

**#0238 – April 1, 2009**

**Why We Believe What We Believe – RECAP**

[Lepine:] Knowing what you believe is important especially when it comes to important subject likes the Scriptures, about Jesus, about salvation, the ministry of the Holy Spirit; in fact knowing what you believe about the Scriptures isn't just important, it's crucial.

This is *inContext* with Michael Easley; I'm Bob Lepine. Michael, for the last several days we have been working our way through a series on why we believe what we believe; a series that was originally presented to students at the Moody Bible Institute. You went through seven messages with those students talking about the Bible, the Trinity, inspiration, Jesus, salvation, the Holy Spirit and Satan. Obviously you had to be selective about what you included and what you didn't include

[Easley:] Right. Right.

[Lepine:] because if we picked up a one volume Systematic Theology, there are subjects in there that you chose not to address with the students.

[Easley:] There was a couple more. [Laughs] I'm visualizing my library and the books on theology that I have. I have a twenty-two volume set, a sixteen volume set, an eight volume set, a three volume set and then a whole bunch of what I call single volume handbooks of theology.

[Lepine:] So this seven part series

[Easley:] [Laughs]

[Lepine:] was not comprehensive? Is that what you're saying?

[Easley:] Well, think about this. Take a step backwards. What is theology? Theology is the study of God. Where do you start and stop?

[Lepine:] [Laughs]

[Easley:] Some authors thought 16 volumes were adequate; others thought 22; others try to condense it into eight. It is really a crazy notion to begin with that we're going to take one book called the Bible and explain all we know about God from that book from salvation history, from other minds that have argued before us. It's really a pretty crazy concept to begin with.

[Lepine:] Well, the apostle John says that if all the things about Jesus were to be recorded it would take more paper than we have, right?

[Easley:] We're getting close. [Laughs]

[Lepine:] [Laughs]

[Easley:] [Laughing] We went electronic. Yeah.

[Lepine:] [Laughing] That's right. Why did you choose these seven topics to address with students and why did you leave others out?

[Easley:] Right. Well pragmatically because this was primarily to the audience at Moody, we were taking our doctrinal statement, the 1928 statement and going through that. Every doctrinal statement, by the way for your church and for the one I'm a part of, those were written in a context, so there is a reaction to some church we've left or broken or started or there's a history and so every doctrinal statement or statement of faith is written in a context, or reaction against usually, some error that has been overlooked. So keep that in mind.

Secondly, when you study doctrine and theology, you're trying to address what are the current issues today that we go to the Bible for help to understand and address? So obviously there would be, you know eight or ten more that we would look at in any given series, but this is where Moody began and this is what we wanted to review.

[Lepine:] Is there a difference between systematic theology and biblical theology? I've heard both of those terms kicked around.

[Easley:] Right. Well, and we would use covenant theology. There would be different ways of approaching it. It is the presupposition of how you come to the Bible to study it. I would come from a systematic or a biblical theology. Let's they were going to address the issue of baptism and what it means, both water and Holy Spirit. So you begin by going to through Bible and seeing all the references and then you start to organize those under subject headings and categories. That would be systematic or biblical theology.

With covenant theology or dispensational theology, you're beginning with a presupposition. Covenant theology of course would look at key covenants that God had made with man and under that period of time how God was dealing with and teaching and what He revealed about Himself.

So we'd look at those under certain segments of time and a biblical theology germane to Abraham, to Noah, to Moses and to the new covenant. So each of them has strength and liability. We all would be, I think, a little bit arrogant to say. "Of course our approach is the better,"

[Lepine:] Mmm hmm.

[Easley:] "to be systematic and biblical." But the idea is as we see these teachings unfold in the Bible, can we get our arms around them to understand what they mean systematically?

[Lepine:] Some people will say, "You know, why do we even need something like a systematic theology?"

[Easley:] Right.

[Lepine:] "We've got the Bible. Shouldn't we just go to the Bible and see what it teaches?"

When you try to order things around a systematic theology, you run into starting to try to make the Bible fit your system rather than just looking at what the Bible teaches.

