

Unity in Our Doctrine I Corinthians 1:10-2:5

I want to begin by saying that what we believe about the Bible becomes the bedrock that shapes our beliefs of the other doctrines and ultimately how we live. We are picking up today on this topic of doctrine where we left off last week. The premise of our discussion is that doctrinal unity is essential for the church. It is a topic that many don't want to discuss for a variety of reasons among them are the notion that doctrine can be divisive, it can be dogmatic, it can even lead to legalism. But suffice it to say that doctrine provides the framework by which we live and by which we govern the affairs of our church. Otherwise we become much like the days of the Judges when everyman did what was right in his own eyes. If we hold to a relativistic view of doctrine where what you believe is different from what I believe and that's okay, then such a wishy washy approach will lead to disunity because no two people ever agree on anything and bitterness or resentment settle in because we don't agree. How important it is to agree on such essential doctrines as the deity of God or the virgin birth of Christ or the essential nature of His substitutionary death and then His subsequent resurrection. How important it is to believe in the full inerrancy and authority of all Scripture not just parts.

Doctrinal unity is important for the church.

As we discovered last week, 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**".

Doctrine 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 or the weight of what is taught. In the days when many of us were in school we were taught history and

government. In those respective classes we were taught the doctrine of the Constitution. We were taught it in such a way that we understood the authority behind what it stood for and the ramifications for not adhering to it. Today there are many classrooms across the nation that don't hold that same view regarding its doctrine and teach that it serves merely as a guide and can be changed by popular opinion or our shifting culture view. Many want to treat what the Bible teaches in the same way

Doctrine is the principles, creeds or values, that forms our beliefs, that guides us. They keep us on a right course. Doctrine should shape our beliefs and not the other way around.

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

Doctrine not only serves as the guidepost by which we can set our direction as a church it also 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. It not only affects 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.

What's the point of having a set of principles if you don't live by them?

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.”

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

When one group believes one thing and another group believes something different, disunity and confusion will occur. Paul did not come with persuasive words to attempt to convince them, he came and plainly spoke about the death, burial and resurrection of Christ allowing the power of the gospel to prick their sinful heart. He didn't want them to come to Christ because he used eloquently persuasive speech. He didn't want to trick them with words to convince them to believe something.

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.*

Time and time again we have been warned to watch out for false teachers. That's what he warned the leaders in the church of Ephesus about. He described the false teachers as savage wolves not sparing the flock by distorting the truth in order to draw followers away from the church.

We discussed how many approach the Bible and doctrine much the same as they would a buffet. They pick and choose what they like and ignore what they don't like. What they say may sound good, but in the same way that Satan beguiled Eve in the garden taking a little bit of truth to make it believable, he added his own twists to it to deceive.

Hebrews 13:9 tells us not to be carried away by all kinds of strange doctrines (teachings). Jesus said in **Matthew 15:9** that **“their teachings (doctrine) are but rules taught by men.”**

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.”**

Doctrine becomes your shield against falsehood.

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.

III. THE WISDOM OF DOCTRINAL FAITHFULNESS

In his book on *BIBLE DOCTRINES: Beliefs that Matter*, Mark Cambron writes “The crying need of the church today is the knowledge of the Word of God...it seems that some of God's choicest leaders are falling into the different isms of today; the cause: the lack of the knowledge of the *doctrines* of God's Word. God's children are backsliding into sin; the cause: the lack of the knowledge of the *doctrines* of the Word of God.” He goes on to write that in order to grow spiritually, Christians must spend time feeding on God's Word. Doctrinal faithfulness in the church begins with leadership. If the captain of a ship is not going in the right direction, the entire ship will be led off course. It's the same in the church. How important it is for the leadership of a church to hold faithfully to sound doctrine.

Why should we study sound doctrine?

What is the relationship between sound doctrine and godly living? Remember, I said earlier that there is a direct correlation to both. Avoid sound doctrine and it will be evident in your character. Study and apply it and it too will be seen in an entirely different character, a character that is godly.

A. I Timothy 1:3-11

In this passage Paul is writing to his friend and colleague Timothy. Timothy is not the pastor, but rather serves as an overseer of the churches in Ephesus. We learn in this letter that he is young and that he has a propensity to be timid. His timidity may be his nature. He may have grown up as a shy boy that carried over in to how he managed or it may be that because of his age he was timid. In that culture respect and authority came with years. The older you were, the more respect you were given when you had something to say, after all they believed that your years equated to wisdom. Being younger than many in the church in that culture may not have set very well with some of them. He may have viewed himself as being in a position of responsibility with little authority. He may have felt like he didn't have a voice in important matters.

I served in one church as an assistant pastor and had to attend all the Board meetings, but according to the church by-laws, I had no vote on the Board. I was given responsibility but no authority. It's difficult to speak up when you don't get a vote.

