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WHAT WE BELIEVE

Foundations Of Christian Doctrine

Someone has said that the most important thing about us is what we believe about God. That is not an overstatement. Beliefs are at the root of everything we do. Those beliefs may be unexamined, illogical, and blindly tied to our desires. But they are constantly fueling and shaping what we do. This is why the highest priority must be given to what we believe and why. Nothing can shape human character more than minds and hearts determined to think right about ourselves, our God, our lives, and our relationships.

Martin R. De Haan II

Managing Editor: David Sper

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IS DOCTRINE KEEPING US APART?

The case against doctrine is growing. An increasing number of people are coming to the conclusion that doctrine is the enemy of the church. Doctrine divides us. It destroys unity and separates family members. It makes it difficult for those who follow Christ to set aside differences and stand together in common purposes of evangelism, discipleship, and social concern. Doctrine is what distinguishes and breaks followers of Christ into thousands of denominations and subgroups.

For this reason, many are pointing out that while doctrine divides, love unites. The implication is that because Christ called us to love one another, and because Christ Himself said that love would be the

distinguishing mark of His people, we cannot afford to let doctrine come between us. As the apostle Paul said, if we don't have love we are like a "clanging cymbal." Without love we are nothing and what we do profits nothing (1 Cor. 13:1-3).

***Doctrine divides.
Love unites.***

We cannot afford to forget, however, that doctrine also unites. Acceptance of the doctrine of Christ is what allows true believers in Christ to find "family" all over the world. Acceptance of the doctrine of the grace of God enables men and women of all ethnic backgrounds and cultural differences to recognize one another as brothers and sisters who are saved by grace through faith alone, in Christ alone.

For the same reasons, love divides. Once we know the truth about who Christ is and what He has done for us, it would be selfish for us to act as though “we are all one” regardless of what we believe about the doctrine of the grace of God. It would be shortsighted to sacrifice the truth for a false sense of unity, just so that we could stand together in social or political consensus.

It was love working together with truth that caused the apostle Paul to write:

I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him

be accursed (Gal. 1:6-8).

Paul knew that forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and adoption into the family of God comes only by grace through faith alone, in Christ alone. Any doctrine of human merit added to what Christ did for us could spell the difference between everlasting life and death. The gospel of Christ makes it clear that you cannot mix faith and works when trusting God for forgiveness and salvation, or when trusting Him for enablement to live as His child.

***Doctrine unites.
Love divides.***

Doctrine can be defined as “principles believed and taught.” By definition, we can’t have Christ without embracing a doctrine of Christ. We need doctrine to

answer questions like:

- Who is God?
- What is He like?
- Does He answer to other names such as Muhammad and Buddha?
- Does He care what we believe about Him?
- Would He send anyone to hell for having a wrong opinion?
- Once knowing Him, how are we to live?

This is why the apostle Paul, who was known for his love, also wrote:

Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. 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. 4:2-4).

Our generation is facing the danger Paul wrote about. The spirit of the age encourages us to accept Christ without bringing us under the lordship of the doctrines of Christ. The

***In Christ, truth
is as essential
as love, and love
is as essential
as truth.***

result is a growing lack of discernment that makes us vulnerable to the “doctrines of demons” (1 Tim. 4:1).

For these reasons, we need foundations of doctrine based not on tradition but on Scripture.

TEN DOCTRINES AND THEIR IMPORTANCE

THE DOCTRINE OF GOD



I. Q. Who is God?

A. God is Yahweh, the one (Dt. 6:4), ultimate (Ps. 97:9; Isa. 40:12-31), eternal Being (Ps. 90:2), who created (Gen. 1:1), rules (Ps. 115:3), and sustains all that exists (Job 38; Acts 17:24-28).

Countless religious substitutes divert worship to themselves. But there is only one Creator and Savior. Because He alone gives life, He deserves our gratitude. Because every heartbeat and circumstance is under His control, He alone deserves

the trust that we habitually place in ourselves, our family, or our finances. Because He is eternal, no one will outlive Him. Because He is the Lord of lords, He is the only one in the universe to whom we must finally answer.

2. Q. How do we know there is a God?

A. The wonders of nature witness to His existence as Creator (Ps. 19:1-4). The inner voice of our conscience testifies to His existence as Lawgiver and Judge (Rom. 1:18-32; 2:12-16). And the love of Christ reveals His existence as Savior and Friend (Jn. 1:1-18; 15:15).

Because God has made Himself self-evident, our problem is not so much to prove His existence as to stop ignoring it (Jn. 3:17-21).

3. Q. How can we define or describe God?

A. God is the one and only (Isa. 44:6), unchangeable (Jas. 1:17), invisible (Col. 1:15), infinite (1 Ki. 8:27), and

perfect (Mt. 5:48) Spirit Being (Jn. 4:24). He is holy (1 Pet. 1:15-16), loving (1 Jn. 4:8-16), and truthful in all that He does (Jn. 3:33). He has lived from all eternity as one God in three distinct persons (Mt. 28:19), and in the course of time He visited us as God in the flesh (Jn. 1:1-14).

He exists with or without our understanding. He can be described truthfully and adequately, but never exhaustively. He is infinitely more, and never less, than we have yet known Him to be.

