

DeYoung, Kevin. *Daily Doctrine: A One-Year Guide to Systematic Theology*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2024. 373pp. + 14pp. (front matter) + 34pp. (back matter).

In his introduction, DeYoung relates his dream of writing a book such as *Daily Doctrine* ever since he was in college. This work reflects both his interest in Christian doctrine and the need to present a wide variety of theological topics in a format that can help “busy pastors, students, leaders, and laypeople.” The unique result is a blend of a systematic- and historical-theology textbook and *Our Daily Bread*—intended to be read as a devotional companion. With a daily schedule in mind, DeYoung anticipates the reality that many readers will face; rather than 365 entries, he has written 260 entries, leaving space for his busy readers to miss two days each week. In addition, he aims to make each entry manageable in length—just one to one-and-a-half pages.

DeYoung acknowledges that his unique blend may evoke criticism from some who think the work should address topics more thoroughly or from others who believe that he addresses topics in a way that is too deep for many readers. Nevertheless, DeYoung’s work provides a unique format that invites readers to a broad series of theological conversations, suited for everyone from the novice to an “old-hand.”

DeYoung works through the 260 entries in traditional systematic-theology categories, starting with preliminary issues and the doctrine of Scripture, then moving through the doctrines of God, man and sin, covenant theology, the person and work of Jesus Christ, salvation, the church, and eschatology. Within this framework, DeYoung addresses a wide array of topics, from long-standing issues of hermeneutics and theology to contemporary issues that might not have been addressed if the book had been written ten to twenty years ago.

As a Presbyterian minister, DeYoung naturally and openly writes from a covenantal and Reformed perspective. Most Christians will find common ground on many topics, however (e.g., inerrancy, the canon, justification, and the mission of the church). Further, since his goal is to help his reader think biblically, he provides a great deal of relevant Scripture within each topic, both in how terms are defined and in how the ideas are developed. Beyond this goal, DeYoung models a traditionally Calvinistic approach to organizing the topics and analyzing various doctrines through a Reformed lens. This approach allows him to introduce (or remind) his readers of the relevance of the development of doctrine throughout history; thus, he draws attention to the value of various creeds and catechisms on a regular basis.

Nevertheless, this approach will naturally divide his readers between those who read with anticipated agreement and those who expect to find areas of disagreement. Reformed believers will find succinct entries that introduce, define, and defend the Reformed view on topics such as the relationship between Israel and the church, the scope of the atonement, reprobation, and the recipients of baptism. Given the length of each entry, non-Reformed readers should not expect much treatment of non-Reformed perspectives on these topics, although DeYoung does at times anticipate and provide brief answers to arguments against Reformed positions.

The titles of the various entries vary from common theological terms (e.g., “Effectual Calling,” “Hypostatic Union,” “Millennial Views”), to longer descriptions (e.g., “The Newness of the New

Covenant,” “The Law and the Christian,” “Church Officers in the New Testament Church”), to questions (e.g., “Is Predestination Fair?” “Is Every Sin the Same in God’s Eyes?” “Does James Contradict Paul?”). Some entry titles demonstrate DeYoung’s desire to increase the theological vocabulary of some of his readers (e.g., “Aseity,” “*Perichoresis*,” “Middle Knowledge,” “*Berith* and *Diatheke*”). In these cases, DeYoung provides clear definitions, from either Scripture or from their historical use as appropriate. In such entries, readers will perhaps learn new terms for somewhat familiar concepts; in others, they will likely be introduced to entirely new concepts (with entirely new terms), depending on their theological background and knowledge.

Many entries deal with common theological topics that should unite orthodox believers across denominational lines. In some cases, however, he is silent on topics and terms while addressing key terms and passages that could easily have been addressed. His entries on Scripture—dealing with the topics of inspiration, inerrancy, and the canon—provide an excellent summary and defense of Scripture on these topics. Nevertheless, DeYoung provides no entries dealing with the preservation of Scripture or the reliability of its transmission. Given both the biblical data and the Bible’s history on these points, one or two entries on these topics would certainly remind the reader of the scriptural and historical defense of the reliability and authority of Scripture in these critical areas.

