

# LET'S TALK ABOUT DOCTRINE

*There is one subject most of Christendom shies away from. Most hesitate to even discuss it. In fact, in many circles it is a “taboo” subject. “Don’t talk about that,” many protest, “because it will upset and divide people! Mercy! You’ll get into arguments and offend someone! Tell us smooth things! Prophecy deceits.”*

*Oh, really? Let’s take the dare. Let’s talk about doctrine.*

*by Lloyd W. Cary*

**D**octrine has become a controversial word these days. Comparatively few Christians wish to discuss the dreaded topic of doctrine. It may not be “politically correct.” Perhaps it is because so many are unsure of themselves. Many, who do not even know the Scriptures, are unwilling to look into them to see what the Bible really says.

The word “doctrine” is not something to be feared or avoided. Doctrine simply means a “teaching,” or that which is taught by a religion or political party.

The word comes from the Latin *doctrina*, meaning a codification of beliefs or a body of teachings, especially when used in a religious sense. We derive our word “doctor” from this word. The Greek word *didache* [διδαχη did-akh-ay'] is translated “doctrine” 51 times, and “doctrines” five times in the kjv.

It is unfortunate that doctrine has been made out to be “the bad guy” in many Christian circles today. A sure way to cloud true doctrine is to bury it in false doctrine. Some view the word “doctrine” as almost a “curse” word. “Doctrine divides,” they parrot. “Don’t get into a doctrinal discussion, or you’ll get into an argument.” It would be difficult, indeed, to get them to sit down at a table with open Bibles and discuss various teachings of the Bible. People, by nature, do not want to change—they want to believe what they *want* to believe.



Perhaps the most frustrating challenge a Christian faces is trying to teach the Gospel to a person who has a closed mind. All too often we meet a person with an attitude that shouts, “Don’t confuse me with the facts, my mind is made up!” In other words, “It does not matter whether or not what you say is true, I am going to believe and do what I want.” Or, “What would my friends or family think if I suddenly change my beliefs?” Some appear to have minds like concrete—all mixed up and permanently set. You can point to many Scriptures; you can provide examples from the New Testament; you can quote the very words of Jesus, yet such a person will remain unmoved. Such an attitude would be almost humorous if it were not so sad. We need to understand this is the way of

the world, so learn not to be discouraged. It is a true saying regarding the devil, "... that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which *deceiveth the whole world.*"

Strangely, many people do not know or even *want* to know what their own church teaches! Theirs is more of a "Christian" fellowship group. Instead of being taught sound doctrine, they would rather have their church, priest, pastor, or teacher provide them with music, meals, or entertaining stories. They would rather be told how Jesus loves them, that all they have to do is say the sinner's prayer and be assured they are saved now and forever as long as they pay, pray, stay, and obey. "Teach us *s-m-o-o-t-h* things," they say ([Isaiah 30:10](#)). Preach *love*. Preach Christ and Him crucified... but *don't* talk *doctrine* to me."

And yes, it is true; Bible doctrine *does* divide. Correct doctrine divides truth from error! Many were astounded at Christ's doctrine: "And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine ([Matthew 7:28; 22:33; Mark 1:22; 11:18; Luke 4:32; John 7:16](#)).

Christ said, "Think *not* that I am come to send peace on earth: I came *not* to send peace, but a sword" ([Matthew 10:34–38](#), *kjv* throughout). This is because following true biblical doctrine will set you apart from commonly believed teachings about God and the Bible. It might even set you apart from the false teachings of your congregation.

The buzzwords of this generation are *experience, feeling, and perception*. "If it feels good, *do* it" is the criteria. "If it tastes good, eat it. If you feel like it, say it." However, the Bible teaches, "There is *a way which seemeth right* unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death. ([Proverbs 14:12; 16:25](#)).

For example, as the "charismatic wave" sweeps over country after country, these or similar words are often parroted: "I've been baptized in the Holy Ghost and *you* haven't. *I* have spoken in tongues, and *you* haven't. So don't talk to *me* about doctrine, because *I know!* I've been under the power of the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost teaches me all I need to know about doctrine. He shows me what is right and what is wrong. It's *experience* that counts, *not* some outdated doctrine."

