

SIGNIFICANCE OF DOCTRINE

INTRODUCTION

There is a certain thinking among many Christians that doctrine is divisive and is therefore not important to emphasize. The concern is that if a group of Christians begin to get too serious about the details of what they believe it will simply lead to arguments and division. Since doctrine divides, they reason, it is best to simply fellowship around Jesus and let the details slide. There is the thought that doctrine does not help us toward godliness or loving one another, which are main ingredients to the Christian life.

The purpose of this article is to ask some questions of such thinking. Is this common notion really biblical? Our greatest desire as Christians ought to be to glorify God, not satisfy our desires for superficial unity. Our primary goal cannot be to be in harmony with others. Our primary goal cannot be to avoid conflict at all cost. Many times the cost is too great. God is not glorified when we dismiss His revealed truth for the sake of getting along with all who profess to be Christians.

DOCTRINE DEFINED

In the Scriptures, the system of doctrine that defines Christianity is referred to as “the faith.” Ephesians 4:12-16 clearly establishes for us that one of the primary goals of those gifts Christ has given to the church is to labor toward growth in “the unity of the faith.” God never intended unity for unity’s sake. He never divorces unity from truth. Doctrinal unity is one of the goals of the Spirit’s work in the church. Christ has appointed leaders in the church to lovingly lead believers to grow up together into a unified body in the truth. While this will be complete only when we reach heaven, it is to be our goal now.

Doctrine is simply teaching. It is both the act of communicating truth and the truth that is communicated. Jesus was known for his doctrine. Matthew 7:28, *And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine:(KJV)*. The Apostles and the early church were known for their love for doctrine. Acts 2:42, *And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers (KJV)*. The fellowship and communion of the first church in Jerusalem was based upon doctrine.

In his letters to individuals and churches, it was the custom of the Apostle Paul to devote the first half of the letter to doctrine and then the latter half to practical application of those doctrines. Doctrine is clearly set forth as the foundation upon which the Christian life was to be lived. To change the doctrine would by necessity affect the end result: life here and/or hereafter.

DOCTRINE REALLY DOES DIVIDE

It was the doctrine of Jesus that created such a stir while He was on the earth. As long as He simply did many mighty works there was no real issue. It was when He distinguished Himself and His purpose by way of doctrine that division came. When He proclaimed that He could forgive sins, he was challenged by the religious leaders among the Jews, “who can forgive sins but God alone?” (Luke 5:21) When He confessed that God was His

father, he was accused of being a blasphemer (John 5:17-18). Jesus frequently caused division by way of His doctrine.

Doctrine may, indeed, be divisive. Doctrine is simply the teaching of Scripture. It is the truth. Truth exposes error. Division results when a person is shown the truth from God's word and that truth is rejected. There are doctrines that are so important that the Holy Spirit guided His servant to write the following words to the Roman church (16:17): *Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. (KJV)* Those are harsh words! You will notice that doctrine is at the center of the concern. The issue here is not so much that one is learning and growing, but that one is promoting a doctrinal position that is contrary to that taught by Paul.

If truth is taught, there will by necessity be a line of division drawn. There will be those who will embrace truth and those who reject it. If someone boldly rejects foundational truths of the faith "once delivered to the saints," it is necessary that there be a division. Division may occur naturally in that there is a mutual parting of the ways. Division may occur by force in that those holding to the truth reject one or more who are espousing doctrinal error (note Titus 3:10).

BAD DOCTRINE PRODUCES UNGODLY RESULTS

I Corinthians 15:33 is a verse that is often taken out of context. Some applications made from this verse are true, but are not necessarily a proper representation of the primary point. Paul is talking about bad doctrine in this context. He is exposing the error of those who were denying the future bodily resurrection. It is in this context that he makes the statement in this verse warning against the deceptive thought that bad doctrine will not have a negative moral impact. The "evil communication" in this verse is specifically referring to the false teaching of no bodily resurrection. Belief in the bodily resurrection is in fact a very basic doctrine that leads to a holy life (note I John 3:1-3).

There are examples in Scripture of the negative impact of bad doctrine:

1. Read Galatians 2:11-16. What doctrinal problem led Peter to separate himself from eating with the Gentiles? This error on Peter's part led Paul to confront him and then to clearly explain the truth concerning this significant doctrine.
2. Read II Timothy 2:15-19. You will see the clear exhortation to study the word of truth. You will see the warning to avoid the useless talk of those who promote error. Notice finally the example that Paul gives. What doctrinal error does he point out that led to the overthrowing of the faith of some? Did you notice that Paul named names?
3. Read Revelation 2:14-15. Do you see that there is doctrine that really does have negative results? While there is much discussion over the details of this doctrine of Balaam, it seems clear that it was at the least teaching that made light of God and His commandments, leading to sinful activity. Bad doctrine is named as the root of serious problems in this church.

It is obvious that we must take a stand for truth. It is clear that we must be guided in our counsel by sound doctrine. Because of the negative consequences produced by errant

doctrine we must make sure that those who serve as mentors for Setting Captives Free are grounded in the truths that will lead to spiritually healthy lives.

