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WORKER



"We are workers together with Him..." (2 Cor. 6:1)

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WHAT IS DOCTRINE?

Kevin W. Rhodes

Biblical doctrine carries the weighty connotations of absolute certainty and salvific necessity. As a result, Christians typically define doctrine in light of its usual contrast with opinion; however, this oversimplifies the term and confuses its biblical meaning, even though the English words “doctrinaire” and “indoctrinate” do carry these overtones. Some contrast gospel with doctrine, driving a wedge between two concepts married in scripture. Others refer to “doctrinal matters” to distinguish from “moral matters.” But doctrine essentially means “the contents of instruction.” Doctrine, then, includes anything taught and, in reference to scripture, anything that the scriptures insist *should* be taught. However, the scriptures themselves describe doctrine as something far more than generic instruction; instead, they portray doctrine in light of its purpose, its content, and its communication. And all these combine to produce the moral responsibility for both those in the pulpit and those in the pew to honor God’s inspired message from page to pulpit to practical application.

Therefore, at its core, doctrine should be educational in nature. This means simply that it requires a prepared teacher delivering a specific message to a willing pupil (Isa. 29:24). The Bible provides so much for us to learn—so much so that revisiting a passage, when conducted with diligence, always provides the opportunity for deeper insight and greater application. But this implies that we are willing to learn. Instruction in the ways of God does not consist of spiritual osmosis but rather requires deliberate effort and focus with attention to detail so that the message conveyed in God’s Word becomes not only familiar to us but a living part of us (Jas. 1:21). Spiritual instruction builds on the whole of God’s Word until the complete picture of God’s plan in every conceivable element comes to light (Heb. 6:2; Psa. 119:105). This implies the necessity

of studying and teaching with direction and purpose rather than randomly and subjectively. Doctrine means that we need more than a few verses on our pet subjects always near at hand; it means we need knowledge of the whole.

However, for that to be of lasting value, doctrine must be divine in origin. The value of any doctrine depends entirely on its origin. The doctrines of men have only the value that men can provide (Matt. 16:12), and thus good doctrine comes only from following what God has revealed (Prov. 4:2). Anything else, in the spiritual realm, is worthless (Jer. 10:8). Jesus Himself said, “My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me” (John 7:16). Therefore, the only doctrine of value for the church is the doctrine delivered by Jesus to the apostles to us through inspiration

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Editor

Cody Westbrook



"We are workers together with Him..." (2 Cor. 6:1)

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF 1 TIMOTHY

Cody Westbrook

The book of 1 Timothy is well known and dearly beloved by God's people. Many sermons have been preached, and articles written, from it that have challenged us and pushed us on to greater spiritual heights. There does seem to be, however, a slight misconception that this book only useful for preachers. While it is true that it contains a great deal of instruction for preachers, it is not a book only for preachers. In fact, one could argue that the primary emphasis of the book is strengthening the house of God—the church (1 Tim. 3:15). A brief overview of each chapter illustrates the point.

The Church and its Doctrine – 1 Timothy 1.

What is doctrine and why does it matter? These questions are answered in the first chapter of the book. The problem of unhealthy doctrine is discussed in verses 3-11. Some in Ephesus were teaching things that were false and spiritually unhealthy. This kind of teaching is deadly because it causes "disputes instead of godly edification" – speculation instead of salvation (1 Tim. 1:4). Timothy's charge was to command that they stop and ensure that only sound doctrine was taught. The goal of sound doctrine is discussed in verses 12-17 in which Paul used himself as an illustration. The problem with false doctrine is that it doesn't save but the goal of sound doctrine is exactly that—salvation. That is why it was so important for Timothy to stand firm and fight (verses 18-20).

The Church and its Worship – 1 Timothy 2.

