Guide Christian Beliefs

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Session 1: Why Study Christian Doctrine

1. Introduction

Theology is the ________________________________ of the sciences. Why?

What do theology and politics have in common?

Religious studies is ____________________________________________________________

Christian theology, in contrast, is _______________________________________________

2. What is Theology?

A. Definition: ________________________________________________________________

B. “Christian doctrine”: _______________________________________________________

C. Primary source of Christian theology: __________________________________________
Marshall’s full definition of “Christian doctrine”: ________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

3. Christian Doctrine and Bible Study

The Bible is a __________________________ but it is not ___________________________

How do theology, science, and philosophy relate to each other?

4. The Use of the Bible in Theology

A. ____________________________________________

B. ____________________________________________

C. ____________________________________________

D. ____________________________________________
5. The Uses of Christian Doctrine

A. __________________________________________

B. __________________________________________

C. __________________________________________

Reflection Questions

1. A Unitarian minister once put up a poster saying that he offered "religion without dogma." Do you think that what he offered is possible?
2. Can a Christian believer study religion or theology "with an open mind"?
3. What other forces want try to compete with the Bible in determining what we believe? Do they have any validity? How do they relate to the Bible?
4. Is the word "doctrine" a good thing or a bad thing in your experience? We all have emotional baggage attached to words; what is your baggage with "doctrine"?
5. Marshall says that anyone studying the Bible is in fact studying doctrine? Do you agree or disagree?
6. Is it possible for a person who is not himself a Christian to understand Christian doctrine fully?
7. It has been said that "deep theology is the best fuel for devotion": discuss.
8. Many sects base their peculiar doctrines on the teaching of the Bible. How would you show the validity or otherwise of their views?
2. Our Knowledge of God

1. Introduction

Intellectual argument or inward conviction?

A. Christian experience

B. Reason

i. 

ii. 

How then do we ultimately know about God?

2. Revelation in nature (Isaiah 40)

A. Cosmological: 

B. Teleological: 
C. Moral: ____________________________________________________________

Can you prove the existence of God?

3. Revelation in history (Psalm 78)

Types of events

Does God reveal himself only in events? What are the problems of this thinking?

a. _________________________________________________________________

b. _________________________________________________________________

4. Revelation in Jesus Christ (John 5:19–47)

Insufficient?
5. Revelation in the Bible (Revelation 1)

A. Historical record

B. Explanatory commentary

6. The inspiration of the Bible (2 Timothy 3:14–17)

A. The Bible has two main events

i. _____________________________________________________________

ii. _____________________________________________________________

Tests for canonicity

a. _____________________________________________________________

b. _____________________________________________________________

B. Inspired _____________________________________________________
C. Revealed __________________________________________________________

D. Believed by _______________________________________________________

E. Technical discussion

   a. Can written statements be revelation?

   b. The difference between being and becoming the Word of God

F. Clarifications

   a. Authors are not _________________________________________________

   b. Paradox: _______________________________________________________

   c. Scope of inspiration

7. The Reliability and Infallibility of the Bible (Luke1:1–4)

   A. ________________________________________________________________
B. ________________________________________________________________

C. ________________________________________________________________

D. ________________________________________________________________

E. ________________________________________________________________

8. Human and divine

9. Authority of the Bible

10. Sufficiency
Reflection Questions

1. “Knowledge and certainty in religion come not from intellectual argument but from inward conviction.” What do you think of this? Right or wrong? What are the dangers of both approaches?

2. How are you going to balance experience, reason, and God’s self-revelation? This is a crucial question, because unless we can agree on how we know God, we will all know him differently depending on our reason and experiences. So please take some time and talk about how these three elements work together (or don’t).

3. If you were trying to persuade a non-Christian of the existence of God, where would you begin?

4. Does it bother you that you can’t prove God’s existence?

5. Can you trace a pattern in God’s dealings with Israel from Psalm 78? Is there any evidence that God still acts on the same principles towards the nations of the world?

6. Why is the revelation of God in Christ (without interpretation) not sufficient for us?

7. What is the difference between the church conferring and recognizing the books in the canon?

8. How do you feel about Marshall’s argument that we can’t prove the Bible is from God, but believing it is from God is the most satisfying explanation of all the evidence?

9. Discuss the significance of asserting that the human/divine nature of the Bible is a paradox and not a contradiction.

10. What objections have been brought against the infallibility of the Bible? Discuss what this term means, and whether the use of it can be defended.

11. What principles should we follow in interpreting the Bible as a source of Christian doctrine?

12. It is common in the church to pay lip service to the affirmation that “the Bible is our final and supreme authority in Christian doctrine and practice.” What are all the ways in which Church behavior contradicts the affirmation?
3. What Can We Know about God?

