

## **Church Doctrine**

What is Christian doctrine? The English word, “doctrine,” comes from the Latin word *doctrina*. It can be defined as, “teaching or instruction.” Christian doctrine simply means the beliefs of Christians.

A Christian doctrine is what the entire Bible has to say on one particular subject. Therefore, we speak of such things as the “doctrine” of Christ, the “doctrine” of God, and the “doctrine” of the church. This refers to what Christians believe about these subjects based upon the teaching of the Bible.

Doctrine Is Different from Theology, but the Terms May Be Used Interchangeably  
Sometimes the word “doctrine” is used interchangeably with the word “theology.” While this is not necessarily wrong, there is a difference between the two terms. Theology, or Christian theology, is the more general term. It refers to the study of the God of the Bible. Doctrine refers to the specific teachings about God that are found in a study of theology such as the “doctrine” of salvation or the “doctrine” of the afterlife.

### Some New Testament References to Christian Doctrine

While the word, “theology” is not found in the Bible, there are over forty New Testament references to Christian doctrine, or Christian teaching. Christian doctrine consists of the teachings of Jesus Christ, as found in the four gospels, as well as the teachings about Jesus Christ, which are found in the remainder of the New Testament.

We will cite a few of the passages that refer to Christian doctrine in an attempt to get an overview of what Scripture says on the subject.

The following are some of the important passages that refer to the “doctrine of Christ,” or Christian doctrine:

1. We Are Told That the People Were Amazed at Jesus’ Doctrine (Matthew 7:28-29)  
When Jesus completed the Sermon on the Mount, the Bible says that the people were amazed with His teaching. Matthew wrote:

When Jesus finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed by his teaching [doctrine], because he taught them like one who had authority, not like their experts in the law. (Matthew 7:28-29 )

The Contemporary English Version translates these verses as follows:

When Jesus finished speaking, the crowds were surprised at his teaching [doctrine] He taught them like someone with authority, and not like their teachers of the Law of Moses. (Matthew 7:28-29)

The teachings of Jesus were given with divine authority, and the people recognized this authority; He was obviously in a class by Himself.

2. The Source of Jesus’ Doctrine Was God the Father (John 7:16-17)

Jesus told the religious leaders where His doctrine originated—it was from God the Father. John records the following:

Then Jesus answered them, “My teaching [doctrine] is not mine but his who sent me. Anyone who resolves to do the will of God will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own.” (John 7:16-17 NRSV)

The Message translates the verses in this manner:

Jesus said, “I didn’t make this up. What I teach comes from the One who sent me. Anyone who wants to do his will can test this teaching [doctrine] and know whether it’s from God or whether I’m making it up.” (John 7:16-17)

According to Jesus, His doctrine, or teaching, comes from the One who sent Him - God the Father. This is a constant theme in the teachings of Jesus—His doctrine is from heaven above.

### 3. The Early Church Was Devoted to the Apostles’ Doctrine (Acts 2:42)

We find that the early church devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles. This teaching centered on what Jesus said and what He did. In the Book of Acts, we read the following account:

They were devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching [doctrine] and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. (Acts 2:42)

The New Living Translation puts it this way:

They joined with the other believers and devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching [doctrine] and fellowship, sharing in the Lord’s Supper and in prayer. (Acts 2:42 )

The first Christians were constantly studying, as well as putting into practice, the teachings of the Lord Jesus.

### 4. The Apostles Were Ordered by the Religious Authorities Not to Teach Jesus’ Doctrine. (Acts 5:27-28)

As Jesus’ apostles spread His teachings, many people were converted to the faith. This caused the religious leaders to order the apostles not to teach His doctrine. We read about this in the Book of Acts:

And when they had brought them [Peter and John], they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, saying, “We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching [doctrine] and you intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.” (Acts 5:27-28 RSV)

The Message translates these verses as follows:

Bringing them back, they stood them before the High Council. The Chief Priest said, “Didn’t we give you strict orders not to teach in Jesus’ name? And here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching [doctrine] and are trying your best to blame us for the death of this man.” (Acts 5:27-28)

Although the apostles were commanded to stop proclaiming the teachings of Jesus, they would not stop; neither could they stop. They had to tell others what they knew to be true.

#### 5. The Doctrine of the Lord Caused People to Believe in Him (Acts 13:12)

We are told that the doctrine of the Lord caused people to believe in Him. We read the following in the Book of Acts about the conversion of a certain governor:

Then when the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, because he was greatly astounded at the teaching [doctrine] about the Lord. (Acts 13:12 )

The Contemporary English Version translates the verse as follows:

When the governor saw what had happened, he was amazed at this teaching [doctrine] about the Lord. So he put his faith in the Lord. (Acts 13:12 )

The doctrine of the Lord, when believed, was life-changing. This is still true today!

#### 6. The People in Athens Wanted to Hear Paul's Doctrine (Acts 17:19)

When the apostle Paul went to Athens, the people wanted to hear his doctrine. The Bible explains the situation as follows:

So they took Paul and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new teaching [doctrine] is that you are proclaiming?" (Acts 17:19 )

The people of Athens had heard that Paul was proclaiming a new teaching. They wanted to hear what he had to say.

