

TLCBiblical.com Video Lessons

300 - The Doctrine Of The Bible

1. Introduction

The religious world is filled with a multitude of beliefs. In each of these belief systems core values and ideas form the basis of convictions held by its followers. In this lesson we'll discuss the **The Doctrine Of The Bible**, what it is, and why we need to understand it.

2. Moving forward in our study of the Bible

In previous lessons we've discussed the content of the Bible. I reviewed it's layout, how the books are grouped, historical timelines, and the major divisions of the Bible. Once a foundation was established we discussed symbolism in the scriptures. I emphasized the need to understand how meaning was assigned to symbolic forms, patterns of symbols in the scriptures and interpreting prophetic language.

A principle that I've emphasized throughout these studies is the need to identify, maintain and preserve the context of passages. I defined context as the conditions or environment that words, phrases, chapters, or, in the case of the Bible, entire books occur in. This environment defines what we're reading and therefore identifies limits to our interpretation. There are several elements that make up the context. I identified these as:

- a. The time period during which events occur or are recorded
- b. The audience being addressed
- c. The subject under consideration
- d. The law in effect at the time

Failures in understanding and preserving the context leads to confusion and conflicts between passages. As we begin a study of the doctrine of the Bible, context will be a critical aspect of understanding passages and gaining a clear idea of what's being taught.

With a working knowledge of the content of the Bible and symbolic forms we're ready to advance our study by examining the unique doctrine of the New Testament. In this lesson we'll discuss:

- a. The definition of doctrine
- b. Elements of the definition
- c. How these elements relate biblical doctrine
- c. Draw conclusions and establish principles to guide us in our study of doctrine

Let's start by defining the term.

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3. What is doctrine

Doctrine isn't a word we use in casual conversation. Most would associate the idea with a religious body as a description of the group's beliefs and practices. Historically the idea of doctrine isn't restricted to faith based organizations. Doctrine is a word that appears in political movements, legal discussions and governmental philosophies. The first thing we need to do is define the word and see how that applies to our study of the scriptures.

We can define doctrine as:

- a. Something that is taught
- b. A principle, position or the body of principles in a branch of knowledge or a system of belief
- c. A principle of law established through past decisions
- d. A statement of fundamental government policy especially in terms of international relations

From these statements there are important points to note.

1. Doctrine includes an accepted body of knowledge
2. This body of knowledge defines a particular group or discipline's identity
3. Doctrine can be understood based on decisions made in the application of the body of knowledge
4. Policies resulting from doctrine are made by a recognized authority, such as government that has the right to make and enforce those policies

As we look at these elements we might think that doctrine is fluid and subject to alteration over time. In human affairs this is true. But what about the Bible? Let's take a look at each of the elements of our definition and apply them to the scriptures.

Doctrine includes an accepted body of knowledge: When we think about spiritual things and God we turn our attention to the Bible. There are certain things that one must accept when recognizing the scriptures as the source from which doctrine is derived. These are:

1. The scriptures originated with God
2. The Holy Spirit revealed them to humans and guided them to record the revelation
3. The Bible is complete
4. Doctrine doesn't originate from sources outside the revealed word

As the series progresses we'll discuss these points in more detail but as we begin these are crucial to our understanding of the Bible and must be adhered to. I noted early in the study of symbolism that the Bible is a closed system, a characteristic we need to remember and respect.

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This body of knowledge defines a particular group or discipline's identity: I'm going to use an example to illustrate this point that I think illustrates the relationship needs to be in regard to being a disciple. When Ray Kroc began selling McDonald's franchises across the country he did so with the requirement that the branding specified by him would be followed. Some time later as he visited franchisee's stores he found that foods had been placed on the menu that weren't authorized. Procedures were being changed and implemented that failed to reflect the system he put in place. This was a problem that had to be corrected. Today when we go into a McDonald's we expect to see specific items that are prepared in a specific manner that are then packaged and delivered in approved containers. We know what the menu contains and even what the menu boards look like. We know what the "crew" members will be wearing and how they should conduct themselves. In the case of large companies like McDonalds there are individuals who routinely visit, observe and rate the look and performance of their franchise holders and company stores. Severe infractions or departures from what's accepted can result in a franchise license being revoked.

I remember years ago a local restaurant decided to drop their franchise agreement with a well recognized chain. They rebranded the restaurant name but continued to sell menu items with the previous names used by the larger company. Images in their store, signage and printed advertising retained many of the same designs and iconic figures. Obviously that didn't sit well with the corporate restaurant chain and eventually after a cease and desist order followed by a lawsuit for infringement the owner of the rebranded establishment discontinued their practices. Changes made by the owner however lacked quality in the menu and eventually they lost money and closed the restaurant.

The lesson here is simple. We understand that when someone claims to be part of a larger group we expect to see evidence of that in what they say and do. How they look and behave reflects their membership in that particular group. Consistency between physical locations further assures us that we can depend on the quality of our experience in their establishment. The examples of McDonald's and the other food service demonstrate that in the secular realm deviation from accepted standards isn't tolerated. As a matter of fact these deviations immediately warn us that something isn't right and usually the lack of quality accompanying the alterations is cause for disappointment. In the case of the infringing restaurant owner I mentioned it was obvious that customers refused to come back when the quality diminished.