1. Introduction

2. God in three persons (Ephesians 1:3–14)

   A. Biblical references

      i. God

      ii. Jesus

      iii. Spirit

   B. Analogies

      i. ____________________________________

      ii. ____________________________________

      iii. ____________________________________
iv.  

C. “Persons”

3. God is Spirit (John 4:24)

A. Negative

B. Positive

4. God is Love (1 John 4:8)

A. Greek word #1: ________________________________________________________________

B. Greek word #2: ________________________________________________________________

C. Fatherhood of God

5. God is Light (1 John 1:5)

A. God is ________________________ and ________________________ .
Define "justice."

B. The expression of God's holiness and righteousness is the __________________________.

C. Sin ____________________________________________________________ us from God

Reflection Questions

1. How would you explain the Trinity to a child? A non-Christian adult? Are there any analogies that are harmful?

2. On the basis of such a passage as Ephesians 1:3–14, what would you say is the significance of the doctrine of the Trinity for the Christian in his spiritual life?

3. How do show erōs love? How do you show agapē love?

4. With the aid of a concordance examine the teaching of the New Testament about God as Father: what evidence, if any, is there that he is the Father of all mankind?

5. Make a list of the different kinds of human love. What light do they throw on the nature of God's love?

6. "The divine attributes of justice and mercy ... do not need to be reconciled, for they are never at war" (J. Denney): discuss.

7. What is the difference between holiness, righteousness, love and justice? In your own experience, have you ever seen all four in one situation?

8. What did you think about the logic behind the statement that since love is meant to express itself in harmonious relationships, there must be some rules, and we call that the moral law? Do we think of the "law" as an expression of "love"? If not, why? If so, how does it impact our daily lives?

9. Marshall writes, "When we refuse to accept God's way, we become the objects of his wrath. This is the inevitable consequence of our attitude, since there can be no room in a moral universe governed by the law of love for those who live for themselves and refuse to submit to the law that structures the universe." What do you think about this way of thinking, as opposed to the pagan notion of God being angry and wants to punish?
4. God and the Universe

1. God the Creator (Genesis 1)

A. God created ____________________________________________________________

B. Genesis is not _________________________________________________________

C. The universe is not ____________________________________________________

D. God is ________________________________________________________________

E. Deism _________________________________________________________________

2. God the Lord (Psalm 107:148)

A. God is ________________________________________________________________

B. God is ________________________________________________________________

C. God is ________________________________________________________________
D. Providence of God

3. **Nature of Mankind (Psalm 8)**

   A. God created humans ______________________________________________________________________

   B. The nature of humans ______________________________________________________________________

      i. Body __________________________________________________________________________________

      ii. Soul __________________________________________________________________________________

      iii. Spirit __________________________________________________________________________________

   C. Chief purpose of humans ______________________________________________________________________

4. **The Problem of Evil (Genesis 3; Job 24)**

   A. The _____________________________________________________________________________________ of Adam and Eve

   B. The problem of the existence of pain and suffering
C. Inaccurate explanations

D. Possible explanation

5. The Nature and Effects of Sin (Romans 1:18–2:16)

A. Definition of sin

i. In relation to God: ____________________________________________

ii. In relation to other people: ___________________________________

iii. In relation to oneself: _______________________________________  

B. Effects of sin

i. ____________________________________________________________
Reflection Questions

1. How do you feel about Marshall’s statement that the Bible does not contain a scientific cosmology since we would not be able to understand it?

2. What about his comment that science is interested in the “what” and “how” of creation, and the Bible is interested in the “why”? 

3. How would a deist or pantheist going to live differently from a Christian?

4. Which of the three “omni-” words impacts you the most?

5. Faith isn’t believing what isn’t true, but believing despite considerable obstacles that something is true. Discuss.

6. Discuss what is meant by the biblical teaching that humans are made in the image of God. Do people still retain that image? In what ways are we different from the animals? Does this have any impact on our beliefs concerning abortion and euthanasia? Animal rights?

7. “The Bible is not concerned to give a scientific account of the origin of mankind, but to insist on their divine creation and their spiritual nature.” Discuss this statement, and how Marshall balances it with the following: “Again, we do well to remember that biological evolution remains a scientific hypothesis, admittedly the most generally accepted theory, but, like every scientific hypothesis, open to falsification and replacement by a better theory.”

8. “Around the explanation of these three passages (Psalm 8:3f.; John 7:17f.; Hebrews 2:6–9), so closely linked, might be gathered no small part of the Biblical doctrine of man” (H. W. Robinson): discuss the question “What is mankind?” in the light of these passages.

9. What would it be like if we lived not seeking our eternal blessedness but rather God’s glory? Be specific and concrete in your answers.
10. There can be no question that the problem of the existence of pain and suffering is paramount, and it is doubtful that you will be able to solve the problem at one time. However, what did you learn from Marshall that might help you down this particular road of discovery?

