



Do You Believe?

Paul David Tripp

12 Historic Doctrines to
Change Your Everyday Life

Foreword by
David Platt

“In this useful and searching book, Paul Tripp does what we have come to count on him to do—take the great and glorious truths of the Christian faith and funnel them into our actual, real-time lives. This book makes wonderfully unavoidable what theology is *for*—buoyancy and hope and energy in my life today.”

Dane Ortlund, Senior Pastor, Naperville Presbyterian Church; author, *Gentle and Lowly and Deeper*

“The Bible is a life book given for life purposes,’ Paul Tripp contends. Based on this premise, Tripp provides a fresh treatment of twelve major doctrines—many of them related to God and his character and work—and connects each of them to life. The connection between biblical doctrine and real life makes this a valuable, practical tool for the pursuit of greater godliness. Highly recommended!”

Andreas J. Köstenberger, Director, Center for Biblical Studies and Research; Research Professor of New Testament and Biblical Theology, Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary; Founder, Biblical Foundations

“Many people believe that biblical illiteracy is the primary cause of the church’s weakness today. And while learning more about the Bible is indeed good, merely knowing right doctrine isn’t enough. The remedy we need will be found only when we take God’s truth into our hearts and ask it to confront and transform us. It is meant to be ingested and lived out, not just studied and examined, and Paul David Tripp knows exactly how to help you do that. *Do You Believe?* will show you how the great doctrines of the Bible are meant not only to inform us but also to quench our thirst, direct our course, and invigorate us. I strongly recommend it!”

Elyse Fitzpatrick, author, *Worthy: Celebrating the Value of Women*

“Here is a book that stretches our minds and hearts to embrace big truths—and to secure those truths like a great tent sheltering us as we live and love, here and now. These chapters keep reminding us to look up and worship the God who is there—and so to better see what’s right in front of our eyes. In his honest, companionable, and still-awed voice of experience, Paul Tripp covers huge doctrinal ground with Jesus and the gospel at front and center. And, on this ground, we find our next small step more solid and sure.”

Kathleen Nielson, author; speaker

“One reason skeptics don’t take Christianity seriously is the disconnect they see between the beliefs and behavior of so many Christians. Do we really believe the doctrines we say we believe? If so, why are our lives so often unchanged—so often indistinguishable from the lives of unbelievers? Paul Tripp tackles this problem compellingly in *Do You Believe?* For twelve central Christian doctrines, he lays out not only what the doctrine is but how we should live in light of it. Doctrine is not just about knowing information, he says. It’s about transformation. This is an urgent and essential book—a treasure trove of wisdom for any Christian willing to take seriously the implications of belief for everyday life.”

Brett McCracken, Senior Editor, The Gospel Coalition; author, *The Wisdom Pyramid* and *Uncomfortable*

“Doctrine comes from God, teaches us about God, and leads us back to God in worship. That is precisely what this book helps us to do—to know God that we might authentically love and worship God in all of life. This book is sure to become a widely used resource for discipleship in churches throughout the world. For far too long, doctrine and the application of doctrine have been separated, and this book rightly brings them back together. Doctrine is about knowing God and living for God in all of life. In this book, Paul Tripp beautifully shows us how to experience the joy of knowing God and living out that knowledge every day of our lives.”

Burk Parsons, Senior Pastor, Saint Andrew’s Chapel, Sanford, Florida; Editor,
Tabletalk

“In this important book, Paul Tripp puts his finger on a live nerve in the body of Christ. He addresses the dangerous disconnect that often exists between sound doctrine and sound living. Tripp sounds the needed warning that knowing truth is never an end in itself but only a means to a far greater end. He reminds us that the goal of biblical instruction must be personal transformation. Here is made the inseparable connection between biblical indicatives and practical imperatives. What God has joined together, let no man separate.”

Steven Lawson, President, OnePassion Ministries; Professor of Preaching,
The Master’s Seminary; Teaching Fellow, Ligonier Ministries

“How horrible would it be to hear the charge, ‘You profess to know Christ but deny him by your actions?’ The apostle Paul saw it in the Cretans to whom he sent Titus, and no doubt he could spy such gaps, whether tiny or glaring, in all of our lives. I desperately want to close those gaps. Hopefully, you do as well. This is a remarkable resource for doing precisely that, by the grace of God: minding the gaps between what we profess to believe and how we live in tangible, everyday moments. Few in our day can speak so compellingly and accessibly on this topic as Paul Tripp. Let him win you back to the critical importance of what we in Christ believe, and how we who believe then live.”

David Mathis, Senior Teacher and Executive Editor, desiringGod.org; author,
Habits of Grace

“Whenever a fresh article or book by Paul David Tripp is released, I take note. I am an avid follower of his counsel, for no matter how many others might cut me slack—I am, after all, a lifelong quadriplegic—I know Paul David Tripp will insist that I interpret my difficult circumstances, as well as my response to them, solely through the lens of Scripture. Although we rarely cross paths, my friend knows my heart, and how prone I am to wander. It’s why I am especially excited about his new work, *Do You Believe?* Our life in Christ thrives only when we are rooted in the great doctrines of the faith, and Paul David Tripp does a stellar job of presenting the fundamentals. Whether you already have a grasp on Christian doctrine or are just getting started, this should be your next read!”

Joni Eareckson Tada, Founder, Joni and Friends International Disability Center

Do You Believe?