It's time we set the record straight on the vital issue of doctrine! Let's talk about doctrine.

## **Why Is Doctrine So Important?**

Doctrine is indispensable to Christianity. True Christianity cannot exist without it. The New Testament repeatedly emphasizes the value and importance of sound doctrine, sound instruction ([1 Timothy 6:3](#)), and a pattern of sound teaching ([2 Timothy 1:13–14](#)). The apostles defended the faithful proclamation of the Gospel ([Galatians 1:8](#)). They coached Christian faith in doctrinal terms, then called for its preservation.

God asks through the prophet Isaiah, "Whom shall he teach knowledge? And whom shall he make to understand doctrine? Them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts. For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little" ([Isaiah 28:9–10](#)).

Your Bible reveals there are the doctrines of Christ ([Hebrews 6:1](#)) and doctrines of devils ([1 Timothy 4:1](#)). In other words, there are *true* doctrines and *false* doctrines!

Studying *true* doctrine is nothing less than a study of the law, mind, and character of God Himself. We are to put on the very mind—teaching, doctrine—of Christ Himself ([Philippians 2:5](#); [1 Corinthians 2:16](#)). That is, we are to learn to think and act as Jesus Christ thinks and acts.

Turn to 1 Timothy, chapter four, verses one through four in your own Bible. It reads, “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly [distinctly], that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth.”

A few more *man-made* beliefs or doctrines we see dividing Christians today include the rapture and the timing of the rapture, young-earth vs. old-earth creationism, charismatic vs. non-charismatic, premillennialism vs. amillennialism, speaking in tongues, women preachers, eating in a restaurant on the Sabbath, Sabbath verses Sunday, the world’s holidays vs. God’s holydays, “soul-sleep” vs. the immortal soul, when is one born again, did Mary have other children, who, what, is the devil, is Jesus merely a created being, is Jesus God, is God a trinity, or a divine family, and many more.

These are *all* doctrines held by various *professing* Christian groups!

The doctrines of the *Church of God International* are summed up in our “Statement of Beliefs,” and are taken from the Bible itself. Send for your free copy of our Statement of Beliefs today. Our beliefs are explained in capsulated form and are backed up by many, many scriptures. You may wish to copy or chain reference them in your own Bible. The Bible *alone* is God’s written revelation to man, not feelings, not tradition, not doctrinal creeds of *men*! *No* doctrine is based on a *single* scripture. “For precept must be upon precept, *precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little*” ([Isaiah 28:10](#)). Be sure to request our free booklet, *How to Study Your Bible* for the rules of Bible study and information on how to mark your Bible.

Bible doctrine is so important that the apostle Paul warned, “I *marvel* that ye are so soon removed from Him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel [or any other doctrine or teaching]: Which is *not* another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert [change] the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel [teaching] unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed” ([Galatians 1:6–9](#)). [Isaiah 8:20](#) tells us, “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.” [2 John 10](#) confirms, “If there come any unto you, and bring not *this doctrine*, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed.”

Teachers who attempt to siphon off some of God’s people must first open the door of their minds. They often come under the guise of “new understanding,” “new truth,” conviviality, and ecumenism. Political correctness has conditioned the majority of people to defend this supposed “open-mindedness” by saying we should not “judge” others but should have a spirit of “love” and “be more Christ-like,” etc. The basic idea is that we should seek fellowship among various groups

and **compromise**—i.e., by *ignoring* differences in doctrine and practice, by putting everything we believe “on the table.” Beware! Do not become so “open-minded” that your brains fall out!