In spiritual matters we recognize the Bible as the standard. We have to develop a knowledge of the scriptures so we understand what we're to teach and conduct ourselves. Our teaching should match the body of knowledge found in God's word and our application of biblical principles needs to be consistent with the scriptures as well. Like the example of franchises that fail to adhere to specific standards in business, believers need to adhere to the standards specified in the Bible. Understanding the scriptures ultimately identifies us as followers of God and provides a consistent experience for those around us. There are groups who claim to teach the doctrine of the Bible but close analysis reveals alterations that have been adopted.

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Unlike corporations like McDonalds and others, however, the head office doesn't send staff out to review a group's performance with the consequence of having a license revoked. God designed the church in such a way that it's our responsibility as believers to understand the word and follow it so that we have God's approval. For those who aren't part of the group who are looking for true Bible believers, comparison of a groups teachings and activities with the scriptures is a test that will identify those who are following God's pattern.

Doctrine can be understood based on decisions made in the application of the body of knowledge: Many claim to be following Christ and are true believers. As I just mentioned in regard to the identity of a body of believers, this is confirmed by examining what they do and how they do it. But, we have to know what the scriptures teach to evaluate this. If we don't know what the Bible teaches we can be misled. We sometimes hear the adage "don't take it at face value" meaning we should observe and get the facts about something before making conclusions. This is critical in spiritual matters and I'll emphasize that point throughout this series. Decisions about a church are frequently made based on how we feel about what we see and hear rather than engaging in a deeper analysis of what, how and why things are done. Deviations from scriptural authority are deadly in a spiritual sense and we need to be very careful when making a decision about religious practices.

Policies resulting from doctrine are made by a recognized authority, such as government that has the right to make and enforce those policies: This is a critical point that gets overlooked all the time. Most Christian denominations are governed by a council, synod or other leader who is recognized as having the ability to determine what a groups beliefs and practices are going to be. Historically there are doctrinal decisions that have been made based on physical need, monetary gain, social pressure, societal attitudes, popularity and other influences that have nothing to do with what the Bible teaches. There are groups who change their practices based on the opinions of a governing body while others are under the direction of a single individual who has been recognized as being able to determine doctrine and practice. There are problems with all of this.

Although decisions were made in the first century by the apostles as they met to discuss problems, such as the question of circumcision for gentile converts, those determinations were made by men who were guided directly by the Holy Spirit in an environment of prayer and submission to God. It was also a unique time in which the Gospel was being revealed. Some of the revelation occurred when problems presented themselves. I referred to these as functional decrees in the lesson on the Sabbath day. God revealed the new law slowly over a period of years. As we'll see doctrinal principles are revealed throughout the New Testament when there are situations or questions that need to be addressed. The solutions to the problem or question is then provided by the direction of God, through the writings of inspired apostles and teachers, then recorded in the form we have now.

Very early in the history of the church, after the apostles were no longer alive, church

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leaders took it on themselves to introduce ideas and teachings based on their own opinions. This evolved into regional meetings to hear these proposals and decide what was to be accepted or discarded. Today there are many who follow this practice. Ecumenical councils, synods and other governing bodies, meet from time to time in order to adjust and determine doctrinal interpretations and practices based on those interpretations. As we examine the scriptures we see there's a difference between meeting to understand God's will and changing God's will. This is a confusing point to some but I think we'll be able to make it clearer as we proceed.

The only authority to issue doctrine is God. We understand that those who recorded God's word were inspired by the Holy Spirit. Divine inspiration as described in the scriptures isn't the writer being moved to record their experiences or ideas. Inspiration by the Holy Spirit refers to the guidance of the writer, by the Holy Spirit, to record precisely what God wanted recorded. Confusion occurs when we don't understand now this took place. Peter tells us that those who spoke and wrote prior to the New Testament era did so as they were "***moved by the Holy Ghost***" (2 Pet 1.21) and didn't understand some of the prophecies since they pertained to a time beyond their own (1 Pet 1.12). When Christ came into the world he delivered the words given to him by his Father in order to complete God's work (John 17.8). Jesus teachings were only the beginning. He told his disciples "***I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now***" (John 16.12). On the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit personally manifested and began to dwell in each of the apostles which we'll discuss in an upcoming lesson. From that point on, the Holy Spirit revealed the word to the apostles and later to inspired teachers to deliver the complete revelation.

In the New Testament we see the personality of the individual writers in the books leading some to conclude that each of the letters were personal expressions and not the result of divine guidance. We'll touch on the subject of inspiration in upcoming lessons but for now I'll summarize what we need to understand about divine inspiration as we move forward in our discussion of biblical doctrine. Here are some points to keep in mind:

1. The word was God's and came from Him
2. Christ began the work of revealing the final revelation
3. The apostles were given the Holy Spirit as a guide and helper
4. The final revelation was given to the inspired writers of the New Testament
5. The revelation is what God wanted recorded, is His word, not that of the writers

From these points we can draw some valid conclusions about the scriptures.

- a. The scriptures are the inspired word of God.
- b. God is the source and originator of the content
- c. God has not authorized humans to modify or change doctrine
- d. The apostles met to understand God's will and were guided by the Holy Spirit
- e. God's word is complete

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f. God is the only authority who can issue doctrine

4. Conclusions

Based on these realizations we'll see that the doctrine of the Bible is:

- a. Unique to the Bible
- b. Factual and objective
- c. Complete
- d. Not subject to change

5. Next

So, if the doctrine of the Bible is unique, factual, objective, complete and unchanging, why are there so many problems understanding it. Why are there so many different ideas about it. The answer to that is simple. In the next lesson we'll discuss **Interpreting The Bible** and the attitudes we need to develop in order to understand it.