

Teaching Doctrine to Children

What is doctrine and why should we teach it to children?

Doctrine is what Christians believe about God; *application* is what we do because of doctrine.

When we teach doctrine to children we should not only teach them the facts about a particular truth, but we need to teach them what they should do because of that truth. It is not enough to teach doctrine on its own, without application. Moreover, it is not helpful to give an application without teaching the doctrinal truth on which it is based. Doctrine leads to application; application is based upon doctrine.

For example, if we teach them about Jesus Christ, we want them to understand and believe that He was a perfect man and that He was, and is, truly God. These are both doctrines, or truths, which all true believers need to believe and understand. But, we also need to show them the applications of these doctrines to their own lives so that they will not only believe the doctrines, but will choose to let these truths govern their lives. For example,

- Jesus Christ is perfect man (that is the doctrine); therefore, I should seek to imitate and be like Him (that is the application).
- Jesus Christ is God (doctrine); therefore, I should worship Him (application).

| Doctrine | Application |
|---|--|
| God is faithful | Trust God for all your needs. |
| Jesus Christ is coming back again | Watch and pray. |
| The Bible is God's Word and absolutely true | Read your Bible every day. |
| God is holy | God wants you to be holy. |
| Jesus Christ is God | Jesus can help you overcome your bad temper. |
| God created you. | God wants you to obey Him. |
| Jesus died for your sins. | He deserves our love. |

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Where does doctrine come from?

All truth comes to man from God; we can only know what God has chosen to reveal to mankind.

Revelation

God revealed His truth to the prophets and to the apostles.

Romans 1:17-18

For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY FAITH." For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,

Galatians 1:11-12

But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Inspiration

God guided and inspired the prophets and apostles to write these truths down.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

2 Peter 1:20-21

...knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

All the writings of the prophets and the apostles are absolutely true because the Holy Spirit guided them in what they wrote and preserved them from error. God's revelation in the Bible is complete; nothing needs to be added.

Illumination

All the truth and doctrine we need is contained in the written Word of God and, the Holy Spirit helps us to understand and apply these truths.

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John 16:12-15

"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you.

1 Corinthians 2:12

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.

For example, the truth of *justification by faith* was **revealed** to the Apostle Paul. He wrote this truth down for our benefit under the **inspiration** of the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit also **illuminates** this truth to our hearts when we read the scriptures.

Application

Doctrine is the basis of our character. Truth or doctrine is not just something to be believed, it should have an influence on us. It is the foundation for our actions. It should lead to a change not just in our thinking, but in what we say and do.

The Gospel message is doctrinal teaching:

- God is the Creator of the universe.
- God is holy and just, and must punish sin.
- Everyone has sinned and broken God's law.
- God loves the world and sent His Son Jesus Christ.
- Jesus Christ took God's punishment for sin.
- Jesus Christ rose again and is alive today.
- Jesus Christ is Lord and demands obedience.
- Salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone.
- Salvation results in forgiveness of all sin, and in a new nature.

Every doctrine taught needs to be applied to the everyday lives of the children. The unsaved child needs to be evangelized on the basis of the doctrine you are teaching and the saved child needs to be edified and exhorted to live their lives in a way that pleases God based on that doctrine, too.

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How do we teach doctrine to children?

Bible stories are the vehicle for teaching Bible truths. They are not an end in themselves.

Hosea 4:6 a

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.

There are two ways to approach teaching Bible truths to children: expositionally and topically.

Teach doctrine expositionally

The best way to teach doctrine is through the systematic expository teaching of the word of God. In other words, teach doctrinal truths as they come up in the passage you are currently teaching. You should make the main thrust of your Bible lesson, the central doctrinal truth in that passage.

| Lesson | Doctrinal Truth |
|---------------|---|
| Creation | God is all powerful and can do anything. |
| Adam and Eve | Sin separates us from God. |
| Cain and Abel | We can come to God through the shedding of blood. |
| Enoch | God wants us to walk with Him. |
| Noah | There is only one way of salvation—requiring obedience. |

As you prepare your teaching, look for the main doctrinal truth in the passage. Ask yourself,

1. Is there some truth about...
 - God?
 - Jesus Christ?
 - The Holy Spirit?
 - Myself?
 - Sin?
 - Salvation?
 - The Bible?

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- The Christian life?
 - The future?
2. How can I use this truth to help show the unsaved child his need for and way of salvation?
 3. How can this truth help the saved child grow spiritually?

