

2. The Reason Behind the Study

This study develops from the simple fact that doctrinal teachings do not fall out in a bodily form at one time or one period. Our understanding of the doctrinal statements grows (as will be explained in a later paragraph) and there is no apostolic catalogue that simply lists the dogma. In one age a particular truth may seem unknown while in another, yesterday's theological hotbox may be a forgotten issue. In practical outworking there is an unfolding of doctrine in the Scripture and it is only logical that a similar unfolding would come in the life of the church. We would have it easier if one of the Apostles had given a list of doctrines (or if the Lord had given a special book enumerating the doctrines) and formulated exact expressions for each including categories of thinking for dealing with all subsequent digressions...but the volumes would fill a library and we are given intelligence to help us not need such efforts. The understanding of doctrine arises progressively within the company of the Lord's people and that is why we need the study of doctrine in historical perspective.

Rationale

3. Doctrine and History

The enunciation of particular doctrines is always against a background of history. The statements of the teachings do not just appear, they are structured in a framework of history in which many obscure matters often play a large role. This is why the particular wording of a doctrinal proposition may lose its "punch" in time...the intricate historical matter that called for a key phrase may no longer be alive or viable. Hence the rewording of exact statements is sometimes necessary to keep them intelligent. (And, on another matter entirely, this should make you appreciate your Bible more...the inspired book requires virtually none of this rethinking. Its message and application have a timeless and omnipersonal thrust.)

Significance of History

Understand Wording - reasons & changes

This has, however, allowed a speculation about the relation between doctrinal enunciations and the historical settings. Some scholars have seen the historical light as being formative and the Biblical material as being rather incidental. (Such thinking will easily lend itself to a formgeschichte approach in doctrinal/textual studies.) In the mind of these men the Scriptures merely became a vehicle of convenience for affirming ideas needed in the historical context. The formers of doctrine merely found something biblical to support what they needed historically. If such were the case, the whole matter of doctrinal study would become a very relativistic expression. This is not our approach.