

Unity in Our Doctrine

I Corinthians 1:10-2:5

Today our topic is one that is not popular among some Christians. They don't like it because it is to confining, too dogmatic. Many church leaders avoid the topic when preaching because it can be divisive. They avoid it because many in their congregations don't want to be bored with it. They think it's as dry as a piece of day old toast. They would rather hear about things that may be more relevant or entertaining. They avoid it because it doesn't draw a crowd when it's announced before such a series begins.

But I want to suggest to you that unless we discuss it and hold to it there cannot be unity in the church. We can have unity in every other area of the church, but if we fail at this, we fail as a church and we will fall as a church. Our topic for today is about unity in our doctrine.

Doctrine simply means something taught. If you read **II Timothy 3:16** in the KJV translates the word **"doctrine"**. In the NIV it is translated **"teaching"**.

It comes from the Greek word *didache* and can have two meanings.

It can refer to what is taught or it can refer to the act of teaching.

When the word is translated to mean what is taught it stresses the authority of what is taught. We might go so far as to call it dogma.

According to the dictionary, doctrine is the principles or creeds of a religion. What we believe. Doctrine can also be the principles or creeds of a political group.

Doctrinal beliefs are carefully worked out principles that are taught and advocated by its adherents.

Doctrine becomes dogma when it is handed down by one authority to another as true and indisputable. Doctrine becomes a tenet when it defends what is taught.

Doctrine becomes the framework that guides the decisions of a church or organization. It guides what is taught and believed by its members.

Here is my opinion. The church is in the state it's in because it is not anchored to its doctrinal beliefs. Rather than doctrine shaping the church, the church has shaped the doctrine. The church has gone adrift from its moorings.

Let me give you a recent example. I don't agree with a lot the Catholic church teaches, but I have agreed with their stand on the sanctity of marriage between a man and a woman. This past week an article was released stating that the Catholic Church is conducting a survey, the results of which they will use in an upcoming meeting by Cardinals. The meeting will address how the Catholic Church can effectively provide pastoral care to the modern family including same-sex couples.

If they cave in to the popular opinion about that lifestyle being acceptable then it won't be long for them to deviate from other long held doctrines.

Many churches have changed their doctrine because they no longer believe that the Bible is infallible, inspired or authoritative.

Many have come to believe that Jesus was just an ordinary man with extra-ordinary abilities and have denied the virgin birth.

Many have changed their view on the idea of salvation as solely of God through the redemptive work of Christ on the cross who paid for the debt of our sin by His own blood, but who rose again.

Instead they believe that whatever your faith God will accept you into heaven.

Many churches have no problem changing their doctrine to fit the changing world we live in.

One day an art enthusiast came home with a painting of the Leaning Tower of Pisa and hung it in his study behind his desk. One morning he came in and noticed that the painting was tilted so he straightened out the frame. The next morning he

came in and found it tilted again. He straightened it again. This happened for a number of days. Finally he asked his house keeper if she was tilting the frame. She admitted that she did because she thought the tower should be straight.

Many people want to tilt doctrine to their own liking to justify their actions or opinions. Scripture is always hung right just the way it is without our attempts at making it the way we think it should be. Cain did that with his sacrifice of grain. The Israelites did that with their worship of golden calves.

Doctrine is indispensable to Christianity. Without it Christianity does not exist. It would be like taking oxygen or water away from humans. Without either one we will die.

Oswald Chambers has written that “It is vastly important to remember that our duty is to fit our doctrines to our Lord Jesus Christ and not to fit our Lord into our doctrines.” Rather than being the main dish, we used Him as the salt to flavor what we have made the main dish.

Isn't that the problem today with many churches? It seems they are about changing their view on Scripture to fit what they believe instead of shaping their beliefs around what Scripture says.

A couple of years ago I was visiting my cousins. We were out on a hayride and one cousin asked me what kind of church we were. I told him we were a non-denominational church, not affiliated with any denomination. He said he liked non-denominational churches because they aren't dogmatic. I took that to mean we are tolerant of any beliefs. That couldn't be further from the truth.