God is worthy of worship (Ps. 103) and He seeks those who will worship Him (John 4:23). However, God will not accept just any kind of worship. There is a standard, a pattern that must be followed, that is laid on in scripture. The chapter begins with a discussion of prayer. Paul describes different kinds of prayers to be offered for different people (vss. 1-7). The second half (vss. 8-15) deal with roles for men and women. Paul desired that "the men pray everywhere" (vs. 8) and women "learn in silence with all submission" (v. 11). The rationale behind the command is laid out in verses 13-14.

The Church and its Leadership – 1 Timothy 3.

God's wisdom is vividly seen in the organization of the local church. The church is a divine institution of which Christ is the head (Col. 1:18; Eph. 1:22). It is composed of people organized into local congregations, and God knew that the organizational structure of the church required that there be men who occupy positions of authority to carry out the work in a proper and orderly way. Thus He created the office of an elder and a deacon (Phil. 1:1). First Timothy 3 outlines the qualifications that a man must meet in order to serve in these two capacities. We may divide these into three categories: personal, family, and church qualifications.

The Church and its Servants – 1 Timothy 4.

God needs faithful servants! He needs servants who are willing to wash feet (John 13:12-15), put others first (Phil. 2:2-4), and help bear the burdens of others (Gal. 6:2). But, what qualities should be present in a faithful servant? First Timothy 4 identifies for us 6 character traits of a faithful servant of God. A servant feeds on God's word (v. 6), excels in spiritual athletics (vss. 7-8), works hard (vss. 9-11), sets a good example (v. 12), manifests spiritual growth (vss. 13-15), and saves people (v. 16). The church needs more faithful servants of God who possess these great characteristics.

The Church and its Relationships – 1 Timothy 5.

The key to unlocking 1 Timothy is 3:15 – the church is God's household! The church is a unique family made up of people from all different kinds of backgrounds, cultures, and life experiences. Though we may be very different, we are all united in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:27). Thus we must love and care for one another at all times. First Timothy 5 deals with this topic. Paul identifies brethren (vss. 1-2), widows (vss. 3-16), elders (vss. 17-25), and masters (6:1-2) all being worthy of honor.

The Church and its Priorities – 1 Timothy 6.

Priorities are those things that occupy a position

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E-mail: office@swcofc.org

Cody Westbrook ----- Editor

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of prominence in our lives. They take first place and are given great emphasis. Our priorities are a reflection of our allegiance. The final chapter of the book identifies three important priorities for the Lord's church: sound doctrine (vss. 3-5), godly living (vss. 6-16), and a proper emphasis (vss. 17-22). Every congregation of the Lord's people would thrive if they would put first things first and pursue the proper priorities.

Our desire is to dedicate this, and subsequent issues of the Christian Worker, to a study of 1 Timothy with a view toward helping the church. Each issue will be dedicated to an investigation and application of the context and themes of 1 Timothy to strengthen each Christian—not just preachers. As we endeavor to mine the precious gems of truth from this wonderful book, we pray that our efforts will offer some value toward edifying the church of our Lord, which we love so deeply.

CW

WHY SHOULD I CARE ABOUT DOCTRINE?

Trent Kennedy

Because I want to be an elder one day

Elders must be concerned about doctrine because they must be able to exhort with sound doctrine and convict a gainsayer using sound doctrine (Tit. 1:7-9). Overseers have the God-given charge of tending to the flock among them (1 Pet. 5:2), and they must feed the local church body (Acts 20:28). An elder knows that some types of doctrines are vanities (Jer. 10:8); he knows that some doctrine leads down a destructive and corrosive path (Matt. 16:2, 2 Tim. 2:17); and he knows that a little leaven can ruin a congregation (1 Cor. 5:6). An elder must protect, encourage, strengthen, and care for the flock using doctrine.

Because I am a minister

Those who labor in the Word under various descriptive titles must care about doctrine because being a good minister is directly tied to good doctrine (1 Tim. 4:6). Like Timothy, all ministers must give special attention to teaching or doctrine (1 Tim. 4:13, 16). I can clearly see in the life of the apostle Paul that he taught publicly and privately with great consistency (Acts 20:20). I can clearly see that he did not deviate from any portion of holy Writ (Acts 20:27). It is no wonder then that others could fully know and follow the doctrine he taught (2 Tim. 3:10).

