

“If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.” (John 14:15 NASB)

“He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him.” (John 14:21 NASB)

“And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments This is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, that you should walk in it.” (II John 1:6 NASB)

Individuals will have far less opportunity to *know* what God’s commands *are* — if preachers and teachers are afraid to declare doctrine. The desire to be loved by those who are around us must *never* exceed the desire to love God and obey His commands.

“ He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.: (Matt. 10:37 NASB)

Preachers and teachers in the Church — as well as every Christian — have an obligation to help fellow Christians remain steadfast in the faith. If believers don’t *know* what constitutes sin — i.e. they are not following God’s commands because they have not been taught doctrine — they can’t help others to remain steadfast.

Relying even on the *very few* verses that we have included in this article concerning “doctrine,” should demonstrate how *very* important sound doctrine is toward living the Christian life. As Christians — we *must* understand that God has given us a standard He expects us to follow — and that standard is in the Bible. When we fail to declare the whole will of God by omitting sensitive doctrinal issues so that our local congregations are a *comfortable* place for the unsaved (or the saved, for that matter) we become the enemy of God.

“...whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.” (James 4:4 NASB)

Sound doctrine is being increasingly threatened because of the direction of our culture today. The consensus becoming more and more popular is that *nobody* should disagree with *anybody*. *Everyone* can believe *whatever* they want to believe and it’s OK. If that perception of “love” *isn’t* practiced in churches today, they are considered to be un-loving and narrow minded. Since that doctrine (teaching) isn’t contained in the Scriptures — it *must* be one of those doctrines spoken of in Matthew 15:9 or I Timothy 1:3.

We simply *can not* propagate a nondoctrinal faith that is “in so complete accord with the current age” that it requires no defense. We must *“teach what is in accord with sound doctrine.”*

*“Diligence” is a privately funded publication of:
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DILIGENCE

“We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure.” — Hebrews 6:11

A ministry of Dennis and Sherri Owens

Volume 9

April 15, 2010

Issue 6

Teaching Sound Doctrine

We might recall from the previous issue of *Diligence* that “doctrine” is —

1. a particular principle, position, or policy taught or advocated
2. something that is taught
3. a body or system of teachings relating to a particular subject:

As we read different versions of the Bible, we see that the word “teachings” is often used instead of the word “doctrine” in some versions. While this difference may be understandable in view of the dictionary definition of doctrine, it *could* possibly be a bit troubling when we take note of the fact that “doctrine(s)” is used 56 times in the King James Version of the Bible — 14 times in the New American Standard Bible — 7 times in the New International Version — and 5 times in the Message. Does it *seem* that the more recent the translation, the *fewer* times the word “doctrine” is used? *Maybe* it doesn’t matter — or maybe it *does*.

We stated in the last issue of *Diligence* that in “many circles today, doctrine is believed to be divisive.” We also stated in that issue that “preachers and teachers often *avoid* getting into discussions or giving sermons that involve sound doctrine.” Frankly speaking — “doctrine” has become a dirty word in today’s culture and has taken on a negative meaning of “rules to follow.”

The Bible speaks of both good and bad doctrine. For example, we read in II John 1:9-10 that we must abide in the doctrine of Christ.

“Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed:” (KJV)

We also see that there were destructive and false doctrines mentioned in the Bible.

“But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.” (Rev 2:14 KJV)

“So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.” (Rev 2:15 KJV)

While these particular verses refer to a “doctrine of Christ,” a “doctrine of Balaam” and a “doctrine of the Nicolaitans,” there are references to several other

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doctrines throughout the Scriptures — some good and some bad. In Matthew 15:9, we even see that men manufacture their *own* doctrine —

“*But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.*” (KJV)

And in I Timothy 1:3, we read —

“*As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer.*” (NIV)

We reference all of these verses (and there are *many* more) to solidify in our minds just how important sound doctrine is when it comes to our ability to remain in Christ. If we *fail* to abide in the doctrine of Christ — we have not God.

As we stated in that last issue of *Diligence*, the cure for apostasy is teaching sound doctrine. That’s not always easy however in a culture that has consistently denigrated doctrine by calling it divisive and something to be *avoided*. But let’s think about this — if “doctrine” is interchangeable with “teachings” — and we no longer teach “doctrine” — we no longer teach Christ! So Christ is divisive, right?? Absolutely!!

