

Series Introduction

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[0 : 00] Well, this morning we're going to begin a new series. We're going to take it. It's from *The Christian Life, A Doctrinal Introduction* by Sinclair Ferguson. is the book that we're going to begin going through.

And it is a doctrinal introduction. And it's covering, we aren't going to be covering every single doctrine or teaching that the Bible talks about or teaches.

But we are talking about the doctrines that relate directly or most closely to the Christian life. So we're talking about the new birth, the beginning of the Christian life.

We're talking about justification. We're going to be talking about what does it mean to be united to Christ? And what does that have to do with how I live now? We're going to talk about election.

And so these are doctrines that connect directly to the Christian life that explain the Christian life.

And so we're going to take it in part.

[1 : 02] And we're going to cover one sort of one doctrine each each week. Today is going to be an introduction. And we want to begin by just asking the question of why.

Why study this? Why is this important? We are already a pretty doctrinally devoted church. Some churches are afraid to speak of steak and potatoes doctrine, grown-up food doctrine.

I don't think that is us. We aren't like that. We are already sort of doctrinally oriented. And so why? Why study this?

And in a way, I want to answer it just with an illustration. And so I want you to think of Arnold Schwarzenegger. Not as he is now, a 60-some-year-old man.

But I want you to think of young Arnold Schwarzenegger, five times Mr. Olympia. In some ways, the bodybuilding ideal. And Christians are bodybuilders.

[2 : 09] We are to be growing ourselves up. We are to be maturing, growing in every virtue. And so we are in the business of growing up to be like Christ, the ideal.

And so if you are a devoted bodybuilder, and this is a question I want you to help me answer. If you are a devoted bodybuilder, what do you need to do if that is what you want to be?

What do you want to do? Or what do you need to do if you are going to grow in that sport?

Strengthen your muscles. You are going to have to strengthen your muscles.

You are going to have to put in the time. You are going to have to train. It is no pain, no gain. You are going to have to lift some really heavy weights very often.

What else are you going to have to do? You need to make it a priority. You need to make it a priority. Right. It seems to me that the people that are on the highest of that competition, that is what they live for.

[3 : 18] That is what they live for. It is the highest priority. I don't think most of them even have a job except to do this. So what else do you need to do? Eat right.

Eat right. And eating right means eating a lot. Right. If you are going to be a bodybuilder, you have to eat a lot. We are not talking about the 2,000 calorie Weight Watchers plan.

We are talking 7, 8, 9 meals a day where you are stuffing it in even if you are not hungry. Brian Shaw is four times world's strongest man.

He is huge. I saw a YouTube video once where they recorded what he eats for a day. 12,000 calories of material.

You need material to work with. What else do you need? So you are lifting heavy weights. You are eating tons of food. We are going to not say steroids, but that is really the answer too.

[4 : 18] What else do you need? Denying yourself junk food. Yeah. You just can't eat. It is chicken and broccoli. That is what it is. And brown rice.

What else do you need? That is not denying yourself. Okay.

Nine times a day though. I would say that is denying yourself. What else do you need? We are missing one really super important thing. Sleep. Yeah. Sleep.

You need sleep. You need rest. If you don't give your body rest, your muscles are not going to grow. So basically, it is a three-legged stool.

You need to train. You need to practice. You need to consume food. And you need rest. And if you don't do all three, you are not going to grow.

[5 : 18] If all you do is train, but you don't eat, well, you are not going to grow. If all you do is eat, but you don't train, you are going to grow, but not muscles. The Christian life in the same way is a three-legged stool.

And the legs are doctrine, experience, and practice. Doctrine, experience, and practice.

So doctrine, and that's what this Sunday School series is going to be about. Doctrine is knowing and really understanding biblical truth.

Be transformed by the renewing of your minds. Or even what we just talked about from Peter.

Prepare your minds for action. Again, that's a military term.

In the ancient world, the way you prepared for battle was you girded up, you know, you listed up your thing. You buckled in your whatever you call it, into your belt.

[6 : 23] And you got ready. When we send troops over to the Middle East for war, what are they going with?

They're carrying 60, 70, 80 pounds of equipment. They're preparing for action, for anything that they need. And that means putting things in their backpack.

Things that they might need. Things that they could use. Things that when the going gets tough, they're going to be glad that they can reach back into their backpack or whatever and take it out and use it.

