

Doctrinal Dilemmas?

If there is any subject that turns otherwise peace-loving Christians into snarling, fighting-mad combatants, it is the subject of doctrine. It seems political correctness and sensitivity training go out the window when doctrinal issues arise. Why is this? Should we even discuss doctrinal issues? What did Christ and Paul think about doctrine? You might be surprised.

There is one subject most of Christendom shies away from. Most hesitate to even discuss it. In fact, in many circles, it is a “taboo” subject. “Don’t talk about doctrine,” many protest, “because it will upset and divide people! Mercy! You’ll get into arguments and offend someone! Tell us *s-m-o-o-t-h* things! Prophecy deceits” (Isaiah 30:10). Preach love. Preach Christ and Him crucified—but don’t talk doctrine to me.”

Oh, really? Let’s break the cycle. Let’s take the dare. Let’s talk about doctrine. OK?

Doctrine has become a controversial word these days. Comparatively few Christians wish to discuss the dreaded topic of doctrine. It may not be “politically correct.” Perhaps it is because so many are unsure of themselves. Many, who do not even know the Scriptures, are unwilling to look into them to see what the Bible really says.

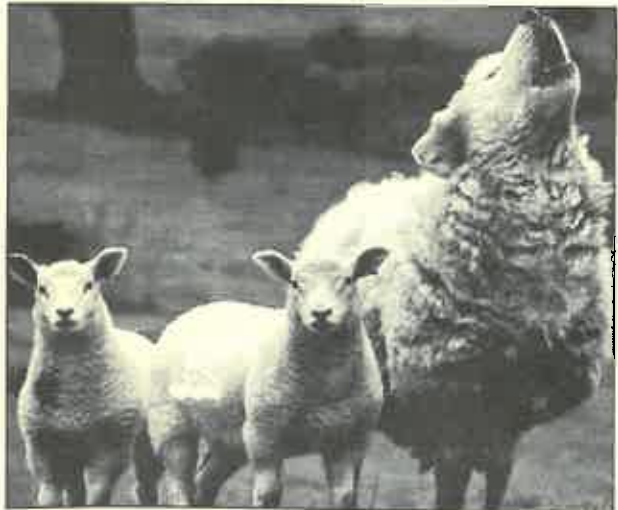
The word “doctrine” is not something to be feared or avoided. Doctrine simply means a “teaching,” or that which is taught by a religion or political party.

The word comes from the Latin *doctrina*, meaning a codification of beliefs or a body of teachings, especially when used in a religious sense. We derive our word “doctor” from this word. The Greek word *didache* [διδαχη did-akh-ay] is translated “doctrine” 51 times, and “doctrines” five times in the KJV (other versions may vary).

It is unfortunate that doctrine has been made out to be the “bad guy” in many Christian circles today. A sure way to cloud true doctrine is to bury it in false doctrine. Some view the word “doctrine” as almost a “curse” word. “Doctrine divides,” they parrot. “Don’t get into a doctrinal discussion, or you’ll get into an argument.” It would be difficult, indeed, to get them to sit down at a table with open Bibles and discuss various teachings of the Bible. People, by nature, do not want to change—they want to believe what they want to believe.

Perhaps the most frustrating challenge a Christian faces is trying to teach the Gospel to a person who has a closed mind. All too often we meet a person with an attitude that shouts, “Don’t confuse me with the facts, my mind is made up!” In other words, “It does not matter whether or not what you say is true; I am going to believe and do what I want.” Or, “What would my friends or family think if I suddenly change my beliefs?” Some appear to have minds like concrete—all mixed up and permanently set. You can point to many scriptures; you can provide examples from the New Testament; you can quote the very words of Jesus, yet such a person will remain unmoved. Such an attitude would be almost humorous if it were not so sad. We need to understand this is the way of the world, so learn not to be discouraged. It is a true saying regarding the devil, “that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world.”

Strangely, many people do not know or even want to know what their own church teaches! Theirs is



“Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves” (Matthew 7:15).

more of a "Christian" fellowship group. Instead of being taught sound doctrine, they would rather have their church, priest, pastor, or teacher provide them with music, meals, or entertaining stories. They would rather be told how Jesus loves them, that all they have to do is say the sinner's prayer and be assured they are saved now and forever as long as they pay, pray, stay, and obey. And yes, it is true; Bible doctrine DOES divide. Correct doctrine divides *truth* from *error*! Many were astounded at Christ's doctrine: "And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his DOCTRINE" (Matthew 7:28; 22:33; Mark 1:22; 11:18; Luke 4:32; John 7:16).

