

BASIC DOCTRINE – THE FUNDAMENTALS

*An Introduction to the Basic
Doctrinal Beliefs of the Christian
Faith.*

Rev. Kenneth Cole

Prof. Darrell Cole

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PART 1: WHY STUDY DOCTRINE

The Apostle Paul was constantly concerned about the spiritual health of the people he visited on his missionary journeys. He was especially concerned with the spiritual health of those he charged with overseeing the flock, people like Timothy and Titus. When Paul wants to contrast bad shepherding of the flock with good shepherding, he warns Titus to concentrate on doctrine: *But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine.*

*(Titus 2:1)*¹

What is doctrine? The Greek word Paul uses here for “doctrine” is “*didaskalia*” and it means “teaching.” Anytime you are taught, you are receiving doctrine of some kind. Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary defines doctrine as “A body of beliefs about God, man, Christ, the church, and other related concepts considered authoritative and thus worthy of acceptance by all members of the community of faith.” Doctrine or teaching is central to Christian life and faith and has been so since the beginning of Christianity. Thus the earliest Christians are

¹ All biblical quotations are from the NKJV unless noted otherwise.

said to have: *continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. (Acts 2:42-43)*

A proper understanding of Christian Doctrine is important for several reasons. First, doctrine provides the content of what we believe. It is important that the content of our faith be accurate so that it truly reflects the truths of Scripture; because our faith must be grounded in what we know is the will and teaching of God. This is why Jesus insists that God be worshiped in spirit and in truth (John 4:24) and it is why we find Paul exhorting Timothy that: *If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed. (1 Tim 4:6-7)*

Second, doctrine gives direction to our obedience and worship to God. We must know what counts as true obedience if we wish to grow in Christlikeness. Paul tells the Romans that: *God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. (Rom 6:17-19)*

As sinners we used to obey the doctrine—the teaching—of the world, but now we have been saved by grace, transferred from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of Christ (Colossians 1:13), so we obey the doctrine—the teaching--of

God. Thus, Paul commends Timothy who has: *carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith. (2 Tim 3:10)*

The study of God's great truths should lead us to an attitude of worship and praise as we come to a realization of God's love, wisdom and power over of our lives. The more we learn of God through sound doctrine, the more we will cry with the Psalmist:

Many, O Lord my God, are Your wonderful works

Which You have done;

And Your thoughts toward us

Cannot be recounted to You in order;

If I would declare and speak of them,

They are more than can be numbered. (Ps 40:5)

Third, doctrine sets boundaries to our faith, beliefs, and practices, and in this way serves as a kind of warning signal when we have crossed the perimeters and are in error. This is why John uses doctrine to distinguish Christians from those of the world.

Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. (2 John 9-10)

When our warning signals are weak due to our failure to learn sound doctrine, we end up making mistakes and disobeying God's will for us. If we keep going in this direction, we end up like those Paul warns against in the first chapter of Romans, those who God gives over to their base, rebellious desires. We also find Paul warning Timothy that one of the hallmarks of spiritual rebellion is the rejection of sound doctrine.

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. (2 Tim 4:3-5)

Theology is closely related to doctrine. The word theology comes from two Greek words, "theos" meaning God and "logos: meaning word or reason. Quite literally, theology means "God-talk" or "God-reasoning." Thus, in a certain sense, every time you talk about God, you are engaging in theology. In a more narrow sense, and this is the sense in which the term is normally used, theology is the study of God and the great truths of God from which we can derive an understanding of what is correct and appropriate for the Christian faith. Inevitably, those who teach Christian doctrine (and pastors do that every time they open Scripture and begin to teach) will also teach theology of some kind. They cannot help doing so because Christian doctrine is "God-talk." It is talking and reasoning about God's

will. In the same way, we can see why it is such nonsense for believers to claim that they do not need to know any theology but simply to have a relationship with Jesus. Well, as soon as we ask who Jesus is and why we need to have any relationship with Him, any answer will be based upon some kind of theology—knowledge about God.

Some may object to the study of doctrine and theology. One concern is that the study of doctrine might lead us to question the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the present move of the Spirit in today's dispensation. Many charismatics hold this fear because, for so many centuries, those who played such a large role in formulating Christian beliefs and practices, both Roman Catholic and Protestant, did not believe that the gifts of the Spirit continued beyond the Apostolic age. At least, they did not believe that the extraordinary gifts such as tongues, prophecy, and healing continued. Happily this is no longer the case. We wish our readers to know that the present authors hold fast to the belief that one of the roles of the Holy Spirit in the church is to foster the manifestations of the gifts of the Spirit, which is for the empowerment of the body of Christ on this earth.