So that's what we're talking about. Doctrine is about preparing yourself. It's about when it comes to those difficult times, you have it. You've trained.

So that's the other thing is practice. Actually doing the Christian life. Really serving. Really loving. Really humbling yourself. Really practicing patience and kindness.

[7 : 25] Jesus wanted disciple makers to make disciples who had learned to obey everything that he had taught them. Not just learn the requirements.

Learn what he had taught them. But actually learn how to obey it. To do it. And then. So. Is that it? Is that the Christian life?

You just know it and then you do it. And. No. There's this third leg and it's experience. Experience. The last verse of Psalm 73.

But as for me. As for me. It is good to be near God. Asaph was not talking about physical proximity. He was talking about felt. Experienced. Closeness. Relational. Closeness. To God.

[8 : 24] Having fellowship. Having dealings with him. I just started reading a book by Abraham Kuyper called To Be Near to God.

It's 110 meditations on this idea of being near unto God. Who is Abraham Kuyper? Well, he lived in the 1900s or the 1800s.

He was a pastor. A theologian. A member of the Dutch parliament. He was prime minister of the Netherlands for four years. I believe he started a seminary. I believe he started a newspaper.

He wrote a book on Calvinism. He wrote a book called Principles of Sacred Theology. He had his doctrine. He knew truth.

He had his practice. He's the one that said there's not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence. Over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not cry, mine.

[9 : 24] That's why he makes a newspaper. That's why he runs for parliament. That's why he's prime minister. Because in his mind, he's saying, Christ is over this. So I have to live a Christian life in this world that I am in.

And he had experience. He just wasn't receiving and then doing. But in his heart, in his spiritual life, he had experience.

He knew what it was to live with God, to walk with God. Just listen to what he wrote in this book, To Be Near Unto God. For when it comes to a meeting with God, the action proceeds from both sides. God comes to him and he comes to God. First from afar, then ever closer. Until at length, all distance falls away and the meeting takes place.

A moment of such blessedness as can never be expressed in words. You feel yourself as it were drawn up into heaven. Or that God has come down from heaven to you and seeks you out.

[10:30] In your loneliness. In your cross. Or in the joy that falls to your lot. And then there is blessedness again. Blessedness or happiness that exceeds everything that can be imagined.

Then it is good. Oh, so good above all things else to be near unto your God. He knew from experience.

How else could he write this? This is what my Christian life is. It's not just knowing about God. It's knowing and having a personal relationship and dealings and meetings with him.

But experience is also just... It's that drawing close to God. Walking with God like Enoch walked with God. Experience though is also...

Just to put it very briefly. It's the hard knocks of life. It's trials. It's tribulations. Some things we learn in Sunday school class. And that's true.

[11:37] Some things we learn by reading books. But some other things we... There's only experience that will teach us.

And we... Peter talked about those trials that bring us grief. But the trials for our good. Refining fires. And when we're in there.

It has a way of making clear. Oh, I guess I really didn't understand that. I didn't know that. As much as I thought I knew it. Or things that I thought were true about me.

Or things that I thought were true about God's people. Or the church. Or the way things work.

Those things turned out to be not true. We learn obedience through suffering. Even as Jesus Christ did.

The cost. And how to obey. We learn it through suffering. We learn faith. And the faithfulness of God. When we are put into those red seas.

[12:37] See, we can read about that. And we can learn about it. Intellectually. But on the ground. There's an experiential need for education.

Where we learn about our God. And so, what do we need to grow? Well, we need doctrine. We're not going to interpret those occasions correctly. We need doctrine in order to obey correctly.

We need doctrine. We need practice. We need experience. And so, why this Sunday school class? Well, because as far along as you are. And as I am.

Or however far that is. We still need it. We still need it. Sinclair Ferguson says. When he first started preaching and teaching. He assumed that what Christians needed.

Was to be instructed in the deeper truths of the gospel. This is what he says. It was not long before experience. My own experience.

[13:37] An observation. Of others. That taught me. How mistaken. I had been. I began to see. The deeper truths.

If there are such things. Are really the old basic truths. Of the gospel. And that's what the people needed. I recently had a conversation with.

A lady who. Who gives from what I could tell. Every appearance of being a Christian. And she and I were talking about. Our church. About Grace Fellowship.

She was talking about what kind of church. She goes to. And. She was asking what we believed. And what we thought. And it seems that her church. That she's attending.

