



Vision & the Doctrinal Basis

An introduction to the doctrinal Bible studies

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“Where there is no vision, the people perish” (Proverbs 29:18a KJV).

Perhaps you have heard this sentence solemnly intoned in a “vision talk” by a leader who suggests that “without a plan, we are dead in the water.” The implication is for people to just go along with the plan and get down to work. However, [this saying from Proverbs 29:18](#) reaches deeper than just advocating planning as a significant aspect of human flourishing. This deeper layer of meaning is the spirit in which we offer this set of [Bible study discussions](#) on [InterVarsity’s Doctrinal Basis](#).

Two words in [Proverbs 29:18](#) need to be examined more closely. “Vision” is a word drawn from the orbit of Hebrew prophecy. It is “prophetic vision.” It describes what prophets see or know from the LORD that they are called to pass on to the people of God. (There are Old Testament examples of this prophetic vision in [Isaiah 6](#), [Ezekiel 1-2](#) or [1 Kings 22](#).) “Vision” is a medium of God’s revelation of himself and his plans. In its broadest sense, it means “God’s revelation.”

The other key word is “perish” which is only one possible interpretation of the original Hebrew word. Its basic meaning is “run wild” or “run amok.” It is the verb used to describe the wild, orgiastic rebellion of Israel in the incident of the Golden Calf in [Exodus 32:6](#). This “running wild” into idolatry resulted in the death of thousands who perished, quite literally. Also, the prophet Amos used this word to describe Israel’s gradual but remorseless decline into idolatry. They became deaf to God’s words and lived in rebellious idolatry that resulted in spiritual death.

These two ideas of “vision” and “perish” provide a more accurate translation: “Where there is no revelation from God, the people descend into idolatry, moral decadence, and spiritual ruin.”

This translation is reinforced by the next line in [this verse](#), “. . . but blessed is the one who keeps the law.” Most of the sentence-long proverbs contain two lines that re-echo and reinforce one another. This is an example of the basic Hebrew poetic convention of *parallelism*. In this case, the lines reinforce and deepen one another by contrast. If the absence of revelation from God brings disaster, “keeping” God’s fatherly instruction (*torah*) leads to blessing, richness, peace and joy.

Unless our plans, goals and personal lives are receptive and submissive to God’s revelation, we, too, decline into idolatry, evil, disorder and spiritual death. Conversely, when we embrace and obey God’s revelation, we can expect authentic life and goodness and growth. What we do with the revelation of God, how we understand and embrace it, and how we put it into action will mark out the way of spiritual blessing for ourselves as disciples and for the Christian communities in which we participate and serve as leaders.

What has all this to do with [InterVarsity’s Doctrinal Basis](#)? This short statement is a succinct summary of the basic truths disclosed to us in God’s revelation in Scripture. A close and persistent reading of the Bible has characteristically led Christian disciples to receive and believe these truths throughout 2,000 years of human history. We invite you to deepen your understanding of the revelation of God by testing it against carefully selected passages of Scripture in this Bible discussion guide. This modest effort to deepen an understanding of God’s truth can pay enormous

benefits by forming clarity, zeal, courage, and conviction in you and in your fellowship. Discover the ways of God that lead to peace, joy, spiritual power, and blessing.

Consider using the Doctrinal Basis as your basic Vision Statement. Let it form your understanding of what you are called to do and why you are called to do it. The Doctrinal Basis will not give you a specific set of plans for your life or for your fellowship. But it will give you the vision of God that sets directions, tests your priorities and interests, and informs and transforms your understanding of what you are called to do -- and called to be -- now and into eternity.

Note: The individual studies in this guide do not address every detail in the Doctrinal Basis. Rather, we have chosen Biblical passages that are at the foundation of the Doctrinal Basis and that seemed both most basic and most contested. These are the truths that are apt to be squeezed out of us in the spiritually hostile environment of the contemporary university. More importantly, they are also the most foundational issues for understanding and growing in Christian faith. These are the truths that have fired the zeal of faithful believers through the ages. These are the truths that ordinary men and women have confessed as they followed the Lord in suffering service -- even martyrdom. These are the truths that have been the vehicles of revival and renewal in many cultures over many years. These are the first and the eternal things. Engage them with eagerness, fidelity and hope.

Also, each passage of selected Scripture contains doctrinal truth *and application to life*. Do not evade the applications! God's revelation is always designed to lead us into richer, fuller, more holy living. Note especially that the Doctrinal Basis begins with "*We believe ...*," and concludes with "*to God be glory forever.*" The [final study](#) asks you to reflect on this framework in light of Psalm 115 to lead you to a new depth of gratitude and worship.

Finally, each study concludes with some suggestions for further reading, deeper reflection, and more study of Scripture. We hope that these studies will encourage eagerness for further learning. They are only a bare beginning, and we pray that you will be led into the life-long joy of learning and understanding the revelation of our God.