Because I am a Bible class teacher

Many Christians would characterize themselves as a teacher even though some might never describe them as a preacher. Teachers must care about doctrine because we live in a time when people “will not endure sound

doctrine” but, to satisfy their itching ears, will gather “teachers after their own lusts,” (2 Tim. 4:3). As a Bible class teacher, I look to the Master Teacher. While I will never be the teacher our Lord was on this earth, the Bible says that multitudes heard him and were “astonished at his teaching” or “doctrine” (Matt. 7:28; 22:33). When I look at the word “teaching,” I notice that it is a noun. According to the Scripture, people were not amazed by Jesus style, eye contact, intonation, cadence, alliteration, or body language. They were amazed by the content of His teaching, His doctrine. While Bible class teachers today can compliment their classes by working on style, they must focus on substance, on content, on doctrine. What an empowering thought: the doctrine that amazed people when Jesus taught during His earthly ministry is the same doctrine that I can and must teach today.

Because I am a parent

As I look at my children and others who are “children in the faith,” I remember that children are known for innocence and humility (cf. Matt. 19:14), and they are also foolish (Prov. 22:15) and in need of regular correction (Prov. 23:13). Children can be easily deceived, fooled, and manipulated. The Bible uses this fact to paint a picture of Christians who are acting childish: “that we may be no longer children, tossed to and fro and carried about by every wind of doctrine...” (Eph. 4:14). I am accountable for the teaching they receive! As a parent I must be aware of this and not allow my “amen” to be assumed or heard behind false doctrine (2 John 10). In order to raise them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4), I must feed them spiritually with words of “faith and good doctrine which nourish the soul,” 1 Tim. 4:6.

Because I am a Christian

Every Christian must care about doctrine. It is fundamentally important to my soul's salvation. I must abide or live in doctrine if I want to have a relationship with God the Father or God the Son (2 John 9-11). I must grow in my doctrine (Heb. 6:1-2) by maturing in faith (Heb. 5:12-14) and growing in knowledge of God's Word (2 Pet. 3:18). Jesus reprimanded individual Christians and entire congregations for holding false doctrine (Rev. 2:14-15). When brethren walk “contrary to doctrine” causing division, they are to be marked (Rom. 16:17). I must care about the doctrine I hold, teach, and practice.

Because I want people to go to heaven

“Take heed to yourself, and to thy teaching. Continue in these things; for in doing this thou will save both thyself and them that hear thee,” (1 Tim. 4:6). Doctrine was personally important to Timothy's salvation, and it was through the

doctrine that he taught whereby others might be saved. Doctrine is necessary to every soul's salvation!

CW

THE TRUTH IN LOVE

Bryan Hodge

“The truth” and “love” are themes found in 1 Timothy (the book of focus in this issue of CW). “The truth” appears five times (1 Tim. 2:4, 7; 3:15; 4:3; 6:5). “Love” appears six times (1 Tim. 1:5, 14; 2:15; 4:12; 6:10, 11). Both are needed in ministry. Both are needed in the church. Our text of study is Ephesians 4:15. It reads, “but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head - Christ.” Let us notice that in order to build the church...

1. We must speak.

Those with the ability to teach and preach should use that ability. Timothy was told “stir up the gift” that was within him, and “not be ashamed” (2 Tim. 1:6-8). He was to “preach the word,” and to do so “in season and out of season” (2 Tim. 4:1-2). Paul said “woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!” (1 Cor. 9:16).

Members should use their tongues to edify (Eph. 4:29), exhort, and stir up love and good works (Heb. 3:13; 10:24). Paul instructed, “comfort each other and edify one another” (1 Thess. 5:11 cf. 4:18; 5:14). Our tongues can be used for good.