Our church spent a considerable amount of time crafting a doctrinal statement. This morning I would like for us to reaffirm our doctrinal beliefs by repeating them aloud. It's a good reminder of what

we believe. I've included a copy in your bulletin for you to stick in your Bible. Let's read them together aloud.

We believe the Scriptures are the Word of God, divinely inspired through men, and are, in the original form, without error or contradiction.

We believe in one God eternally and equally existing in three Persons, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

We believe that Salvation is ours by faith in the accomplished work of Jesus Christ on the cross. We believe that He died in our place as a payment for our sins, and that He was buried and rose again the third day as proof that He had victory over death and the grave. We believe that Jesus Christ is the only one who can and will save our souls if our faith is placed in Him.

We believe that the Holy Spirit is equally God, and that He is our divine teacher and intercessor. We believe that the Spirit of God imparts spiritual gifts as He so desires for the purpose of evangelism and edification within the Body of Christ. We believe that He indwells the believer at the moment of conversion, and will never leave us or forsake us.

We believe that the believer is eternally secure in Jesus Christ, and that salvation by faith in Jesus can never be destroyed or deserted.

We believe in the bodily resurrection of the saints at the return of Christ. We will be raised to share in His eternal kingdom and glory. We also believe that the unrighteous dead will be raised to judgment and everlasting punishment.

We believe the return of Jesus Christ will be before the establishment of His Kingdom, and that His gathering of the saints could occur at any moment.

We believe that the true Church is comprised of all believers, regardless of age, sex, or race, and is called “The Body of Christ” in the scriptures.

This is our basic doctrinal statement. If we don't agree on these core statements, then we will not be

in unity about many things. What we believe serves as a daily guide for Christian living as well as help to refute false doctrine. It is one thing to believe in a basic doctrine of the Bible, it is quite another thing to practice what we believe about that doctrine. *Doctrine always leads to something that is practical.* Why do I say that? Read the letters written by Paul and you see that when he answered questions of concern addressed to a particular church he always framed the practical nature of his exhortation by addressing doctrine first. The doctrine he taught always led them into some practical application for daily Christian living. *Doctrine must not only affect what we believe but also how we live.* That's why it is so important for you to be in God's Word regularly. To negate the teaching of doctrine is to negate the strength by which we live out the Christian life in daily action.

For my doctrine class in college we used the book *Elemental Theology* by Emory Bancroft. Here's what he had to say in the opening chapter of the book and the topic of the doctrine of Scriptures: "The attitude taken toward the Scriptures themselves governs in a large measure the conceptions and conclusions drawn from their teachings. If they are regarded as fully authoritative upon the subjects with which they deal, then their positive statements constitute the sole foundation for Christian doctrine."

Too often we hear people say that is a nice statement, but it doesn't pertain to me or I don't believe that or it's old fashioned and out of touch. Doctrine should always lead to some practical application.

That each of us hold to these key doctrinal statements is essential for unity in the church. When Paul wrote to the Corinthians he warned them about doctrinal factions.

I. A WARNING ABOUT DOCTRINAL FACTIONS – I Corinthians 1:10-2:5

Paul begins by appealing to them as brothers. The word appeal comes from the basic word to come along side of or to comfort. It's the same root word used by Jesus speaking of the Comforter who is the Holy Spirit.

It is an urgent request on his part to this body of fellow believers and he appeals to them in the name of Jesus Christ. In essence Paul is saying that we share a common unity in the person of Christ, they were in fellowship because of the common salvation they had through Christ and he was appealing to them on that name. Remember that a name referred to a person's character and will, all that he was.

Paul is telling them not to lose sight of who they belonged to, that their actions were not reflecting the character and will of Christ who wanted them to be united. As believers they shared fellowship with Christ, which meant they also shared fellowship with each other.

It becomes confusing to unbelievers when they see Christians not getting along, when we can't agree on the basic area of the Gospel or the Bible.

Paul is urging them to agree with each other so that there are no more divisions and so that they would be perfectly joined together in mind and thought.

