

OUR DOCTRINAL FOUNDATION

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“And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine” (Acts 2:42).

The Importance of Doctrine

Doctrine simply means the teaching of God’s Word. In our day most people do not want sound doctrine, but they want preachers who will make them feel good (II Timothy 4:3). Nevertheless, we must love, cherish, and obey the Word of God. Merely knowing and accepting the truth is not enough; in order to escape deception and condemnation we must have a love for the truth (II Thessalonians 2:10-12).

Therefore, Paul admonished ministers: “Give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.... 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” (I Timothy 4:13, 16). “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (II Timothy 4:2).

By becoming established in truth, we fulfill the scriptural admonitions (1) to be studious (diligent) workers approved of God, who are not ashamed but who rightly divide (correctly handle) the Word of truth (II Timothy 2:15); (2) to use Scripture profitably for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness (II Timothy 3:16); (3) to be strong in our beliefs rather than tossed about by every wind of doctrine (Ephesians 4:14); and (4) to give answers to everyone who asks about our faith (I Peter 3:15).

Some erroneously suppose that study deadens spirituality, but a sincere, prayerful study of biblical doctrine will enhance spirituality. In fact, true spirituality can only develop from a solid understanding of God’s Word. The truth

sets us free spiritually (John 8:32). The more we comprehend divine principles, the more God's power will operate in our lives and in our churches.

Another erroneous assumption is that there is little connection between belief and conduct. To the contrary, inadequate or false views will definitely affect our choices and actions. The more we assimilate divine principles, the more Christ-like we will become in daily life.

The way to attain maturity in the faith is to have a balance of doctrine and spirituality. We must be zealous to hear, read, and study God's Word, and we must be equally zealous to pray, worship God, and have fellowship with one another.

The Apostolic Message

What important doctrines did the apostles proclaim? What should we believe, obey, and love? For an initial answer, let us look briefly at the apostle Peter's message on the Day of Pentecost. It is important for several reasons: it was the first sermon of the New Testament church (i.e., after the outpouring of the Spirit), Jesus had ordained Peter to open the doors of the kingdom of heaven with this message, it had the simultaneous support of all twelve apostles, and it succinctly proclaims how to enter the New Testament church.

The doctrine of God: There is one true God, as proclaimed in the Old Testament, and in the last days He wants to pour out His Spirit upon everyone. (See Acts 2:17; Deuteronomy 6:4.)

The doctrine of Jesus Christ: Jesus died, was buried, and rose again for our salvation. He is both Lord and Messiah—both the one true God and the sinless, perfect, anointed Man through whom God reveals Himself to us. In other words, Jesus is the Lord Jehovah, the God of the Old Testament, manifested in flesh to be our Savior. (See Acts 2:21-36; Colossians 2:9-10.)

The doctrine of salvation: We enter into the New Testament church through faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior, repentance from sin, water baptism in the name

of Jesus Christ, and the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the initial sign of tongues. (See Acts 2:1-4, 36-39; 11:13-17.)

The doctrine of holiness and Christian living: We must separate ourselves from sin and worldly values and dedicate ourselves to God and His will. The new life of holiness will transform us both inwardly and outwardly. It is characterized by prayer, fellowship, giving, joyful worship, miraculous gifts of the Spirit, and evangelism. (See Acts 2:40, 42-47; Hebrews 12:14.)

The doctrine of eternal judgment: The Lord is coming back for His people. The righteous will inherit eternal life; the unrighteous will inherit eternal death. (See Acts 2:19-21; Revelation 22:12-21.)

In our day, the Apostolic Pentecostal movement is distinctive for its teaching of the Oneness of God, the New Testament plan of salvation, and aspects of practical holiness.

The Oneness of God

God is absolutely and indivisibly one (Deuteronomy 6:4; Galatians 3:20). In Jesus dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily (Colossians 2:9). He is the self-revelation of the one God, the incarnation of the full, undivided Godhead (John 20:28; I Timothy 3:16).