It has been said that sometimes silence is golden, but sometimes it is merely yellow. Do we care enough to speak? “Is there not a cause?” (1 Sam. 17:29).

2. We must speak the truth.

The original word translated “speaking the truth” is *aletheuo*. It appears twice in the New Testament (Gal. 4:16; Eph. 4:15). It means to proclaim the truth, or to deal with truthfully. It is the truth of God's word, not human opinions or human wisdom that needs to be proclaimed. The truth has power. It is the truth, which begets (Jas. 1:18), sets free (John 8:32), purifies (1 Pet. 1:22), sanctifies (John 17:17), and arms one for spiritual war (Eph. 6:10-17).

Moreover, it is not enough to speak some truth, but hold back on teaching all that should be taught. Paul said, “I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house” (Acts 20:20). Again, he said, “I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27).

Someone has written,

“If you are my friend, if you are concerned about my soul, give me the truth... for the truth,

and only the truth, can make me free from the shackles of sin, strengthen me in the pathway of righteousness, and lead me to heaven's joy.”

3. We must speak the truth in love.

Our speech should be motivated by love, genuine love. Love motivated Paul to correct the brethren at Corinth (2 Cor. 2:4). One brother has written,

“One of the most unloving acts that one could do - is nothing - when he knows that a brother is being overcome by sin... Brotherly love cares enough to correct” (Jimmy Jividen, *Koinonia*, pp. 147, 179).

Our speech should be tempered by love. We should be in the habit of seasoning our words with salt (Col. 4:6). Yes, there is a time for bold speech (e.g. Matt. 12:34; 23:13ff; 2 Cor. 4:21). However, this should be the exception and not the norm. Jesus was very bold with His active, vocal opponents, who were trying to interfere with His work, or who were plotting against Him. This is not the way He treated most people (Nicodemus, John 3; the woman at the well, John 4; the woman caught in adultery, John 8; the rich young ruler, Mark 10). We should avoid being unnecessarily offensive, rude, or unkind.

We should try to be compassionate, and demonstrate our love. Imagine two preachers. One points out sin in a member's life with a gleam in his eye, and seems to enjoy it. The other points out sin in a member's life with a tear in his eye, and seems sincerely concerned. Which one would you want to hear? Paul shed tears (2 Cor. 2:4; Phil. 3:18). May we “rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep” (Rom. 12:15). Let us learn to sincerely care for people. Remember that without love, we are nothing (1 Cor. 13:1-3).

Preachers and members should remember that preaching is not just about rebuking (2 Tim. 4:2). It is also about convincing, exhorting, comforting, and edifying (2 Tim. 4:2; 1 Thess. 4:18, 5:11, 14; 1 Cor. 14:26b; Acts 14:21-22, etc.).

CW

HOW TO DETERMINE IF SOMETHING IS A SALVATION ISSUE

Ben Giselbach

The question about whether something is a “salvation issue” gets thrown around occasionally among some circles. “Is using instrumental music in worship is a salvation issue?” “Is what you wear to worship a salvation issue?” “Is church attendance a salvation issue?” Used this way, the phrase “salvation issue”

(never found in Scripture) is employed to describe an issue that Christians must get right in order to go to heaven.

I've always thought that this theoretical distinction of whether something is a "salvation issue" is kind of silly—if not outright arrogant. After all, it doesn't matter what I, or any other human, thinks is a "salvation issue." Are we willing to embrace a pseudo Christianity that categorizes certain commands of God as being either "important" or "non-important?"

If There Were Such A Thing As "Salvation Issues" vs. "Non-Salvation Issues..."

...Who Gets To Decide?

The phrase "salvation issue" was coined only a generation ago in an effort to justify those who failed to believe what the Bible taught on a given issue. "You can be mistaken about a host of different Biblical issues so long as you believe the truth about Jesus or salvation," or so the argument goes.