Other Books by Paul David Tripp

A Quest for More: Living for Something Bigger Than You

Age of Opportunity: A Biblical Guide for Parenting Teens (Resources for Changing Lives)

Awe: Why It Matters for Everything We Think, Say, and Do

Broken-Down House: Living Productively in a World Gone Bad

Come, Let Us Adore Him: A Daily Advent Devotional

Dangerous Calling: Confronting the Unique Challenges of Pastoral Ministry

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Foreword by David Platt

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Luella, you have always been my muse, but with this book you became a partner. Those morning and afternoon discussions about chapter after chapter have been a major contributor to what this book has become. I am blessed to have you as my life companion and my best friend.

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Foreword

I REMEMBER EXACTLY where I was sitting. I also remember thinking that I shouldn't be sitting.

It was a theology class in seminary, and my professor was teaching on the doctrine of God. As he spoke about God's holiness in all, his sovereignty over all, and his glory above all, I sat in awe. And I thought, "I shouldn't just be sitting here taking notes. I should be bowing down on my knees. Truth like this is not mere information to be learned; truth like this is revelation that completely changes the posture of my life."

I share this memory because it's exactly how I felt as I read this book. I couldn't just sit there as my eyes scrolled across each page. Not when those eyes at times were filled with tears that drove me to my knees in worship. Not when my heart at other times was so filled with joy that I stood to my feet and started to sing. Not when my soul was overwhelmingly moved to pray for my life, my family, the church, and billions of people who have never even heard this truth.

Now don't misunderstand: this book is filled with information to be learned. I think I underlined half of the sentences I read! But far more important, this book is filled with revelation that will completely change the posture of your life—if you will let it.

I make the statement above only because this book is filled with truth from God's word. To be clear, the Bible alone is supernaturally inspired to transform your heart, mind, and life (you'll read about this in the first two chapters). But God has gifted the church with servants who help us understand God's word and apply it to our lives. Paul Tripp is one such servant, and he has given us an invaluable gift in this book.

For this book takes truth that is all too often reserved for select students in theology classes and makes it available, accessible, and applicable to every single follower of Jesus. No matter how young or old you are, and regardless of whether you have been a Christian for a day or fifty years, this book is for you. It takes the cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith that we all need to know and brings them to bear on the everyday struggles, trials, temptations, and pleasures of students and senior adults, singles and married couples, children and parents, men and women in every age and stage of life.

In sum, I can say without hesitation or reservation that this book will become a staple resource that I walk through with my wife, my children, my church, and anyone else I am helping to grow in Christ. For this reason, I gladly and wholeheartedly commend it to you. May reading the pages ahead lead you to fall on your knees in worship and then rise to your feet with zeal to love God with everything you have and to live for the spread of his glory everywhere you go.

David Platt

Preface

WRITING THIS BOOK has been one of the greatest privileges of my life. That I have been able to spend month after month meditating on the most amazing body of truth the human mind could ever consider leaves me in awe of God's goodness. As is true with every book I write, I write what I need, knowing that if I need it, then others do too. I wrote this book to awaken us out of our street-level theological thoughtlessness. I wrote it to narrow that troublesome gap between what we say we believe and how we actually live. Without ever intending to, many of us live theologically contradictory lives. We say we believe that God is both sovereign and good, but when trouble comes, we panic as if no one is in control or we allow ourselves to question God's goodness and love. We say we believe in the necessity and power of divine grace, but when confronted, we argue for our righteousness, and in so doing, resist the very grace we say we believe in. We say we believe in eternity but get caught up in expending our time, energy, and money on the temporary pleasures of the moment.

I confess that there are still gaps between what I profess to believe in my life and how I live in given moments, and I am sure there are some in your life as well. My prayer is that God would open our eyes to those gaps and that he will use this book to help us understand more clearly

what it looks like to live out of what God has declared and we have affirmed to be true.

I want to explain something about this book. My goal wasn't to write a comprehensive systematic theology; many fine ones have been written. This book doesn't cover every doctrine of the Christian faith, but rather focuses on twelve of its core doctrines. These are doctrines that should be known and familiar to any Bible believer. There are two chapters dedicated to each doctrine. The first chapter defines and explains the doctrine being considered, and the second chapter considers what it looks like to live in light of that particular truth.

My goal in the twelve application chapters is not to make direct application to every area of life, but to help you to understand that there is a particular culture or lifestyle that flows out of each doctrine. Truth that does not form your lifestyle is probably not truth that is believed in the biblical sense of what faith actually is. In this book I am asking how our lives should be shaped by the doctrines of God's omnipotence, the doctrine of creation, the doctrine of justification, the doctrine of eternity, and so on. My goal is that thinking of biblical truth as a lifestyle will become more and more natural as you read through this book.

So rather than being an exhaustive consideration of the theology of Scripture, this book is meant to be a training manual on what it looks like to carry what you believe into the situations, locations, and relationships of your daily life. I haven't covered every doctrine and I haven't traced out all of the implications of the doctrines that I do cover, but my hope is that this book will help you to think of the theology of God's word in new and practical ways. And my prayer is that the result would be less of a lifestyle of theological forgetfulness and more of an everyday culture in your life that is shaped and directed by the precious truths that God has so lovingly revealed to you and that you have come to hold dear.

Paul David Tripp
12/1/2020

Introduction

The Dangerous Dichotomy

I FOUND MYSELF in yet another frustrating conversation with one of the most theologically knowledgeable men I have known. There was no theological hallway I could walk down with him that he hadn't traversed again and again. He was confident, defensive, and ready for the next debate. The problem was that I was not there to debate him; I was there to help him. But he was nearly impossible to help. I was his counselor, and the reason he needed counsel was that there was a huge, dysfunction-producing gap between what he knew so well and the way he lived. His marriage was crumbling, none of his children respected him, and his friends found him more than hard to handle.

