

1. Introduction on Christian Doctrine

Doctrine

When some hear the word “doctrine”, they tend to have a negative response. Why is that?

They equate doctrine with dogma and dogmatic people; to debate and disagreement; to controversial matters that cause division. They equate doctrine to thoughts and concepts that are beyond the reach of the average person; ie, it's only for the highly intellectual.

Though some may have a negative view on doctrine, what actually is “doctrine”?

The word “doctrine” is derived from a Latin word which simply means “teaching”. Therefore, Christian doctrine is Christian teaching. As Christians, we often use the term for a body of Christian teaching that describes what we believe the Bible says about key things. For example, creeds and statements of faith are doctrine, or doctrinal statements.

The Churches of Christ forefathers had a negative view of doctrine (especially creeds). They had a slogan: “no creed but Christ”. What are the positives/negatives of such a slogan?

Positives – it emphasises that Christianity is not all about having right knowledge, and that right knowledge, on its own, doesn't save. It's Christ and a personal relationship with Him that saves.

Negatives – without a creed (or doctrinal statement) how can we be sure that we are speaking about the true Christ? For example, Mormons say they believe in Christ, but not the Christ of the Bible, for according to them, he is a brother of Satan. They have a differing doctrine on Christ. So, doctrine is important in helping us define what we hold to, or what we mean.

Creeds

In church history, creeds were important to keep Christ's church away from error. They were doctrinal statements that summarised the most important truths in the Bible. A famous creed is the Apostles' Creed. What important statements are made by this creed?

I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; And in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, our Lord; Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary; Suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead and buried: He descended into hell [hades]; The third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead; I believe in the Holy Spirit; I believe in the holy catholic [universal] church: the communion of saints; The forgiveness of sins; The resurrection of the body; And life everlasting. Amen.

The Bible and Doctrine

The Bible speaks of doctrine. What do we learn from the following verses?

1 Tim 1:3-4 – false doctrines damage the church, which need to be countered with sound doctrine

1 Tim 4:15-16 – sound doctrine ensures our salvation and helps others to be saved

1 Tim 6:3-5 – false doctrines lead to ungodliness and strife; sound doctrines lead to godliness

2 Tim 4:3-4 – maintaining sound doctrine will always be a battle in a fallen world

Tit 1:7-9 – sound doctrine encourages believers in their faith, and it helps us to refute error

Tit 2:1 – we are called to speak that which is sound doctrine

The above verses from the pastoral letters, ought to help us see why it is important to do our best in maintaining and having sound doctrine. It ensures our salvation and is important in our sanctification.

In this home group series, we will be looking at various doctrines of the Christian faith. Can you think of some of the more important ones? (ie, ones you may find in a book on Christian doctrine?)

The attributes of God? The Trinity? Who is Christ? Who is the Holy Spirit? What is man? What is sin? What is the atonement? What is salvation? What is the church? etc.

What is the foundation for all sound Christian doctrine? (cf. 2 Tim 4:1-4)

The Word of God is the source and foundation of sound doctrine. It's not theologians, or popes, or any other person. We receive it when we submit ourselves to God's revealed truth (the Bible).

Next week we will look at our first doctrine - the doctrine of the Bible; what is the Bible? More correctly, what does the Bible say about the Bible?

Before we meet, consider your own beliefs on the Bible.

Summary: Sound doctrine is essential for ensuring our salvation and helping others to be saved.

2. Our Doctrine on the Bible

Review: *What is Christian doctrine? Why is sound doctrine important? (1 Tim 1:3-4, 4:15-16)*

Christian doctrine is simply Christian teaching – in particular, it's biblical teaching on various topics, such as “who is God?”, “who is Christ?”, “what is sin?”, “what is salvation?”, etc. Sound doctrine is essential for refuting error, for helping us know God's will, and for ensuring our own salvation and that of others.

