

Doctrine Divides? Or Doctrine Unites?

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Doctrine unites? A strange saying, you may think, because everyone knows that doctrine divides. Many churches say, "We have no creed but Christ." Sounds so Biblical, pious and sincere, doesn't it? But someone might ask you: "Who is this Christ? How is he God and Man? How did he save us? From what did he save us? How can one man crucified on the cross save a multitude of people?" What would you say then?

Many evangelicals even say that it doesn't matter what you believe, as long as you're sincere, and as long as you live a Christian life. But if you don't know what the Bible says about God, man, sin, salvation, prayer, or the church, how do you live a "Christian life"? Or how do you even know you're a Christian? Aren't Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, etc., sincere in living their religion's life?

I don't care who you are,

Where you're from,

*What you did,*¹

As long as you love me. ~ Backstreet Boys

If you had a girl friend, you would say, "I love Jane so much!" But when someone asks, "Who's Jane? What's she like? Where is she from?" do you answer, "I don't know anything about her, but I know I love her." I hope none of you gives an answer like that about your beloved!

Christ's commission to his apostles is "*make disciples of all nations ... teaching them [didasko] to observe all that I have commanded you.*"² If you don't know much about Jesus and what he teaches us in the Bible, what would you teach others?

We Protestants distinguish ourselves from Roman Catholics by saying that we are justified by faith alone in Christ alone, not by works. How are we justified by faith alone? Obviously, only a handful of American evangelicals know what that means: more than 70 percent of them believe that man is basically good!¹

Doctrine [*didaskalia*] is extremely important to Paul, using it 19 times. He warns us of those who teach false doctrine:

Romans 16:17: I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the **doctrine** that you have been taught; avoid them.

Ephesians 4:14: so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of **doctrine**, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

1 Timothy 1:3: As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different **doctrine**.

1 Timothy 6:3-4: If anyone teaches a different **doctrine** and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing.

¹ R. C. Sproul, "The Pelagian Captivity of the Church," *Modern Reformation*, May/June 2001, Vol. 10 No. 3, 22-23, 26-29.

And Paul also exhorts Christians, especially pastors, to train, teach, and follow sound doctrine [*didaskalia*]:

1 Timothy 4:6: If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good **doctrine** that you have followed.

Titus 1:9: He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound **doctrine** and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

Titus 2:1: But as for you, teach what accords with sound **doctrine**.

Titus 2:10: ... but showing all good faith, so that in everything they may adorn the **doctrine** of God our Savior.

If Mormons unite around their Book of Mormon, Muslims around their Qur'an, Masons around the Masonic Creed, why then do evangelicals loathe Christian creeds and doctrines? I submit that this isn't because of piety or sincerity, but because of Biblical illiteracy (i.e., laziness in studying the Bible), and fear of controversy and of offending others. We really don't know what to say to others who ask us about the whats, whys, and hows of our beliefs.

Here's a glimpse of American teens' Biblical illiteracy:

Claims:

1/3 claim to be "born again"

88 percent say they're "Christian"

60 percent says the Bible is totally accurate

Yet:

more than half believe Jesus committed sins while he was on earth

60 percent claim good works is the way to heaven

2/3 say Satan is just a symbol of evil

only 6 percent believe in moral absolutes

91 percent of "born again" teens reject absolute truth

60 percent of evangelical teens say all religions teach equally valid truths.²

This is a direct result of fun and games masquerading as youth ministry, psychobabble as sermon, coffee hour as Sunday school, opinion polls as Bible study, and happy-clappy concerts as worship (or school chapel). "The vast majority of teens who call themselves Christians haven't been well educated in religious doctrine and therefore don't really know what they believe," says Christian Smith, a University of Notre Dame sociologist.³

Welcome to the wonderful (or shall I say, wonder-less), mindless world of evangelicalism!

² Dale Buss, "Christian Teens? Not Very," *Wall Street Journal*, July 9, 2004.

³ Sonja Steptoe, "In Touch With Jesus," *Time*, October 29, 2006.