God has revealed Himself as Father (in parental relationship to humanity), in the Son (in human flesh), and as the Holy Spirit (in spiritual action). (See Deuteronomy 32:6 and Isaiah 63:16; Luke 1:35 and Galatians 4:4; Genesis 1:2 and Acts 1:8.) The one God existed as Father, Word, and Spirit before His incarnation as Jesus Christ, the Son of God; and while Jesus walked on earth as God Himself incarnate, the Spirit of God continued to be omnipresent. However, the Bible does not teach that there are three distinct centers of consciousness in the Godhead or that Jesus is one of three divine persons.

Jesus is true God and true man as one divine-human person. We can

distinguish these two aspects of Christ's identity, but we cannot separate them. The Incarnation joined the fullness of deity to complete humanity.

Jesus possessed all elements of authentic humanity as originally created by God, without sin. Thus we can speak of Jesus as human in body, soul, spirit, mind, and will. (See Matthew 26:38; Luke 2:40; 22:42; 23:46; Philippians 2:5.) According to the flesh, Jesus was the biological descendant of Adam and Eve, Abraham, David, and Mary. (See Genesis 3:15; Romans 1:3; Galatians 3:16; Hebrews 2:14-17; 5:7-8.) We should not speak of two spirits in Jesus, however, but of one Spirit in which deity and humanity are joined.

Christ's humanity means that everything we humans can say of ourselves, we can say of Jesus in His earthly life, except for sin. In every way that we relate to God, Jesus related to God, except that He did not need to repent or be born again. Thus, when Jesus prayed, submitted His will to the Father, and spoke about God, He simply acted in accordance with His genuine humanity.

As Jehovah manifested in the flesh, Jesus is the only Savior (Isaiah 45:21-23; Matthew 1:21-23). Thus, Jesus is the only name given for our salvation (Acts 4:12). The Father was revealed to the world in the name of Jesus, the Son was given the name of Jesus at birth, and the Holy Spirit comes to believers in the name of Jesus. (See Matthew 1:21; John 5:43; 14:26; 17:6.) Thus, the apostles correctly fulfilled Christ's command in Matthew 28:19 to baptize "in the name [singular] of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" by baptizing all converts with the invocation of the name of Jesus.

New Testament Salvation

Salvation is by grace through faith and not by human works (Ephesians 2:8-9). The doctrine of grace means that salvation is a free gift from God, which humans cannot merit or earn; in other words, salvation is God's work in us. The atoning death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ have made this gift available.

The doctrine of faith means that we receive God's saving work by trusting in Jesus Christ. Faith is more than mental assent, intellectual acceptance, or verbal profession; it includes trust, reliance, appropriation, and application. Faith is alive only through response and action; we cannot separate faith from obedience. (See Matthew 7:21-27; Romans 1:5; 6:17; 10:16; 16:26; II Thessalonians 1:7-10.) Saving faith, then, is (1) acceptance of the gospel of Jesus Christ as the means of salvation and (2) obedience to that gospel (application or appropriation of that gospel).

The gospel of Jesus Christ is His death, burial, and resurrection for our salvation (I Corinthians 15:1-4). On the Day of Pentecost, the birthday of the New Testament church, the apostle Peter preached the first gospel sermon to the crowds who had gathered to observe the Spirit-filled believers as they spoke in tongues and worshiped God. He proclaimed the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Convicted of their sins by his simple yet powerful message, the audience cried out, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). Peter, with the support of the other apostles, gave a precise, complete, and unequivocal answer: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38). As this verse shows, we respond to the gospel, obey the gospel, or apply the gospel to our lives by repentance from sin (death to sin), water baptism by immersion in the name of Jesus Christ (burial with Christ), and receiving the Holy Spirit (new life in Christ). (See Romans 6:1-7; 7:6; 8:2, 10.)

This response is the biblical expression of saving faith in Jesus Christ. (See Mark 1:15; 16:16; John 7:37-39; Acts 11:15-17.) This threefold experience, viewed as an integrated whole, brings regeneration, justification, and initial sanctification. (See I Corinthians 6:11; Titus 3:5.) Baptism of water and Spirit is the birth of water and Spirit, the born-again experience of which Jesus spoke in John 3:3-5. The three steps are not human works that earn salvation but divine works of salvation in human lives.