4. Q. Where do we get the idea that God is one God in three persons?

A. The Bible emphasizes the unity of God (Dt. 6:4; Gal. 3:20; 1 Tim. 2:5; Jas. 2:19), but it also describes Him as three distinct persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—all of whom are fully and equally God (Mt. 28:19; Acts 5:3-4; 2 Cor. 13:14; Heb. 1:8; 1 Pet. 1:2).

5. Q. What do we mean when we say that God is infinite?

A. God is infinite in that He is unlimited (Lk. 1:37). He is unrestricted by time, space, or circumstance. He is eternally timeless (Ps. 90:2; Rev. 22:13), all-powerful (Mt. 19:26), all-knowing (Job 37:16), and everywhere-present (Ps. 139:7-12; Mt. 28:20). Yet He always remains distinct from His creation (Isa. 40:18-26). He is limited only in the sense that He cannot do anything inconsistent with His own goodness (Ti. 1:2; Jas. 1:13).

This means He is vastly different from the gods of Eastern mystics or Western materialists. Their gods are either so small and self-contradictory, or so secular and inclusive that they cannot be distinguished from cows, rats, scorpions, statues, or human thought.

6. Q. What is the comfort of believing

that this triune God is the Creator and Sustainer of everything?

A. This assurance enables us to be patient in trouble (Rom. 5:3-4; Jas. 1:2-4), thankful in prosperity (Phil. 4:10-13), and joyful even in the face of death (Rom. 8:28-39; 2 Cor. 4:7-5:9).

God is ultimately all that we need. While our tendency is to seek satisfaction and significance in lesser persons or pursuits, God alone offers us lasting hope and life.

THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST



I. Q. Who is Jesus Christ?

A. Jesus Christ is the God-man who appeared on our

planet to reveal God (Jn. 1:1-14), to show us how to live (1 Jn. 2:6), and to rescue us from the guilt and power of sin (Rom. 6:1-14). He is Savior (Acts 4:12), Life (Jn. 14:6), and Lord (Rom. 10:9,13) to all who put their trust in Him.

Because of who He is and what He has done for us, Jesus deserves our genuine appreciation, our deepest affection, our complete obedience, and our unconditional loyalty.

2. Q. How does the New Testament affirm that Jesus Christ was genuinely human?

A. The Lord Jesus was born of a woman (Gal. 4:4). He had a human body that developed mentally and physically in the same way that other children do (Lk. 2:40,52). He became tired (Jn. 4:6-8), hungry (Mt. 4:2), and thirsty (Jn. 19:28). He slept (Mt. 8:24). He wept (Jn. 11:35). He was tested (Mt. 4:1-11; Heb. 2:18; 4:15). He

felt anger and grief (Mk. 3:5), compassion (Mt. 9:36), and agony (Lk. 22:44).

Because He endured not only what we endure but far more, He understands and feels what we are going through. Because He lived as a real man, He showed us how to depend on the Holy Spirit for our every need. He modeled the way all of us can depend on God.

3. Q. How does the Bible show that Jesus was not only man but also God?

A. The Bible explicitly states that Jesus is God (Jn. 1:1; Rom. 9:5; 1 Tim. 3:16; Ti. 2:13; Heb. 1:8). Jesus possesses attributes that only God could have: eternity (Jn. 8:58), omnipresence (Mt. 18:20), omniscience (Jn. 16:30), omnipotence (Rev. 1:8), and immutability (Heb. 1:12). Jesus does what only God can do: forgives sin (Mk. 2:1-12), gives life (Jn. 5:21), raises the dead (Jn. 6:39-

40,54; 11:38-44), and executes judgment (Jn. 5:22,27). Jesus was given names and titles of deity: Immanuel, meaning "God with us" (Mt. 1:23); King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev. 19:16); and Son of God (Mt. 26:63-65). Jesus Himself claimed to be God (Jn. 10:30; cp. v.33).

In saying that Jesus is God, the Scriptures state more than we could ever understand. What remains is for us to show by our actions that we believe in One whom we can worship and serve, even though we can't fully understand Him.

4. Q. Why did Jesus die a criminal's death on a Roman cross?

A. Since hanging was a token of supreme humiliation, the triune God decreed that Jesus Christ should die in this manner to portray the fact that He bore God's wrath against the sin of the whole human race (1 Jn. 2:2). Through this humiliating

death, infinite in value because of Christ's deity, our Lord provided an atoning sacrifice (Isa. 53:4-5; Heb. 9:26), satisfied God's justice (Rom. 3:25), and bought our forgiveness (Col. 1:14).

How can we repay Him? We cannot! We are eternally indebted to Him. All we can do is show our love and gratitude by offering ourselves and our service as a living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1-2).

5. Q. How important is Christ's resurrection?

A. Through our Lord's resurrection, God confirmed Jesus as His Son (Rom. 1:4), showed His satisfaction with Christ's sacrifice on our behalf (Rom. 4:25), affirmed Christ's power to give life to those who trust Him (Rom. 8:11), and assured us who believe on Him that someday we too will receive resurrection bodies (1 Cor. 15:20-21).