In his home, this master of the theology of God's grace was a man of ungrace. He was known more for impatient criticism than patient mercy. He could exegete and explain the doctrine of God's sovereignty, but in the situations and relationships of his daily life, he had to be in control. He had an airtight Christology, but unlike Christ, he did not love well, serve well, or forgive well. His wife had asked if I would counsel them because their marriage was imploding. He made it very clear that he didn't think he needed to be counseled. To say that there was a contrast

between the gorgeous theology he had spent so much time studying and the way he lived would surely be an understatement.



Salina loved the gospel, never missed her morning devotional reading, and had Alexa belting Christian music throughout her house all day long. If the doors of her church building were open, she was there. If a Christian conference or concert came to her city, she'd probably go. On the surface everything looked fine with Salina. But Salina lived in constant fear. She was so afraid of what people would think of her that she would frenetically replay conversations over and over again in her head, regretting what she said and fretting about what the hearer now thought of her. She was afraid of her boss and constantly convinced that she was about to lose her job. Over the years she had become a bit of a hypochondriac, fretting over any small sign of physical abnormality. Somehow the big, transforming gospel that she consumed every day hadn't freed her from her bondage to fear.



Brad led one of the small groups in his church. He was asked to do so because he was biblically literate and on the surface seemed mature. He was good at leading this small group, and they studied and discussed God's word together. He had recently been asked to participate in elder training and seemed eager to do so. The people in his small group appreciated him and his leadership. But Mindy, Brad's wife, had a different experience of Brad and those small group meetings. Every time they met, Mindy struggled with the difference between the "public" Brad, the well-liked small group leader, and the "private" Brad, the man she was married to.

At home, Brad did not act like a mature Christian man. With Mindy, Brad was often angry, cynical, and demeaning. He would argue Mindy into a corner over the smallest of things, leaving her

wondering what had happened to the man she thought she was marrying. As Mindy sat with her small group friends, she was often tempted to blurt out, “Brad’s not who you think he is and we need help,” but she knew she never would. She loved Brad and pleaded to God for help, but she just didn’t know what to do.



I could give example after example of a dichotomy that exists in so many of us (and still exists in some places in my own life) between what we say we believe and the way we live. And I am persuaded that the gap between the doctrine we say we believe and the way we actually live is a workroom for the enemy. What I am going to say next may surprise you, but I think it needs to be said and considered. The enemy of your soul will gladly give you your formal theology, if in your real daily life he can control the thoughts and motives of your heart and, in so doing, control the way you act, react, and respond.

This dichotomy is the reason for this book. It has convicted me when I look at my own life and saddened me as I’ve seen it in so many others. As we begin, I want to first look at the importance of doctrine and then examine what the Bible has to say about this dichotomy.

The Importance of Doctrine

“Daddy, did God make telephone poles?” It seemed like one of those endless unimportant questions that, near the end of a long day, can make a parent a bit insane. We had been teaching our children that God created the world and everything in it, and our son had been mulling that deep thought in his little brain. In fact, as we drove to Burger King, he was thinking about it quietly in the back seat as he looked out the window at the string of telephone poles that lined the street. It was a deeply theological question asked by the little philosopher strapped into the child’s seat in the back of the car. He couldn’t help thinking, because he couldn’t help being human. He was doing what God designed

humans made in his image to do. Sometimes his questions made us laugh, sometimes they made us wonder what was rattling around in his cranium, and other times his constant questions just made us wish he would stop asking us questions. But he wouldn't ever stop because he was doing what every human being does.¹

Little children never seem to quit asking why, teenagers obsess about what's fair and unfair, husbands and wives argue because they have interpreted a particular situation differently, and the elderly person looks back over the years trying to make sense of it all. We all do it all the time, and most of the time we don't realize that we're doing it and we fail to understand the profound significance of what we're doing. It's a deeply and uniquely human thing that we're doing. It gets to the heart of how God wired us to operate, yet its life-shaping importance doesn't tend to get the play that it should. Every day at some time and in some way we all work to make sense out of our lives. We dig through the mound of the artifacts of the old civilization that was our past and try to understand our journey and what it means. We endlessly toss around the current events and relationships of our little worlds, trying to decide how we should respond to the situations and relationships around us. We peer into the future, hoping we can somehow divine what is to come and prepare ourselves for it. We just never leave our lives alone, and we never stop thinking, even when we are asleep.

It's important that we all become more conscious of the vibrant mental activity that so influences the choices we make, the words we say, and the things we do. You may be a plumber, a homemaker, a musician, a dad, a teacher, a student, an accountant, a gardener, or an athlete, but you are also a thinker. If you are human, you think (although some of us show it more than others). You may think improperly or inconsistently, but you think. None of us have ever had a thoughtless day. All of us have constructed a superstructure of life assumptions that functions as the instrument we use to make sense out of life. So, all of us are

¹ Much of this section first appeared in my article "The Importance of Doctrine," Paul Tripp website, July 2, 2018, www.paultripp.com/.

theologians, all of us are philosophers, all of us are counselors, and all of us are archeologists who dig through the past to understand what was. And here's what is vital to understand: *your thoughts always precede and determine your activity*. Stop and reread the previous sentence because it is very, very important. You don't do what you do because of what you are experiencing at the moment. No, you do what you do because of the way you have thought about and interpreted what you are experiencing.

We know that you can put three people in the very same situation, experiencing the very same thing, and all three will have remarkably different reactions. Why? Because they interpret that situation differently. A variance in interpretation will always lead to a difference in response.

