

What Is Doctrine?

David Halbrook

Many religious groups are doing less “doctrinal preaching” today, believing “doctrine divides,” but the Bible records the doctrine of Christ and the apostles (2 Jn. 9; Acts 2:42). What part of their message is not doctrine? Did their teachings cause unnecessary division?

Paul told Timothy: to warn people who teach another doctrine, that *some will depart from the faith, giving heed to... doctrines of demons*, and to *preach the word* though some people reject true (sound) doctrine (1 Tim. 1:3; 4:1; 2 Tim. 4:2-4). Notice in these verses that *the faith* and *the word* have the same meaning as *doctrine*—God’s revelation.

You may hear Catholic doctrine (ex., infant baptism) or Protestant doctrine (ex., salvation by faith alone), but you do not read of those in Scripture. Man-made doctrines are the result of human traditions and authority. True doctrine is found only in the Bible. Our goal is not to spread “church of Christ doctrine” but only the original teachings (doctrines) of Jesus and the apostles, recorded in Scripture. Do our weekly articles teach any other doctrine? If so, tell us. If not, then learn and keep the doctrine of Christ.

Editor’s Note: Though our gospel meeting ends today, of course our work continues daily. We learned this week about some of the departures mentioned in this article. Use what you learned this past week, along with this short article in *Arkansas Weekly*, to help others think about what the Bible teaches on these subjects.

Simple opportunities to teach the lost and assist each other.

Pray for: Janice White, The Ledgerwoods, Novela Puckett, Samuel Southall, others with ongoing trials, our brethren who are travelling, and new Christians among us.

Every one of us who participated in our gospel meeting, according to their ability, has aided the growth of the church (Eph. 4:16). Let’s daily keep the mindset to work.

We assemble each Sunday at 10AM, 10:45AM, 5PM & Wednesday at 7PM

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The Exhorter

Acts 11:23 *Exhorted them all... cleave unto the Lord*

Church of Christ--Quail Valley

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What Is Liberalism?

Ron Halbrook

I have been asked to explain the meaning of the term "liberalism" as it has been used to describe problems and issues among churches of Christ since the 1950's. We are always glad to receive and answer questions from those who are "searching the scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (**Acts 17:11; 1 Pet. 3:15**).

Two Attitudes: Conservative & Liberal

"Conservative" and "liberal" may be used to describe basic attitudes toward any law, document, or standard of authority. Conservative means a commitment to strictly follow, protect, or preserve the standard without changing its instructions, which is the spirit of **Philippians 1:17** ("set for the defense of the gospel"), **Jude 3** ("earnestly contend for the faith, which was once delivered unto the saints"), and **Revelation 22:18-19** (not to "add unto" or "take away from the words" revealed). Liberal means not strictly following the message or pattern of teaching, but allowing unauthorized changes to be made.

"Liberal" and "conservative" can have many applications. In the period 1875-1925, liberal thinking infiltrated the restoration movement, which allowed instrumental music to be added to the worship and missionary-society centralization to be added to the organization of the church. In the 1950's, liberal thinking again infiltrated churches of Christ, which had four basic applications.

Social Activities

1. In the New Testament, the work of the church was limited to evangelism, worship (to glorify God and edify saints), and benevolence to destitute saints (**1 Tim. 3:15-16; Acts 2:42; 20:7; 2 Cor. 9:1**). In the 1950's, churches began to provide social activities such as social meals, parties, and ball games. Then, churches began to add to the church building special rooms called "fellowship halls" which were

actually kitchens and dining rooms. Now, some of the big rich churches even build gymnasiums. Such social and recreational work is not the proper work of the church. This is one form of liberalism.