“*Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.*” (Matt. 10:34 NIV)

We are living in a day when *everything* is tolerated in our churches — everything *except* sound *doctrine*! The line between culture and the New Testament Church is becoming more and more blurred *because* “doctrine” is considered divisive and it is therefore best to avoid preaching doctrine from pulpits and in classrooms.

It is a *fact* however, that Christianity *does* have particular, fundamental principles (or doctrines) that *must* be taught and adhered to.

“*You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine.*” (Titus 2:1 NIV)

“*Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.*” (1 Timothy 4:16 NIV)

“*He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.*” (Titus 1:9 NIV)

But many Christians have *accepted* Satan’s lie that since doctrine is divisive, it should be avoided *so that* we might appear to be more loving and accepting of everyone. What a lie!! Christianity has a message — and it isn’t *always* easy to swallow. There *are* forbidden activities. There *is* sin. There *are* rules that must be followed if one is to abide in the doctrine of Christ. Living a Christian life is living a life *founded* on doctrine. If we’re told to refute those who oppose sound doctrine, then we must *know* exactly *what* sound doctrine *is* as well as practice it! Doctrine can not therefore be a “feeling” or a subjective belief. It is based on *facts*. Facts are apparently what Paul was referring to when he said he was innocent of the blood of all men because he had not failed to declare the whole will of God (Acts 20:26-27). Paul was *certain* that those with whom *he* had come into contact, knew every bit of doctrine (or facts) that *he* knew. Paul *taught* sound doctrine! In a book entitled

Christianity and Liberalism, J. Gresham Machen states:

“The writer of the Epistles had been in direct communication with those intimate friends of Jesus who had begun the Christian movement in Jerusalem, and in the Epistles he makes it abundantly plain what the fundamental character of the movement was. But if any one fact is clear, on the basis of this evidence, it is that the Christian movement at its inception was not just a way of life in the modern sense, but a way of life founded upon a message. It was based, not upon mere feeling, not upon a mere program of work, but upon an account of facts. In other words it was based upon doctrine.”

IS doctrine divisive? Yes! To be divisive is to create discord. Discord is a lack of harmony between persons or things. Those who “*have not God*” have no harmony *with* God. Those who have no *desire* to have harmony with God will likely be offended by the doctrine of Christ. Does that mean Christians should stop preaching and teaching doctrine? If it does — then Christians have no message to proclaim. For the message of the Gospel *is* offensive to those who don’t want to hear it.

“*Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?* (Gal. 4:16 NIV)

The preaching of Christ crucified was a “stumblingblock” to the Jews and “foolishness” to the Gentiles (I Cor. 1:23) but that didn’t stop Paul from preaching it so no one would be offended. There *is* offense in declaring the doctrine of Christ. When Christians reach a point of never offending anyone, they are no longer declaring the whole will of God — or perhaps *none* of the will of God. Over 75 years ago, J Gresham Machen stated in one of his writings:

“when men talk thus about propagating Christianity without defending it, the thing that we are propagating is pretty sure not to be Christianity at all.

They are propagating an anti-intellectualistic, nondoctrinal Modernism; and the reason why it requires no defense is simply that it is in so complete accord with the current age.”

Let’s face it — no one objects to *nondoctrinal* “Christianity” because there is nothing to object to. It will be in agreement with wherever current culture has drifted.

The trend among churches today is to *completely do away with* doctrine in order to be more inclusive and be viewed as a more loving and welcoming body of believers. Emphasis is therefore placed on a message of reaching out with kindness, benevolence, etc.. As the emphasis is focused more and more in that direction, doctrine becomes less and less important so as to allow for a variety of beliefs on any given subject. Therefore, the question asked by postmodern churchgoers is, “How can I make this place appear to be more loving and more accepting? The answer of course then is “don’t preach doctrine because it is divisive.

We have seen from even the *very few* Scriptures already quoted in this issue that — while love and acceptance is certainly an important part of living the Christian life — *real* love for the souls of individuals would not only encourage but *insist* on obedience to God’s commands and to the doctrine of Christ.