

D^octrine

The Scripture:

Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers (1 Timothy 4:16).

You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine (Titus 2:1).

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

The thought:

In essence, doctrine is the teaching or the truth of the faith. Doctrine is interwoven throughout our faith in Jesus Christ who is himself “the truth.” Here we are considering doctrine as the more or less codified details of truth. Doctrine, in this view, is structured and organized deductively. It starts with certain truths and works from these on to other truths that are related to or are derived from the essential issues of the faith.

For example, we might start with the doctrine of God or the doctrine of creation and work from there to the doctrine of man and the doctrine of sin. After that we might study the doctrine of salvation. All of these interrelate and it is thus a help to our understanding to look at these truths in a structured pattern. Such an approach makes sure that we do not miss any important aspects of God’s truth.

Sometimes doctrine is addressed philosophically and sometimes practically. Sometimes the approach is Biblical. A Biblical approach would work through the Bible from beginning to end describing great themes as they are noted and developed throughout the various books of the Old and New Testaments. This is an activity called Biblical theology. Alternatively if we start with questions of truth, reality, and ethics, we would be looking at theology philosophically.

When all is said and done, the truth comes to us in various ways and needs to be received and applied to some extent in the way that it is revealed to us. Technically,

doctrine may speak of general revelation and special revelation. General revelation addresses how God reveals himself to us through his creation. For example, the growth of plants and the overwhelming appearance of pattern in the observable world are indications of a creator. Paul speaks of this when he states: "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse" (Romans 1:20).

When we speak of special revelation, we are considering God's expression of himself in Jesus, "the Living Word," and also in Scripture, "the Written Word." God has revealed himself in creation, in the writings of the Old Testament, in Jesus as the incarnate Son, and then in the New Testament. This entire process of revelation is superintended by the Holy Spirit as he inspires the hearts and minds of humans.

The astonishing thing, though, is that whatever the greatness of human understanding, the revelation of God is more than adequate to challenge these abilities. Whatever the basics of human perceptions, God's revelation is again fitting to the task of simplicity. There is the oft-quoted account that Karl Barth, when asked what he considered to summarize the greatest theological ideas, replied: "Jesus loves me, this I know; for the Bible tells me so."

Doctrine can be a helpful and meaningful tool in the grounding of our faith. However, we must take care that for our salvation or guarantee of heaven is not dependent upon our theological understanding or upon the consistency with which we hold various doctrinal beliefs. It is dependent upon only God's grace. Paul makes it clear that "... it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). Doctrinal understanding is not the source of our salvation. Even emphasis upon great and careful understanding of doctrine can become a "work" and a source of pride.

The song:

*Sing them over again to me, wonderful words of life,
Let me more of their beauty see, wonderful words of life;
Words of life and beauty teach me faith and duty.*

*Beautiful words, wonderful words, wonderful words of life,
Beautiful words, wonderful words, wonderful words of life.*

*Christ, the blessed One, gives to all wonderful words of life;
Sinner, list to the loving call, wonderful words of life;*

All so freely given, wooing us to heaven.
--Philip P. Bliss (1874)

The question:

Am I learning the truth of God through the doctrines taught by the church? How am I teaching these truths to others?

The experience:

Christianity is so much a religion of learning and teaching that we can be overwhelmed by how much there is to know. Yet, the knowing is always a matter of the both the mind and the heart.

Learning through the church should not just be a matter of indoctrination—of rote memorization and unquestioning obedience to the proclamations of a human organization. It is a process of being led. The Latin root of the word education is *educare* which means “to lead.” We are allowing ourselves to be led into the truth of Jesus. This is not a transfer of facts from God to us in some magical way. It is the learning of the one, Jesus, who came and lived among humanity and participated in the pain and suffering that are a part of human life in this broken world.

Jesus becomes the answer to our need for truth. He just does not have truth. He is the truth. This gives a rationale for the exceedingly strong bond between Christianity and education. Wherever the Christian church has gone, schools have been established at every level.

It is not surprising that when Jesus asks the disciples if they will leave him, Peter responds, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (John 6:68).

From the simplicity of the wordless book and basic flannelgraph lessons to the most scholarly lectures on the Epistle to the Hebrews, God is at work drawing his people to him through the truth.

Doctrine comes from the Latin, *docere*, which mean to teach. To be a Christian means to teach and to be teachable all through life. Jesus calls us to this when he says: “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me” (Matthew 11:29).