Because of some stressful or difficult matters in Ephesus and what Paul says to begin the letter, it sounds like Timothy was looking for another ministry opportunity. Paul urged Timothy to remain in Ephesus for the express purpose as stated in **verses 3-4 "so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies."**

It was exactly what Paul warned would happen when he met with the Ephesian church leaders on his way to Jerusalem just before his arrest. Timothy may have felt inadequate for the task because of his age, but Paul had confidence in him to do the job. We also get the impression from this letter that these false teachers were leaders in the church. Notice again Paul's admonition to them in **Acts 20:29-31 "Savage wolves will come in among you**

and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples."

These false teachers weren't peddling their views on some street corner or in another building across town, they were in the assembly, they were from their own number.

Paul uses strong wording here urging him to stay. The word urge means to press upon the attention, to plead with. It stresses the strong effort to persuade someone to do something.

Imagine you are sitting comfortably in your living room reading the newspaper or watching Wheel of Fortune when you see sparks, smoke and fire come from an outlet on the opposite wall. You wouldn't calmly get up and tell others in the house to finish what they are doing and think about leaving in the next 5 or 10 minutes. Instead there would be urgency to your message: Everyone out, fire!

Because of the nature of what was happening in Ephesus, Paul needed and urged Timothy to stay and deal with the problem.

Notice how he was to deal with it. It was a command to these false teachers. It wasn't a request. It wasn't an observation. It wasn't a wish. He was to command them, order them to stop. The command was to be immediate, both in Timothy's going with authority and in demanding that they stop teaching false doctrine immediately.

What were they teaching? Paul defines it as myths and endless genealogies. It's really uncertain what this all includes. One author suggests that it was probably mythical stories built on Old Testament history and genealogies that later developed into intricate Gnostic philosophical systems.

We conclude that Paul knew what they were teaching was Biblical error and that it was empty of

any spiritual value. You might as well base doctrine on Aesop's fables or Grimm's Fairytales.

Why were they to stop teaching this false doctrine?

Verse 4 gives the answer. They promote controversy rather than God's work. All that the church does is to develop unity not disrupt it and what they were teaching was wrong, controversial and dismantling unity in the church. Their teaching led to more erroneous speculations, questions, and arguments. They did not further God's plan as we see in verse 5 is the goal of love in the congregation. Love promotes and encourages unity in the body. It never divides because it does not seek its own.

They wanted to teach the Law but didn't know what they were talking about. They claimed to be experts in the Law but hadn't thoroughly studied it or understood it. They taught that the Law had no merit. Paul disagreed. He said the Law has value. It shows a person that he is a sinner in need of a Savior. It doesn't save, but it points to the One who can save. Essentially Paul is saying that the Law becomes the measuring stick by which we determine if something is sound doctrine. The Law points to the message of the good news of Christ.

1. Sound doctrine refutes false teaching
2. Sound doctrine confirms our beliefs and values
3. Sound doctrine leads to godly living

B. I Timothy 4:1-16

False teachers have always been a problem, even in Jesus' time. He spoke openly about the Pharisees being false teachers. Paul is speaking here that we are to be wary of false teachers until Christ returns because that is how long they will be around. Especially as the day draws near for Christ's return many will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits.

At first reading you may come away with the impression that those who are abandoning the faith were believers, but I want to suggest something else.

Mark 4:1-20

II Chronicles 25:2, 14-15, 27

These false teachers fall away from the faith meaning that they were close to having the truth, close to believing but like the story of the sower, something snatched it away, they didn't want to follow it.

Instead Timothy was encouraged to train himself in godliness, much as an athlete trains to compete in the games. It takes diligence and determination. It takes desire. A person who exhibits a godly life will have the authority to expound doctrine, people will listen to him or her. When what we say we believe doesn't match how we live, then we lose all credibility.

Paul's encouragement to Timothy is for us today: watch our doctrine to make sure it is truth. Persevere in it, never lose hold of it, continue with great effort in spite of difficulty.

1. Sound doctrine disciplines for godly living
2. Sound doctrine aids in our present and future life
3. Sound doctrine is to be pursued wholeheartedly
4. Sound doctrine will be evident in your life to others
5. Sound doctrine is to be watched closely

C. I Timothy 6:3-10

This is a return to what he began in 1:3. It's the subject of false teachers. They had once known the truth but had been led into error. I think of my friend who now calls these people his "post-faith friends." They may have once gone to church, even embraced what the Bible teaches, but have left the faith. I wonder if they were truly saved to begin

with and have become deceived by the lies of the enemy. Only God truly knows their heart or ours.

Notice in this passage that Paul refers to these false teachers as being conceited. It's a word that means smoke and came to refer to a cloud or puff of smoke. Being puffed up means to be arrogant. A follower of sound doctrine should be humble not conceited. Arrogance is often masked by an air of intelligence. They pompously walk around as if they know something, confident in their own self-assessment. Paul says they don't know anything. They pretend scholarship. I recently read that half of all job applicants falsify their educational credentials.

