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Introduction to Book I

Every major doctrine that is essential to the Christian faith is discussed at some length in this first book. A shocking ignorance of the core doctrines of the Christian faith prevails throughout most of the evangelical congregations of today's churches. That is true even in many of our so-called Bible churches where an overriding emphasis is often placed upon a surface application of Scriptures to the modern lifestyles of individuals rather than sound contextual interpretation. Rank religiosity has mostly replaced an in-depth study of systematic theology.

For instance, some may complain that baptism and the Lord's Supper are absent from this book. (Both are discussed in detail in Book II). That is because those rituals are not core doctrines upon which the Christian faith stands or falls. Nonetheless, many churches spend considerable time presenting those rituals as essential doctrines since they are something in which the congregation can become fully engaged whereas they feel that systematic theology is not. Those ritual practices are in fact most often construed as works that a Christian must perform without fail in obedience to Christ, or in order to receive and maintain his redemption. While none of that is true, contemplation of those rituals has largely replaced the study of God and his great work in the redemption of mankind upon which our faith rests.

Those sincere believers who desire to receive and understand sound doctrine are also kept ignorant largely because no minister dares teach serious doctrine from the pulpit lest the majority of the congregation complain or go elsewhere. Some have sought to rectify that by discussing doctrine in a special class apart from the regular service. Unfortunately, when major doctrines are taught they are often taught in a cryptic way by clerics that is cloaked in intellectual and theological language that the average layman cannot understand. It is sincerely hoped that this first book can be of assistance by presenting the essential doctrines in as plain a manner as possible.

According to many ministers, the average persons in the pews are just not up to listening to such weighty theological matters. As Paul wrote to Timothy, "...the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth and shall be turned to fables" (2Ti.4:3,4). Preachers seeking the approval of their audiences avoid the teaching of sound doctrine lest their congregations become bored with their efforts. That failure to teach sound doctrine leaves a vacuum into which all forms of religiosity, speculation, error, and fables are pulled in as replacements.

The fact is that a large majority of churchgoers and members are not only ignorant, but blissfully hope to remain so lest their own faulty pet notions of God and salvation crumble under the heavy weight of Truth. They wish to have Christianity, but they want it only as they define it and on their own terms. Many sitting in church pews wish only to be entertained from the pulpit, not informed of Truth. Many see Theology as a mere intellectual exercise that has no practical benefits, and in fact inhibits experiencing Christianity on a practical level. They see any serious discussion of Truth as inhibiting Christian love; better to let believers believe whatever they wish and revel in love and fellowship with them in a state of blissful ignorance. That opinion characterizes most of what we call Christendom today.

However, an in-depth study of God and his ways actually provides the basis for all true Christian living and is extremely practical. In the absence of sound theological doctrine, the church moves increasingly away from Christ toward experientialism, emotionalism, and various blind forms of ritualism as an authentication of their nebulous “faith.” In doing so, they drift away from true Christianity toward deadly Churchianity (the worship of the temporal church and its ordinances instead of Christ and his Word).

It is only through the teaching of sound theological doctrine that we learn to live day-to-day in the light of God’s Truth within a hostile world and avoid being drawn into superstition and error through purely emotional experiences. It is through the study of God that we learn to love Him with all our heart, soul, and mind and through that love for God come to love our neighbor as ourselves (Mt.22:37–39). We cannot love God if we do not even know who He is, and we cannot truly love our neighbor if we cannot see him in the same light as God sees him.