Now what does this have to do with the purpose of the doctrines that are revealed in the word of God? Well, everything! The God who hardwired you to be a thinker is also the God who inspired the writers of the Old and New Testaments to pen his truths so that we would have them at our disposal. The Bible is the result of a loving Creator unpacking what is true for his creatures so that they will know how properly to make sense out of life. Without his loving revelation, we wouldn't know how to know, we wouldn't know for sure what we know, and we would have no way to know if what we think we know is true or not. In the Bible, God, the meaning-giver, explains foundational truths to the meaning-makers he created. Every person who has ever lived has desperately needed the unfolded mysteries found in Scripture. The Bible is not so much a religious book, left to be relegated to the hallowed and separate corridors of institutional religion. No, the Bible is a life book given for life purposes, so that the creatures to whom it is given would look for life in the only place where life can be found. The doctrines of the Bible are not so much ideology as they are living and divine tools of salvation, transformation, identity, and guidance.

Before we look at how the doctrine of the Bible is an instrument of these four things, we want to think through what the Bible is and how it works. If you have spent any time reading or studying God's word, you know that the Bible isn't arranged by topic. If we're honest, that

frustrates some of us. We wish the Bible were arranged by topic and had subject tabs on the edge of the page so we could quickly go to our topic of interest. But the Bible is arranged the way it is by divine intention. Your Bible has been carefully designed by your Lord to operate in a particular way that is for your good and his glory.

The Bible is essentially a grand redemptive story, a narrative. Or we could say that the Bible is a theologically annotated story. It is the sweeping story of God's plan and purpose of redemption accompanied by God's essential explanatory and applicatory notes. This means you cannot treat your Bible like an encyclopedia; it doesn't work that way. For example, if you only go to verses with the word *parent* in them to understand parenting, you will omit the majority of the things the Bible has to say about this significant human calling. To the degree that every passage tells me things I need to know about God, things I need to know about myself, things I need to know about life in the fallen world, things I need to know about the disaster of sin, and things I need to know about the operation of grace, to that degree every passage tells me something I need to know about every area of my life. I will say much more about this in the chapter to follow.

So, what role does doctrine play? First, the doctrines of Scripture provide a helpful shorthand for the grand redemptive story. Every doctrine captures something about God, his work, and our need, allowing us to summarize vast amounts of content and historical activity in one word. For example, the doctrine of justification captures a set of things that God did to secure our right standing with him. Because of this doctrine we have a summary term to use when speaking of God's grace that is shorthand for all the things God did to secure our position as his children. We can use the term *justification* without having to retell the story, with all of its detail, again. Every doctrine in Scripture provides a summary or shorthand for things God knows are vital for us to know and understand.

Second, every doctrine is an explanation. We would not fully understand, for example, the implications of the fall of Adam and Eve, the

calling of Abraham, the righteous life of Jesus, the cross, the empty tomb, the ascension, or the establishment of the church if it were not for the explanatory doctrines of God's word. Through them, God helps us to understand how we have acted in our sin and how he has acted toward us and for us in his grace. We are saved not so much by the doctrine, but by the historical things God has willingly and graciously done on our behalf. The doctrines explain those things to us so that we can admit our need and reach out for God's help.

Now carefully consider this: God never intended the doctrines of the Bible to be ends in themselves, but rather means to an end. The doctrines God has revealed have a greater purpose than to give you a big theological brain. They are meant to provide more than an outline and a theological confession. Perhaps the best word picture for what the doctrines of the Bible were intended to do is found in Isaiah 55:10–13. Isaiah describes the truths in the Bible being like rain or snow that falls and waters the earth. What is the result?

Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress;
 instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle;
 and it shall make a name for the LORD,
 an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off. (Isa. 55:13)

We must admit that this is one of the strangest word pictures in all of the Bible. If you had a thornbush in your backyard, you wouldn't say, "You know, if it keeps raining, that thornbush will turn into a cypress tree." If you did say that, the person next to you would think you were a bit insane. You would never think that a well-watered brier would somehow morph into a myrtle. What is the prophet trying to communicate by stretching our botanical understanding? What does this metaphor tell us about what God intends the truths (doctrines) of his word to produce?

Isaiah's strange word picture paints a picture of radical, organic transformation. The plant that is being watered becomes an entirely different plant. So it is with the doctrines of the word of God. Their primary

purpose is not *information* but *transformation*. The informative function of the truths of Scripture is not the goal of those truths but a necessary means to the goal of those truths, which is radical personal transformation. God's plan is that when the rain of biblical doctrine falls on us, it would change us—not that we would become better renditions of ourselves but that we would become spiritually different than we were before. As the rain of truth falls, angry people become peacemakers, greedy people become givers, demanding people become servants, lustful people become pure, faithless people become believers, proud people become humble, rebels become obedient people, and idolaters become worshipers of God.

The doctrines of the word of God were not intended just to lay claim on your brain, but also to capture your heart and transform the way you live. Those doctrines are meant to turn you inside out and your world upside down. Biblical doctrine is much more than an outline you give confessional assent to. Doctrine is something you live in even the smallest and most mundane moments of your life. Biblical doctrine is meant to transform your identity, alter your relationships, and reshape your finances. It's meant to change the way you think and talk, how you approach your job, how you conduct yourself in time of leisure, how you act in your marriage, and the things you do as a parent. It's meant to change the way you think about your past, interpret the present, and view the future.