With that being said, what issues can I label as being "inconsequential" to my salvation? No one has the right to walk up to God's throne and tell Him to scoot over. If I disobey God regarding any issue He has addressed in His word (either explicitly or implicitly), I am guilty of sin. Sin is the violation of God's will on a given issue (1 John 3:4; 5:17; Jas. 4:17; Rom. 14:23; Prov. 24:9). All issues – from "big" matters to "little" matters – have the power to damn my soul (Rom. 6:23).

Who gave me the right to compartmentalize issues such as sexuality and marriage, worship, gender roles in the church, baptism, and denominationalism as either "essential" or "non-essential" matters? Which of these am I willing to be wrong about and still be found pleasing to God?

...What is the least I have to do to be pleasing to God?

One of the dangers of categorizing things as "salvation issues" is that it fosters a sort of "checklist" mentality when it comes to Christianity. ("As long as I'm good on these things over here, I don't have to worry about those things over there.") Yet Christianity has never been a merit-based system. It is a system of salvation granted to us only by the grace of God (Eph. 2:8-9). God's free gift of salvation of course has some requirements of receipt (belief & obedience, cf. Mark 16:15-16), but a saving relationship with God is a result of our obedient love for Him. Someone who is deeply in love with God never tries to categorize His law into "essentials" and "non-essentials." Jesus rebuked the ancient scribes and Pharisees for forgetting the basis from which their obedience was to spring (cf. Matt. 23:23-24).

...Which of God's commands can we sacrifice on the altar of relativism?

When I take matters on which God has spoken and

depreciate them to mere "matters of opinion," I have sacrificed the conviction that God's Word can be known and understood. God has never spoken out of both sides of His mouth on an issue. There is no Biblical teaching about which all interpretations are equally valid.

If I don't get everything right in my understanding of the Bible, it isn't because God could not adequately communicate His Word—it's because of me. The human heart itself is the most common limitation in understanding God's Word. The heart that does not recognize or desire truth is the most common and pervasive pitfall in Bible interpretation.

We need to be levelheaded about this question. The first order of business is to get our baseline right: God, and God alone, gets to decide what is a "salvation issue."

Things We Must Get Right From The Beginning

Of course, the Bible teaches, in no uncertain terms, that there are things one must do and believe in order to be saved by God's grace, despite the sincerity of someone to the contrary.

- I must have faith in God and His reward for the faithful (Heb. 11:6; cf. Rev. 2:10).
- I must repent of my sins, entering into a covenant with God to conform to the identity of His Son (Luke 13:3; Acts 3:19; Gal. 2:20).
- I must have at least a basic, though no-less fervent, understanding of what it means to yield to the Lordship of Christ (Matt. 28:28; Acts 2:36; 10:36; Rom. 10:9-10; Jude 4; Rev. 17:14).
- I must be baptized for the express purpose of (a) receiving forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; Gal. 3:26-27; 1 Pet. 3:21) and (b) being added by Jesus to His church (Acts 2:47; cf. Col. 1:13).
- And, I would argue, I must have at least a rudimentary concept of the kingdom of God, since it was so central to the preaching of the gospel during the beginning of the church (Acts 8:12; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31; cf. Col. 1:13).

In other words, sincerity is not enough. There will be plenty of people—a heartbreaking number—who honestly believed they were Christians but did not satisfy the requirements of salvation so clearly stated by the New Testament (Matt. 7:21-23). There are simply some things a person must get right from the beginning in order to be saved.

All Christians Are On A Learning Curve

When someone becomes a Christian, do they have to understand everything about instrumental music, denominationalism, modesty, the Lord's Supper, the church organization, the division between the Old and New Testaments, etc.? As important

as these issues are, certainly not immediately!

Once someone has become a Christian, he/she begins a lifelong period of growth. We must remember that all Christians have varying degrees of spiritual maturity—some growing faster than others. [Much of the “speed” of this development is based upon desire (1 Pet. 2:2)].