6. Q. Where is Jesus now and what is He doing?

A. Jesus Christ ascended to heaven 40 days after His resurrection where He has taken a place of honor (Acts 1:9; 2:33). He will remain there until He returns to "catch up" the church (1 Th. 4:13-18) and then later return to the earth as King to judge the world (Mt. 25:31-46) and rule for 1,000 years (Rev. 19:11-20:6).

In the meantime, He is preparing a place for us (Jn. 14:3), interceding for us as our Advocate (Rom. 8:34; 1 Jn. 2:1), sympathetically responding to our needs (Heb. 4:14-16), and functioning as the Head of the church (Eph. 5:23; Col. 1:18).

While one person can say to another, "What have you done for me lately?" such a question would reflect mindless ignorance or ingratitude if expressed to Christ. He constantly and effectively works in our behalf.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT



1. Q. Who is the Holy Spirit?

A. The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity, truly God and therefore co-equal with the Father and the Son (Mt. 28:19; Acts 5:3-4; 2 Cor. 13:14). Since He is spirit, He does not have to be seen or felt in order to be close to us. Since He is holy, He must be met on “holy ground.” This is why people who have not separated themselves from sin lack the awareness of His presence.

2. Q. What were His roles as a member of the Godhead during the Old Testament era?

A. He acted with the

Father and Son in creation (Gen. 1:2), equipped people to do God’s service (Ex. 31:1-5; Num. 11:16-17), renewed nature (Ps. 104:30), came upon Israel’s kings (1 Sam. 16:13), inspired Israel’s prophets and the men who wrote the Scriptures (1 Pet. 1:10-12; 2 Pet. 1:21), and worked in the hearts of people to lead them to believe God and do His will (Acts 7:51).

This shows how willing God is to provide supernatural strength to those who want to serve Him. Those who want to do God’s will don’t have to do it in their own power.

3. Q. What is the Holy Spirit’s relationship to the church, the body of Christ?

A. The Holy Spirit gave birth to the church (Acts 2:1-47), baptizes believers into the church (1 Cor. 12:13), abides in the church (1 Cor. 3:16), unifies the church

(Eph. 2:22; 4:3-4), gives gifts to the church (1 Cor. 12:4-11), provides leaders for the church (Acts 20:28), directs the work of the church (Acts 13:2), and uses the church to hold back or hinder evil in the world (2 Th. 2:7).

*Those who want
to do God's will
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own power.*

Because the Holy Spirit indwells the people of God both individually and collectively, the church should not be thought of as a merely human institution. It should not be taken for granted. It should never be casually dismissed or ignored. In many ways our actions toward the church are actions taken toward God (Acts 5:1-11).

4. Q. What does the Holy Spirit do for those who have not made peace with God?

A. He draws attention to Christ (Jn. 16:13-14), empowers God's messengers (1 Th. 1:5), brings conviction to sinners (Jn. 16:8-11), and produces the new birth (Jn. 3:5; Ti. 3:5).

For these reasons, no person is too bad or too hardened to be converted to Christ. No person is so evil that he cannot be saved. The purpose of God has never been to save only good people or to bring deliverance only to those who were naturally endowed with qualities that would make them desirable prospects for the kingdom of heaven. God sent His Spirit into the world to come to the rescue of all kinds of people—even the very worst and most hateful.

5. Q. What does the Holy Spirit do in the lives of believers?

A. He permanently indwells believers to mark us out as God's possession (Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 6:19). He seals us to guarantee our ultimate salvation (2 Cor. 1:21-22; Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30). He fills us when we yield to Him, giving us power for life and ministry (Acts 6:3; 13:9-12; Eph. 5:18-21). He produces Christian character in us (Gal. 5:22-23). He teaches us (1 Cor. 2:10). He intercedes for us when we cannot pray (Rom. 8:26-27). He enables us to discern false teaching about Christ (1 Jn. 2:20-27). He assures us that we are God's children (Rom. 8:16). He equips us to serve one another (Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12:1-31). He guides us (Rom. 8:14).

We are inclined to assume that what we see in the mirror is what counts. But what really counts is what the Holy Spirit can do in a heart that is given unreservedly to Him.

6. Q. In what ways can we harm ourselves by sinning against the Holy Spirit?

A. We are warned about sinning against the Holy Spirit by grieving Him through disobedience (Eph. 4:30), lying to Him (Acts 5:3), quenching Him with a negative attitude (1 Th. 5:19), resisting Him (Acts 7:51), and insulting Him (Heb. 10:29).

*We need the
Holy Spirit far
more than we think
we do.*

For this reason, we should be far more concerned about maintaining a good relationship with the Spirit than we are about staying on good terms with our spouse, children, parents, employer, or friends.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE BIBLE



I. Q. What sets the Bible apart from all other books?

A. The Bible in its entirety was written by men who were inspired by God (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21). And because it is inspired (lit. “breathed out”) by God, the original documents are without error of any kind (Jn. 17:17). It is authoritative in all matters of faith and conduct (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

This book is like no other book in the world. It is a record of the life and work of the most important Person in the universe. Behind the pages, storylines, events, and people of His book, He waits

to meet personally with every honest seeker. While the natural world reveals God’s power, majesty, and wisdom, the Bible reveals His plan of personal, eternal salvation. It is the Author of this book and what He offers His readers that make the Bible so timeless and important.