A year or so ago the New York Times posted a story about a man named Diederik Stapel. He lived and taught at a university in the Netherlands with a doctorate in psychology. In the Netherlands he had become an academic star on his way up to claim the spot of Dean of the School of Social and Behavioral Sciences. In the spring of 2011 he had publicized the results of a study conducted at a train station showing that a trash-filled environment tended to bring out racist tendencies in individuals. Just days earlier, he received more media attention for a study indicating that eating meat made people selfish and less social.

In the summer of the same year, his graduate school friend and colleague who had become the head of the psychology department confronted him with accusations from others that he had committed research fraud, citing that data from both studies appeared to be identical. The accusations were then forwarded to the rector of the university. Stapel had to do some fast acting and drove to the location of his research to craft his web of deception. He had to fabricate a ruse that would convince his accusers that the research was accurate. In the end it all unraveled and he was an academic fraud.

False teachers like to come across as having all the facts to support their position, but they leave out important principles. The only result in the end is that their teaching leads to division and quarrels. Paul also highlights the reason behind their ruse. He says they do it for money.

Acts 8:9-23

Paul concludes that the person who is teaching sound doctrine will be content, knowing that the love of money is the root of all evil.

1. False teaching is arrogant and ignorant
2. False teaching leads to division and quarrels
3. Sound doctrine leads to contentment

D. II Timothy 1:8-14

Paul saw beyond his present circumstances to see the bigger picture of what his suffering was accomplishing. A person who is not sound in doctrine will miss what God is trying to do. They are more likely to cast blame at God for what they are going through than to understand that all things work for good to those who love called who are called according to His purpose in order to conform us to the image of Christ.

1. Sound doctrine will help in times of persecution and suffering
2. Sound doctrine will confirm our salvation

E. II Timothy 4:1-5

Paul is giving a forceful order here – Solemnly charge. The NIV doesn't capture the gravity of the command. The order is directly connected to Christ who gave the commission. This is to be a public proclamation that is to be continuous. In other words, don't do it just once, but keep doing it. If Timothy is carefully guarding the truth he can consistently teach the truth. He is to be ready and carries the idea of vigilance

Jeremiah 20:9 “If I say, ‘I will not remember Him or speak anymore in His name,’ then in my heart it becomes like a burning fire shut up in my bones; and I am weary of holding it in, and I cannot endure it.”

Teach sound doctrine not only to encourage believers to grow spiritually and be united in what we believe, but teach it to unbelievers because a day will come when they may become like the rocky soil and the seed of the Word has no soil to grow.

Teach what is healthy and nourishing.

1. Sound doctrine prepares the individual to teach the Word of God in order to “correct, rebuke, encourage,” and patiently instruct for maximum spiritual benefit and growth.
2. Sound doctrine prepares the individual for when others won’t tolerate it wanting only what will appeal to their conscience.

F. Titus 1:5-16

1. Sound doctrine will help select godly leaders
2. Sound doctrine will help leaders lead with proper motives

This year at our Deacon meetings we have been taking a brief look at 12 doctrines. It’s important for our church leadership to all agree on what we believe about those doctrines.

It’s important for you as well to study sound doctrine. I want to suggest several books that may be of interest and help to you so that we can be a church that continues to be united in our doctrine instead of being caught in the trap of tickling itching ears with what you want to hear.

Chafer’s Systematic Theology – Lewis Sperry Chafer

Elemental Theology – Emery Bancroft
(*Christian Theology* – Emery Bancroft, Amazon)

Bible Doctrine – Wayne Grudem (Abridged from *Systematic Theology*)

Many churches are trying to give people principles without the power of the gospel. That power is lost without a solid foundation in doctrine. Right doctrine will lead to right living when we obey it. Otherwise, when temptation or persecution comes along, and they will, we will be like the seed that is scattered on unfertile soil. We will wither away.

Baker’s Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology has this to say that we close with: “Faithful obedience and love are not alternatives to sound doctrine. They are the fruit of right doctrines as it works itself out in the believer’s character and relationships.”

Paul fought against factions and false teachers. He fought for doctrinal faithfulness. *Someone said that “the real danger to unity in the body of Christ is when it is no longer grounded in the truth and doctrine of God’s Word but is guided by feelings and emotions.”* When we are not grounded in the truth of God’s Word but allow our emotions to guide us then we will be easily influenced by the cultural opinions that we allow to shape our beliefs. When the church compromises its stand on Biblical doctrine it loses its integrity, its unity and its influence in the world.

I close with this question.

Does sound doctrine matter to you? If you want unity to exist in the church, it should. It’s not enough for me to expound it; you also need to examine it for yourself and apply it in practical ways.