Another concern is that different denominations within the Christian body have different doctrinal beliefs. Will these differences serve any purpose other than being used to bring divisiveness and separation to the body of Christ when God calls for unity? While it is true that different bodies of believers may hold to divergent views on many things, such as the modes of baptism to the gifts of the

Holy Spirit, we are still exhorted by God to give diligent study to His word in order that we might grow in understanding of what His will is for us. We cannot grow in Christlikeness without growing in understanding of God's complete will for us.

This is why Paul urges the Corinthian Christians: *not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature. (1 Cor 14:20)*

Moreover, Christ commands us to love God with: *all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment. (Mark 12:30)*. At least part of what it means to love God with all your mind is striving to learn more about God. How can we say we love God if we have no desire to learn more about Him and His will for us?

Given what Christians face today in a culture permeated with the influx of new age teaching, moral relativism, pluralism, revival of pagan beliefs, and anti-Christian, pseudo-scientific theories promoted as scientific fact, we need more than ever to familiarize ourselves with God's instructions. For God will hold us accountable. Since the beginning of the early church Satan has tried to inject erroneous ideas into the heart of the church and dilute the truth. We must labor to know what God has commanded. Paul faced a world much like our own, with its pressures on Christians to compromise with Paul's teaching, which is why he warns Timothy to: *Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. (2 Tim 2:15-16)*

The stakes are very high when it comes to the study of God's will for us. The study of the doctrine—the teaching—found in the Bible must be done with prayer, reverence and humility. We should take heart because God promises us in His word that He will give us success in drawing near to him.

Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. (James 4:8)

This is also at least part of what Paul is getting at when he tells the Philippians to work out their own salvation with confidence because it is God who wills and works within them (Philip 2:12). It is only from a God-given desire of the heart that we go to God's word to study and put forth the effort to know what God desires of our minds and bodies.

If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority. (John 7:17)

Is the understanding of doctrine necessary for salvation? Yes and no. On the one hand, to simply believe in a god is not enough. According to James, the brother of the Lord, knowledge of doctrine without saving faith puts you on the same level as a demon!

You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe — and tremble! (James 2:19)

On the other hand, we have Paul telling the Romans that: *if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. (Romans 10:9)*

Here we find that there must be a faith in and a confession of at least two basic doctrinal truths of Christianity: in order to enter into a saving relationship with Christ and receive eternal life one must have faith in and confess the Lordship of Christ and His resurrection from the grave. In fact, if we unpack the assumption underlying the whole argument, we can conclude that, for anyone to be saved, they must believe the following Christian teaching or doctrine: (1) That there is a God; (2) that what the Bible says gives us an accurate picture of that God and of man, which is (3) that man is a sinner fallen short of the holiness of God and (4) needs saving; and (5) that salvation is available only because of the person and work of Jesus Christ. Moreover, if we continue to read Paul, we find very quickly that even more doctrine needs to be believed, for Paul insists here and everywhere he writes on the subject that in order for the person to be saved the Holy Spirit must convict their hearts as well as their minds. Salvation is of the heart and involves surrender of the will. It is one thing to know what to believe and another to have saving faith in it. It is a tragedy that many people have sat in church for most of their lives, knowing the truth but have never responded in faith

and given their hearts to God. In summation: a certain knowledge of doctrine does have a necessary place for in salvation experience, and so does the immediate work of the Holy Spirit on our minds and hearts to understand, to believe, to accept, and to live by sound doctrine.

Lastly, there is a necessity in God's church to teach doctrine simply because doctrine needs to be taught. Unfortunately many believe that theology is a subject reserved only for the Seminary or University students interested in scholarly biblical studies or for those who may have not read Hebrews 6:1 when it says: *Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection.*

We all want go on to leave the basics behind and progress on to the teaching that leads to the blessing of maturity. But before we move on too quickly we need to ask ourselves: how can we leave the primary doctrines behind if we do not know or have never studied them to begin with? More important, are we not always in danger of going astray in the higher principles we think we have formulated from Scripture when we have gotten it wrong at the elementary level? How, for example, do we know what the gifts of the Spirit mean for us if we do not have a proper understanding of God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and what God wills for redeemed people? A good grounding in the elementary truths of Scripture protects us from being led astray from a so-called "higher knowledge" than conflicts with the elementary principles. We remember a case widely

reported in the news in which a supposedly Holy Spirit-filled preacher convinced a number of women in his church that the Holy Spirit had revealed to him that they ought to have sex with him and the women agreed to this because they believed the Holy Spirit had really revealed this. How much pain these women would have been spared had they been firmly grounded in the basic truths of Scripture which clearly reveal that such sexual relationships are never God's will. There are plenty of other similar stories where quite famous figures in the evangelical and charismatic world have gone astray and attempt to lead many others with them because they, and those to whom they preach, have no solid grounding in the elementary principles of faith.