Um. Believes a lot of the very same things. And we were talking about the gospel. And it was good. We were talking about that together. And she was excited. And she was tracking.

[14:35] You know. How you have those conversations. With someone you just met. And it's good. It's like. Oh. This is. This is someone who has the same. Beliefs and thoughts. That I have. And. Then she started talking about.

The end times. And how. She thinks that. They're. They're right on us. Right now. And she's super. Super excited about that. Um.

She thinks the rapture. Is almost here. And. The seven year tribulation. Is coming. And she is excited. And she's really into these websites. That. That.

Um. Show the real things. Of what's really going on. In the world. And. That sort of. I felt like. I'd. Take an exit.

Off the. The highway. And I wasn't sure. What to make of all that. And so. I just. Kind of said. I was trying to be diplomatic. And I said. Well. I don't know. If you're right.

[15:31] I hope you are. I mean. It'd really be nice. If Jesus comes back. Tomorrow. Um. And she said. Yeah. I don't talk about. This big steak. Usually.

I just keep to the edges. The introductory stuff. By which. The introductory stuff. She meant. The gospel. And. And so.

From that point. In the conversation. I said to myself. You know what. I'm going to make a big deal. Out of Jesus. And I'm going to make a big deal. About how good it is. To be. A Christian.

The glories. Of being a Christian. The riches. That we have in Christ. And. And. I don't care. You know. In the big scheme of things. It doesn't matter. If the rapture. Or if there is one.

Or whatever. Like. It matters. If there's Christ. And our salvation. And. What we have in him. Is the big steak. Christ. And what we have in him.

[16:28] Is the. The. The big thing. And I want. And I am hoping. That she gets more of that. But. That's doctrine. That big steak.

Of. Who is Jesus? What. What is he like? What has he done for me? What has he promised me? Doctrine is food. And food is for living.

And. And that's what. Today really is about. Knowing. Is for living. All the. All that we're going to be talking about. In the weeks to come.

It would be an incredible disservice. To you. If. If we just. Kept it at the intellectual level. And we didn't say. Now this is why it's important.

As for. For living. So. Why study this? Because it is for living. This is about. Practicing better. And experiencing. More.

[17:23] So doctrine is not. An end of itself. William Ames. Was a Puritan. And he wrote. Sort of like. The standard Puritan textbook.

On theology. And. It was in the. Form of a catechism. And he asked. What is doctrine? And his answer was. Doctrine is for living. Unto God.

Doctrine is for walking. With God. Doctrine is for comfort. And joy. And peace. It's for strength. It's for wisdom. It's for living better.

It's for knowing our God better. It. It's for life. And so. If you've been tracking with me. I do want to open up the floor here.

And I want you to. To think with me. And kind of help. Flesh this out. I want to open the floor. And ask you. How has. Knowing the Bible.

[18:18] Knowing doctrinal truths. About the Bible. Helped you. In your life. Where you said. It was that truth. That gave me stability.

It was that. Truth. About what I knew. That gave me help. That gave me joy. That gave me grace. That gave me peace. In those moments. And. How. How is.

How have you seen it. In your own personal life. And. Maybe. How have you seen it. In other people's lives. Where. Hey. They're going through something. Or they're. They're experiencing something. And I see that doctrine.

Has made a huge difference. I think we could go on. And I hope you could. But.

You see. I hope you can see. And I'm sure you could see. Even if you haven't shared. Is that. That. That. This doctrine. Is not just. Just.

[19:13] Objective truth. That doesn't. In any way. Sort of connect. To our lives. It's for our comfort. It's for our joy. It's for our peace. It's for our strengthening.

It's for. Conviction. It's. It's to change us. It's to help us. It's important. For experience. That's what Dale.

Was talking about. It's. It's important. For obedience. 13 times. In two letters. Paul asked. Do you not know. Do you not know. Do you not know.

That you yourselves. Are God's temple. And that God's spirit. Lives in you. Do you not know. That the saints. Will judge the world. Don't you know. That the wicked. Will not inherit. The kingdom of God. That's all just.

From like two paragraphs. In his letter. To the Corinthians. And. And ten more times. And he's saying. You're not living. Up to what. You know.

[20:07] Or what you should know. Or. Or think about. How Jesus taught. So here we are. Sitting at Jesus feet.

On the mountain. And he's teaching us. And the question. Roger's question. Of how. How should we pray. How do I communicate. How do I have fellowship. What. What. What is my relationship.