Christ said, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword" (Matthew 10:34, KJV throughout). This is because following true biblical doctrine will set you apart from commonly believed teachings about God and the Bible. It might even set you apart from the false teachings of your congregation.

The buzzwords of this generation are *experience*, *feeling*, and *perception*. "If it feels good, do it" is the criteria. "If it tastes good, eat it. If you feel like it, say it." However, the Bible teaches, "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25).

For example, as the "charismatic wave" sweeps over country after country, these or similar words are often parroted: "I've been baptized in the Holy Ghost and you haven't. I have spoken in tongues, and you haven't. So don't talk to me about doctrine, because I know! I've been under the power of the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost teaches me all I need to know about doctrine. He shows me what is right and what is wrong. It's experience that counts, not some outdated doctrine."

It's time we set the record straight on the vital issue of doctrine! So, let's talk about doctrine.

Why Is Doctrine So Important?

Doctrine is indispensable to Christianity. True Christianity cannot exist without it. True doctrines are simply points of truth from God's Word, as opposed to the convoluted reasonings and traditions of men. We must worship God in spirit and in truth (John 4:23–24).

The New Testament repeatedly emphasizes the value and importance of sound doctrine, sound

instruction (1 Timothy 6:3), and a pattern of sound teaching (2 Timothy 1:13–14). The apostles defended the faithful proclamation of the Gospel (Galatians 1:8). They couched Christian faith in DOCTRINAL terms, then called for its preservation.

God asks through the prophet Isaiah, "Whom shall he teach knowledge? And whom shall he make to understand doctrine? Them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts [spiritual babes]. For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little" (Isaiah 28:9–10).

Your Bible reveals there are the doctrines of Christ (Hebrews 6:1) and doctrines of devils (1 Timothy 4:1). In other words, there are true doctrines and false doctrines! We should always *prove* what we *think* we know.

**Honest and sincere students
of God's Word change their
beliefs to match the Book, but
arrogant and dishonest people
change and wrest the words to
match their beliefs.**

Studying true doctrine is nothing less than a study of the law, mind, and character of God Himself. We are to put on the very mind—teaching, doctrine—of Christ Himself (Philippians 2:5; 1 Corinthians 2:16). That is, we are to learn to think and act as Jesus Christ thinks and acts.

Turn to 1 Timothy 4:1–4 in your own Bible. It reads, "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly [distinctly], that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and DOCTRINES of devils Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth."

A few more man-made beliefs or doctrines we see dividing Christians today include the rapture and the timing of the rapture, young-earth vs. old-earth creationism, charismatic vs. non-charismatic, premillennialism vs. amillennialism, speaking in tongues, women preachers, whether fallen angels had sex with women and produced giants, whether homosexuality is a sin, eating in a restaurant on the

Sabbath, Sabbath vs. Sunday, the world's holidays vs. God's holydays, "soul-sleep" vs. the immortal soul, when one is born again, whether Mary had other children, who and what the devil is, whether God knows all things in advance, whether Jesus is merely a created being or truly God, whether God is a trinity or a divine family, and many more.

Believe it or not, these are *all* doctrines held by various professing Christian groups! Everyone wants to express *their* opinions.

The doctrines of the Church of God International are summed up in our *Statement of Beliefs* and are taken from the Bible itself. (Send for your free copy of our *Statement of Beliefs* today.) Our beliefs are explained in capsulated form and are backed up by many, many scriptures. You may wish to copy or chain reference them in your own Bible. The Bible alone—not feelings, traditions, or doctrinal creeds of men—is God's written revelation to man! No doctrine is based on a single scripture. "For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little" (Isaiah 28:10). Be sure to request our free booklet, *How to Study Your Bible* for the rules of Bible study and information on how to mark your Bible.

Bible doctrine is so important that the apostle Paul warned, "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from Him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel [or any other DOCTRINE or teaching]: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert [change] the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel [teaching] unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:6-9). Isaiah 8:20 tells us, "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to *this word*, it is because there is no light in them." Second John 10 confirms, "If there come any unto you, and bring not *this DOCTRINE*, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed."

Teachers who attempt to siphon off some of God's people must first open the door of their minds. They often come under the guise of "new understanding," "new truth," conviviality, and ecumenism. Political correctness has conditioned the majority of people to defend this supposed "open-

mindedness" by saying we should not "judge" others but should have a spirit of "love" and "be more Christ-like," etc. The basic idea is that we should seek fellowship among various groups and compromise—i.e., by ignoring differences in doctrine and practice, by putting everything we believe "on the table." *Beware!* Do not become so "open-minded" that your brains fall out!