We pray that this discussion guide will be a tool in the hand of Almighty God to bring doctrinal renewal to [InterVarsity Christian Fellowship](#), starting with your fellowship and your life. May the living God -- Father, Son and Holy Spirit -- pour out a clear *understanding* of God's truth, a zeal for obedient *practice* of God's truth, and eternal *rejoicing* in the God of all truth.

To God be glory forever!

TOOLS FOR FURTHER GROWTH

Here are suggestions for more study and reading for a valuable overview of Christian theology:

J. R. W. Stott, [Basic Christianity](#) (IVP Classics) (InterVarsity Press, 2007). A model of clarity and simplicity, this work shows how a profound grasp of Christian truth empowers evangelism. John Stott is one of the most outstanding evangelical leaders of the last generation.

J. I. Packer, [Knowing God](#) (InterVarsity Press, 1993). For decades, J. I. Packer's best-selling classic has helped Christians around the world discover the wonder, the glory and the joy of knowing God. This is a masterful exposition of core Christian convictions by an eminent theological teacher.

Bruce Milne, [*Know the Truth: A Handbook of Christian Belief*](#) (InterVarsity Press, 1999). This textbook-like survey of Christian theology provides self-paced assignments for personal study and excellent suggestions for further reading.

SUGGESTIONS FOR USING THESE BIBLE STUDIES

“Give me understanding according to your word.” (Psalm 119:169b)

Our purpose in creating these Bible study and discussion guides is to *teach* the doctrinal truths in the [InterVarsity Basis of Faith](#) *through a thoughtful, inductive Bible study* of carefully selected passages of Scripture. Thoughtful inductive Bible study forms us theologically, as well as morally, spiritually, and missionally. Growth in doctrinal understanding helps us become more faithful and deeper students of Scripture. This has been true for Christian disciples for 2,000 years of the worldwide Christian movement and so it will be for you. *Thanks be to God!*

These study and discussion guides are designed for personal or group use – or both. In a small group, the insights of others as they are led by the Holy Spirit will enrich your understanding and challenge what you already know!

When used by a group, the guides assume you will gather together around an open Bible and seek to understand the Bible passage in each study. The questions in each guide promote group discussions. The primary function of the study leader is to help the group come to grips with the passage. This is most basically what *inductive* Bible study is about. The leader seeks to promote rich, broadly-based, engaging discussions by using the questions in the guide.

Note: Leaders should freely adapt the guide to their particular group. However, because the questions in the guide are thoughtfully designed, we recommend that the leader follow the guide, especially the new and inexperienced leaders. Remember that rich and animated discussions are not the leader’s goal; the goal is to understand the teaching from the Lord through discussions. Bible study discussion groups of this sort have had a long and fruitful history in the InterVarsity movement, and we hope you will come to know the joy of this particular spiritual practice.

MANUSCRIPT STUDY

“Manuscript study” is another common method of inductive Bible study which has been a blessing to our InterVarsity movement. In fact, manuscript study makes the same three basic assumptions:

- the Biblical text
- a group seeking understanding
- a leader who directs the group into the text by facilitating discussion.

These guides have real value for those who use the manuscript method. Here are three simple and basic suggestions for manuscript study leaders:

- *Use the carefully selected Biblical passages to create your manuscript for each study.* The passages are primarily didactic and aim to teach. They are the most critical passage for the

doctrinal truth being considered, and they are powerful passages that have been repeatedly used by the Lord to advance his kingdom and renew his people.

- *Use the study questions since they are designed to get at the doctrinal content and application of the passage.* Don't use them slavishly. Modify and restate the questions, or add other questions to clarify the group's understanding. But if the study questions don't arise in your group, please do not take this as a sign that you can take a pass. If you really want to understand these important didactic texts, you must engage with the types of questions raised in the guide. If the questions don't occur to the people in your group, raise them for discussion. Otherwise you will not be leading the group into what is most critical in these important Scripture passages. And your group may not fully grasp the important tenet of the Basis of Faith under consideration.
- *Make a list of the questions from the guide that seem most critical to you as issues to be raised.* Keep this list in mind as you assemble questions from the group and discuss them.

MORE GUIDELINES

- These studies do not address every detail in the Basis of Faith. Many Biblical passages read together have a place in forming each of the statements in the Basis of Faith. Some feel that we should and must explore texts throughout Scripture. But, this guide is only a beginning. We have chosen one primary Biblical passage for each statement in our Basis of Faith that is at the foundation of each doctrinal belief. Each selected Scripture is the most basic -- and often the most contested -- for each doctrinal teaching.

The selected passages teach the truths that are apt to be squeezed out of us in the spiritually hostile environment of the contemporary university. More importantly, they raise the most foundational issues for understanding and growing in Christian faith. These are the truths that have fired the zeal of faithful believers through the ages. These are the truths that ordinary men and women have confessed as they followed the Lord in suffering service -- even martyrdom. These are the truths that have been the vehicles of revival and renewal in many cultures over many years. These are the first and the eternal things. Engage them with eagerness, fidelity and hope.

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These theological Bible study guides are a work in progress. We invite your feedback, questions and suggestions for improvement. [Contact Collegiate Ministries.](#)