Influential Events During the Patristic Period

During the first 500 years of Church history, several major councils played significant roles in shaping Christian doctrine and addressing theological controversies. Here are some of the most notable ones:

- First Council of Nicaea (325 AD)
- First Council of Constantinople (381 AD)
- Council of Ephesus (431 AD)
- Council of Chalcedon (451 AD)

## Developing and Debated Theological Beliefs During the Patristic Period

There were many beliefs that developed and took on different forms throughout the history of the church. These examples will give you an inside look at the major doctrines that were discussed and developed.

- **Trinity:** The doctrine of the Trinity, affirming the belief in one God in three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—was discussed and formulated during this period, particularly in response to various heresies.
- **Christology:** The nature and person of Jesus Christ were subjects of intense theological debate during the Patristic Period. Questions regarding the relationship between Christ's divine and human natures, his incarnation, and his work of salvation were addressed.
- **Scripture:** Early church fathers affirmed the divine inspiration of Scripture, teaching that the writings of the Old and New Testaments were inspired by God and thus carried divine authority.
- **Soteriology:** The doctrine of salvation, including the role of grace, faith, and works in salvation, was debated. Early Church Fathers discussed topics such as original sin, justification, sanctification, and the role of the sacraments in salvation.
- **Ecclesiology:** The nature and structure of the Church, including questions of authority, hierarchy, and sacramental theology, were topics of discussion. The primacy of the bishop of Rome (the Pope), the role of councils, and the concept of apostolic succession were emphasized.
- **Sacraments:** The theology and practice of the sacraments, particularly baptism and the Eucharist, were developed and codified during this period. The Patristic Period saw discussions on the efficacy and significance of the sacraments for the spiritual life of believers.

## The Controversies and Debates in the Patristic Period

In the first 500 years of the church, several heresies and heretical groups emerged, challenging orthodox Christian beliefs and prompting theological controversies. Here are some of the major heresies and heretical groups during this period:

- **Gnosticism:** Gnosticism was a diverse religious movement characterized by the belief in secret knowledge (gnosis) as the key to salvation and enlightenment. Gnostic systems often involved elaborate cosmologies, dualistic views of the material world, and the belief in a transcendent divine realm.
- **Arianism:** Arianism was a theological position associated with the presbyter Arius, who denied the full divinity of Jesus Christ. Arius taught that the Son (Jesus) was a created being, distinct from the eternal God the Father, and subordinate in nature.
- **Docetism:** Docetism was a theological position that denied the full humanity of Jesus Christ, teaching that Jesus only appeared to be human but was purely divine. Docetists believed that Jesus' physical body was an illusion and that he did not experience genuine human suffering.
- **Marcionism:** Marcionism was a religious movement founded by Marcion of Sinope, who rejected the Hebrew Scriptures and advocated for a radical dualism between the God of the Old Testament (the Demiurge) and the God of Jesus Christ. Marcionites produced their own canon of scripture, consisting of edited versions of the Gospel of Luke and selected Pauline epistles.
- **Montanism:** Montanism was a prophetic movement led by Montanus, who claimed to receive direct revelation from the Holy Spirit. Montanists emphasized charismatic gifts, strict moral discipline, and apocalyptic expectations.
- **Nestorianism:** Nestorianism was a Christological position associated with Nestorius, the patriarch of Constantinople, who taught that Jesus Christ existed as two separate persons—one human and one divine—united in a moral or personal union.

## The Nicene Creed

The Nicene Creed is a statement of Christian faith that is one of the most widely accepted and recognized symbols of Christianity.

*We believe in one God, the Father, the almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.*

*We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father.*

*Through him all things were made. For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven; by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and was made man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.*

*We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified. He has spoken through the Prophets.*

*We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.*

## Influential Individuals During the Middle Ages

During the Middle Ages or Medieval periods, several influential church figures emerged, shaping the theological landscape and the course of Christianity. Here are some of the leading figures from these periods:

- Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274)
- Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109)
- Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153)
- Peter Abelard (1079-1142)
- Gregory I (540-604)

## Influential Events During the Middle Ages

During the Middle Ages of Church history, several major councils played significant roles in shaping Christian doctrine and addressing theological controversies. Here are some of the most notable ones:

- Great Schism (1054)
- Fourth Lateran Council (1215)
- Council of Constance (1414-1418)

## Developing and Debated Theological Beliefs During the Middle Ages

There were many beliefs that developed and took on different forms throughout the history of the church. These examples will give you an inside look at the major doctrines that were discussed and developed.

- **Transubstantiation:** The doctrine of transubstantiation, which teaches that the bread and wine of the Eucharist become the body and blood of Christ, developed during this period.
- **Scholasticism:** Scholastic theology, characterized by the synthesis of faith and reason, flourished during the medieval period, particularly through the works of Aquinas and others.
- **Mariology:** The veneration of Mary, the mother of Jesus, grew during the medieval period, leading to the development of doctrines such as the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption of Mary.
- **Sacramental Theology:** The medieval period saw the development of elaborate sacramental theology, particularly regarding the seven sacraments recognized by the Catholic Church.
- **Doctrine of Purgatory:** Belief in purgatory, a state of purification for souls destined for heaven, became more defined during the medieval period, influencing practices such as prayers for the dead and indulgences.