The Deadly Dangers of False Doctrine

Let's test our memories:

Has anyone followed the case of *Andrea Yates*—the woman who drowned her five children in a bathtub because it was "God's will"? The foundational issue she was grappling with was a false understanding—false doctrine!—of who and what God is! She stated that her desire was to kill her children so they would be kept from falling into Satan's hands if they grew up, and to punish herself for being a bad



Andrea Yates

mother. What else would cause this if not FALSE, or FAKE, DOCTRINE—a false understanding of God and His Word?

Or take the case of *Jim Warren Jones*, leader of the Peoples Temple Christian Church, Disciples of Christ. On the evening of November 18, 1978, in Guyana, Jones ordered his congregation to



Jim Jones

drink a concoction of cyanide-laced, grape-flavored Kool-Aid. In all, 918 people died, including 276 children. It was the greatest single loss of American civilian life in a non-natural disaster until the events of September 11, 2001. What was the basic error? False belief! FALSE DOCTRINE! Or, following a *man* instead of God's Word.

Or the case of *Marshall Applewhite, Jr.*, of the Heaven's Gate group, who led 38 of his followers to wear purple clothing and eat the poisoned purple pudding of death!



**Marshall
Applewhite, Jr.**

He preached that suicide would allow them to leave their bodily “containers” and enter an alien spacecraft hidden behind the Hale-Bopp comet. Again, the culprit is misinformation—FALSE DOCTRINE!

Or take the case of mother Eve: She listened to the subtle voice of the serpent and was persuaded to take of the forbidden fruit. Why? Because she listened to the devil’s lie. He promised her additional *benefits*. She gave way to FALSE DOCTRINE!

Christ warned repeatedly about false teachers, false prophets, and false doctrine.

Matthew 24:5: “For many shall come *in my name*, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.” In verse 11, He said, “And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many.”

Also Matthew 24:24: “For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.” How? By lies—by false doctrine!

Yet again, Christ warned His followers, “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits” (Matthew 7:15).

Note that these false teachers come *in disguise*. They do not *appear* to be false teachers—they do not appear to be ravening wolves. Verse 22 shows that they don’t even necessarily deny Christ—they call Him “Lord, Lord.” They appear to be godly, sincere, good, moral people. Never forget: the devil is the father of lies (John 8:44). “For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers [yes, the devil has ministers—many more than God!] also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works” (2 Corinthians 11:13–15). The devil will go up to 99 percent truth to slip in his one percent error, because he knows that, like leaven, false doctrine will spread and grow until it consumes entire congregations. What is the methodology? By craft, speculation, presumption, supposition, and guesswork, they plant “new” ideas into people’s minds—in other words, false doctrine!

Second Peter 2:1–3 warns, “But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily [stealthily] shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the

Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not.”

Acts 20:30: “Also *of your own selves* shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.” That is, to cause schism in the church or congregation in order to get a following to support them. Satan’s strategy is “divide and conquer,” hence all the splits and schisms in the churches today. Beware of those who insist on a hierarchal church government (the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes referenced in Revelation 2:6,15), or that they are the “one and only” true church. Christ said, “I am the vine [singular], ye are the branches [plural]” (John 15:5). Christ said, “And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold” (John 10:16). The Bible definition of a Christian is found in Romans 8:9: “Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His.” And to whom does God give His Holy Spirit? “...the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that *obey him*” (Acts 5:32). It matters not to which computer data bank one may belong to; what matters is, do you unconditionally belong to Jesus Christ?

The prophet Jeremiah predicted, “The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so” (Jeremiah 5:31). Paul warned Timothy, “For the time will come when they will not endure sound DOCTRINE; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables” (2 Timothy 4:3–4).

Appreciation for Truth Requires Opposition to Error

One of the surest ways to become a victim of false doctrine is to think that it is not dangerous, and you don’t need to be concerned about it. If you play with a live snake’s head long enough, it *will* bite you!

People tend to seek consistency in their beliefs and perceptions. So what happens when one of our beliefs conflicts with another previously held belief? The term “cognitive dissonance” is used to describe the feeling of discomfort that results from

holding two conflicting beliefs. When there is a discrepancy between beliefs, something must change in order to eliminate or reduce the dissonance.

Cognitive dissonance occurs when one finds that what he or she has always believed is in conflict with what the Bible *says*.

When two things are opposites, they cannot be reconciled. Things different are not the same. If we embrace true doctrine, we must be against its opposite—false doctrine. The stronger we favor a truth, the stronger we should oppose its opposite.

Examples:

If I favor a democratic republic, I must oppose dictatorship.

If I favor life, I must oppose death.

If I favor light, I must oppose darkness. The more I value the one, the more I must object to the other.

