

It Is Written

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Is There a Difference Between Gospel and Doctrine?

by Stan Cox

Back in the 1970's, brethren were troubled by the teaching of men, the most famous being Carl Ketcherside, who taught a bifurcation of the gospel of Christ and the doctrine of the church. This has long been a popular view held by many in the denominations. If you have ever heard someone say that unity in doctrine is not important so long as we all accept Jesus as our Savior, you have heard this position taken.

Some say, "You have to believe in the resurrected Jesus, but you don't have to agree on whether baptism is for believers or it can include infants too." Or, "You can differ on whether to take the Lord's Supper every Sunday or twice a year." Or, "God doesn't care if you use an mechanical instrument in musical worship or not!"

Ketcherside and his followers sought to give a scriptural rationale for this position. First, they contended that the gospel is preached exclusively to the lost. The gospel, in Ketcherside's view, consisted of seven core facts. Note these words from his pen, "The gospel consists of seven facts about a person. Those facts are the life, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, coronation and glorification of Jesus." (Mission Messenger, Vol. 36, No. 5, pp. 130, 132). All must believe these seven facts in order to be "in fellowship" with God, and as such, with other believers.

However, Ketcherside viewed apostolic doctrine in another light. In his view, the two are absolutely distinct. The gospel is for the lost, and doctrine is for the saved. This leads to the conclusion that as long as one accepts the seven "fundamental facts" he is in fellowship with God. He may be in error doctrinally, but that error does not separate him from God. Thus, unity (fellowship) in diversity. This view did great damage in the Lord's church in that decade.

Views such as this become popular, not because they are valid, but because they are comforting. Brethren have always struggled with the question of fellowship. It is hard to question, and even harder to reject, a person's claim that they are acceptable to God. For many, doing so seems heartless and judgmental. So, "because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; 4 and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables" (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

Some use this rationale for their acceptance of those God rejects, some use others. The common thread is the desire to accept those in error. Having claimed this distinction between doctrine and gospel is invalid, we now offer proof.

First, the Bible actually refers to God's revelation using numerous different terms — not just two. Cecil Willis, in an article for Guardian of Truth Magazine, catalogued the terms. He concludes: "Having enumerated and documented that well over seventy different terms are used in the New Testament to refer to the same Body of Truth, is it not preposterous to try to take only two of those terms ("Gospel" and "Doctrine"), and to try to dichotomize, fragment, compartmentalize them into separate bodies of truth?" (Guardian of Truth, January 2, 1992). Among those terms include: "the faith", "the truth", "the word", "the way", in addition to "doctrine" and "gospel."

Second, where Ketcherside claimed that "preaching" was done to the lost, and "teaching" to the saints, scripture reveals otherwise. For example, Paul talked of preaching to the saints in Rome. His letter was addressed to the saints (cf. Romans 1:7), and yet he told them, "So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek" (Romans 1:15-16).

Conversely, Paul told the Romans that while they were lost in sin, they were led to salvation because they were taught "that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness" (Romans 6:17-18). It is obvious the terms are used interchangeably in scripture.

Third, the scripture clearly reveals that doctrine is a matter of fellowship. Consider John's words, "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. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds" (2 John 9-11). This passage is unanswerable by those who claim a distinction between "doctrine" and "gospel." If they claim that the "doctrine of Christ" in this text is referring to the teaching about Christ Himself, then they must admit that the terms can be used interchangeably. John did not say it was necessary to abide in the "gospel of Christ", he said "doctrine of Christ."

If they contend that the doctrine of Christ is the apostolic doctrine which derived from Christ's authority (the position I hold), they must admit that a failure to abide in doctrine is just cause for the cleaving of fellowship. Either way, their position is untenable.

In fact, the scriptures are replete with admonitions to be pure in doctrine, (cf. 2 Timothy 2:15), and to withdraw from any and all that refuse to hold to that truth (cf. 2 Thessalonians 3:6). While we freely admit that maintaining fellowship only with those who abide in the doctrine of Christ is sometimes hard, it is God's way and must be respected.

The Difficult Part

By Bill Hall

Many, before entering the Lord's service, no doubt feel that once they have been baptized, become accustomed to attending worship periods regularly, and overcome some of their old habits, they will pretty well "have it made" in serving the Lord. Doing these outward services, however, is the easy side of obeying Christ. The difficult side involves that which is within; it involves keeping the heart right.

It is easy to attend the worship periods, but it is difficult to worship, to rid the mind completely of worldly things, and to concentrate fully on the Lord. It is easy to sing, but it is difficult to meditate on the words, making the sentiment of the song one's own sentiment. It is easy to bow the head, but it is difficult to pray. It is easy to eat bread and drink fruit of the vine, but it is difficult to concentrate fully as one should on the suffering of Christ. Sitting through a worship period is not in itself worship, for true worship must proceed from the heart (Ephesians 5:19; John 4:24).

In moral realms, the difficult thing to do is to keep the heart pure. It is relatively easy to refrain from killing, stealing, or committing adultery. After all, one is hindered in such matters by the laws of the land, social pressures, forbidding circumstances, fear of being caught, etc. It is difficult, however, to completely rid the mind of jealousy, selfishness, discontent, lust, hatred, bitterness, a spirit of revenge, etc. Anyone who has ever been jealous of another knows the difficulty involved in cleansing the heart of this terrible sin. So, it is with all the sins of the heart.

It is easy to develop a friendly way and gracious manner with others, but it is difficult to develop genuine love and concern for others within the heart. It is easy to give something to some charity drive, but it is difficult to develop real compassion for the poor. It is easy to say, "Forgive me, Lord," but it is difficult to repent.

The wise man said, "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Proverbs 4:23). This is an essential part of serving the Lord...and the difficult part!

No Apologies Necessary

By Brady Cook

We go out of our way to avoid hurting people's feelings; the last thing we want is strife between us and someone else. However, Paul understood the importance and the impact that piercing words would have on an individual, and he was more than ready to use them if necessary. Making a reference to their correction from past sin, Paul said, in 2 Corinthians 7:8-9, "Even if I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it ... not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led to repentance."

Political correctness and tact always have their place in conversation, but when a person's immortal soul is at stake, manners must be put aside in favor of godly sorrow. Jesus warned His followers that "anyone who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me" (Matthew 10:37). What is our attitude in delivering news about spiritual status to others? Are we hesitant to tell them because of the sorrow it might bring? When is a convenient time to tell them? We must act now, put feelings aside, and approach them as a loving brother or sister that is concerned about their eternal soul.