We should also point out that we are seriously distorting the author of Hebrews if we draw the conclusion that once the elementary principles are taught they were never to be spoken of again. Paul continually reminded the early church of the basic reasons for their faith as he wrote the Corinthians: *Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you — unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He*

was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time. (1 Cor 15:1-8)

The Amplified Bible renders verse 1 of the above passage as: *AND NOW let me remind you [since it seems to have escaped you], brethren, of the Gospel (the glad tidings of salvation) which I proclaimed to you, which you welcomed and accepted and upon which your faith rests. (1 Cor 15:1) AMP*

Paul wasn't shy about going over once again the basics of their faith. Sometimes it is good to teach the rudimentary principles so that we fully understand with an assurance what we believe and why we believe it. We should remind ourselves that Paul's most troublesome church was at Corinth where the congregation had left behind basic teaching to their great shame even though they had a partially sound grasp of the higher things. But it was precisely because they had forgotten about the elementary principles that they were had a misunderstanding of and were misusing the higher things.

This is also why Paul warned the church at Thessalonica: *Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle. (2 Thess 2:15)*

The Greek word Paul used here for traditions is “*paradosis*,” which is defined as “A tradition, doctrine or injunction delivered or communicated from one to another.” (The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament)

Today’s society is changing fast. The traditional Judeo-Christian view of life has been all but dismantled as a basis for western culture. At present the church of our Lord Jesus Christ may be facing some troubled times. When we look at politics, we see new and extreme positions on human relationships and sexuality being thrust upon society at an alarming rate.

From time to time throughout its history the church has been forced to defend its faith in the political arena. As was the early church under the government of Rome, the bride of Christ may soon be faced with the question of who is Lord, Caesar or Christ? What will the church stand on when faced with something that civil government commands that the church knows, or ought to know as children of God, it cannot do?

When God revealed Himself to Moses on Mt Horeb and called him to be His instrument to deliver the Children of Israel, Moses was faced with the challenge of his life. A head-on collision against what may have been the most powerful monarch of his day, Pharaoh, along with his government, his army, his nation, and most of all, Egypt’s gods and all their spiritual darkness.

Yes, God knew about Israel's suffering and the promise that He had made to their forefathers in giving them the land of Canaan, but God begins the conversation by introducing Himself. The first thing Moses needed to understand is who God was. God revealed to Moses (and to us!) that He was not just another manifestation of the god's of Egypt or of any other nation. He was not one of many gods, not even the most powerful God, as if He could have been the head of or CEO of gods Inc. This God, the only God, Yawheh, was the only eternal God who had revealed Himself to the Moses' forefathers as God Almighty and to whom Abraham addressed as the Lord.

Even the name God chose that day is all-important. When Moses asked: ... "when I come to the children of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they say to me, 'What is His name?' what shall I say to them?" (Ex 3:13), God answered: "I AM WHO I AM." (Ex 3:14). This is a title rich in monotheistic, self-existing, independent, omnipotent, sovereign meaning.

As Paul reminded the believers of his day who were also destined to face difficult times ahead: *For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live. (1 Cor 8:5-6)*

If we are to face the future with confidence and joy, we need to know who our God is, what His nature is, what His character is like, what His will is for us, and most of all, how much He loves His children.

In attempting to heal the divides that inevitably come from different bodies of believers trying to come to grips with God's teaching, some theologians have found it helpful to distinguish essential and unessential doctrines. What they mean by essential doctrines are the beliefs that are primary and necessary to the Christian faith. These are baseline, foundational doctrines that must be believed, confessed and adhered to in order to be a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven and a member of the family of Christ. Essential doctrines serve as the basis for all of the rest that we believe. Here are the ones we wish to cover in this work.

Part 1: The Doctrine of General Revelation

Part 2: The Doctrine of Special Revelation

Part 3: The Doctrine of God

Part 4: The Doctrine of Man

Part 5: The Doctrine of Sin

Part 6: The Doctrine of Jesus

Part 7: The Doctrine of Salvation

Part 8: The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit

Part 9: The Doctrine of Angels, Demons and Satan

Part 10: The Doctrine of the Church

Part 11: The Doctrine of Future Events