Error is the opposite of truth. If I appreciate truth, then I must oppose error. To suggest that false practices do not matter much is to necessarily imply that truth does not matter much!

Every passage that emphasizes the importance of truth simultaneously emphasizes the danger of error. The more we care about truth, the more firmly we will oppose error.

“The fear of the LORD is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate” (Proverbs 8:13). “Through Thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way” (Psalms 119:104). See parallel passages at: Psalm 119:128, 163; 36:4; 97:10; 101:3; Amos 5:15; Micah 3:2; Zechariah 8:17; Matthew 6:24; and Romans 12:9.

Who, What, is Behind the Deception of False Doctrine?

As we know, “that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan...deceiveth the whole world” (Revelation 12:9). To deceive means to cause someone to believe something that is not true; to trick, mislead, falsify, dupe, defraud, or victimize.

Going on to 2 Corinthians 11:13–15: “For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.”

Reading on to Ezekiel 22:25–26: “There is a con-

spiracy of her prophets in the midst thereof, like a roaring lion ravening the prey; they have devoured souls; they have taken the treasure and precious things; they have made her many widows in the midst thereof. Her priests have violated My law, and have profaned mine holy things: they have put no difference between the holy and profane, neither have they shewed difference between the unclean and the clean, and have hid their eyes from My Sabbaths, and I am profaned among them.”

We are warned, “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4:7).

What Can We Do?

“For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect” (Matthew 24:24). In 1 Corinthians 10:12, we are warned, “Let him who thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall.”

When someone tells you that false teaching is not a big problem and you don’t need to be very concerned about it—to just love the brethren and don’t worry about false doctrine—*he* is teaching you a false doctrine when he *says* it! It will be just a matter of time before he will try to get you to accept other false teachings! Not every false teacher will belittle the danger of false teaching. But anytime a man tells you that false teachers are not a serious danger, you can be sure he is telling you that either because he is a false teacher or because he is under the influence of false teachers!

What should we do about it? How can we escape the danger of false teaching?

On the subject of biblical ignorance, it is indeed sad that so many people, including many professing Christians, simply don’t know what the Bible teaches or even what their own churches teach, and often hold to unbiblical or even heretical beliefs. For example, a recent study found that a mere 10 percent of Americans have a biblical worldview, despite 70 percent of Americans claiming the label of Christian.

What we must do:

(1) LOVE THE TRUTH. Don’t just “*like* it.” Many have died for the truth. We have seen that the people who are most likely to accept error are the people who are not sufficiently dedicated to the truth (John 17:17).

“For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth [restrains and hinders] will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all conceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie” (2 Thessalonians 2:7–11).

(2) **STUDY GOD’S WORD DILIGENTLY.** “Prove all things” (1 Thessalonians 5:21). If we proved a doctrine once, we can prove it over and over! The way to recognize error is to compare it to the truth (Acts 17:11; 2 Timothy 2:15; 3:16–17). “Thy Word is truth” (John 17:17). Honest and sincere students of God’s Word change their beliefs to match the Book, but arrogant and dishonest people change or wrest the words to match their beliefs (Jeremiah 23:36; Romans 1:18, 25; 2 Corinthians 2:11, 17; 4:2). Sound doctrine cultivates moral behavior, conduct, and ethics (Romans 6:17; 1 Peter 3:8–16).

(3) **HONESTLY EXAMINE EVERY DOCTRINE AND PRACTICE** before you accept it (2 Corinthians 13:5). Further, if we can’t teach it to others from the Bible, we don’t know it well enough ourselves!

(4) **LET GOD’S WORD BE THE STANDARD** for all our spiritual decisions (Galatians 1:6–9; 2 Timothy

3:16–17; Matthew 15:9; 2 John 9; etc.)

“He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day” (John 12:48).

“For I give you good doctrine, forsake ye not My law” (Proverbs 4:2).

“If you put the brethren in remembrance of these things, you shall be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, which you have attained” (1 Timothy 4:6).

In Conclusion

What about you and me? How much do we care about truth? Do we care enough to study diligently, to remove error from our lives, and serve God faithfully? If you *know* the truth, have you *obeyed* it? Are you living a faithful life as a Christian? Or are you living a lie? (James 2:19; 1 John 5:3).

Beware the dangers of drifting! Beware of Christian compromise! They are two of a Christian’s most common and deadliest enemies.

“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole *duty* of man” (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

In this article we’ve talked about sound doctrine. We are *told* to do so (Titus 2:1). This should be our central focus, first, last, and always, testing our beliefs to see if they truly do line up with what God has said about Himself in the Bible.

Read the Book!

