

Introduction to Doctrine

Perhaps no other single word has been so successfully twisted by the devil today as has the biblical word "doctrine." In the minds of millions, doctrine involves the following concepts:

1. Doctrine is that silly and useless practice of arguing (in the spirit and tradition of medieval monks) such things as "How many angels can dance on the head of pin?" "Could God create a stone so heavy that even he couldn't lift it?" "Could he plant an immovable post in the ground and then throw an unstoppable rock at it?"
2. Doctrine divides, whereas love unites.
3. One cannot mix doctrine with soul-winning.
4. Doctrine is dull and impractical.
5. Doctrine is over the heads of most people.
6. Why learn a lot of doctrine when we don't live up to the light we already have?
7. The key goal is to let the Bible master us, and not spend our energies in mastering the Bible.

In answering these charges, one could say that they are as far removed from the truth as the Babe in Bethlehem is from Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer! Each argument needs but a brief refutation.

1. True biblical doctrine has nothing whatsoever to do with dancing angels, massive rocks, sturdy posts, and speeding stones! The word doctrine, as found in the Bible, refers to the systematic (and often simple) gathering and presentation of the facts concerning any great body of truth.
2. True doctrine does indeed divide. It divides light from darkness, right from wrong, and life from death. But it also unites, for God's love cannot be known or appropriated by sinful men without the involvement of doctrine.
3. These two not only can be mixed, they must be mixed if God's commands are to be followed. It is thrilling to note that the greatest soul winner of all time and the greatest theologian who ever lived were one and the same--the Apostle Paul! The same man who went door to door, pleading with tears for men to accept Christ (Acts 20:20, 21, 26), also wrote some 50 percent of the New Testament, including that most profound of all doctrinal books, the epistle to the Romans.
4. To the contrary, doctrine will put both a fire and a song in the hearts of those who read and heed its tremendous truths.
"And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?" (Lk. 24:32).
"Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" (Eph. 5:19).
"Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand" (Rev. 1:3).
"Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book" (Rev. 22:7).
5. This is simply not true, as refuted by Christ himself. "At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take

my yoke upon you and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Mt. 11:25, 28-30).

6. To follow this twisted logic would mean never to go beyond the first commandment (Ex. 20:3), which says we are to have no gods or interests placed before the true God. But who has not on occasion been guilty of this? Should we therefore conclude that the sixth and seventh commandments (Thou shalt not kill; thou shalt not commit adultery," Ex. 20:13, 14), should not be kept simply because we do not always obey the first commandment?

7. This statement is pious nonsense, for one cannot possibly be even remotely influenced, let alone mastered, by that which he or she knows nothing about. It is true that the goal of Bible study is to become Spirit controlled. But the fruit of the Spirit can never come apart from the root of personal study.

Having listed and answered those objections to studying doctrine, let us now give some important advantages for doing it.

1. Doctrine will help save us from theological food poisoning.

"Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all. 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" (1 Tim. 4:13-16).

"Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils" (1 Tim. 4:1).

"I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables" (2 Tim. 4:1-4).

2. Doctrine will help settle us.

"That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive (Eph. 4:14).

3. Doctrine will acquaint us with the details of God's eternal plan.

a. Concerning the history of Israel.

"Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea" (1 Cor. 10:1).

b. Concerning the restoration of Israel.

"For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in" (Rom. 11:25).

c. Concerning spiritual gifts.

"Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant" (1 Cor. 12:1).

d. Concerning the rapture.

"But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope" (1 Thess. 4:13).

e. Concerning the destruction of this earth.

"But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up" (2 Pet. 3:8, 10).

4. Doctrine helps us edify God.

"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15).

5. Doctrine helps us equip ourselves.

"But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived. But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; and that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3:13-17).

"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Eph. 6:10-17).