2. Q. How do we know that the Bible we hold in our hands accurately represents the original documents that go back more than 3,500 years?

A. The amazing similarity of thousands of well-preserved manuscript copies gives strong evidence that they accurately reflect the originals. We can be confident that if God inspired a book to reveal Himself, He would oversee the preservation of that book.

3. Q. What evidence can we give to support the claim that the Bible is the inspired Word of God?

A. Christ repeatedly expressed confidence in the reliability of the Jewish Scriptures—the 39 books of the Old Testament (Mt. 5:17-18; Lk. 24:27,44). In the fourth century, the church fathers declared these 39 books plus the 27 books of the New Testament to be divinely inspired, authoritative, and complete.

While the doctrine that the Scriptures are the inspired and inerrant Word of God is a matter of faith, it is a reasonable faith. The unity of the message of these books written over a period of about 1,600 years is astounding. Its accuracy of historical detail, its completeness of storyline, its amazingly fulfilled prophecies, its beneficial impact on society, and its transforming power in the lives of those who read it believably are such powerful testimonies that it is actually unreasonable not to believe in the inspired Scriptures.

The best reason to believe in the Bible is that Jesus Christ, the perfect God-man, believed in it (Mt. 12:39-42; 19:4-5; Lk. 17:26-29). The most personal reason to believe is found by each individual in the wisdom, rightness, and strength that comes from following the Bible.

4. Q. How can we understand the Bible?

A. By asking the help of its divine Author, by seeking to determine what its human authors meant, by interpreting it literally and in context as we would any other book, and by submitting humbly to its message.

5. Q. What should we do when we encounter a Bible passage we can't understand or verses that seem to contradict one another?

A. If after serious study we can't find the answer or solution, we should proceed to other passages with the assurance that the problem is

with us, and that someday, either on earth or in heaven, our difficulty will be eliminated.

THE DOCTRINE OF SALVATION



1. Q. What is salvation?

A. Salvation is deliverance from the penalty, pollution, and power of sin (Rom. 6:14,23; Ti. 3:4-6). It is eternally more important than being saved from fire, deep water, illness, or loneliness. While most people struggle to be saved from social embarrassment, poor health, poverty, or personal discouragement, the issue of their eternal well-being is usually overlooked or minimized.

2. Q. What is sin?

A. Sin is any thought, word, or deed that either violates or falls short of complete conformity to God's holy laws (Rom. 3:23; 1 Jn. 3:4). In short, Jesus and His apostles taught that sin is anything that doesn't reflect selfless love for God and others.

3. Q. What has God done to provide salvation?

A. He became a member of the human race in the person of Jesus Christ (Jn. 1:1,14), lived sinlessly as our substitute to fulfill God's righteous demands (2 Cor. 5:21), suffered and died on the cross to bear the penalty for our sins (Mt. 20:28; Rom. 4:23-25; 1 Cor. 15:3-4), and rose from the grave to break the power of death and defeat Satan (Acts 2:24; Heb. 2:14-15).

In other words, He accepted full responsibility to pay the price for the

consequences of our sin. Although Christ actually took our place, His suffering was shared by the Father and the Spirit. Certainly they deeply felt the pain of seeing one so dearly loved experience such terrible humiliation and agony.

The rescue offered by God is eternally more important than being saved from any other kind of debt, disease, or death.

4. Q. For whom did Christ die?

A. Jesus Christ died for all, even for those who will not believe on Him (Jn. 3:16; 1 Tim. 2:4-6; Heb. 2:9; 2 Pet. 2:1; 1 Jn. 2:2). He died for

those who are sinners by nature (Ps. 51:5), disobedient by choice (Rom. 3:23; Col. 1:21; Ti. 3:3), spiritually dead (Eph. 2:1,5), unable to please God (Rom. 8:8), and under His wrath and condemnation (Jn. 3:36; Rom. 1:18; 3:19).

Christ died for people who have nothing to offer Him but brokenness and need. He died for people who have fallen far short of their original purpose to know Him (Jn. 17:3), to glorify Him (1 Cor. 10:31), and to enjoy Him forever (Rev. 7:15-17; 21:1-4).

5. Q. Who will be saved?

A. From the divine perspective, God saves those whom He has chosen from before the foundation of the world (Acts 13:48; Rom. 8:30; Eph. 1:4; 2 Th. 2:13; 2 Tim. 1:9). From the human viewpoint, salvation is legitimately offered to everyone and is freely given to all who believe on Jesus Christ (Mt. 11:28; Jn. 1:12;

3:15-16,36; 6:40,47;
11:25-26; 20:31; Acts 16:31;
Rom. 10:9-10).

Our part is not to understand the mind and mystery of God but to gratefully accept His undeserved love. Of this we can be sure: All who sincerely want to be saved and who accept the invitation to believe in Christ will never be turned away (Jn. 6:37). In time and eternity they will learn that they came because of the choosing, urging, and drawing of the Father (Jn. 6:39,44,65).