With God like. And. Well. How should you pray. Well he says. You don't. Don't pray like the hypocrites. Who think they'll be heard.

Because of their many words. So. Less words. Instead of just. Going on and on. Well. Why. Why. Why not pray like them.

Why pray. Simply. And. It's a doctrinal reason. God is your father. Truth. Period. Your father is God. [21 : 05] And your father. Already knows. What you need. I don't know. If you thought about. That in a while. But. Do you see how. What a great.

Difference. That makes. And how we. Come to God. What do you. Why were they using. So many words. Why were the hypocrites.

Saying. Going on and on. Why are the pagans. Praying on and on. What's driving that. That. Well. They want to impress. The other people. Who else. Do they want to impress. God. They want to impress. God. They think.

By their many words. They'll be. Heard. And so. God. For them. Was someone to impress. To manipulate.

[22 : 00] To earn. Just let me. How does it feel like. To be in a relationship. Where you have to manipulate. And impress. And earn. All the time.

What's that like. What. Exhausting. What else. Stressful.

Miserable. Uneasy. Like. You probably. Have been in that situation. You have to go to work. And your boss. Doesn't like you. When the best you can do. Is sort of try to. Get along.

And the whole thing. Is fearful. And uneasy. Jesus words. Are full of comfort. He's saying. Talk to your father. Your father. Knows what you need.

You don't have to. Impress him. With your many words. You don't have to. Manipulate him. You don't. Just ask. He already knows.

[22 : 58] And just ask. The Lord's prayer. Is full of doctrine. Talks about the fatherhood of God. It talks about. His heavenly existence.

Talks about his holiness. It talks about his kingdom. And it's coming. It talks about how he daily provides for us. Forgiveness.

Temptation. The devil. And the whole point is this. That knowing. God. And his character. And his ways. Is the foundation. For practical. Christian. Living. It changes how we pray. It changes how we feel.

About God. Toward God. It changes how we. Consider our situations. That's what Karen was talking about. How do I. Evaluate. This. This circumstance.

[23 : 54] That I'm in. Or what Linda was saying. How do I evaluate my past. Think about the last night.

Last night. With Jesus. And his disciples. How do the disciples feel. They're greatly troubled. They're troubled in their heart.

Their hearts are troubled. And so. Jesus. Knows this. And what does Jesus do. Did he just say. Well. It'll all work out. Boys.

Don't worry. No. Their hearts are troubled. And he gives them comfort. But it is doctrinal comfort. It's truth. Comfort. He says. I'm going away.

But I'm going to come back. For you. And in my father's house. There are many rooms. He teaches about the Trinity. He says. If you know me. You know the father. I am in the father.

[24 : 53] And the father is in me. That's Trinitarian doctrine. And the father is going to send another comforter. The spirit of truth. The spirit will take what is mine. And make it known to you.

And so he teaches about the Holy Spirit. And what his role is. And what his work. His job is to do. He comforts us in our trouble. He helps us in our need. He's the paraclete.

And that just. It means. He's the advocate. The helper. So we should think of the Holy Spirit. As sort of. The really good lawyer.

The really good counselor. The one who's on your side. Who's bringing you the truth. That you need. When you. When you need it. And so disciples. Here. Here's your comfort. You have father. Son and Holy Spirit. For you. And you know us. And we know you. So doctrine is not impractical.

[25 : 55] Or stodgy. You know. Cold. And. It's comfort. It's joy. It's peace. And when life. Is all thrown upside down. And the mountains are falling into the sea.

Psalm 46. Be still. And know. That I am God. So doctrine. It fills our lives.

With stability. With grace. Roger. Can you. Roger. Can you go ahead and read. I've asked Roger to read. Second Corinthians.

Eleven. Twenty. Three. And twenty. Twenty. Eight. We just said. The doctrine fills our lives. With stability and grace. Now listen to what. Paul lives through. Are they servants of Christ.

I am out of my mind to talk like this. I am warm. I have worked much harder. Been in prison more frequently. Been flogged more severely. And been exposed to death again and again.

[26 : 54] Five times I've received from the Jews. The forty lashes. Minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods. One time I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked.

I spent a night and a day in the open sea. I've been constantly on the moon. I've been in danger from rivers. In danger from bandits.

In danger from my own countrymen. In danger from Gentiles. In danger in the city. In danger in the country. In danger at sea.