What was the problem in Corinth? Why were there divisions? Vs. 11-12 tell us that he had heard from others in the church that there was quarreling, that there were factions within the church over whose Bible study club you belonged to. Some liked Paul. Some liked Peter. Some liked Apollos. Some liked Jesus.

But Paul asked some rhetorical questions in vs. 13. **"Is Christ divided?" Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul?"** The answer to both is no. Christ is not divided and Paul did not die for the church. Through the Holy

Spirit He has brought together into one body what we call the universal church. It comprises all those who by faith claim Christ as Savior. If the universal church is not divided then the argument stands that the local church should not be divided either. Christ died for them, something that no other person could do. Paul could no more die to save someone than you or I. You might as well believe a turnip or a marshmallow could save someone if you believe a person even like Paul could die for others. I've sacrificed many a marshmallow on the altar of a camp fire, but I don't believe for a minute that can save me. Neither did Paul ever think that of himself. It can't be done. On one occasion Paul even said that if he could give up his own salvation in order for the nation of Israel to be saved he would do so, but he knew that was impossible.

Then in verse 17 he exclaims the purpose for which he was sent – to preach the gospel. **And how was he to preach?** Not with human wisdom. Otherwise he said that the gospel would lose its power and effectiveness.

I read recently about a youth rally where a thousand kids had gathered for an event. There was a moving story that struck at the emotional chords of kids and hundreds came forward at the invitation. The volunteer who was counseling kids who went forward said that when he asked the kids why they came forward, they said they didn't really know, the story the speaker told was real emotional and they felt they needed to do something, but what they didn't know.

We can fill the seats with people and appeal to their emotional nature telling stories that will have them on the edge of their seats and in the palms of our hands, we can have drama and music that will rock this place and get people all stirred up but at the end of the day if we only made an emotional appeal through persuasive speech and we haven't shared the gospel our preaching has only been with human wisdom. That's why it's difficult to preach the

cross to the lost. They don't understand it, but it's what they need. Paul says it's nothing more than foolishness to them. They don't get it so they mock what they don't understand. **Near Rome Archeology unearthed a caricature of Christianity. It was a cross with the head of a donkey on it.** The cross is foolishness to them. The Jews saw the cross as a stumbling block. They held onto the text that says that the cross is a curse so how could this guy who claimed to be the Messiah die by means of something that is cursed. The Gentiles thought the cross was a sign of weakness. No true citizen of Rome would be caught dead, literally, on it.

But to Paul the cross was the power of the gospel. He didn't couch the gospel in the language of some guy trained with great oratory skills. Some people have that ability and are gifted at speaking with eloquence. They study speaking techniques and utilize persuasive arguments and convince people to believe something, but at the end of the day it may only be a convincing of the head not a conviction of the heart. Doctrinal unity is about a conviction of the heart. Never be ashamed of the doctrine we believe and teach from the Bible. Never be ashamed of the doctrine of the cross. Paul preached doctrine and so did Peter, Apollos and Jesus. What they preached was meant to galvanize the church, but the Corinthian church used these personalities to divide the church.

Someone once said to me that if I wanted to reach the teens I needed to change my preaching. Let me rephrase vs. 17, **"For Christ did not send me to be a trained illusionist to trick people into believing, He didn't send me to be a gifted orator to persuade people, but to preach the gospel of the cross otherwise the cross has lost its power."**

Paul wrote in **Romans 1:16 "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation, the Jew first and also to the Greek."**

Jump down to **I Corinthians 2:1-5**

Paul told the Corinthians without apology or excuse that he came to proclaim the gospel to them. He went on to remind them that the Jews wanted a sign. They were all about signs. I like signs. They tell me where to go. But they do no good if they are not followed. The Jews had been given plenty of signs, but they wanted more. They told Jesus to show them a sign and they would believe. He said the only sign they would get was of Jonah who lived three days in the belly of the great fish and then spit out on dry land. That was their sign that the Son of Man would be three days in the grave and then would be resurrected. He gave them many signs from turning water into wine, healing the blind, the lame, and the deaf. He even gave them a sign by raising Lazarus from the dead. And what was their response? Oh, now we see, now it makes sense and we believe. That wasn't their response. Instead of falling down in belief and repentance, they plotted his murder. They would get no more signs.