6. Q. On what does God base His choosing of some and not others for salvation?

A. God sovereignly chooses according to His own good pleasure (Eph. 1:4-11). Although His choice is in harmony with His foreknowledge (1 Pet. 1:2), it is not based on it. If God did not take the initiative, no one would believe and choose Him (Jn. 6:44).

7. Q. Does divine election do away with human freedom and responsibility?

A. No! God is sovereign and man is both free and responsible. We cannot fully harmonize these truths, but we must accept both of them in humility and faith.

This requires reasonable trust in God. A human parent expects his small child to trust his parental judgment when that child is not able to see the big picture. Shouldn't we grant the infinite God that same consideration and respect?

8. Q. How do we receive salvation?

A. By faith alone. Neither zealous commitment to good works (Eph. 2:8-10; Rom. 4:1-12) nor careful observance of religious ritual (Gal. 3:1-9) play a part in obtaining salvation.

Salvation is not found in our efforts for God but in trusting God's efforts for us.

As important as it is to go to church, a 50-year record of perfect attendance would not help us qualify in any way for heaven. God does not require our money, our attendance, our prayers, or our songs. All He requires is that we place our trust in Christ. On that basis He gives salvation. Everything else follows.

9. Q. What is the repentance called for by John the Baptist, Jesus, Paul, and Peter? (Mt. 3:1-2; 4:17; Acts 2:38; 20:21).

A. Repentance is that change of attitude about one's self, one's sin, and God, which involves the whole personality—mind, emotions, and will. In varying degrees, it always accompanies true faith. Sorrow for sin often accompanies it and helps give evidence that genuine repentance has occurred (2 Cor. 7:9-10).

10. Q. What is saving faith?

A. It is personal trust in God. It is believing that He, on the basis of Christ's substitutionary death and resurrection, forgives and accepts all who trust in Jesus Christ and rely on Him alone for salvation (Rom. 3:21-26; 4:1-25; 5:1-2; Eph. 2:8-10).

It is therefore not what I do but what I believe that counts. If what I believe is right, doing right will follow. Good works are the fruit and the evidence (Eph. 2:10; 1 Jn. 3:7-10), not the ground or the cause.

11. Q. What does the Bible mean when it speaks of our justification? (Rom. 5:1-2).

A. The Greek word Paul used is a legal term meaning "to be declared righteous." It depicts the action of God as Judge. When we believe on Jesus, He declares us righteous (Rom. 3:24-26), free from condemnation (Acts 13:38-39; Rom. 4:8; 8:1), and restored to His favor (Rom. 5:9-11).

No human court has ever offered a decision of mercy, pardon, or acquittal that deserves more celebration than the justification God offers to every person who believes in Jesus.

*Good works
are the evidence
of salvation,
not the basis.*

12. Q. What is sanctification?

A. Sanctification, which in the Greek language means “set apart,” begins as an act of God by which He sets apart for Himself those who trust Christ (1 Cor. 6:11; 2 Th. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:2). This *positional* sanctification on God’s part calls for us to respond in *practical* sanctification—an ever

increasing separation of ourselves from sin and a continual growth in holiness (2 Cor. 7:1; 1 Pet. 1:15-16; 2 Pet. 3:18).

God’s command to be holy is as fitting to a Christian as the insistence of a mother who requires that her children, the dog, and her husband not track mud, tar, paint, and grease into the house.

13. Q. What is redemption?

A. Redemption is our salvation viewed from the perspective of the price Jesus paid to rescue us. He redeemed us from the law (Rom. 7:6) and from its penalty (Gal. 3:13), from our bondage to sin (Rom. 6:6,11,18,22; Ti. 2:14), and from the domain of Satan (Col. 1:13-14). He did so through His death on the cross, the act by which He met the demands of God’s holy nature (Mt. 20:28; Eph. 1:7; 1 Pet. 1:18-19).

THE DOCTRINE OF CHRISTIAN LIVING



I. Q. What is Christian living?

A. It is love-controlled conduct that is grounded in and flows from our personal relationship with Christ. As we grow in our understanding of how much He loves us, we will grow in our ability to love God above all else and to love our neighbor as ourselves (Mt. 22:37-39; Jn. 13:34; Rom. 13:8-10; 1 Cor. 13).

Nothing is as important as Christlike love—not knowledge, not religious observance, not ability, not rule-keeping, not appearance, not personal sacrifice. While we may be ignorant without

truth, we are nothing without Christ and His love.

2. Q. What are the evidences of a relationship with Christ?

A. Those who know what it means to love Christ and to be loved by Him will be marked by deep gratitude to God (Col. 3:12-17), regular conversation with Him (1 Th. 5:17), patient trust in Him (1 Pet. 1:6-9), humble submission to Him (Jas. 4:6-10), and careful attention to love others as He has loved us (1 Jn. 4:7,11).

All of this is beyond our ability to do in our own strength. But it is the normal result of letting Christ, by His Spirit, live His life through us (Gal. 2:20; 5:16,22-25; Eph. 3:16-21; 5:18).

3. Q. How can we communicate with God?

A. By regularly and prayerfully expressing our own hearts to God (Mt. 6:5-

15) and by carefully listening to Him speak to us through His written Word (Ps. 119; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; Heb. 4:12).