Discussion: The first doctrine we will look at is on the Bible. The Bible was written over a 2000 year period (2000BC to 95AD) by over 40 authors. But what is the Bible? Since all Christian doctrine is from it, we need to make sure we have a right view of it. Consider our church's Statement of Faith. It says: “We believe that God has revealed all that is necessary to salvation and life in the sixty-six books of the Holy Scriptures, which are the Word of God. All Scripture is inspired of God, and is infallible and inerrant, and is the final arbiter [authority] in all disputes. Its authority is derived from its Author and not from the opinions of men.”

What key points are mentioned in this statement? [discuss]

Forming a Doctrine on the Bible

Why do we need to have an accurate statement on the Bible?

The Bible is attacked by the world and even by those who profess Christianity, over its accuracy and authority. Attacks, left unchallenged, would see the Bible relegated to some outdated religious book. Contending for the faith (Jud 1:3-4) means contending for what the Bible is, as well as what it says.

One of the first declarations we make in regard to the Bible is that it is inspired (2 Tim 3:16-17).

What do we mean by this? What don't we mean by this?

By inspired, we don't mean that the Bible just inspires us, or that its authors were inspired in the sense of how we would speak of a famous composer. Instead, we mean that God inspired people to write it. It's God-breathed. Because of this, we declare the Bible to be the Word of God (cf. 1 Thess 2:13).

In what way has God inspired its 40 or so authors to write the books of the Bible? (2 Pet 1:20-21)

Most of the Bible is not the “dictations of God”. Instead, God has moved people to write, allowing them to use their personality and writing style. In essence, it's like the Bible has dual authorship – God and man – but with the primary author being God.

Another declaration we make is that the Bible is infallible and inerrant? What does that mean?

By infallible we mean that the Bible is completely trustworthy – it doesn't deceive. By inerrant, we mean that the Bible is not false or defective; it is free from error. Note 1): This doesn't mean we take a blind literal interpretation of the Bible. eg, we allow for figurative and poetic language. 2) We also only declare that the original manuscripts are infallible and inerrant, as translations may have minor errors.

How can a Christian claim the Bible to be inerrant/infallible when it contradicts science, or where there are discrepancies between various accounts? (eg, consider Matt 28:1-6; Luke 24:1-7)

The Bible isn't a science book, but we believe that when it touches on science, it speaks accurately. In regard to differences between various accounts, let us remember that this naturally occurs with eyewitness accounts. It's not that they are false. Eyewitnesses see things differently from each other.

What gives the Bible the right to be our final authority on various matters?

Because God is truth, knows all things, and is the author of the Bible, everything the Bible has to say on various matters is our final authority. Who knows about God and life more than God does? Therefore, our final authority is not a pastor or pope, or even what we think. The Bible is our final authority.

What is the Bible a final authority on? Everything? (cf. 2 Tim 3:16-17)

It's not the final authority on everything (eg, physics), but it is on all matters of faith/conduct.

Convinced of the Inspiration of the Bible

The Bible, internally, declares that it is inspired (2 Tim 3:16). But can we be sure and convinced?

What helps convince you that the Bible is inspired; that it truly is the Word of God Word? [discuss]

- Fulfilled prophecies – eg, concerning Jesus (Isa 7:14, 9:1-7, 53:1-9), the present times (2 Tim 3:1-5)
- Jesus quoting the Bible – eg, Jesus often said “it is written” (Matt 4:3-10), confirming the OT. He even referred right back to Gen 1:27 and Gen 2:24, when speaking on marriage in Matt 19:4-6.
- Archeology – verifies the various places and people that the Bible speaks about
- History – other books give proof that what the Bible says did happen (eg, the writings of Josephus)
- Consistency – the Bible reads as one book – even though it is made up of 66 books with many authors.
- Accuracy – it accurately explains our human state (sin/death), and the solution to our state (salvation), and it is absolutely relevant and contemporary for all time – including our time.

What do we learn about the Bible from Psa 119:160, Isa 40:7-8, Isa 55:10-11, Heb 4:12? Why?

It is truth, it endures forever (eternal), it is powerful and effective – all because it is inspired by God.

Summary: The Bible is God-inspired and our final authority on all matters of faith and conduct.