

Taking Heed to Doctrine

By Elder David Pyles

Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee. – 1Tim 4:16

The fact that we should take heed to ourselves should be obvious to anyone, but Paul also commanded the young man Timothy to take heed to doctrine. He said that in doing this “*thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.*” This statement obviously puts insuperable importance on doctrine under any plausible definition of the word “save.” One contradiction in Christianity today is that some who take “save” here to mean “*eternally save*” are the very ones who are the most dismissive about doctrine. Indeed, many downplay it these days, and blame doctrine as causing the numerous denominations in the religion. A common saying among them is that “doctrine divides.” Such thinking has led to the so-called “ecumenical” movement in which numerous churches have declared themselves to be nondenominational and advertise themselves as being doctrinally neutral.

The curious thing is that since this movement started, there has been an explosion in the number of denominations, leaving Christianity more fractured than ever before, and oftentimes divided over issues wherein nearly all Christians were formerly agreed. There is actually no surprise in this. The presumed proverb that “doctrine divides” is diametrically opposite to the truth. Doctrine actually unites. This can be seen everywhere in society: When two warring nations wish to put an end to conflict, they draw up a treaty and make a commitment to the doctrine expressed therein. The United States would have divided long ago had it not been for the commitment of its citizens to the doctrine expressed in the Constitution. When two firms wish to cooperate in a business endeavor, they agree to a doctrine expressed in a contract. Marriages also are held together by commitment to a doctrine. Doctrine unites, and it is the only thing that can unite on an enduring basis. So the fact that Christianity became even more fractured with the ecumenical movement is really what a thinking mind should have expected.

The first step in becoming a better Christian is in changing how we think. As the Apostle Paul said, “*And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God,*” (Rom 12:2). The Bible is actually replete with verses expressing the same idea. The following is but a sample:

Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. – Mt 22:37-38

That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind... – Eph 4:22-23

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus... – Php 2:5

And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in his sight... – Col 1:21-22

For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. – 2Tim 1:7

Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ... – 1Pet 1:13

In light of all these verses, it is obvious that being a good Christian not only requires that we have a right way of *acting* but also a right way of *thinking*. Now our doctrine provides the basic framework in which our thoughts are formed and our decisions are made. It is therefore crucial to sound Christianity.

Many Christians would agree that we live in a world whose thinking is becoming increasingly perverted. This problem can exist even within professed Christianity. All Christians should be concerned that this degenerative trend is partly owing to a failure on our part to effectively teach, and all Christians should consider that such an outcome is exactly what should have been expected after multitudes of Christians decided that doctrine is of secondary

importance and should take low priority, or even no priority, in our church services.

When Paul told Timothy to take heed unto doctrine, he surely did not mean that Timothy should commit himself to personal opinion and introspection. All men are disposed to do this anyway. Rather, Paul meant that Timothy should *avoid* doing such, and make himself a diligent student and follower of the word of God. Every Christian should be warned that these two approaches terminate upon very different outcomes. Any new student of the Bible is going to find things in it that are contrary to his expectations. The reason is explained in:

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. – Isa 55:8-9

The commandment to heed doctrine was given to a young man. Young people are the very ones who are most apt to neglect doctrine, preferring rather to be entertained. Many modern churches have been all too happy to accommodate them in this error. Any older person will acknowledge that the older we become, the more difficult it becomes to reform our errant way of thinking. This is best done when we are young. Yet many modern churches have chosen to minimize doctrinal teaching to youth, and defer this until later ages, or perhaps never teach it at all. Be sure that Satan has not been such a fool. He has placed his doctrine and its teachers in every sector of society having access to our youth.

If taking heed to doctrine will save both us and others, then the clear suggestion is that not heeding it will lead to our mutual ruin.