## Influential Individuals During the Reformation and Post-Reformation Period

During the Reformation and post-Reformation periods, several influential church figures emerged, shaping the theological landscape and the course of Christianity. Here are some of the leading figures from these periods:

### Reformation Period:

- Martin Luther (1483-1546)
- John Calvin (1509-1564)
- Jacob Arminius (1560-1609)
- Huldrych Zwingli (1484-1531)
- William Tyndale (c. 1494-1536)

### Post-Reformation Period:

- John Wesley (1703-1791)
- Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758)
- John Owen (1616-1683)
- George Whitefield (1714-1770)
- Richard Baxter (1615-1691)

## Influential Events During the Reformation and Post-Reformation Period

During the first 500 years of Church history, several major councils played significant roles in shaping Christian doctrine and addressing theological controversies. Here are some of the most notable ones:

- Council of Trent (1545-1563)
- Augsburg Confession (1530)
- Heidelberg Catechism (1563)
- Westminster Standards (1646)
- Synod of Dort (1618-1619)

## Developing and Debated Theological Beliefs During the Reformation and Post-Reformation Period

There were many beliefs that developed and took on different forms throughout the history of the church. These examples will give you an inside look at the major doctrines that were discussed and developed.

### Reformation:

- **Sola Scriptura:** The principle of "Scripture alone" as the ultimate authority for Christian faith and practice was emphasized during the Reformation. Reformers sought to return to the authority of the Bible over against tradition and church hierarchy.
- **Sola Fide:** The doctrine of "faith alone" emphasized the belief that salvation is by grace through faith in Christ alone, apart from works. This doctrine challenged the Catholic Church's emphasis on religious works for salvation.
- **Sola Gratia:** The principle of "grace alone" affirmed the belief that salvation is entirely a gift of God's grace, not something earned or merited by human effort. This doctrine emphasized the sovereignty of God in salvation.
- **Priesthood of All Believers:** The Reformers emphasized the priesthood of all believers, affirming that all Christians have direct access to God through Christ and do not require intercession from clergy or saints.
- **Justification by Faith:** The doctrine of justification by faith alone, apart from works of the law, was central to the Reformation. Reformers emphasized that believers are declared righteous before God solely on the basis of their faith in Christ's atoning work.

## Post-Reformation:

- **Doctrine of Scripture:** The authority, inspiration, and interpretation of Scripture remained central topics of discussion. Different theological traditions offered varying perspectives on the nature of biblical authority and the methods of biblical interpretation.
- **Doctrine of Salvation:** The nature of salvation and the relationship between faith, grace, and works continued to be debated. Different theological traditions emphasized different aspects of soteriology, leading to diverse perspectives on issues such as predestination, free will, and the extent of Christ's atonement.
- **Doctrine of the Church:** Ecclesiology remained an important area of theological inquiry, with discussions focusing on the nature and structure of the Church, the sacraments, and the relationship between the Church and the state. Different ecclesiological models emerged within Protestantism, Catholicism, and Orthodoxy.
- **Doctrine of Worship:** Theology of worship and liturgy underwent development, with various Christian traditions exploring different forms of worship, music, and liturgical practices. Debates arose over the role of tradition, the use of sacraments, and the balance between formality and spontaneity in worship.
- **Doctrine of the Sacraments:** The theology of the sacraments continued to be a subject of theological reflection, with discussions focusing on the number and nature of the sacraments, their efficacy, and their significance for the spiritual life of believers.
- **Doctrine of Eschatology:** The study of last things, including death, judgment, heaven, and hell, remained an area of theological inquiry. Different theological traditions offered diverse perspectives on eschatological themes, leading to debates over issues such as the millennium, the resurrection, and the final judgment.
- **Doctrine of Christology:** The nature and person of Jesus Christ continued to be a central focus of theological reflection, with debates arising over issues such as the relationship between Christ's divine and human natures, the incarnation, and the role of Christ in salvation.

## Influential Individuals During the Modern Era

During the Modern Era, several influential church figures emerged, shaping the theological landscape and the course of Christianity. Here are some of the leading figures from these periods:

- John Nelson Darby (1800 to 1882)
- Karl Barth (1886-1968)
- Dwight L. Moody (1837-1899)
- C.I. Scofield (1843–1921)
- Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981)
- Charles F. Parham (1873-1929)
- William J. Seymour (1870-1922)

## Influential Events During the Modern Era

In the Reformation and post-Reformation periods, several church councils, events, and theological developments significantly shaped and developed Christian doctrine. Here are some key examples:

- Modern Missions Movement
- The Azusa Street Revival
- The Rise of Academia
- The Non-Denominational Movement

## Developing and Debated Theological Beliefs During the Modern Era

There were many beliefs that developed and took on different forms throughout the history of the church. These examples will give you an inside look at the major doctrines that were discussed and developed.

- **Dispensationalism:** A theological framework that emerged in the 19th century, particularly in the United States, and had a significant impact on church doctrine during that time. It is characterized by its interpretation of biblical history and prophecy as divided into distinct periods or "dispensations,"
- **Evolution and Creation:** The theory of evolution, proposed by Charles Darwin in the mid-19th century, sparked debates about the relationship between science and religion, particularly regarding the interpretation of Genesis and the doctrine of creation. The tension between evolutionary theory and traditional Christian understandings of creation continues to be a topic of theological discussion.
- **The Social Gospel:** Emphasized the application of Christian principles to social issues such as poverty, inequality, and injustice. This movement sparked debates about the relationship between faith and social action, as well as the role of the church in addressing systemic problems.
- **Critical Scholarship:** An approach to academic inquiry that applies rigorous analysis, examination, and questioning to religious texts, using methods such as historical criticism, source criticism, form criticism, and textual criticism. The rise of historical-critical methods of biblical interpretation led to debates about the authorship, composition, and historical accuracy of the Bible. This gave rise to the debate between theological liberalism vs. fundamentalism.
- **Pentecostal Movement:** The Pentecostal movement, which began in the mid-20th century, emphasized the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer and included practices such as speaking in tongues, healing, and prophecy. This movement birthed all of the Pentecostal and Charismatic denominations as well as controversial movements such as the "Faith Healing" movement.