4. Q. What are the conditions for effective prayer?

A. God answers our prayers when we pray in faith (Mt. 17:20), according to His will (1 Jn. 5:14), with a pure heart (Ps. 66:18), with a forgiving spirit (Mk. 11:25-26), in the Spirit (Eph. 6:18), and with absolute sincerity (Ps. 145:18).

5. Q. Why is patient trust so essential to the Christian life?

A. God is honored and will honor us when we patiently trust His wisdom, power, and goodness no matter how fiery our trials, how deep our griefs, how excruciating our pain, or how unexplainable His ways are to us (Job 1:20-22; 13:15; 19:25-27; 23:10; 2 Cor. 4:16-18; Jas. 1:2-4; 1 Pet. 1:6-9; 4:12-19).

6. Q. If love fulfills the

law, why must we keep God's commandments?

A. The commands of the Bible are God's guidelines to show us how we can live out in daily practice the love we have for Him and our neighbors (Mt. 22:37-40; Rom. 13:8-10; 1 Jn. 5:3).

Those who do not meditate on the Word of God will soon become distracted and preoccupied with lesser thoughts, routines, and details. They will become more concerned with their own desires than with the physical, spiritual, and eternal needs of others.

7. Q. Why is telling others about Jesus an important element in Christian living?

A. Christ commanded it (Mt. 28:19-20), and the eternal needs of others demand it (Rom. 1:16-17; 10:8-17). It is impossible to love others as Christ does without being concerned about their deep, everlasting

need. To love others as Christ loves them might involve more than being concerned about their eternal and spiritual well-being. But it cannot involve less.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH



I. Q.What is the church?

A. The church is the body of Christ. The term *church* in the New Testament sometimes refers to the entire body of people—past, present, and future—who through faith in the Lord Jesus make up the organism called the body of Christ, the universal church (Eph. 1:22-23; 5:23-32; Heb. 12:23). At other times the same Greek

word *ekklesia* (which means “a called-out group”) refers to a local assembly of believers (Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 1:2; 16:19; Gal. 1:2; 1 Th. 1:1).

In either case, the church should be as important to us as it is to Christ. It is far more than brick and mortar. Its people together make up the body of Christ. Its members both individually and collectively house the Spirit of Christ.

2. Q.When did the church begin?

A. The church was born on the Day of Pentecost, 50 days after our Lord’s resurrection, when the Holy Spirit came on a small number of disciples, baptizing them into one body and filling them with His power (Acts 2:1-13).

By this act, God temporarily set aside the nation of Israel as His primary means of revealing Himself to the world. In Israel’s place, the Lord chose

to work through an international body of people who were united not by national affiliation but by personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:27-29; Eph. 2:13–3:10).

3. Q. What are the officers of the local church?

A. Two: bishops (elders) and deacons. Their qualifications are given in 1 Timothy 3:1-13. Turmoil, confusion, and spiritual dissension occur as a result of not taking the spiritual qualifications of church leaders as seriously as the apostle Paul did. Their role is not merely administrative—serving on committees and exercising authority. They are to provide the church with examples of spiritual maturity and Christlikeness.

4. Q. What is the meaning of church baptism?

A. Baptism in the name of the triune God (Mt. 28:19)

testifies to the believer's faith (Acts 2:38; 8:37-38), symbolizes the washing away of his sins (Acts 22:16), and expresses the believer's identification with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection and his intention to live a Christ-exalting life (Rom. 6:1-23).

This is far more than induction into a fraternity or club. No other ceremony deserves to be compared with the importance of this act of public identification with Christ and His people.

5. Q. What is the meaning of the Lord's Supper?

A. The Lord's Supper is a church observance in which believers share bread and the cup as a memorial to Christ's crucified body and shed blood (Mt. 26:26-29; 1 Cor. 11:23-26).

By vividly reminding us of the price Jesus paid to save us, Communion calls us to self-examination and spiritual

renewal. While it has no saving power, it is not to be observed carelessly or indifferently (1 Cor. 11:27-34).

6. Q. What is the local church to do when a member continues to live in sin despite repeated warnings?

A. The church is to confront such a person lovingly about his sin. If all attempts at correction are resisted, the church is to disassociate itself from the member with the hope and prayer that such action will result in his repentance and return (Mt. 18:15-20; 1 Cor. 5:1-13).

If this were done more consistently and lovingly, individual members of the church would not think it a light or casual thing to live in sin while identifying with the Lord Jesus Christ.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAMILY



1. Q. What is a family?

A. A family is the basic building block of society. It begins when a man and woman become husband and wife, and it normally grows as children are born to them (Ps. 127; 128).

When God's regulations for the honor and preservation of the family are ignored, society unravels. Divorce, premarital and extramarital sex, unwed mothers, abusive husbands, negligent wives, and rebellious children combine to signal the fall of a civilization.

2. Q. Why did God institute marriage?

A. God ordained marriage

as a lifelong and exclusive union of a man and woman to enrich one another (Gen. 2:18-24), to fulfill mutual longings for intimacy (1 Cor. 7:1-5; Heb. 13:4), and to provide a godly home as the proper setting for the procreation and nurturing of children (Ps. 127; 128).