The doctrines of the word of God are a beautiful gift to us from a God of amazing grace. They are not burdensome, life-constricting beliefs. No, they impart new life and new freedom. They quiet your soul and give courage to your heart. They make you wiser than you had the natural potential to be, and they replace your complaining heart with one that worships with joy. God unfolds these mysteries to you because he loves you. He is the giver of life, and every doctrine in his word plants seeds of life in your heart. And as those seeds take root and grow, you too grow and change.

God isn't just after your mind; he's after your heart. And he's not just after your heart; he's after everything that makes up you. His truths

(doctrines) are the ecosystem in which the garden of personal transformation grows.

No passage captures this better than 2 Timothy 3:16–17: “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” This passage is so important for understanding how the truths (doctrines) of Scripture are meant to function in our lives. It gives us not only four ways that Scripture (and each of its doctrines) is meant to function in our lives but, more importantly, it provides a process by which Scripture is meant to function. Here are the four steps in the process.

1. Teaching: the standard. The truths of the Bible are God’s ultimate standard. They establish for us who God is, who we are, what our lives were designed to be, what is true and what is not, why we do the things we do, how change takes place, what in the world has gone wrong, and how in the world it will ever get corrected. The doctrines of the word of God provide the standard, lovingly revealed to us by our Creator, by which we can know, with surety, what we would never know without them.

Everyone looks to some kind of standard because we all want to know, and we all want to know that what we know is true. So everyone carries a “bible” around with them, either one of his or her own making or the perfect standard handed down by the one who is truth.

2. Reproof: comparison to the standard. Reproof is the process by which you are compared to a standard and in some way found lacking. This word clues us in to what we are meant to do with the truths revealed in God’s word. Every truth is meant to function as a mirror into which we look to see what is revealed about us in light of that truth. If you look into the mirror of God’s perfection, you are immediately confronted with the reality that you are far from perfection. If you look into the mirror of the doctrine of sin, you see that you, too, are a sinner. No truth is meant to live in abstract, impersonal separation from us. Every truth is a measuring stick to which we compare our thoughts, desires, words, choices, motivations, relationships, worship, and hopes. Knowledge of

doctrine should produce not only knowledge of God, but a penetratingly humbling knowledge of self.

Theological study should produce not only praise and worship of God, but also heartfelt grief, confession, and repentance. Truth that does not reprove (confront) is truth not properly handled. It is possible and tempting to handle biblical doctrine unbiblically by omitting or resisting its reproving function.

3. Correction: closing the gap between where I am and where God wants me to be. The doctrines of Scripture are meant to correct us. Correction is a process where what has been revealed to be wrong or lacking is brought closer to the standard. In the face of every truth in Scripture our question should be, “What does this truth reveal about me that needs to be corrected, and how will that correction take place in a way that is consistent with who God is, how he has revealed change takes place, and in light of what he has provided for me in the person and work of the Lord Jesus?”

Progressive sanctification, which is God’s redeeming work in us between our conversion and our homegoing, is a continual process of comparison-correction, comparison-correction, driven by the truths of his word and empowered by the work of his Spirit.

4. Training: faithfully putting God’s standard into practice. In the face of every teaching of Scripture we should ask, “What new thing is God calling me to put into regular practice in my thoughts, desires, words, and actions?” You train to do better what you haven’t done well or haven’t done at all. Embedded in every doctrine of the word of God is a call to brand-new ways of living. So, believing in the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit and the inexhaustible resources of his grace, we submit to his call to live in a new way.

Second Timothy 3:16–17 calls us to handle the truths of Scripture in a way that results in a constant pattern of personal self-examination that leads to honest and humble confession, which produces a commitment to repentance, resulting in a life of increasing spiritual maturity and joyful obedience. Not just your thinking is being changed, but every

area of your life is being brought into greater and greater conformity to the will of the one who created you and recreated you in Christ Jesus.

Now, let's be honest. This is not always the way that we relate to and respond to the truths of God's word. In all of us, somewhere, gaps still exist between what we say we believe and how we actually live. Many of us are willing to live with functional inconsistency between the truths that we declare we believe and how we choose to live. So it must be said that the truths you actually believe are the truths that you live, because faith is never just intellectual assent. More importantly, biblical faith is a commitment of the heart that radically alters the way you live. Truth not lived is truth not believed.

This dichotomy I am describing is a dangerous, God-dishonoring, spiritually debilitating, idolatry-producing, moral-resolve-weakening, relationship-damaging, and body-of-Christ-weakening spiritual dynamic that gives the devil a huge opportunity in our hearts and lives. Some of us don't see the gaps in our lives. Some of us confess and repent when we see the gaps. And some of us have learned to live with the gaps for so long that they don't bother us anymore.

This gap jumps off the pages of Scripture in two specific accounts. The stories of these two characters are well known to us. They have been retained for us, by the God of grace, because they are about people who are just like us and God does not want us to fall into the same traps they did.

The first character is Jonah. God called Jonah to preach warnings of judgment to the evil city of Nineveh. The very thought of taking God's message to these despicable people was repulsive to Jonah, so rather than heeding God's call, he booked himself on a boat heading in the opposite direction as far as he could go. But God wasn't done with Jonah.

God sent a terrifying storm. The crew of the boat, trying to figure out why this storm had been inflicted upon them, cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. So they asked Jonah who he was and where he was from. Jonah's answer should get your attention: "I am a Hebrew, and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven" (Jonah 1:9). Take time to examine and think through Jonah's answer. "I am a Hebrew." Well, that's true. "I fear

the LORD, the God of heaven.” What? There appears to be no fear of God whatsoever in this man. He had no problem with looking God in the face and saying, “I will not do what you have asked me to do.” He had no problem with taking his life into his own hands and doing the opposite of what God had called him to do.