[Easley:] I think Christ was probably the best theologian to ever walk the planet and much of what He teaches is built on a systematic theology; His citations of the Old Testament, His references to prophecy, His references to time, His tipping His hand about the future and the coming kingdom. He was a walking theologian. The apostle Paul is taking things from Judaism into the Gospel going to the Gentile at how the gospel spreads around the globe. There is missiology; the doctrine of missions and how missions work. So the Bible is full of theology. It's just growing eyes and lenses to see how this document works together.

[Lepine:] So a systematic theology, or an approach to the Scriptures systematically it in one sense a topical approach. You're taking themes or topics -

[Easley:] That's fair.

[Lepine:] - and looking at how the Bible speaks to that in the Old Testament, the New Testament, the epistles and all the different literature -

[Easley:] Right.

[Lepine:] - and trying to get a comprehensive view of a single subject through a variety of passages.

[Easley:] Right. Right. Let's use the illustration of baptism. If you were to study the subject of baptism just in the book of Acts, you are going to have some problems; you are going to have some challenges. So you need a systematic approach to understand who's being baptized, when, what do we know of Revelation at that time and then how baptism unfolds even from Christ's teaching to Paul's time. So this is a systematic theology.

I want to be careful with the phrase "progressive" because it has other meanings but there is a progressive nature to learning. So we learn about baptism. The Jews followed a baptismal rite but that baptism means something very different after Jesus is baptized. The only way you can come to those conclusions is with a careful study of the text, building a systematic of Biblical theology.

[Lepine:] Do you think it's good for Christians to have a systematic theology, -

[Easley:] Oh.

[Lepine:] - whether it's the 22 volumes that you've got -

[Easley:] Right. [Laughs]

[Lepine:] - or a single volume? Should you have one in your library?

[Easley:] I encourage Christians to have three study books at least. Number one, a good copy of the Bible. Number two, a good concordance, and we talk about an exhaustive concordance. Not the little one in the back, but a big fat one.

[Lepine:] Mmm hmm.

[Easley:] And thirdly, a handbook of theology; not simply because we're here at Moody, but Paul Enns' book *A Handbook of Theology* by Moody is a wonderful tool. I actually have probably a dozen what I call single volume handbooks of theology and I love them because, for example, someone's going to ask you, "Well, what's the baptism of the Holy Spirit anyway?"

Where are you going to find the answer to that?

[Lepine:] Hmm.

[Easley:] If you don't have a single volume handbook of theology you're probably going to go to Wikipedia and try to find it out -

[Lepine:] [Laughs]

[Easley:] - which is not a good resource for this type of thing. But if you have a systematic book like Dr. Enns' who goes through, explains the Holy Spirit, explains baptism, explains indwelling, sealing, the permanent relationship He has with the believer and so forth, you start to see those passages. And by the way, any good theology is going to give you more than one reference to a point. They're going to give you ample evidence to say "This is where we know this about the Holy Spirit. There are five different references that underscore this point."

[Lepine:] Are we weak today as Christians and as a church in the area of systematic theology?

[Easley:] My opinion is terribly. And again, it goes back to the pulpit, not to vilify poor pastors who have too much to do. I remember hearing Carl Henry years ago, Bob. He was speaking to a group of pastors in the mid-cities of Texas when I lived down there, about a hundred of us in the room. You know Carl Henry of course is a dinosaur of a theologian; a brilliant man and he stood up and he said, "Men, get your books off the shelf."

[Lepine:] Hmm.

[Easley:] You have to study. You have to get your nose in the books and we are losing this and pulpits, for entertainment value, we are watering down, we are dummying down, we are simplifying the message so much. I'm all for simplifying the message but that doesn't mean we're simpleton. I try in every message I do Bob, I call it a sidebar or an excursus in my own study, where if there is a word that talks about election or chosen, I may have a three sentence, a twenty-five word or maybe a four minute excursus about a point.

Recently I talked about hope in a message; about our hope fixed and I did a very small quick Bible study of the word hope and the systematic theology behind hope. Hope is not just this outcome; I want something good to happen like the little train. Hope is a confident assurance of something in the future, but I don't get to see it right now. That's a theology; that I am trusting Christ at His word about something in the future that I can't quite comprehend. This of course is where theology should under gird our study of topics.