11. Marshall’s honesty is describing the questions raised by pain and suffering may be difficult for some people to process. Does he overstate or understate the problem?

12. Which of Marshall’s answer to the problem was most helpful?

13. An old Jewish book states: "Each of us has been the Adam of his own soul." Discuss this statement in relation to the teaching of Paul in Romans 5:12–21.

14. “The common notion that sin is selfishness betrays a false assessment of its nature and gravity” (J. Murray): what, then, is the biblical view of the essence of sin?
5. The Person and Work of Jesus

1. Jesus Christ as God and Man (John 1:1–18; Philippians 2:5–11)

   A. Deity of Jesus

   B. Humanity of Jesus

       1. Characteristics

       2. Paradox

           i. Truly ________________________________

           ii. Truly ________________________________

       3. Docetism

       4. “Emptying himself”

      5. Birth of Jesus

   A. Jesus came to _______________________________________________________

   B. Jesus fulfilled _______________________________________________________

   C. Suffering Servant ____________________________ (Isaiah 40–53)

   D. Deliverer ___________________________________________________________

   E. Revelation __________________________________________________________


   A. Unique circumstances

   B. Significance of the resurrection

      i. _________________________________________________________________

      ii. ______________________________________________________________
C. Ascension

4. The Need for the Cross (Ephesians 2:1–16)

5. The Cross Shows God’s love (1 John 4:7–12)

6. The Cross as a sacrificial offering (Hebrews 9)
   A. 
   B. 
   C. 
7. The Cross as deliverance from sin (Revelation 5:1–14)

A. Victory

B. Redemption

Reflection Questions

1. Would anything have been lost from the Christian religion if Jesus had not been a real man?
2. “Perfect humanity is divinity.” Is it?
3. As you look at all the titles and functions for Jesus, you can see how not one of them by itself is adequate for describing Jesus. Which one most impacts you? Is there one that is more difficult to accept than the others?
4. How would you describe the doctrine that Jesus was our “substitute”? Try to not use biblical language that a non-Christian wouldn’t understand.
5. How do the three aspects of the biblical understanding of the cross as a sacrificial offering fill out your understanding of the event? So often today the ideas of sin and punishment are viewed as outmoded and inappropriate to a loving God.
6. "If Christ had done less than die for us, there would have been no atonement" (J. Denney): why not?
7. How would you get across the significance of the death of Jesus to modern people who are not familiar with such ideas as sacrifice and redemption, and think that they are out of date?
6. The Life of the Christian

1. Salvation (1 Peter 1:3–12)
   
   A. Three time frames
   
   B. Sufficiency
   
   C. Gift

2. Eternal Life (John 6:27–71)
   
   Basic definition: 4010

3. Peace with God (Ephesians 2:11–18)
   
   A. Justification
   
   B. Forgiveness
   
   C. Reconciliation
4. **Sons of God**

   A. Conversion

   B. New birth

   C. Adoption

   D. Not God’s children by nature

5. **Union with Christ (John 15:1–11; Romans 6)**

   A. Relationship

   B. “In Christ”

   C. Body of Christ

   D. Identification with the death and resurrection of Jesus

   E. “Dead to sin. Alive to God.”
6. Possession of the Spirit (Romans 8:1–27)

A. Empowers ____________________________________________________________

B. Assurance ____________________________________________________________

7. The Human Response (Colossians 3:1–17)

A. The fundamental attitude of the Christian towards God is _________________.

   i. __________________________________________________________________ God’s gift of salvation.

   ii. Repentance: __________________________________________________________________

   iii. ______________________________________________________________________ to God in Christ.

B. Perseverance __________________________________________________________________

C. Faith expresses itself outwardly in ________________ and ________________.
Reflection Question

1. Many people doubt that because of their sin God is actually able to save them. How would you use the discussion of salvation to encourage them (i.e., three time frames, sufficiency, gift)?

2. Do you think of “eternal life” as a present possession? What practical application does this have to how you live today?

3. One of the more interesting discussions I (Bill Mounce) had with a student was about justification. He had never even heard about the doctrine and was convinced that any time he sinned he lost his salvation and would go to hell if he didn’t repent before death. How would you counsel him based on Marshall’s discussion of justification?

4. One of the debates today is over the nature of conversion, and Marshall is strong in seeing that conversion involves a “change in direction,” a “right-about turn,” a “new birth.” How do you feel about this? Has this been the definition you are used to?

5. Of all the metaphors for conversion, which one is most precious to you? Why?

6. What grounds has a Christian for being sure (a) that he is now a son of God, and (b) that he will enter into the life of heaven?

7. Do you know of anyone whose conversion was so slow and gradual that there is almost no point at which they clearly turned to become God’s child? What are the pros and cons of this type of conversion (as opposed to a cataclysmic turning)?