Thus, Acts 2:38 is the comprehensive answer to an inquiry about New Testament conversion, expressing in a nutshell the proper response to the gospel. Not only did Jews from many nations on the Day of Pentecost receive the Acts 2:38 experience, but so did all other converts in the New Testament, including the Samaritans, the apostle Paul, the Gentiles at Caesarea, and the disciples of John at Ephesus.

In each case, believers were baptized with the invocation of the name of Jesus, even some who had previously been baptized another way. (See Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:3-5; 22:16.) The Epistles also allude repeatedly to the Jesus Name formula. (See Romans 6:3-4; I Corinthians 1:13; 6:11; Galatians 3:27; Colossians 2:12.) Moreover, the examples in Acts show that the baptism of the Spirit is for everyone and is accompanied by the initial sign of tongues. (See Acts 2:4; 10:44-47; 19:6.) The experience signified by tongues is the promised outpouring of the Spirit (Acts 2:6-17, 33).

The Life of Holiness

The pursuit of holiness is essential to the Christian life. “Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14). God commands us to be holy in all our conduct because He is holy (I Peter 1:15-16).

Being holy is a process of growth as we conform to the character and will of

God. Although we are imperfect, we are growing into maturity. Throughout this process, we are holy in the sense of (1) *separation* from sin and (2) *dedication* to God. (See Romans 12:1-2; II Corinthians 6:17-7:1.)

Holiness is both inward and outward. (See I Corinthians 6:19-20; II Corinthians 7:1; I Thessalonians 5:23.) Thus, it encompasses thoughts and attitudes as well as conduct, speech, amusements, and dress. The practices of holiness separate us from the world's value system, namely, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (I John 2:15-17).

Holiness is not a means of earning salvation but a result of salvation. We do not manufacture our own holiness, but we are partakers of God's holiness (Hebrews 12:10). We are not saved by adherence to certain rules but by our faith relationship with Jesus Christ, which issues forth in obedience and produces spiritual fruit.

The Christian life is one of liberty, not legalism. Instead of following the external law, we are motivated internally by faith, love, and the Holy Spirit, which produce greater dedication and power than the law could impart. Christians have freedom to make personal choices in nonmoral matters, but liberty does not negate moral law or scriptural teaching. (See Romans 6:15; 14; Galatians 5:13.)

All true holiness teachings are based on Scripture—whether specific statements or valid applications of principles to contemporary situations. We learn holiness from the inspired Word of God, anointed pastors and teachers who proclaim and apply the Word, and internal promptings and convictions of the Holy Spirit.

Holiness begins in the heart, as we develop the fruit of the Spirit, put away ungodly attitudes, and embrace wholesome thoughts. (See Galatians 5:19-23; Ephesians 4:23-32; II Corinthians 10:5; Philippians 4:8.)

Holiness includes proper stewardship of the body as the temple of the Holy Spirit. We are not to become gluttonous or use substances that defile, intoxicate, or

addict. (See I Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:12, 19-20.) We are to use our tongue for wholesome speech. (See James 1:26; 3:1-2; 4:11; 5:12.) We are to guard our eyes from evil. (See Psalm 101:2-3; 119:37; Matthew 6:22-23.) Because of the widespread display of evil in modern media, we must be particularly mindful of the dangers associated with television ownership, movies, and the Internet.

Holiness extends to outward appearance and dress. (See Deuteronomy 22:5; I Corinthians 11:13-16; I Timothy 2:8-10.) Biblical principles here include (1) modesty, (2) avoidance of personal ornamentation (ornamental jewelry and makeup), (3) moderation in cost, and (4) distinction between male and female in dress and hair. Women are to let their hair grow long instead of cutting it, while men are to cut their hair noticeably short.

Other important aspects of holiness include justice and mercy in personal and social relationships; the sanctity of marriage and sexual relationships only within the marriage of one man and one woman; the sanctity of human life; honesty and integrity; wholesome fellowship, unity, accountability, and mutual submission to godly authority in the body of Christ; and regulation of amusements.

Holiness is an integral part of our salvation from the power and effects of sin. It is part of abundant life, a joyful privilege, a blessing from God's grace, a glorious life of freedom and power. The life of holiness fulfills God's original intention and design for humanity. For the Spirit-filled believer, holiness is the normal—indeed the only—way to live.