[Lepine:] So what do you say to a pastor who says, "You know Michael, if I go off on these theological rabbit trails in my messages, people's eyes glaze over" -

[Easley:] Sure.

[Lepine:] - "and they tell me later 'Don't give us all that theology, Pastor. Give us stuff that will help us in our daily life this week.'"

[Easley:] Right. Right. One of the interesting things we discovered even the first time he broadcast this series Bob, there was a resistance to talk about theology and yet the response from our friends has been wonderful. This has been one of the most popular things we've done, much to my surprise. I think the reason for that is people want to know why these things are important. You need to study it well. You do need to package it in such a way that a person understands why the Trinity is important.

Again, as we looked at a few days ago, for me revisiting the Trinitarian doctrine, the part that really encouraged me was the role of salvation; that there is a Trinitarian component to our salvation. That got me excited and you know what? When you're excited about a subject you're learning and what the Lord is teaching you in the Scripture, your people become more intrigued about that.

[Lepine:] So maybe part of the challenge is that pastors have not made theology as simple as it could be, -

[Easley:] Could be.

[Lepine:] - or as understandably relevant as it really is.

[Easley:] Right. You know some friends of ours did a survey in their congregation about the top ten subjects you'd like to hear a sermon preached on.

[Lepine:] Right.

[Easley:] And you were telling me the number one topic was -

[Lepine:] Number one was predestination.

[Easley:] Right. So what does that tell you? People are interested in these issues. Now the way you come to that issue is critical and this is where your homiletics and your communication skills obviously help, but I'll tell you that the best way to teach systematic theology is to look at the papers because if you read newspapers and the headlines you'll see tons of illustrative material about why it's important we pin our hopes on Biblical theology.

[Lepine:] You've heard people say for years things like, "Don't give me all that theology, just give me Jesus."

[Easley:] [Laughing] Right.

[Lepine:] And anytime I've heard somebody say that I've said, "Well, okay."

[Easley:] Which part? [Laughing]

[Lepine:] I'll say, "Who is Jesus?" And they'll start to answer.

"Well, He's God's Son."

And I go, "No, don't give me all that theology stuff."

[Easley:] Right.

[Lepine:] "Just give me Jesus."

The reality is that anytime we're talking about the things of God, we're talking about theology.

[Easley:] Yeah.

[Lepine:] We have to learn not to be scared of that word or the idea. It really is what the study of God is, right?

[Easley:] Exactly. Right now I would say truth is the issue of theology we should be thinking through. What is truth? Because it's the relativistic nature of what's true for you, as long as you don't impose that truth on me. Well if I found a cure for cancer and that was truth and I cure any cancer, I think you'd want the exclusive truth. We're now running scared in the corner that we can't say, "This is the truth of Jesus. This is the truth of the sin nature of man. This is the truth. There is no remedy for man's condition."

So we need not new words; we need a new way of communicating that no, this is not an opinion. This is truth. And to back into that with our friends who are relativistic to say, "Do you really think that what's true for you is true for me? Well if I want to take your wallet because it's true for me, is that true for you?"

[Lepine:] Mmm hmm.

[Easley:] "Well, no. You've impinged upon my rights."

A good pastor, a good Sunday school teacher, a good small group leader is going to be watching his flock. What are they getting into that is false theology?

[Lepine:] Last year about this time in Louisville, Kentucky there was a big gathering of pastors for an event called "Together for the Gospel." Here in a couple of weeks in Chicago Dr. Don Carson and Tim Keller and a number of others are gathering for an event called "The Gospel Coalition." There does seem to be a resurgence, -

[Easley:] Yes. Yes.

[Lepine:] - a renaissance among pastors and church leaders to say, "We've got to be about these important truths."

[Easley:] Yeah. Yeah. Unfortunately, and please hear me carefully, I am not against the church growth concepts and seeker sensitivity and some of these concepts. I think God

has used these in extraordinary ways. I think the danger is we go after success but at the end of the day, I would much rather be a Bible teacher who is clearly extolling, explaining, unpacking the word of God for people to pin their hopes and confidence on. I believe God honors that.