A huge gap exists between the cultural confession of this Hebrew man and the reality of how he responded to God and chose to live his life. The “fear” he is talking about is a cultural abstraction that bears little resemblance to the way he chooses to live his life. It may be a distant, impersonal item of intellectual assent, but it falls short of the transforming power of true belief the Bible describes. True belief always results in a willing submission to God and a joyful obedience to his calling. God wants more from Jonah than a cultural identity. God will settle for nothing less than the allegiance of Jonah’s heart and the submission of himself to the holy will of God.

The second incident is equally as striking. Here is the apostle Paul’s account of what happened.

But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, “If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?” (Gal. 2:11–14)

It is one of the most dramatic moments in the New Testament church. Paul confronts Peter face-to-face. How high must the stakes have been for this encounter to have taken place? The answer is, very high. At stake was the very character and purity of the gospel and faithful allegiance to God’s revelation. We know from Acts 10 that

God had made it clear to Peter that Gentiles were included in his plan of redemption, and they were not to be excluded in any way or to be treated as second-class citizens. But Peter, who had been in open fellowship with the Gentiles, withdrew from the Gentiles when a Jewish circumcision group showed up. In so doing, he acted in direct contradiction to the gospel doctrines he had been taught and had professed to believe. This striking moment makes it clear how dangerous the dichotomy between doctrine and life can be.

It is important to note that what happened here was not the result of Peter changing his doctrinal position. The problem was not first theological; it was moral. Fear of man was a more powerful motivator in Peter's heart than what God had taught him was right and true. This is why we must always shine the light of the doctrines of Scripture on the thoughts, desires, motivations, and craving of our hearts.

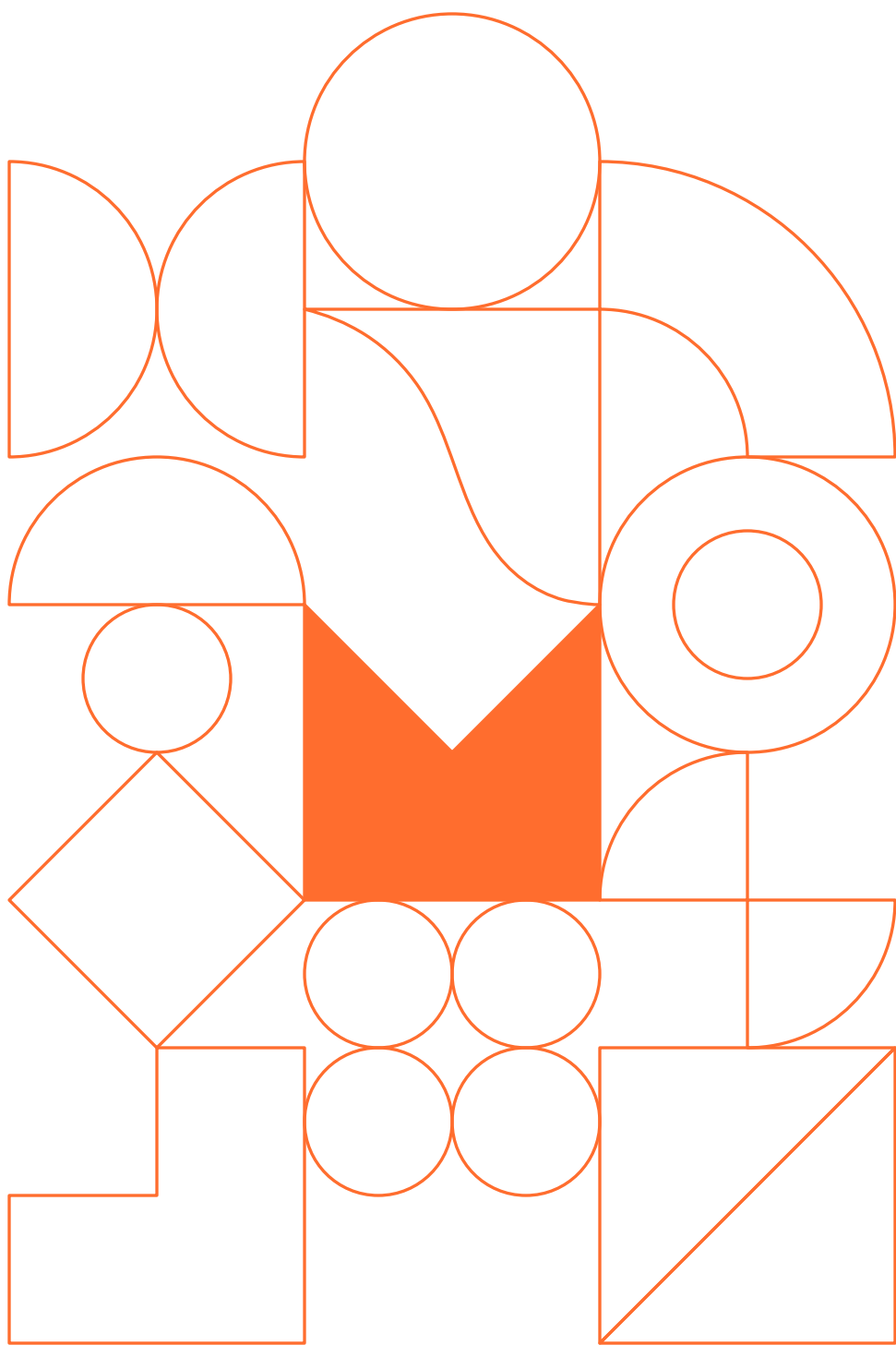
Do we think as the doctrines of God's word have taught us to think?
 Do we value what these doctrines have taught us to value?
 Do we love what these doctrines have taught us to love?
 Do we accept whom these doctrines have declared us to be?
 Do we desire what these doctrines have taught us to desire?
 Do we make choices that these doctrines would direct us to make?
 Do we act, react, and respond in light of what these doctrines have taught us?

