

## 2. Reasons behind the study

Doctrinal teachings do not fall out in bodily form at one time or in one period. Our understanding of doctrinal propositions grows and there is no apostolic catalogue that simply lists all possible dogma. In one age a particular truth may seem unknown while in another the great theological debate of former years may be virtually ignored. Within the Scripture itself there is a practical unfolding of truth 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, failing that, if the Spirit had guided one of the writers of the sacred page to simply tell us what that all were.--and do it in a tabular fashion. If such sources formulated exact expressions (including the possible parameters of thought for all subsequent digression) for each, we would be spared a lot of work. But the volumes needed to such would have been many and we are simply 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. As we see the understanding increase and become more comprehensive in expression, our appreciation for the teaching of the Scripture grows and we become more aware of the fullness of its revelation.

## 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 large roles. This is why the particular wording of a doctrinal proposition may lose its "punch" at times...the intricate historical matter that called for a key phrase may no longer be alive or visible. Hence the rewording of exact statements is sometimes needed to keep the meaningful

### ASIDE:

Let us note that when one sees how our own ideas must be constantly updated in expression to keep them relevant, it should encourage us to know that this is not true of the Bible. Its message and application have a timeless thrust and the manner of communication gives an omni-personal message. Any work of men needs nearly constant supervision to make sure it says what it needs to say. It is not this way with the Bible.

This has allowed speculation about the relation between doctrinal enunciations and the historical settings. Some scholars have seen the historical light as being formative and the Biblical materials as being almost incidental. Such thinking will easily lead to a formgeschichte approach in doctrinal/textual study. To these thinkers 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 supported historically.