[Lepine:] Let me take one of the subjects you didn't address in your seven part series; one of the theological issues that you'll find in most systematic theologies; and that is the doctrine of sin. I bring that up to say, what would you say theologically about our understanding of sin and then why is it important for us to understand that on a theological level?

[Easley:] Sin of course, this is the garden event. When Adam and the woman choose to violate the one prohibition it throws man into this turmoil. To study the doctrine of sin, which almost sound like an oxymoronic concept, we are in a condition we can't get out of. We are all dying. We are on a freight train bound to hell with no handbrake and no conductor. And so we need help beyond human ability. This is back to Humpty Dumpty.

[Lepine:] Mmm hmm.

[Easley:] All the resources of the King and all the strength of his army could not put back together, so in Adam's fall, we did all. So the doctrine of sin begins with understanding we are all in a condition that separates us from a holy God who intended for and wanted a relationship with us forever. So after the garden event we've been trying to pick up the pieces ever since and so we wait for the Savior who did that.

[Lepine:] So if we're approaching something like the doctrine of sin, we're asking questions like, "What is it?"

[Easley:] Yes.

[Lepine:] "Where did it come from? How does it affect me? How does it affect God? What does the Bible have to say about this?" Again it's a topical approach to that.

[Easley:] Right. Right.

[Lepine:] Once we unpack all of that then the practical ramifications seem like they just jump right off the page.

[Easley:] Sure. If you go back to the first sacrifice, and I'm guilty of a sanctified imagination sometimes with these passages, but I see what we call a pre-incarnate Jesus Christ in the garden. I see after Adam and the woman sinned that He comes on the scene and in my sanctified imagination I think He took a lamb; a sheep; a male sheep and He butchered it in front of them.

I think He cut its throat. I think He bled it. I think He took the skin off the animal. Now you could say He manifested in a second and there was a set of clothes for Adam and the woman. You could say that. I like to elongate this because it was inadequate clothing from leaves that were going to be insufficient for the environment they were going to be in.

[Lepine:] Mmm hmm.

[Easley:] So the Son of God pre-incarnate prepares them for a life that is going to be bitter and full of thorns and thistles and pain and the fallen nature that they have begun. A wonderful, terrible, beautiful picture and that lamb, then, is forecast all through the Scripture.

[Lepine:] Mmm.

[Easley:] This is John's comment. "The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." And of course He then dies. His blood pays for our sins. The Passover lamb. You can't miss the images. So the Scripture is in a way trying to deal with that one sin, the doctrine of sin, that Adam and the woman began when they just simply took a piece of fruit they weren't supposed to eat.

[Lepine:] A number of years ago I was in a church where once a week, early in the morning a group of guys would get together. It was a large number of guys from the church and we went through a one volume systematic theology -

[Easley:] Yeah. Great.

[Lepine:] - a week at a time taking each chapter. The one we used was the one written by a gentleman that both of us know, Dr. Wayne Grudem out of Phoenix Seminary,

[Easley:] Mmm hmm. Mmm hmm.

[Lepine:] and one of the things I really liked about Dr. Grudem's systematic theology is how each chapter ends. In most chapters he includes at the end the text of a hymn.

[Easley:] Mmm.

[Lepine:] And he said the reason he did that was because "your study of theology should always be doxological."

[Easley:] Mmm hmm.

[Lepine:] It should always lead you to a place where your response to what you've just studied is praise for God.

[Easley:] Mmm hmm.

[Lepine:] Really the purpose for studying any of these doctrines is not just so that we can become smarter. In fact I remind myself often of what is it; 1 Corinthians ten where it says "Knowledge puffeth up?" [Laughs]

[Easley:] Right. [Laughs]

[Lepine:] [Laughing] And we have to remind ourselves that this is not just knowledge for knowledge's sake, -

[Easley:] Yeah.

[Lepine:] - but the reason to study and learn these things is so that we can praise God.