And in danger from false brothers. I have labored and coiled. And have often gone without sleep. I have no hunger. In thirst. And have often gone without food.

I've been whole. And naked. Besides everything else. I face daily. The pressure of my concern. For all the churches. How is it that Paul is just not.

[27 : 54] Shriveled up somewhere. Just done. Overwhelmed. I can't do this anymore. I can't go on anymore.

How is he not so traumatized. That he's just living in constant. Paralyzing fear. What's the answer. Like. Paul. I think has a very strong personality.

That's part of the answer. God gave him a strong personality. To face these things. But what. What kept Paul going. Through those things. Again.

And getting up. Again. And getting up. And getting up. And going. And going. The answer is. He knew. His God. He knew.

Who he was. I'm his servant. I'm his. He knew the work of Christ. He knew the indwelling power. Of the Holy Spirit. And that's why his appeals.

[28 : 50] To the church. Are so poignant. Don't you know. Don't you know. How does he keep going. Well he knew. He knew it.

And he's saying. If you only knew. And understand. Then your lives. Would be different. Your lives. Would be different. So. Think of Romans 12.

Just. Just listen to how. One person. Paraphrased. Romans 12. Two. Don't let the world. Around you. Squeeze you. Into its own mold.

But let God. Remold your minds. From within. So that you may. Prove in practice. That the plan. Of God. For your. For you. Is good. It meets. All his demands.

And moves. Towards the goal. Of true maturity. Let. Let. God. Remold your minds. From within. And.

[30 : 00] And so. The more we understand. And appreciate. The mercies of God. The more we live for Christ. The more we prove. In practice. That's an obedience. And real service.

And real sacrifice. That God's plan is good. And so there we have. Those three legs. Of the Christian life. We have doctrine. And we have practice. And we have experience. And. As.

As the grace of God. Expands our heart. And changes our minds. So that. We see. And know. Him better. And we. And we know.

His love. More deeply. Then. My heart. Loves him more. I love him. Because he first.

Loved me. And so my. My heart's love. Is just an answer. To his. And so. The louder. I hear. His love. In my heart. And the more deeply. I understand it.

[30 : 57] Then the more. I love him. And so this is not. Barren. Doctrine. It is. Experiential. Christianity. And. But these waters are.

The love of God. Is. Deep. These are ocean. Waters. And. There are. Shallows. There are. Shallows. Where. Wait. Where we first. Learn about his love. And. There are beaches. And shallows. And where we get in. But. You know. Some Christians.

It seems. Never get past. The shallows. They don't have a boat. They don't have a boat. To get them out. To the deep parts.

And that boat. Is doctrine. That will get you out. To the deep parts. And there's a boat. That will take you out. To the deeps. And give you all the. Scuba gear you need.

[31 : 51] And it's. And it's doctrine. Now some people. Keep their boat. On dry dock. Their boat. Doctrine. In the dry dock. And all day long. They work on their boat.

And they get it just right. And they love to talk about their boat. And what it can do. And they hang out. With other boat people. Who like to work on their boats. And they have conferences. And meetings. Where they narrow.

And perfect their boats. But they sadly. Hardly ever take their boat. Out to the deep waters. And true biblical Christianity. Is taking the boat.

Out to sea. Where you. Where you're. Loving God. And you're knowing. His love for you. It's using. All of that doctrine. To where.

The deep. Deep. Deep. Love of Jesus is. And where the grace. And the stability. And the joy is. And that's what this class is.

[32 : 46] And yeah. So it's doctrine. But it's doctrine. That it's meant. To get you out to sea. Throw you into the waters. And so you have to start.

Praying with Paul. And Paul says. He's praying. Lord. Give me strength. And what do we need. Strength for. What does he ask. Strength for. I need strength.

To understand. Just how wide. And long. And high. And deep. Is the love of Christ. What he's saying. Is this. Ocean is too big. Lord. It's too much. For me. To understand.

To handle. It's overwhelming me. Strengthen me. To swim. Your love. Is too much. Give me. More strength. So I can hold it. Hold more of it. And that's what doctrine is for.

Knowing is for living. And it's. It's for living. Abundantly. Well. Our time is gone. We'll see you next week. In this class. We're dismissed.

[33 : 42] We'll be dismissed. We'll be dismissed. We'll be dismissed. We'll be dismissed.