When marriage loses its God-given honor, husbands, wives, and children all experience the deep wounds of neglect and rejection. A relationship designed for help, comfort, and encouragement becomes a primary source of pain, dissatisfaction, and insecurity.

3. Q. What are the responsibilities of a husband to his wife?

A. To love her sacrificially as Christ loved the church (Eph. 5:25), to commit himself to a lifetime relationship (Gen. 2:24; Mt. 19:4-6), to be understanding toward her (1 Pet. 3:7), and to care for her (Eph. 5:28-30).

It's not easy to be the kind of husband God intended. Nowhere is a man's character tested more intensely. Nowhere is there a greater need for the grace and inner strength of Christ.

4. Q. What are the responsibilities of a wife to her husband?

A. To submit to him as to the Lord (Eph. 5:22-24), to love him (Ti. 2:4-5), to be considerate of his desire for intimacy (1 Cor. 7:3-5), to be sexually faithful (Ti. 2:5), and to respect him as the head of the home (Eph. 5:33).

It's not easy to be the kind of wife God intended. Nowhere is a woman's character tested more intensely. Nowhere is there a greater need for the grace and inner strength of Christ.

5. Q. What are the responsibilities of parents to their children?

A. By their example as well as by what they say,

parents are to instruct their children in Bible truth (Dt. 6:4-9) and impart to them a fear of evil and a desire for godliness (Prov. 1:8-10; 3:1-8; 4:1-9; 22:6). They are to do this in a kind, gentle way, and back up their teaching by their own conduct so that their children will be inclined to follow them instead of being provoked to anger (Eph. 6:4).

6. Q. What is the responsibility of children to their parents?

A. Paul commanded children to obey and honor their parents (Eph. 6:1-3). He also taught that older children have a financial responsibility to assist their parents if they become unable to provide for themselves (1 Tim. 5:4).

THE DOCTRINE OF THE SPIRIT WORLD



1. Q. What is the spirit world?

A. It is that invisible realm inhabited by holy angels who actively serve God for our good (Heb. 1:14) and by Satan's demonic forces who oppose God and seek to harm us (Eph. 6:12).

Its existence is one of the primary reasons that things in our world are not always as they seem. Our challenge is far greater than merely to deal with the visible details of life. Our primary struggle for well-being does not depend just on our flesh-and-blood relationships but on unseen friends and enemies as well.

2. Q. What are angels?

A. Angels are created (Ps. 148:1-5), powerful (Ps. 103:20), personal (Lk. 1:26-38; 15:10), deathless (Lk. 20:36), spirit beings (Heb. 1:14) designed to worship (Heb. 1:6) and serve the Lord (Ps. 103:20), and to minister to believers (Heb. 1:14).

While natural observation does not reveal their importance to us, faith in the Word of God assures us that God's sovereign provision in our lives is often mediated by these invisible servants. Even more astounding is the assurance of the Scriptures that they do not always remain invisible. Because of this, the letter to the Hebrews urges us, "Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels" (Heb. 13:2).

3. Q. Who is Satan?

A. Satan is an especially powerful angel who rebelled against God. His act of rebellion is not described directly in the Bible but is

alluded to in Isaiah's description of the king of Babylon (14:12-15) and Ezekiel's reference to the king of Tyre (28:11-19). He is also referred to in the Bible as the devil, Lucifer, Beelzebub, Belial, serpent, dragon, ruler of this world, god of this age, prince of the power of the air, angel of light, accuser, tempter, deceiver, murderer, liar, and evil one.

Because of his constant activity against God and the people of God, he is a far greater threat to us than any other enemy, personal or national.

4. Q. Who are the demons?

A. Demons are fallen angels who apparently joined Satan in his rebellion. Some are active as members of Satan's army (Eph. 6:12) while others have been imprisoned by God (2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6).

These personal agents of Satan's evil empire can stimulate and arouse the

worst capacities and desires within us. They don't make us evil, but they willingly dominate those who refuse to surrender their hearts to God.

5. Q. What are the activities of Satan?

A. With the help of his demon followers, he plants false Christians among the true (Mt. 13:24-30; 2 Cor. 11:13-15). He seeks to devour the Lord's people (1 Pet. 5:8). He falsely accuses God's children (Job 1:6-12; 2:1-5; Zech. 3:1-10; Rev. 12:10). He rules over the unsaved world (Jn. 12:31; 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:2). He deceives people through his outright lies (Jn. 8:44) and his cleverly designed thought-systems (2 Cor. 4:4; 11:14-15; Col. 2:8,20-23; 1 Tim. 4:1-3; 1 Jn. 2:15-17; 5:19). And he can possess nonbelievers (Mk. 5:1-13; 6:13; Acts 5:16; 16:16-18; 19:11-12).

We are constantly interacting with the workings of this evil strategist. Often,

like Peter (Mt. 16:23), we are so unaware of the ways of God that even our good intentions can serve Satan's purposes. For that reason we must continually depend on the Lord's ability to lead us.

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6. Q. What did Christ do to assure the ultimate defeat of Satan and his forces?