We need to be patient with Christians if they have not yet attained a coherent knowledge of the truth (cf. Rom. 14:1; 15:1; 1 Cor. 8:9). Someone may hold to an incorrect Biblical position for the time being, but still be searching for the truth.

Not only are we to teach our fellow Christians the truth, but we are to do it with “complete patience” (2 Tim. 4:2). The apostle Paul, knowing Christians mature at different rates of speed, wrote:

- We urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all (1 Thess. 5:14).
- ...with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:2-3).
- Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive (Col. 3:12-13).

Some Christians used to be members of various denominations, and many will likely have some theological baggage to overcome. Someone who grew up being a Catholic, Mormon, Jehovah’s Witness, Methodist, Baptist, etc., will likely be disadvantaged in adapting to pre-denominational Christianity. They will have to “unlearn” several of the false beliefs they had previously been taught.

Other Christians grew up being taught a postmodern worldview, and thus will have some philosophical baggage to overcome. The truth claims of the Bible will run counter to the relative truth culture has taught them through the years. Yet other Christians grew up in an abusive household, or suffer from learning disabilities, and thus will have some psychological or emotional baggage to overcome.

Christians of course have an obligation to contend for the faith if false religion is being taught (Jude 3). Yet, at the same time, those who harshly insist their brethren immediately drop what is deemed to be a wrong belief, without being willing to first patiently teach them, are often a cancer in the church.

So long as a person is still breathing on this earth, he/

she must always be in pursuit of the truth (2 Thess. 2:12). It is when a Christian rejects God’s Word about something that an issue—any issue—can become a “salvation issue.”

God Often Grants A Period of Grace

God is often merciful and gives us a period of grace. Consider the “seven churches of Asia” in Revelation 2-3. Jesus critiqued each congregation, telling them what they needed to change if they still wanted to be saved. To the Ephesian church of Christ, for example, He said:

Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent (Rev. 2:5).

By the phrase “remove your lampstand,” I suppose God still considered the names of those Christians still written in the book of Life (cf. Rev. 3:5), but He was placing them on probation. They were guilty of sin—and all sin is a “salvation issue.” But by His grace He gave them a period to repent.

When does God’s grace period end? To the Thyatira church, Jesus said:

I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols. I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works (Rev. 2:20-22).

Did Jezebel get to decide when God’s grace period ended? Perhaps her preacher tried to comfort her by saying, “Yes, sexual deviancy is a frowned upon at this church, but it isn’t a salvation issue.”

Only God, in His sovereignty, gets to decide how far His grace will extend. We are not promised an opportunity to repent always (Acts 5:1-11). But when we refuse to obey the words of Christ, any issue can become a “salvation issue” (2 Thess. 1:8).

Conclusion

Before entering into Christ, all sins are salvation issues (Rom. 6:23; 3:23). After the gospel has been obeyed, Christians must “walk according to the Spirit” (Rom. 8:1-2); otherwise any sin can once again become a “salvation issue.”

One of the beautiful things about Christianity is that I don’t have to get everything right—I just have to “walk in the light” (1 John 1:7). I simply must continually try to get everything right. It is

when I become dispassionate about serving God – categorizing His commands as “salvation issues” and “non-salvation issues” – that I jeopardize my salvation. I cannot afford to stop pursuing the truth of His Word.

I might not get everything right concerning the various teachings of the Bible (in fact, I’m confident I won’t). I might be honestly mistaken when it comes to issues like church attendance, modesty, gambling, the indwelling nature of the Holy Spirit, the “end times,” the proper use of church funds, etc. This doesn’t mean the truth can’t be known; this doesn’t mean there is “room for disagreement.” But there is, however, room in the church for greater patience with those who are honestly mistaken on these issues – but are still searching for the truth. [And if someone is publicly teaching something that he/she is honestly mistaken about, we should gently pull them aside and explain the truth “more accurately” to them (Acts 18:25-26).]

