

Introduction

1 What is the purpose of this book?

To help individual Christians to gain a clearer understanding of the fundamental teachings of their faith.

To provide preachers and Bible-class leaders with outlines of the central themes of the Bible in order to help them in their preaching and teaching.

2 Why is it needed?

a) For the past fifty years in many parts of the world Bibles, hymn-books and Christian literature have been very scarce or non-existent. Believers were deliberately deprived of Christian literature.

b) For many years pastors were compelled to work in secular employment, had no opportunity for Bible training, and had little time to devote to study of the Word of God.

c) Much of the spiritual literature which is now available does not present the truth within the context of the Bible as a whole and is therefore often 'one-sided'. For example, books on healings, miracles and tongues.

3 What is the remedy for this situation?

a) The Church must provide a teaching ministry

For teaching to be successful it must be continuous and systematic. This is the way children learn in school. Their teachers prepare a syllabus of lessons which take the children step by step through the different subjects they must study. The teachers have to spend a lot of time preparing the lessons they will teach. They plan ahead so that the children are taught in a continuous and systematic way. In this respect the School is more successful than the Church. Although there are obvious differences between the Church and the School, there are points of similarity too. Both institutions exist to impart knowledge to their members, and both want them to understand and benefit from what they hear and the information they are taught. Both Jesus and Paul gave a high priority to teaching.

Someone once showed Spurgeon, the great English nineteenth century preacher, a similar book of Bible teachings to this one, saying, 'This is like chapter 37 of Ezekiel's valley of dry bones – very many and very dry!' But Spurgeon wisely replied, "Be a prophet and they will live!" Spiritual teachers not only need the power of the Holy Spirit; they also need to be able to teach the fundamental truths of the Bible as well.

i) The Lord Jesus Christ taught his disciples

The Gospels were written by those who heard his teaching and wrote down what he taught them. Luke is the exception and used written sources for his gospel. Jesus sent out his disciples to preach and teach all that he had taught them. It took him three years to teach them by word and by example before they were ready to be left to do this work on their own.

ii) The apostle Paul taught the churches

For example, he spent over two years in Ephesus teaching the Word of God every day in the School of Tyrannus (Acts 19:9-10). He not only taught the church publicly; he also went to believers' homes to teach them 'the whole counsel of God' (Acts 20:27). What was this? If we read his letter to the Ephesians we can see that he taught them all the major Christian doctrines. Do we today teach 'the whole counsel of God'?

iii) The apostle Paul commanded church elders to teach the Word

He tells Timothy to read the Scriptures to the congregation, to exhort them and to teach them (1 Timothy 4:13). He also tells him that those elders who work hard at teaching God's Word should be properly remunerated, because teaching requires much study and diligence.

Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in the word and doctrine (1 Timothy 5:17).

Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches (Galatians 6:6).

And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also (2 Timothy 2:2).

iv) The apostle Paul also taught the churches by his letters

These letters prove that the Church needs to be taught Christian truths. From them we can see how important it is for these to be taught to Christians at all times. If we fail to teach doctrine what will happen? Let the apostle Paul tell us:

And He Himself gave some to *be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ ... that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine ... (Ephesians 4:11-12,14).

Christians who are ill taught are unstable and will inevitably be blown about by every wind of teaching. If we do not teach properly we will have weak, ignorant and carnal churches, easily confused by the cults and led astray by the devil.

b) The Church must have a teaching plan

The two-year programme given at the back of this book is only a suggestion. Some prefer to work Sunday by Sunday through a book of the Bible or a special theme. Whatever method is chosen must be suitable for each individual church. It is important that some method, some programme of teaching is put into operation by the elders of the church or else there will be no regular teaching. In this scheme 46 Sundays are covered each year, leaving six for special occasions.

It will need much preparation and hard work by those who teach, but there is no other way for believers to learn and to grow in an understanding of their faith and their Lord.