8. Martin Luther once described the state of a Christian being "simul justus et peccator" (at the same time justified and yet a sinner): what does this description mean, and would you accept it?

9. Have you ever met someone who says he/she has achieved “sinless perfection” and are no longer able to sin? How would you deal with this?

10. Do you agree or disagree with Marshall’s understanding of the “baptized in the Spirit” and the subsequent being “filled by the Spirit”? Have you ever experienced this subsequent act of filling? Share what it was like.

11. Faith includes both acceptance of what God offers, and also repentance from sin and submission to God in Christ. What do you think of this definition? What would be some of the implications if we really believed this?

12. What do you think is meant by the "greater works" in John 14:12?
7. The Christian Community

1. The Nature of the Church (Matthew 16:13–28)

A. Definition ____________________________

B. Establishment ____________________________

C. Function ____________________________

2. The Life of the Church (Acts 11:19–30)

Description: witness and mission

A. ____________________________

B. ____________________________

i. ____________________________

ii. ____________________________

A. Hearing

B. Sacraments

The sacraments, therefore, should be understood as ways in which God tells us of his gracious disposition to us, and acts graciously towards us by cleansing us from our sins and giving us spiritual sustenance."

i. Baptism

ii. Lord’s Supper

4. The Ministry of the Church

A. Ministry vs. Priesthood

B. Gifts of the Spirit
C. Preaching the Word of God

D. Pastoral care and discipline

E. Care for the poor

F. Ordination

G. Church government

Reflection Questions

1. The church is people, not the building. Is it proper to speak of “going to church”? Is it possible to go to what you are? What are the ramifications of this distinction?

2. The distinction between the “visible” and the “invisible” church is critical. What are some of the implications? The main implication is how we view those gathered for a worship service on Sunday morning.

3. How do you feel about Marshall’s understanding that the church is the new Israel?

4. The church’s four basic aspects are teaching, fellowship, prayer and worship. Does this represent your church experience? If not, then why? If so, what are the benefits of a well-rounded understanding of the church?

5. Marshall disagrees with the sentiment that worship is something we offer to God. What did you think of this discussion?

6. Marshall argues that the main purpose of the church is not to worship God but to serve him. What do you think about that? What would be the ramifications in our weekly routines if this were so?

7. Does anything actually “happen” in the sacraments?
8. Marshall makes five points as to what happens in baptism. What are they?
   a. 
   b. 
   c. 
   d. 
   e. 

9. What are three methods of baptism? Which one is most significant to you?

10. Marshall makes a strong argument for infant baptism, biblically understood. What did you think of it?

11. What are the five parts to the meaning of the Lord’s Supper?
   a. 
   b. 
   c. 
   d. 
   e. 

12. What is the problem of using “minister” only of one person in the church? What would happen in your church if everyone understood he or she is a minister and a priest?

13. What are the main tasks of ministry in the church? Which one are you most inclined to perform?
8. Last Things


A. Incarnation of Jesus

B. Jesus will one day rule openly over all mankind

2. The Second Coming of Jesus (Luke 17:20–37)

A. Details are unclear

B. Second Coming

C. Millennium

i. __________________________________________________________

ii. _________________________________________________________

iii. _________________________________________________________
D. Judge and Savior

3. The Resurrection of the Dead (1 Corinthians 15)

A. State of the dead

B. Resurrection of the righteous

   “Spiritual body”

C. Resurrection of the unrighteous

D. Eternal punishment vs. Annihilationism

E. The fate of those who have never heard the gospel

F. Universalism

   i. ________________________________

   ii. ________________________________

**Reflection Questions**

1. Marshall starts by placing his discussion of eschatology firmly in the past and our present. The last days have begun, and will most certainly come to fulfillment. How does that affect how you think about this topic?

2. If the details of Jesus’ return are so unclear, why do you think so many people argue so much about it?

3. What are the meaning of the three different views of the Millennium?
   a. Pre-millennialism
   b. Post-millennialism
   c. A-millennialism

4. Discuss whether the different forms of millennialism make any difference to the present Christian lives of those who hold them.

5. What do you think of the doctrine of Annihilationism (as expressed by Marshall)?

6. "In a universe of love there can be no heaven which tolerates a chamber of horrors, no hell for any which does not at the same time make it a hell for God" (J.A.T. Robinson): how would you answer this criticism of the New Testament doctrine of the final destiny of the wicked?

7. “There are hints that the heathen will be judged according to how they have responded to the light which they have had. There are some grounds for holding that those whose way of life was such that they would have accepted Christ if they had had the opportunity to do so will be saved at the last day, because the sacrifice of Christ avails for them also.” What do you think of this?

8. If heaven is not rightly pictured in terms of figures dressed in nightgowns, sitting on clouds and playing harps, what sort of pictures can we use to express its true character?