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PREFACE

This is the second of a trilogy of books originally published for the London Men's Conventions, aimed at equipping Christian men in the very practical area of applying the gospel to everyday living. Although originally written for men, this particular book has the least in it that is specifically for men, so we hope it will be of help and interest to any group of believers who want to grow in their understanding of the Christian faith.

Rock Solid aims to help us get to grips with twelve great truths that together form the core of what it means to be an evangelical Christian. In order to tell the truth, we must know the truth. This book seeks to help explain and clarify these important and glorious doctrines, or 'themes', of the Bible so that we might be able to teach them to others, and contend for them in the workplace and among our neighbours.

The Introductory Chapter paints the big picture and shows why these foundational truths of the gospel are so important today, and how they are related to each other to provide the 'good deposit' of the Christian faith, as the apostle Paul called it.

There then follow twelve chapters in which the essence of these great Bible themes are explained and applied—with the help of a short Bible study and discussion questions aimed at stimulating our thinking and encouraging our action. Brief contemporary stories of how these particular truths have been used by God, either to bring men to Christ, or to teach them something of His ways in their lives are included in each chapter. We hope that you will

find these true stories, together with the cameos of 'famous Christian men,' who in the history of the church have contended for the particular doctrine, a great encouragement.

This is primarily a book to be worked through. It is written in the hope that it will not simply be read straight through, but, in men's or women's groups, or informal small groups, it will be used as a means of getting a clear hold on the truths that define who we are as followers of Christ.

Tim Thornborough and Trevor Archer
February 2009



INTRODUCTION: WHY IS DOCTRINE SO IMPORTANT?

Richard Coekin

Here are twelve big questions that are the subject of debate in churches and in our culture in general, or which regularly trouble ordinary believers:

- ★ Will a devout Buddhist be with us in heaven?
- ★ How can adultery be wrong if it feels so good?
- ★ Is Jesus' death on the cross an act of 'cosmic child abuse'?
- ★ Should the Church of England consider joining with the Roman Catholic Church?
- ★ How can I trust God when my best friend has just died of cancer?
- ★ How can I tell if my mother is really a Christian?
- ★ Why shouldn't I watch a little porn?
- ★ Why does it matter if the Digo tribe in Tanzania have never heard about Jesus?
- ★ Why are some evangelical Christians so opposed to some church leaders?
- ★ Should we get rid of sermons in a post-modern culture?
- ★ Is the little house-church down my street really a church or a dangerous sect?
- ★ Should practicing homosexuals be allowed to become ministers in the church?

There's a vicious rumour going round that doctrine is boring and irrelevant. Just something for 'theological types' to argue about, and only of passing interest to the man in the pew. If this is what you think, you could not be more wrong.

The answer you might give to each of these twelve current and controversial questions depends on a doctrine. Each one finds an answer in the corresponding chapters of this book; because this book explores twelve of the most relevant and important themes or 'doctrines' of the Bible.

Each one has been treasured and proclaimed down the centuries by Christians known as *evangelicals* (those concerned to believe and teach the '*evangel*' ie: the gospel of the Bible). But each one has also been challenged throughout church history and is still being challenged today.

This book aims to clarify and explain these vital doctrines so that Christian men of our generation will be prepared to stand up and proclaim them: to teach them in our families, our Sunday schools and churches; to contend for them in our church councils, in the office and in the pub; and to ensure they are passed on to the generation after us.

Christian men don't want to be ashamed of the teachings of our Saviour passed on by His prophets and apostles in Scripture, for He said: 'Whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this sinful and adulterous generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father'(Mark 8 v 38).

We want the whole world to hear and understand the profound truths of the saving gospel announcement that **Jesus** (the crucified man from Nazareth) **is the Christ** (the promised Saviour King) **and our Lord** (the risen divine Ruler and Judge of us all), which are amplified in these twelve 'doctrines'. We need to understand them.

This is vitally important for showing how these themes are not random and isolated ideas, but belong together and sum up the essential teaching of the Bible.

Why are these doctrines important today?

‘Doctrines’ are principles that summarise the Bible’s teaching about particular topical issues. Such principles are enormously helpful in applying the Bible’s teaching to the practical issues of real life. I will struggle to find one Bible text to give me a thorough answer to any of the twelve current issues mentioned at the start of this chapter! I need to find some kind of summary of what the Bible as a whole teaches about such questions. These are biblical ‘doctrines’.