A. By His death and resurrection, the Lord Jesus broke Satan's power (Col. 2:14-15; Heb. 2:14-15). So the devil and his forces operate today as defeated foes who know they are doomed to the lake of fire (Mt. 8:29; Jas. 2:19; Rev. 20:10).

It is absolutely essential to keep in mind that Satan's final outcome is a foregone conclusion. His predetermined fate is a terrible reality that should help us to avoid either carelessness or despair.

7. Q. How can we defeat Satan?

A. We who have placed our trust in Christ can overcome Satan in our daily lives by submitting to God and resisting the devil (Jas. 4:7; 1 Pet. 5:8-9); by being aware of his strategy and avoiding the sins that give him a foothold in our lives (1 Cor. 7:5; 2 Cor. 2:10-11; Eph. 4:26-27; 1 Tim. 3:6-7); by putting on the full armor of God (Eph. 6:11-18); and by totally rejecting all forms of occult activity, including magic, spiritism, and witchcraft (Lev. 19:26,31; 20:6,27; Dt. 18:10-12; Isa. 8:19; Mic. 5:12; Gal. 5:19-21; Rev. 21:8; 22:15).

THE DOCTRINE OF THE FUTURE



1. Q. What happens when a person dies?

A. The person's soul-spirit leaves his body and goes either to Hades, where he consciously awaits resurrection, judgment, and eternal punishment, or to heaven, where he consciously awaits resurrection, judgment, and eternal reward (Lk. 16:19-31; Jn. 5:28-29; 2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:21-24; Heb. 9:27).

This universal and personal fact should constantly influence and shape our attitude toward the present. Each of us lives on the edge of a future that is continuously devouring the present and entombing it in the past.

2. Q. When will believers receive their resurrection bodies?

A. Believers in the church age, both living and dead, will receive their resurrection bodies when Christ returns at the rapture—that time when He comes back to catch up living believers and conclude the church age (1 Cor. 15:52-58; 1 Th. 4:13-18). Old Testament believers will receive their resurrection bodies immediately following the great tribulation (Dan. 12:1-3).

These new bodies will last forever. Our present struggles to cope with the problems of disease, handicap, and physical appearance are temporary inconveniences, not permanent injustices.

3. Q. When will Christ return to catch up believers and conclude the church age?

A. It may take place at any moment, at a time when many will not expect Him

(Mt. 24:44). Therefore, we should always be ready (Mt. 24:45–25:30) and living in such a way that we will not be ashamed when Jesus returns (1 Jn. 2:28–3:3).

*Our present
problems should
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4. Q. What will take place on earth in the absence of the church?

A. The world will go through a time of confusion and distress marked by the rise of a world ruler depicted in Scripture as the “beast,” “man of sin,” and “Antichrist,” who will blaspheme God’s name and persecute all who turn to

Jesus (2 Th. 2:1-12; 1 Jn. 4:1-3; Rev. 13:1-18). While he is violently opposing God, he and the rest of mankind will experience supernatural judgments from heaven (Rev. 6-19). He will be defeated by Christ Himself at His return (Rev. 19:11-21).

5. Q. Why will God send supernatural judgments on the earth during this time?

A. God will use these judgments to display His wrath against the wickedness of unrepentant mankind (Isa. 13:6-16; Rev. 16:4-21), to lead a great multitude to saving faith in Christ (Rev. 7:9-17), to bring about the conversion of the nation of Israel (Ezek. 36; 37), and to bring in a golden age when Israel's promised Messiah will rule as King of the earth for 1,000 years (Isa. 2:1-4; 11:1-10; Jer. 33:14-16; Rom. 11:25-27; Rev. 20:1-6).

6. Q. How will Christ's earthly kingdom end?

A. After 1,000 years, God will release Satan (Rev. 20:7) and give mankind one more opportunity to choose between obeying Him or the devil. Multitudes will make the wrong choice and join in one last rebellion (Rev. 20:8-9). At this time, God will supernaturally defeat His foes (Rev. 20:9-10), purge the present earth-system with fire (2 Pet. 3:10-13), and assign Satan, fallen angels, and all Christ-rejecting persons to eternal punishment in the lake of fire (Rev. 20:10-15). Then He will create a new heaven and a new earth where those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life will serve Him forever (Rev. 21:1-22:5).

In this light, our Lord said, "What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mk. 8:36-37).

WITHOUT LOVE WE ARE NOTHING

As we conclude, let's remember that right doctrine cannot exist without love. We can't think rightly unless our thoughts are motivated by the love of God.

*Knowledge
minus love
equals nothing.*

It's easy to forget this. It's hard to remember that knowledge without love is like a head without a body. Too often, those who know their doctrine are marked more by self-centeredness and arrogance than by approachability and love.

Paul knew that while knowledge puffs up, love

builds up (1 Cor. 8:1). He knew that all of the knowledge in the world minus love equals nothing. He wrote, "Though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge . . . but have not love, I am nothing" (1 Cor. 13:2).

Then the apostle went on to describe the love that will show whether or not we have right thinking. He wrote:

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails (1 Cor. 13:4-8 NIV).

It's love that motivates us to correct misbelief and to pursue the truth of God.

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