Paul then taught them the doctrine of Jesus—how God became a human being in the Person of Jesus Christ.

#### 7. Christians Are to Obey the Doctrine of Christ (Romans 6:17,18)

Paul wrote a letter to the church at Rome concerning the doctrine, which the believers in the church were obeying. He said:

You used to be slaves of sin. But I thank God that with all your heart you obeyed the teaching [doctrine] you received from me. Now you are set free from sin and are slaves who please God. (Romans 6:17-18 )

The doctrine, or teaching, of Jesus sets people free from sin. Therefore, correct doctrine should lead believers into holy living. If this does not happen, then something is wrong.

#### 8. Believers Are to Advance in Their Knowledge of Jesus' Doctrine (Hebrews 6:1-3)

The writer to the Hebrews wrote about the need for believers to go beyond the basic teachings, or doctrines, of the Christian faith. The Bible says:

Therefore we must progress beyond the elementary instructions about Christ and move on to maturity, not laying this foundation again: repentance from dead works and faith in God, teaching [doctrine] about baptisms, laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. (Hebrews 6:1-3 )

The Contemporary English Version reads as follows:

We must try to become mature and start thinking about more than just the basic things we were taught about Christ. We shouldn't need to keep talking about why we ought to turn from deeds that bring death and why we ought to have faith in God. And we shouldn't need to keep teaching [doctrine] about baptisms or about the laying on of hands or about people being raised from death and the future judgment. Let's grow up, if God is willing. (Hebrews 6:1-3 )

Our knowledge about Jesus Christ should continue to grow as we mature in the faith.

#### 9. The Importance of Correct Doctrine Is Emphasized (2 John 9, 2 Timothy 4:1-3)

Scripture emphasizes the absolute importance of correct doctrine or teaching. John wrote the following to believers:

Everyone who goes on ahead and does not remain in the teaching [doctrine] of Christ does not have God. The one who remains in this teaching [doctrine] has both the Father and the Son. (2 John 9 )

In the same manner, Paul wrote about the importance of Christian doctrine. In a letter written shortly before his death, Paul said the following to Timothy:

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season, convince, rebuke, and exhort, be unfailing in patience and in teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching [doctrine], but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own likings. (2 Timothy 4:1-3 RSV)

Knowing that he was about to die, Paul ended his last letter with the emphasis of holding on to correct teaching. Again, we find the New Testament emphasizing the importance of sound teaching.

#### Jesus Spoke of the Source of All Error—Wrong Doctrine (Matthew 22:29)

Finally, we note that Jesus told the religious leaders of His day what was the source of their errors; wrong doctrine. Matthew says:

But Jesus answered them, "You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God." (Matthew 22:29 ESV)

Among their problems, the religious leaders did not understand the Scriptures—they did not really know the doctrine, or teaching, that came from God. If they had known what the Scriptures taught, they would have accepted Him as the promised Savior, or Messiah, instead of crucifying Him.

#### Conclusion: Christian Doctrine Is Highly Important

From this brief survey of selected verses in the New Testament, we find that Christian doctrine, or Christian teaching, is of the utmost importance.

When we get our doctrine right, then all other things will fall into place. On the other hand, if we get our doctrine wrong, then our lives will be affected in a negative way.

Therefore, we cannot over emphasize the importance of right belief because this should lead to right living.

#### Summary – Question 2

##### What Is Christian Doctrine? (Christian Teaching)

The word doctrine means “teaching,” or “instruction.” While some use this term interchangeably with the word theology, there is a difference between the two. Christian Theology is the study of the God of the Bible. It is a general term.

Christian doctrine refers to the specific teachings of the Bible on various subjects. This includes the “doctrine” of Christ, the “doctrine” of the Holy Spirit, and the “doctrine” of the Trinity.

The New Testament has a number of references about the importance of Christian doctrine. For example, we find the people amazed at the doctrine of Jesus. Jesus Himself told the religious leaders that His doctrine came from God the Father.

The early church continued teaching the doctrines of Jesus. The doctrines were causing many people to believe in Him as the Savior. This led the religious leaders to command the apostles not to teach the doctrine of Christ to anyone.

When the apostle Paul came to Athens, the people wanted to hear his doctrine. When the opportunity arose, he preached Jesus Christ to them. Paul wrote to the believers in Rome about the importance of following the teaching, or doctrines, that had been given them.

The writer to the Hebrews listed some of the basic doctrines or teachings of the Christian faith and encouraged believers to proceed beyond these elementary truths. We also find an emphasis on correct doctrine from the writings of the apostle Paul and the apostle John.

Finally, Jesus told the religious leaders of His day that the source of all error was their lack of understanding the doctrines, or teachings, that God had revealed in His Word.

From these references, we find that the study of Christian doctrine, or Christian teaching, is crucial if one wishes to properly understand the Christian faith.

When we walk in Jesus Christ and we follow him in His footsteps and we follow his Doctrine of his teaching we will know the true meaning of the Holy Scriptures of the word and the truth.