‘Doctrine’ is therefore a bit different to the ‘exposition’ of a Bible text (exploring the meaning of one passage). It is also different to ‘Biblical Theology’ (exploring how God has developed themes progressively through the different books of the Bible). We do need to use all three approaches in interpreting the Bible. But, if one contrasted these approaches in terms of, say, studying wildlife, ‘exposition’ is like studying one region of Africa and looking at the variety of animals that happen to be there. ‘Biblical theology’ is like tracking one animal as it travels across the region. But ‘doctrine’ is like collecting all the animals of one species together in a game reserve in order to make a comprehensive survey and come to accurate general conclusions about that animal! ‘Doctrine’ gives us general conclusions about the whole Bible’s teaching on particular issues. We all have our own doctrines (ie: our assumptions) about what the whole Bible teaches. The value of a book like this is to try and ensure that our doctrine is accurate and our assumptions are truly biblical.

Now, bad doctrine is crushingly dull. Sometimes it becomes so over-systematised that it seems to be more human construction than biblical summary—so it is important to keep involving what the Bible actually says in how we articulate our doctrines.

Sometimes doctrine becomes so swamped in historical debates that it seems more like church history than what the Bible teaches (so we must keep returning to what the Bible teaches, rather than what church leaders have said). Sometimes doctrine is

employed so much in criticising others that it seems more about dividing up the ‘tribes’ of Christianity than about understanding God’s uniting word (so it’s vital to be humble about our doctrinal conclusions, gentle in how we express them and joyful in recognising Christians from other backgrounds who are united with us in these truths).

Good doctrine is, however, invaluable. It is helpful in providing a sense of proportion and perspective to our understanding of Scripture, especially for inexperienced Christians. This prevents us overemphasising minor themes and underemphasising major principles. It is helpful in providing the background or context for interpreting any part of the Bible. This is especially helpful in understanding the more difficult texts. It is also enormously helpful for giving us general principles for making the countless moral decisions we have to make each day. And doctrine is vital for finding ways to express the faith of the Bible in language that ordinary people can understand! Good doctrine is truly invaluable.

How do these doctrines help describe evangelical faith?

Some people object to defining ‘evangelical’ doctrines at all. They plead that we just describe ourselves as ‘Christian’ and leave labels to others. We can all sympathise with this desire. It’s ugly to use terminology for making assumptions about people or chucking slogans at them in criticism. However, we still need labels and to learn how to use them lovingly.

The term ‘evangelical’ is a helpful name for a generally recognised set of doctrines. If we can’t use any labels, we end up having to list what we believe in great detail every time we want to join with other Christians in initiatives. Or else we become needlessly suspicious that everyone else believes different things. Young children don’t like big words, but as we grow up we learn to use terminology and labels in every area of thinking and communication. Christianity is no different. As we grow in our

responsibility for others and our desire to help others, we have to find terminology and labels for different beliefs.