Where in our hearts is there a war of allegiance between what these doctrines call us to and what we want for ourselves?

Are there places where we have become comfortable with a dichotomy between what we say we believe and the way we live?

It is these questions that are the motivation for this book. My prayer is that this book would be one of God's tools to help you, by his illuminating and enabling grace, to close the gap between your confessional theology and your functional theology, and by closing the gap, give the enemy less opportunity to do his evil work.

My intention is not to give you an exhaustive systematic theology with applicatory insights, but rather to look at twelve cardinal gospel doctrines and ask, “What does it look like to live as an individual, citizen, parent, spouse, or child in light of these doctrines?” May God meet you with his rescuing and renewing grace as you take this walk with me through the beautiful garden of the doctrines of his word.



The Doctrine of Scripture

ALTHOUGH OUR CONSCIENCE and God's creation beautifully display his goodness, wisdom, and power, and therefore leave us without excuse, their message is not enough to give us the knowledge of God and his will, which is necessary for salvation. So God, in his wisdom and grace, at various times and in a variety of ways, revealed himself, declared his will, preserved and proclaimed his truth, and protected the church against corruption and the deceits of Satan and the world by committing his truth to writing. This makes Scripture (the Bible, Old and New Testaments) necessary and essential.

The authority of Scripture, that it is to be believed and obeyed, does not depend on the testimony of any person, but completely on God, the author. It is to be joyfully received because it is the word of God.

The testimony of the church along with Scripture's doctrine, its majestic style, the agreement of all its parts, the fact that every part gives glory to God and reveals the only way of our salvation, and its overall perfection together argue that it is the very word of God. All things necessary for God's own glory and for our salvation, faith, and life, have either clearly been set down by God in Scripture or can properly be deduced

from Scripture, so nothing needs to be or ever should be added by new revelations or any new human insights or traditions.

One final thing must be said. All Scripture, every book in the Old and New Testaments, penned by some forty authors and encompassing Biblical Literature, Narrative, History, Poetry, Wisdom, Prophecy, Gospels, Epistles, and Apocalypse, was written under and directed by the inspiration of God. See Ps. 19:1–3; Prov. 22:19–21; Isa. 8:20; Luke 16:29, 31; 24:27, 44; John 16:13–14; Acts 15:15; Rom. 1:19–21; 2:14–15; 3:2; 15:4; 1 Cor. 2:10–12; Eph. 2:20; 2 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3:15–17; Heb. 1:1; 2 Pet. 1:19–20; 1 John 2:20, 27; 1 John 5:9.¹

Understanding the Doctrine of Scripture

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. (Rom. 1:18–20)

God created the world not only to bring us pleasure through its beauty and sustain us through its resources but also to serve a significant moral purpose. Everything God made is designed to confront us with God's existence and nature and, in so doing, confront our delusions of autonomy and self-sufficiency. Every morning when we get up, we bump into God and come face-to-face with his existence. He is revealed in the wind and the rain, in the bird and the flower, in the rock and the tree, in the sun and the moon, in the grass and the clouds, in sights, smells, touches, and tastes. Everything that exists is a finger that points to God's existence and glory. The cycle of the seasons points to his wisdom and faithfulness. The fact that we all see creation's beauty and are warmed

¹ Author's paraphrase of the doctrine of Scripture as found in parts of the Westminster Confession of Faith, chap. 1.

by its sun and drenched by its rain points us to his love and mercy. The thunderous storms, with crashes of lightning and violent winds, point to the immensity of his power. The created world is a surround-sound, Technicolor display of the existence and attributes of the one who created it all. The message of the created natural, physical world is so all-encompassing and clear to everyone that you have to fight to suppress, deny, and resist its message.

How good God is to build into creation reminders of himself, so that we, image bearers created for relationship with him, would be reminded of him again and again simply by looking at the world he created, which surrounds us everywhere we look.

But God in his infinite wisdom knew that the general revelation of creation, which confronts us with his existence and glory, could not impart to us the kind of knowledge of him, the necessary knowledge of ourselves, an understanding of the meaning and purpose of life, and an awareness of the disaster of sin and of the fallenness of the surrounding world that could rescue us from us, propel us to him for his saving grace, and provide us a plan for how we should then live as children of that same grace. And so he gave us the wonderful and amazing gift of his word.

It is important to never stop giving thanks that God guided and directed the writing of every portion of his word and carefully ruled the process by which the various books of the Bible were protected, collected together, and preserved, so that we could hold the very words of God himself in our hands and be assured that what we are reading is, in fact, all that God knew would be essential for us to know and understand.

As we think about the doctrine of Scripture, it is impossible to overstate the importance of what we are now considering. The existence, inspiration, authority, and trustworthiness of Scripture is the doctrinal foundation upon which every other doctrine stands. If there is no such thing as a God-breathed Scripture, if it does not reveal to me the truths that are essential for a knowledge of God, knowledge of self, and the way of salvation, then I have no right or authority to say what is true to myself or anyone else. If there is no inspired, authoritative, and trustworthy

word of God, then I am left to myself to decide, by my own experience, personal insight, or collective research with others, what is true.