IMPORTANCE OF SOUND DOCTRINE

Sound doctrine is directly linked to our salvation. Error concerning the doctrine of Jesus Christ brings eternal consequences. If a person rejects the truth that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, he is not of God (I John 4:1-3).

Does the possibility that the *Jesus* being preached by many is not actually the Jesus of the Bible? The Apostle Paul warned of this possibility in the early days of the New Testament Church. II Corinthians 11:3-4, *But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him.* It is possible that “another Jesus” might be preached!

How are we going to identify the true Jesus of the Bible? It is through sound doctrine that the truth will be known and error exposed. It is necessary today to know which *Jesus* people are talking about. We cannot assume that one who says *Jesus* is talking about the same person that we know and love. How important is it that we understand and teach the truth concerning the person of Jesus Christ? Read John 17:3 for the answer. Eternal life hinges upon a proper knowledge of Jesus. Doctrine that is a true representation of the teaching of Scripture is essential in order to have eternal life.

We are told in another place that “the holy scriptures...are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (II Timothy 3:15). Paul speaks this to Timothy as he commends the teaching of his mother and grandmother in his childhood. He learned the Scriptures. He learned truth. Doctrine was essential to Timothy’s salvation, as it is also to ours.

Paul continues in the next verse of that passage listing “profitable for doctrine” as one of the characteristics of Scripture. To speak of the value of Scripture and yet reject the value and necessity of doctrine is to misunderstand the nature and purpose for the giving of Scripture. Apart from sound doctrine, no man will ever be led to understand his need before God and the remedy for that need in the only true and living God, born in the flesh, who is Jesus Christ.

Sound doctrine is directly linked to our godliness. Over and over in Scripture we see the significance of doctrine to a godly life. Doctrine (also referred to as “the faith” and “the truth”) is the very foundation of the structure of a godly life. False teaching will lead a person to live a life that may appear commendable, but in the end will prove disastrous. Don’t forget the words of Jesus in Matthew 7:21-23! All that may seem religious and right may, in the end, be proven vain. We will be able discern the good from the evil in this life if we have a solid doctrinal foundation.

Note the concern that Paul has for this matter as he writes to Timothy. He says in I Timothy 4:6-7, *If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of **good doctrine**, whereunto thou hast attained. But refuse profane and old wives' fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness.* Paul was concerned about errant doctrine being taught to the Ephesians that would lead them to a lifestyle that may have seemed “holy” but, in fact, would have been ungodly. In the previous verses Paul listed some of “doctrines of devils.” Do you see those doctrines in verses 2 and 3? Good doctrine, which is according to Scripture, will keep us from becoming slaves to the commandments of men and will set our hearts upon God in truth.

Read Titus 2:1-8, and observe the connection between “sound doctrine” and godly attitude and character. This passage provides a strong link between doctrine and life. We must be providing counsel that flows from sound doctrine that will in turn lead to godly lives.

Remember the words of Jesus as He prayed to His Father concerning all those who would believe on Him. He called upon His Father to *sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.* The very sanctifying process that we are aiming for in the lives of those we mentor is dependent upon truth!

God tells His servants to be teachers of sound doctrine. I Timothy 4:13, *Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to **doctrine**.* And verse 16, *Take heed unto thyself, and unto the **doctrine**; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.* II Timothy 4:2, *Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and **doctrine**.* With such exhortations as these how can we dare push doctrine aside as insignificant or unnecessary?

BIBLICAL RELATIONSHIP TO THOSE NOT SUBMITTING TO TRUTH

There cannot be a working relationship with those who reject the truth. Those who would be mentors must submit to the truth and give counsel based on that truth. Those who are students must be pressed with the truth and not be permitted to continue in doctrinal error without being confronted about it. We cannot ignore error simply because we are fearful of losing a student or potential mentor. Yes, we must have a spirit of love and patience as we speak the truth. Nevertheless, we must speak it, if perhaps God will give our hearers a spirit of repentance (II Timothy 2:24-26)

If a potential mentor rejects the standard of truth set forth clearly in Scripture, then we must take a position of separation from them. God has given us a mandate to act in this way. Romans 16:17, *Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.* Galatians 1:8, *But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.* 2 John 1:10, *If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him*

God speed: Titus 3:10, A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject.

We must contend for the faith. Contending for the faith necessitates our understanding of that faith and actively setting it forth. We cannot ignore doctrine and be pleasing to God at the same time. A position like this may at first seem unloving and perhaps harsh. But as you consider that this position flows out of a supreme love for God first and a submission to His truth as the answer for man's greatest need, then you come to see that this is actually the most loving position possible. We really do care for the souls of those to whom we minister. We want them to walk in the freedom that so many of us now enjoy. We are convinced, with an open Bible before us, that this freedom will come by way of the truth being clearly set forth and the Truth Himself becoming all in all to every student.

CONCLUSION

Please read the doctrinal statement of SCF and determine if you are seeing the truths set forth in that statement. Once considering those truths, please verify what points you may still have problems with. You will need to be in agreement with all the points listed in order to be a mentor with Setting Captives Free.