Similarly, DeYoung includes several entries on human origins. For day 63, he explains and defends the idea that the days of Genesis 3 are best understood as twenty-four-hour periods, and for day 64, he emphasizes the critical importance of Adam being an historical (rather than a mythological or merely literary) figure. These entries, along with some others surrounding it, provide a scriptural and rational basis for rejecting the basic tenets of theistic evolution, particularly attempts to make the theory fit within Scripture. However, DeYoung does not name evolution or theistic evolution in this section (and there are no entries for these terms in the index).

Despite omitting mention of some controversies, DeYoung provides some clear arguments in entries on contentious contemporary issues. On days 75 and 76, he deals directly and clearly with the biblical basis for recognizing two distinct genders (both in their distinctive bodies and roles) and marriage (as a permanent union whereby God intends the role of a wife to complement her husband). On day 77, he tackles the issue of transgenderism, drawing from Scripture and the previous two entries to conclude that “we do not have an inalienable right to do whatever we want with our physical selves,” applying this from how we attire ourselves to what we do with our God-given, biological differences.

In entry 179, DeYoung tackles the question of the “New Perspective on Paul,” acknowledging that while recent writers (James Dunn and N. T. Wright) have drawn proper attention to the “Jewishness of the New Testament,” they have nonetheless blurred key doctrines, particularly the basis for how God imputes Christ’s righteousness to sinners, both in the present and the future. On the topic of universalism (day 243), although he does not name any figure more recent than Origen, he is clearly addressing a present, forceful undermining of a clear biblical doctrine. Once he gets to annihilationism (day 244), he does identify contemporary advocates, including P. E. Hughes and John Stott. It is particularly in topics such as these that DeYoung’s appeal to historical doctrine comes through, albeit in ways that most Christians will agree with. In such cases, DeYoung argues, Christians

must stand with the “author of Christianity . . . in spite of selfish prejudices and appeals to human sentiment” (352).

In this vein, on days 191 through 195 DeYoung provides both an excellent summary of the doctrine of the church, dealing with the nature, unity, holiness, and catholicity of the church. He argues that the oneness of the church does not require fellowship with anyone who claims to be Christian, stating that “if we do not share ‘one faith’ with Mormons or liberals or Unitarians (and we do not), then we have no unity to maintain” (280). However, he omits any mention of how Christians, even within the Reformed tradition, have attempted to apply these principles of unity and holiness. In light of his appeals to historical doctrine in other areas, the omission is glaring. Even Martin Luther—despite being cited on a number of doctrinal issues—is not specifically credited with his critical protest against the heresies of the Roman Catholic Church. J. Gresham Machen likewise receives no mention despite being a clear historical example (within DeYoung’s own theological tradition) of delineating clear lines of fellowship between truth and error.

Further, DeYoung acknowledges the basis for such application in both moral and doctrinal arenas: “According to the apostle Paul, some factions—when the result of moral laxity or theological heterodoxy—can be an occasion for true Christians and true churches to stand apart from counterfeits (1 Cor 11:19)” (280). But other passages that could provide the basis for such actions (Gal 1:8–9; 2 Cor 6:1–7:1; 2 John 7–11) receive either little or no attention with regards to what a believer should do when he finds himself among professing believers who have chosen to violate the moral or doctrinal boundaries found in God’s Word.

The simplest approach to a work such as *Daily Doctrine* is to recognize what it attempts to accomplish rather than what it does not. If someone wants more in-depth treatment on topics, there are already many fine (and lengthy) works available. If someone wants a basic devotional, that space is similarly well-populated. Christians who want an introduction—or a review—on a wide variety of theological topics will benefit from many of the entries, although non-Reformed believers will quickly notice that the selection and treatment of topics reflect Reformed doctrine in soteriology and a covenantal approach to ecclesiology. (In this light, if someone from another theological perspective decided to produce a work uniquely for their own tradition within Protestant Christianity, DeYoung’s work provides a helpful template of topics for doing so).

DeYoung’s greatest strength in *Daily Doctrine* is his succinct biblical and historical treatment of a range of interesting theological and contemporary issues. The most notable weakness—perhaps inherent in its purpose—is that the work aims primarily for the head. Although some entries touch on matters of the heart, the work as a whole tends to omit or bypass practical implications and applications. A second edition that adds such material—while providing a succinct treatment of these topics, if that is possible—would increase this work’s value to any reader who wants to know God with his head and follow the Lord with his heart.

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