This would mean, then, that there is no unified, God-given standard to which we all can appeal. Every person must discover what he or she thinks is true, and then we all must do what we think is right in our own eyes. There can be no way of being sure that what you think and believe is right, so you have no right to argue for what you believe to another; no authoritative system of truth exists that can provide a unified standard of belief and moral behavior. We are left in a world (with its fingers pointing to God) without any way of knowing for certain what the word, passed down from the Creator himself, would provide for us. No one has any basis for delineating doctrines, declaring that they are true, and teaching that they should provide the framework to guide our thinking, desires, decisions, words, and actions.

As we consider Scripture as a gift of God's grace, we must think about one other thing. One of the devastating results of sin is that it reduces all of us to fools. A fool looks at truth and sees falsehood. A fool looks at bad and sees good. A fool ignores God and inserts himself into God's position. A fool rebels against God's wise and loving law and writes his own moral code. A fool thinks he can live independently of help. A fool will not think as he was designed to think, desire what he was created to desire, or do what he has been called to do. But here is what is deadly about all of this: a fool doesn't know he is a fool. If a fool isn't given eyes to see his foolishness, then he will continue to think he is wise. So God, in the beauty of his grace, did not turn his back on our foolishness and walk away. God looked on foolish humanity with a heart of compassion and not only sent his Son to rescue fools from themselves, but also gave us the wonderful gift of his word so that fools would not only recognize their foolishness, but would also have a tool by which they could progressively become wise.

I have thought many times that I would not know how to live without the wisdom of God's word. I would not know how to be a responsible man without the wisdom of God's word. I would not know how

to be a husband, a father, a neighbor, a friend, a member of the body of Christ, a citizen, or a worker without the Bible. Without Scripture, I would not know right from wrong. Without the truths of the word, I would not know how to understand and respond to suffering. Without Scripture, I would be confused about who I am and what the purpose of my life is. Without my Bible, I would not know about sin or understand true righteousness. Without God's word, I would not know how to handle sex, money, success, power, or acclaim. Without Scripture, I would have no understanding of origins and no concept of eternity. Without the word, I would ask people and material things to do for me what they have no power to do. Without God's word, I would have no idea of my need for rescue, reconciliation, and restoration. Without my Bible, I would have no understanding of what it means to love or what it is that I should hate. Apart from God's word, I would have no wise and holy law to follow and no amazing grace to give me hope.

The way I understand everything in my life has been shaped by the body of wisdom that is found only between the first chapter of Genesis and the last chapter of Revelation.

True confession: I have written more than twenty books on a variety of topics, but none would have been written apart from the gift of God's word to me. If it were not for Scripture, I would have no wisdom of any worth to share. And if I were so bold as to attempt to write something, I would have no confidence in the truthfulness and helpfulness of what I wrote, if it were not for God's word. My Bible is my lifelong friend and companion. My Bible is my wisest and most faithful teacher. My Bible is my mentor and my guide. My Bible confronts me when I am wrong and comforts me when I am struggling. The word of God turned me into a willing student, and I will never quit studying until I am in my final home. Because I am a fool who has been rescued by Wisdom and given by him the gift of the wisdom of his word, my Bible is my most treasured physical possession. I know that as long as sin still lives in me, there will be pottery shards of that old foolishness still lying around that

will need to be dug up and replaced with divine wisdom, so I approach my Bible every day as a needy and thankful man. I cannot boast in any wisdom that I have because it is all from my Lord, written into the pages of his word.

The apostle Paul speaks to the foolishness of sin and the rescuing wisdom of God's word:

For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written,

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”

Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.” (1 Cor. 1:18–31)

As he writes this powerful contrast between human wisdom and the wisdom of God, Paul is talking about Scripture, with its core message being the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul's words echo David's in Psalm 119, where we see the wisdom of God's law. There is hope for fools because there is wisdom to be found—not first in the university classroom, on the pages of a research paper, on a popular podcast, or on the *New York Times* bestseller list, but in the pages of God's word. You can be highly trained and still be a fool. You can be a well-educated and gifted communicator and still be a fool. You can be successful and prominent and be a fool. You can have social media dominance and still be a fool. You can be a person that people look to for guidance and still be a fool. But no one is hopelessly trapped in their foolishness, because God, who is the source of all true wisdom, is a God of tender, forgiving, and rescuing grace. To all who confess their foolishness and run to him for wisdom, he offers mercy and grace in their time of need.

I want to note one more thing. Although the Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew and the New Testament in Greek, God, in the wisdom of his sovereignty and the tenderness of his grace, has ordained and guided the translation of his word into the common languages of peoples around the world, so that the truths revealed only in his word would be available to all who would desire to know them and live in light of them. And he has called generations of gifted, trained, and godly scholars to participate in the ongoing translation of his book, so that no one anywhere would be left without the gift of God's word.

Not only do we have the gift of God's word, but we also have the gift of the Holy Spirit, who guides us, teaches us, and illumines the word for us so that we can know, understand, confess, and repent. I not only need the content of God's word, but I also need the help of the Holy Spirit to enable me to understand it, to assist me to apply it, to empower me to live it, and to equip me to take its message to others. God rescues me from my foolishness not just by handing me a book, but also by giving me himself to open the wisdom of that book to me. I don't do this as an author. I write a book and move on. It is then up to the reader to make

sense of what I have written. I don't travel to reader after reader, sitting with them as long as it takes, shining light on the things I have written, making sure they understand, and helping them to apply the content of the book to their everyday lives. But that is exactly what God does. He goes everywhere his word goes. He patiently sits with readers every time they open his book. He teaches them out of his word. God is not only the author of his word, but he is also its primary teacher. When you get the word of God, you also get the God of the word, and that is a beautiful thing.