

If such were the case, the whole matter of doctrinal study would become a very relativistic expression. This is not our approach.

Our approach to the history/doctrine discussion is to emphasize that historical theology is an understanding of the apprehension of truth in historical context, not the creation of "truths" to meet a particular historical need. The press of historical circumstance might corrupt a particular wording or force in an expression but it should not "create" portraits of a truth which would later need alteration or abandonment. In this sense the doctrine originate in historical context but does not devolve from it. The doctrine is from the Word which, due to the press or opening of history, is suddenly seen in greater clarity. That is to admit history may bring something to light that was otherwise obscure or unnoticed but it is illumination that is provided, not creation that is caused. Our impression is that in the jungles of history we could never find doctrine but history may help us isolate particular teachings in the Word of God.

We approach the total subject from the point of believing the Bible to be the Word of God, plenarily inspired, free of error, fact, judgments, as intended in the discussion of the writers. We hold it as both infallible and inerrant in the present phase of the understanding of these things. We do not argue these particular points in this course but it is our basic working position. It explains why we seek the doctrines in the Scripture...feeling that what is found there is true as the author of it all is Truth.

4. The Nature of Doctrine

In the light of these notes we may well ask: "Does doctrine change?" Perhaps the question could be altered, "Does doctrine develop?" If doctrine changes or develops, how can we be sure that what we are now teaching is correct or that it will not need considerable correction in a few years? Will our present symbols be equally valid in the passage of time or will the change of doctrine cause us much re-orientation in theological lines? These are the questions to which we now address ourselves.

Our concept is that doctrine (or doctrines, if one is thinking of individual expressions) does not change in essence but that the understanding changes and that consequently the expression may change with time. It is not, we think, the doctrine that changes but it is our grip upon it which at times is more or less secure. If our grip is sufficiently insecure a new statement may seem almost like a new doctrine but what we are seeking to do is firm the grip, not create something fresh. Our contention is that if we could disassociate ourselves from