[Easley:] That's a great reminder. And just for friends who have never heard the concept "doxa," the Greek word for glory, and again the word "ology," the study of; biology is the study of life; theology is the study of God. The concept of doxology is a vertical nature; that we're giving glory and praise to God. So you're exactly right. Even more important than apologetics, that we are studying these things to see a better, clearer understanding of who our Father is and how we worship Him.

[Lepine:] And when you read through, when you're preparing for a message, when you're looking at your systematic theologies, does it turn your heart to praise?

[Easley:] Oh, oh, without a question. And again in reference to the Trinity, to see the role of the Trinity in my salvation, you talk about going from academic to emotion. Wow! What a concept that it required a Trinitarian doctrine to be academic for you and me to be saved. What's my response to that? Amazing grace.

How could he love a wretch like me? How could he go through that? I am amazed at substitutionary atonement tandem with the idea of harmartiology, the doctrine of sin. He has to die in my place. Why can't I work it off? Why can't I just be a little better than the average murderer, licentious felon?

[Lepine:] Hmm.

[Easley:] I'm in the same situation. I need a Savior who will take care of that for me. I need someone who can remedy my spiritual cancer, as is everyone listening to you and me Bob. And again, the study of doctrine, if it ended in a little more academic information, we failed terribly.

But if it moves you to know who your Father is, that He loves you, that He died for you, that He sent His Son to die for you, that He cares inestimably about your soul and life. That's the study of theology.

[Lepine:] So the next time one of our listeners hears somebody talking about systematic theology, rather than getting scared of that term, we ought to embrace it and understand that that's how we get to know God.

[Easley:] And to circle back Bob, I would encourage everyone who is hearing us, you need to own a copy of a handbook of theology. Bob will tell you exactly how to get that but this would be an extraordinary gift. Give it to a friend. Take a small group through it. Cindy and I have done the same thing that Bob has referenced. You will be amazed at how you will grow in love and appreciation for what God has done for you.

[Lepine:] Well, and along with the *Moody Handbook of Theology* on our website at [incontextradio.org](http://incontextradio.org) we've prepared a companion study guide for this series on "Why We Believe What We Believe" and you can order the study guide, the *Moody Handbook of Theology* and along with it we'll send you a CD that has MP3 files of all of these messages in this series. And I think you're right. To go through this in a small group setting, in a church group setting or to take a new believer through these studies one at a time.

It's a great way for folks to be grounded in an important understanding of these essential truths of the Christian faith. All of the information about these resources can be found on our website, [incontextradio.org](http://incontextradio.org). We hope you will make plans not only to go to the website today to find out about these resources, but also to visit the website regularly and on an ongoing basis because in the days ahead, Michael, if folks want to find out more about what you've been teaching on recently, hear new messages, hear new programs, probably the best way for folks to do that is through the *inContext* radio website.

[Easley:] Right. We'll be ending the broadcast on the Moody Radio Network for the most part; we'll retain a few stations but most of the programs will be driven to the Internet and to some other stations in the future. So for those who've maybe not listened to radio online, it's not that difficult. It's new only the first time and then you become fairly skilled at how easy it is to go to a website, bookmark it, click on there and you can listen online; you can download it and it will all be available in MP3 formats for your iPod or however you prefer to listen to it.

We'd encourage folks to go check out the *inContext* website and the link will remain there with Moody for a time so that people can find their way if they want to continue to follow the teaching.

[Lepine:] Well, and they can learn more about your new assignment as Pastor of Fellowship Bible Church in suburban Nashville, Tennessee. Again it's on the [incontextradio.org](http://incontextradio.org) website and you know, from time to time folks may still have a chance to hear you on the new program that Moody is launching called *Today in the Word*. It's going to feature some of the best messages that have been delivered on the Moody Campus over the last four decades.

There'll be messages from people like Howard Hendricks and John Piper, Billy Graham and Warren Wiersbe and also messages from former presidents at Moody like William Culbertson, George Sweeting, Joe Stowell and Michael Easley. So I hope folks will tune in beginning Monday on many of these same stations at this same time for the brand new Moody program, *Today in the Word*.

I hope you'll be back with us tomorrow as we look back at several of the highlights of the last several months. That's tomorrow on *inContext* with Michael Easley.