I must continually strive to better understand the gospel of Christ, because everything becomes a “salvation issue” when I stop seeking the truth and obeying God. By God’s grace, He will let my lampstand burn long enough for me to come to a better knowledge of the truth. And even at my best, at the end of the day, I will just be an “unprofitable servant” (Luke 17:10). Thank God for His grace.

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(Acts 2:42). When our doctrine is divine, it provides an internal motivation like no other to teach (Acts 5:28), to live (Titus 2:10), and to protect (1 Tim. 6:1). God therefore dictates the content of doctrine, leaving any addition, subtraction, or alteration the object of divine censure (Rev. 2:14-15, 24). God Himself dictated the curriculum of study for His people. Only this doctrine can accomplish the purpose God intended, and that only when delivered faithfully.

Doctrine therefore should be distinctive in message, honoring God’s holiness rather than adapting to man’s unlawfulness. Divine doctrine carries a distinct form and distinct responsibilities (Rom. 6:17). It has an unchanging character (Rom. 16:17; Eph. 4:14) that demands loyalty (1 Tim. 1:3) and develops a distinct following (1 Tim. 4:6). The latter does not simply reflect a checklist of ideas but rather a specific manner of living, because the purpose of distinct doctrine is to produce a distinctive lifestyle that matches the words of Scripture and the character of God (1 Tim. 6:3). This doctrine is no mystery, nor is it so ambiguous that it cannot be recognized. To the contrary, doctrine lays out a specific path and a code of conduct

that people may follow without question or reservation (2 Tim. 3:10). This distinctive message, presented in the volume of scripture, provides the basis for fellowship with God, the foundation for faithfulness to Him, and the responsibility for all followers to discern so as to accept nothing except what came from Him (2 John 9-10). Therefore, anything God’s people teach should be completely distinct from doctrine that is false, erroneous, and unhealthy in any way.

It therefore follows that doctrine must be sound in quality. While most are familiar with this wording, few appreciate its real meaning. Soundness refers to spiritual health – not just doctrinal correctness. Sound doctrine instructs people in sound living and therefore challenges spiritually unhealthy practices (1 Tim. 1:10). Sound doctrine addresses people’s needs rather than appealing to people’s lusts (2 Tim. 4:2-4). Sound doctrine holds to the truth of God’s Word faithfully not only to challenge false doctrine (Titus 1:9) but also to build healthy lives and relationships in Christ (Titus 2:1-10). Doctrine – instruction – therefore addresses far more than what we should believe; it addresses how we ought to live.

To this point we have focused on the content of doctrine; however, the scriptures’ focus on doctrine include one more essential characteristic. Doctrine should be incorruptible in delivery. If doctrine is instruction, then this implies that is something taught, and this in turn implies a teacher. But, as James pointed out, teaching doctrine carries great responsibilities (Jas. 3:1). Therefore, anyone who steps forward to teach what God has delivered has the responsibility to prepare for that task diligently (1 Tim. 4:13). This means applying the lesson to self first (1 Tim. 4:16a), seeking the salvation of others second (1 Tim. 4:16b), laboring to point of exhaustion to help others learn (1 Tim. 5:17), and living with integrity the lessons learned and taught (Titus. 2:7).

Doctrine is therefore different than dogma. It is not necessarily what you are accustomed to hearing; it should be exactly what God says and therefore what you need to hear – even if that is news to you (Mark 1:27; Acts 17:19). And we should approach learning such with an eagerness motivated by the joy of salvation and the hope of heaven. The foundation of doctrine should be Scripture, for it alone offers the instruction needed by every man to the profit of his soul (2 Tim. 3:16). Christians thus have an obligation to God to teach what God wants taught with unmistakable clarity for the purpose of maturing people spiritually and with a purity in heart that signals a motivation of selfless love. This is the principle, the power, and the purpose of doctrine.

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