Teach doctrine topically

Because the various doctrines are spread throughout the Bible, you can to teach them in a more systematic way. That is, you might want to teach a series of lessons on a specific doctrine, selecting Bible stories from different parts of the Bible to illustrate your lesson. For example:

Doctrine of God

| Doctrine | Lesson |
|-----------------|--|
| God is Creator | The Creation of the world (Genesis 1 and 2 with Romans 1:20) |
| God is holy | Isaiah's vision and his response (Isaiah 6) |
| God is love | The conversion of Saul (Acts 9:1-22) |
| God is patient | Elijah running from Jezebel (1 Kings 19) |
| God is wise | Joseph and his problems (Genesis 37-50) |

Doctrine of Jesus Christ

| Doctrine | Lesson |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Jesus Christ is God | The four men and their friend (Luke 5:18-26) |
| Jesus Christ is perfect man | The Christmas story (Matt 1:18-25; Luke 2:1-20) |
| Jesus Christ is prophet | The story of Nicodemus (John 3:1-16) |
| Jesus Christ priest | The ascension and exaltation of Jesus (Luke 24:45-53; Acts 1:1-11) |

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|----------------------|---|
| Jesus Christ is king | The second coming of Jesus (John 14:1-4; Acts 1:11, 1 Thes 4:13-18) |
|----------------------|---|

Doctrine of Sin

| Doctrine | Lesson |
|-----------------------|--|
| Sin is disobeying God | Adam and Eve (Gen 3:1-24) |
| God must punish sin | Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11) |
| Sin is universal | Abraham and Moses and their sins (Gen 12:10-20; Ex 2:11-15; Num 20:7-13) |
| Sin has consequences | David and Bethsheba (2 Sam 11, 12) |
| God forgives sin | Jonah and Ninevah (Jonah 2 and 3) |

Doctrine of Salvation

| Doctrine | Lesson |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Only Jesus Christ can save | The Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-40) |
| Salvation is by faith alone | The Philippian jailer (Acts 16:26-34) |
| Salvation involves repentance | The prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) |
| Salvation makes us new people | The story of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10) |
| Salvation brings complete forgiveness | The account of Saul's conversion (Acts 9:1-220) |

Rather than making a hard choice between teaching expositionally or topically, you can include both in an annual teaching plan. For example, you could devote the first ten weeks to a series of topical lessons and then the rest of the year spend teaching series of expository lessons. Or, you could teach expository lessons on Sunday morning and topical lessons at a mid-week class.

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What are the main doctrines we should teach?

Because the Bible, the Word of God, is our source for all truth, it is wise to begin with that and then, like building blocks, proceed with the doctrine of God, and so forth.

Doctrine of the Bible

- The Bible is the written revelation of God.
- The Bible is God's Word and absolutely true.
- The Ten Commandments show us God's standards and reveal our sin.

Doctrine of God

- There is a God—and only one.
- God is the Creator.
- God is spirit.
- God is holy and just.
- God is love.
- God is all powerful.
- God is faithful.
- God never changes.
- God is wise.
- God is everywhere.
- God knows everything.
- God is majestic.
- God is gracious.
- God is merciful.
- God is patient.
- God is jealous.

Doctrine of Jesus Christ

- Jesus Christ is God.
- Jesus Christ was born as a baby with a human mother and a divine Father.
- Jesus Christ is truly and perfectly man.
- Jesus Christ died on the cross for sinners.
- God the Father punished His Son Jesus Christ for our sins.
- Jesus Christ rose again from the dead.
- Jesus Christ prays for believers.
- Jesus Christ is Lord.
- Jesus Christ ascended into heaven and now sits on the right hand of the Father.
- Jesus Christ is coming back again.
- Jesus Christ will be the Judge.

Doctrine of the Holy Spirit

- The Holy Spirit is God.
- The Holy Spirit lives in believers.
- The Holy Spirit gives assurance to believers.
- The Holy Spirit makes all believers more like Jesus Christ.

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- The Holy Spirit has baptized all believers into the body of Christ.
- The Holy Spirit has sealed all believers.
- The Holy Spirit guides believers.
- The Holy Spirit gives believers help and power to live and to serve.
- The Holy Spirit gives gifts to believers.

Doctrine of Sin

- Sin is disobeying God and His commandments.
- Sin must be punished by God.
- Sin separates us from God.
- Sin is universal.
- All people are sinners by nature and by practice.
- Death and eternal separation from God are the results of sin.

Doctrine of the Way of Salvation

- Salvation is by faith in Jesus Christ.
- Sinners need to turn from sin to be saved.
- The sinner who believes is justified.
- The sinner who believes is born again.
- The sinner who believes is adopted into God's family.
- The sinner who believes is redeemed.
- The sinner who believes has everlasting life.
- The sinner who believes is part of the body of Christ.
- Believers can be sure they are saved.
- One day all believers will be glorified.

Doctrine of the Future

- At death, believers go immediately into the presence of God.
- When Christ returns every believer will receive a resurrection body.
- Jesus Christ will judge the service of believers.
- Heaven is the place of everlasting joy and glory—where God is.
- Hell is a place of punishment and everlasting separation from God.
- God will make a new heaven and a new earth.

Doctrine of the Christian Life

- The sinner comes to God by faith and he then lives by faith.
- Sanctification is the process by which God, the Holy Spirit, makes us holy and more like Jesus.
- It is not possible to be sinless, but it is possible to have victory over a sin.

Miscellaneous Doctrines

- All believers are part of the universal church and should be members of a local church.
- The devil is the enemy of God and God's people.
- Angels are spirit beings who minister to believers.
- Death is the separation of body and soul.