Centralized Organization

2. In the New Testament, each church sent support directly to preachers in the field and also sent benevolent help directly to destitute churches (**Phil. 4:15-17; 2 Cor. 11:8; Acts 11:27-30**). There was no centralized board, bureau, or agency of any kind. In the 1950's, the "sponsoring church" arrangement provided a plan for many churches to send donations to a large church, which in turn oversaw the funds to send and support gospel preachers into the world and to send benevolent help to destitute churches. This has the effect of transforming a local eldership into a board of directors to oversee the work of many churches. This human plan of centralizing the work of many churches under one eldership is liberalism, reflecting the centralization found in denominationalism and Catholicism.

3. In the New Testament, each church did its work of evangelism and benevolence without building and sustaining human institutions to do the work for the churches (**Phil. 4:15-17; Acts 6:1-7; 11:27-30**). In the 1950's, human institutions such as colleges, summer camps, childcare agencies, medical clinics, and retirement centers obtained donations from the treasuries of the churches. These became church supported institutions. This is the same principle violated by the missionary society, centralizing the work of the churches through a human institution. This is a form of liberalism, reflecting the same centralization found in denominationalism and Catholicism.

Church Benevolence to Sinners

4. In the New Testament, local churches gave benevolent help from the treasury to needy saints, but not to sinners in the world (**Acts 6:1-7; 2 Cor. 9:1**). In the 1950's, some brethren advocated the church should give benevolent help from the treasury to sinners in the world. This is another form of liberalism.

Spirit of Compromise

Liberalism also has a spirit of compromise rather than a spirit of warfare against sin and error (**2 Cor. 10:3-5**). Many liberal churches try to preach a "positive" gospel setting forth the true plan of salvation and worship, but they avoid exposing false doctrines, false religions, and false teachers by name as was done in Bible days (**Matt. 16:12; 2 Tim. 2:16-18**). Some of these liberal churches try to preach a "positive" gospel about the need to live a pure and godly life, but they do not openly

fight against worldliness and expose the sinfulness of social drinking, smoking, gambling, immodest dress, profanity, dancing, fornication, adultery, unscriptural divorce and remarriage, "and such like" (**Gal. 5:19-21**). Such churches do not practice discipline or withdrawal from unfaithful members (**1 Cor. 5; 2 Thess. 3**). This "positive" approach gradually allows the leaven of sin and error to work among God's people. Less and less direct teaching is done on more and more Bible principles. Fewer and fewer warnings are given against more and more forms of sin and error. The church becomes weaker, softer, and more open to false teaching and sinful conduct in many forms. Such churches will gradually lose more and more distinctive marks of New Testament Christianity and become more and more like modern denominations.

Brethren who embrace this liberal spirit of compromise are highly offended and embarrassed by strong gospel preaching which deals directly with sin, error, and false teachers. Such brethren become agitated against and alienated from strong preachers and plain preaching. In this way, Satan builds a wall which protects the liberal-minded church from hearing the full truth of the gospel. Those who "will not endure sound doctrine" turn to teachers who will tickle their ears with smooth, sweet, soft preaching—just as Paul warned in **2 Timothy 4:1-5**.

In order to avoid liberalism in every form, we must preach "all the counsel of God" and "fight the good fight of faith" against every form of sin and error (**Acts 20:27; 1 Tim. 6:12**). [Truth Magazine, XLIV,12 (June 15, 2000):372-73 (20-21)]

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. (Proverbs 9:10)

To fear God means to have reverential respect for Him. If you fear God you dread displeasing Him. He is high and holy, and you tremble before Him (Psalm 111:9; Jer. 5:22). Until one fears God he cannot possess true wisdom. He may be "street smart", but failure to fear God leaves him foolishly in sin. (Read the striking contrast between worldly wisdom and heavenly wisdom in James 3:13-18). Do you want to be wise and understanding? Start by respecting God and holding Him in honor. Listen to His word and follow His will. You will not gain wisdom by choosing to sin; you will only increase sorrow and death. Instead, choose to be wise: "*fear God and keep His commandments*" (Eccl. 12:13). [Joe R. Price; SWORD TIPS #276 (September 8, 2014)]