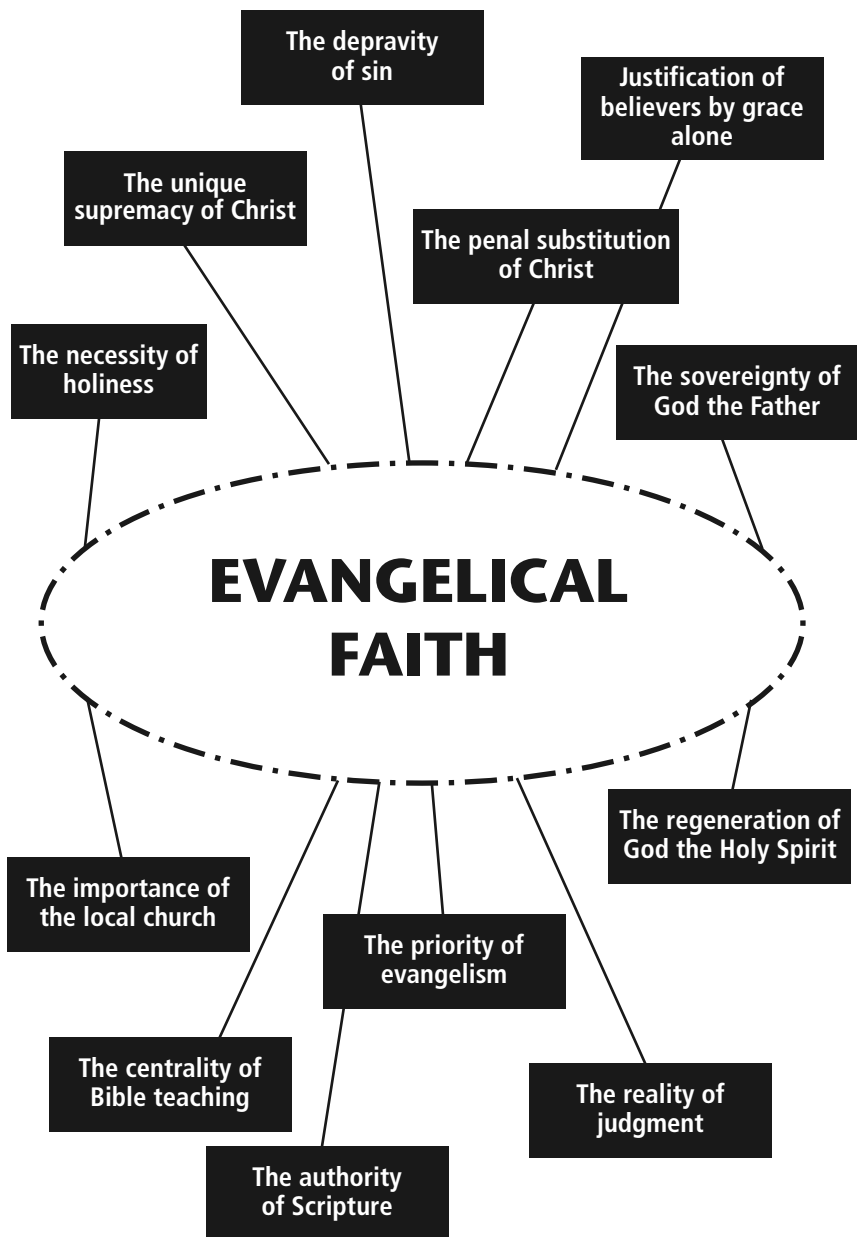
Some say that the name ‘evangelical’ is no longer useful! Certainly, some people are describing themselves as Evangelical who wouldn’t agree with many of the principles explained in this book! But most Christians still use this label and, until a better one becomes widely used, this book will hopefully contribute some clarity to what the label has generally been understood to include over centuries.

It’s worth recording that all the contributors to this book are passionate believers in, and open teachers of, all the doctrines considered in this book. While we would all debate the finer points and the precise ways of explaining these doctrines, we are united in these truths! The truth does distinguish error, but it is also the focus for our unity!

The doctrines explored in this book are, however, not a complete summary of evangelical faith e.g. there’s nothing here specifically about Creation or the Trinity, which evangelicals certainly believe!

These twelve doctrines have been chosen because they are important truths which have all been challenged at various times by different groups and are strongly contested today. Indeed, one recent survey of British Anglican clergy reports that roughly a quarter do not believe that Christ died on the cross for our sins, a third do not believe that Jesus rose bodily from His grave, and nearly half do not believe that Jesus is the only way of salvation! These are twelve doctrines that in successive generations have been defended and clarified as vital biblical truths that must not be surrendered.

They are therefore like some sections of the castle ramparts of biblical faith which are under constant attack from the enemies of the gospel—other sections will no doubt have to be defended in future generations. These doctrines help clarify what genuine evangelicals believe. Other Christians would believe some of



them, but only evangelical Christians believe all these doctrines consistently. *But these are not a complete statement of all that we believe.* Evangelicals also believe all that the Bible teaches because this is well summarised in the historic creeds such as the Nicene and Apostles' creeds, which are recited in many churches each Sunday. But the doctrines in this book are biblical truths which evangelicals have always believed, and which others have repeatedly disputed and still dispute today.

It has been rightly said that evangelical faith is trying to be no more and no less than the faith expressed in the Bible. Our church traditions (what others have previously worked out in church history), our rational thinking (what we think the Bible means), and our reflection upon our experiences (trying to work out what is happening to us according to the Bible) help us to understand the text of the Bible. This means we only believe what the Bible says about God.

An evangelical will not accept ideas about God that contradict or go beyond the plain teachings of Scripture. Evangelicals will humbly try to adapt our traditions, rational thinking and experiences to what the Bible plainly says. Someone who accepts the traditions of the Church and its councils beyond the Bible, or even revises the faith of the Bible, could be described as 'traditionalist' (such as Roman Catholics). Someone who allows modern rational thought about God to go beyond the Bible, or even to revise the Bible's teaching, could be described as 'rationalist' (such as liberals). Someone who allows reflection upon our experiences to go beyond what the Bible says, or even revises what the Bible says, could be described as 'subjectivist' (such as some charismatics). Such people will, of course, still be real Christians if they are trusting the central gospel message of Scripture that Jesus Christ is Lord, as evident in His incarnation, death for our sins, resurrection to rule and return to judge. For more on this see *Men of God*, available from The Good Book Company.