The Greeks didn't care about signs, they wanted wisdom, knowledge. They were into philosophy. They liked to analyze and debate different ideas. They didn't care about truth. Truth was relative not absolute. Tell us what you believe and we'll consider it. That's what some preaching has become today, nothing more than philosophical mumbo jumbo. It's presented as something to consider, not as something that is truth, something absolute.

Paul strolled into Athens and observed the statues to their many gods and one assigned to an unknown god. He set out to teach them about the one they worshipped in ignorance who was the true and living God. They were curious and asked Paul to come back and teach them more about this strange God who rose from the dead. That was new to them. They had never heard such ideas. Some thought it preposterous. Others were curious. They didn't care about the truth of what was taught, they

only wanted something new to debate whether they believed it or not was irrelevant.

Paul did not come with persuasive words to attempt to convince them, he spoke about the death, burial and resurrection of Christ and allowed the power of the gospel to prick their sinful heart.

For there to be unity in the church we must believe and practice the core doctrines of Scripture. It will help avoid doctrinal factions.

Now, for just a few moments I want to discuss a warning about doctrinal fabrication.

II. A WARNING ABOUT DOCTRINAL FABRICATION

Having a strong doctrinal position that we hold as a church and as individuals will help us to stand strong against false doctrine. *If you stand for nothing, you will believe anything.*

Jesus warned about those (Pharisees) who taught false doctrine and Paul wrote some poignant words about false teachers as well.

Romans 16:17-18

I Timothy 6:3-5

According to **II Corinthians 2:17**, false teachers corrupt the Word of God. They corrupt it by incorrectly interpreting what the Bible says making subtle changes to it, or even just flat out denying it. Atheists like to argue from an incorrect and incomplete understanding of doctrine.

Consider what John had to say about false teachers.

II John 9-11 "Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching (doctrine) of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching (doctrine) has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or

welcome him. Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work.”

Watch out for false teachers.

When it comes to the Bible and its authority, you cannot pick and choose what you want to believe and the rest you just leave. Many people approach doctrine the same way they approach a buffet. They grab their plate and wander around choosing the things they like ignoring the things they don't like. They like the fried chicken and ham but they'll pass on the meatloaf. They pile on the mashed potatoes but skip the boiled cabbage. They'll take the peppers and cucumbers for their salad but they don't want anything to do with garbanzo beans and pickled corn. That's the way false teachers treat doctrine. I don't like this doctrine of sin because it's too harsh or that of man's depravity because it doesn't capture my good side but I do like angels and the Holy Spirit. We like that they help us and they appear to be kind. And just give me a small helping of the doctrine of Christ, I'm hoping He will bring a miracle with this disease or help me get that promotion, and I'll pass up on eschatology. That's too hard to understand with all those bowls and trumpets and vials and who gets that 10 horned beast and frog like spirits, although I might take a helping of the new heaven and no sickness. That's pretty cool.

Then there are still other false teachers who fabricate their own doctrine.

Hebrews 13:9 tells us not to be carried away by all kinds of strange doctrines (teachings). Some like to mix doctrine. They take a bit from the Bible and add their own ideas. Jesus said in **Matthew 15:9** that **“their teachings (doctrine) are but rules taught by men.”**

World religions do that. Hare Krishna followers believe in god and talk about prayer, but not prayer to the one true God.

The words of Jesus help us in response to false

teachers who fabricate the truth of doctrine: **“Take heed what you hear.” (Mark 4:24)**

Doctrine becomes your shield against falsehood.

Paul's warning to his protégé is worth our heeding.

I Timothy 4:1 “The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught (doctrines) by demons.”

The truth of God's Word will shape you, that is why it is important that each of us become a student of doctrine. Sound doctrine not only defines us as a church, it develops us into a church that is unified as we stand shoulder to shoulder in what we believe.

(The final point of this message will be shared in the next message.)