## The Deadly Dangers of False Doctrine

Let’s test our memories:

- Has anyone followed the case of *Andrea Yates*—the woman who drowned her five children in a bathtub because it was “God’s will?” The foundational issue she was grappling with was a false understanding—*false doctrine!*—of who and what God is! She stated that her desire was to kill her children so they would be kept from falling into Satan’s hands if they grew up, and to punish herself for being a bad mother. What else would cause this if not false doctrine—a *false* understanding of God?
- Or take the case of Jim Warren Jones, leader of the *Peoples Temple Christian Church-Disciples of Christ*. On the evening of November 18, 1978, in Guyana, Jones ordered his congregation to drink a concoction of cyanide-laced, grape-flavored Kool-Aid. In all, 918 people died, including 276 children. It was the greatest single loss of American civilian life in a non-natural disaster until the events of September 11, 2001. What was the basic error? *False belief! False doctrine!*
- Or the case of Marshall Applewhite Jr. of the *Heaven’s Gate* group, who led 38 of his followers to wear purple clothing and eat the poisoned purple pudding of death! He preached that suicide would allow them to leave their bodily “containers” and enter an alien spacecraft hidden behind the Hale-Bopp comet. Again, the culprit is misinformation—*false doctrine!*
- Or take the case of mother *Eve*: She listened to the subtle voice of the serpent and was persuaded to take of the forbidden fruit. Why? Because she listened to the devil’s lie. He promised her additional benefits. She gave way to *false doctrine!*

Christ warned *repeatedly* about false teachers, false prophets, and false doctrine:

Matthew 24:5: “For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.” In verse 11, He said, “And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many.”

Also Matthew 24:24: “For there shall arise *false* Christs, and *false* prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall *deceive* the very elect.” *How?* By lies—by **false doctrine!**

Yet again, Christ warned His followers, “Beware of *false prophets*, which come to you *in sheep’s clothing*, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits” (Matthew 7:15).

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**One of the surest ways to become a victim of false doctrine is to think that it is not dangerous and you don’t need to be concerned about it.”**

Note that these false teachers come in disguise. They do not *appear* to be false teachers—they do not appear to be ravening wolves. Verse 22 shows that they don’t even necessarily deny Christ:



they *call* Him “Lord, Lord.” They *appear* to be godly, sincere, good, moral people. Never forget: the devil is the father of lies ([John 8:44](#)). “For such *are* false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers [yes, the devil has ministers!] also be transformed *as* the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works” ([2 Corinthians 11:13-15](#)). The devil will go up to 99 percent truth to slip in his one percent error, because he knows that, like leaven, false doctrine will spread and grow until it consumes entire congregations. What is their methodology? By craft, speculation, presumption, supposition, and guesswork, they plant “new” ideas into people’s minds—in other words, False doctrine!

[2 Peter 2:1–3](#) warns, “But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of *truth* shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not.”

[Acts 20:30](#): “Also *of your own selves* shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.” That is, to cause *schism* in the church or congregation in order to get a following to support them. Satan’s strategy is “divide and conquer,” hence all the splits and schisms in the churches today. Beware of those who insist on a hierarchal church government (the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes referenced in [Revelation 2:6,15](#)), or that they are the “one and only” true church. Christ said, “I am the vine [singular], ye are the branches [plural]” ([John 15:5](#)). Christ said, “And *other* sheep I have, which are not of this fold” ([John 10:16](#)). The Bible definition of a Christian is found in [Romans 8:9](#): “Now if any man have not the *Spirit* of Christ, he is none of His.” And to *whom* does God *give* His Holy Spirit? “... the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that *obey* him” ([Acts 5:32](#)). It matters not to which computer data bank one may belong to; what matters is, *do you unconditionally belong to Jesus Christ?*

The prophet Jeremiah predicted, “The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; *and my people love to have it so*” ([Jeremiah 5:31](#)). Paul warned Timothy, “For the time will come *when they will not endure sound doctrine*; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables” ([2 Timothy 4:3–4](#)).

### **Appreciation for Truth Requires Opposition to Error**

One of the surest ways to become a victim of false doctrine is to think that it is *not dangerous* and you *don’t need to be concerned* about it. If you play with a live snake’s head long enough, it will bite you.

People tend to seek consistency in their beliefs and perceptions. So what happens when one of our beliefs conflicts with another previously held belief? The term “cognitive dissonance” is used to describe the feeling of discomfort that results from holding two conflicting beliefs. When there is a discrepancy between beliefs, *something must change* in order to eliminate or reduce the dissonance.

Cognitive dissonance occurs when one finds that what he or she has always believed is in conflict with what the Bible says.

When two things are opposites, they cannot be reconciled. If we embrace true doctrine, we must be *against* its opposite—false doctrine. The stronger we favor a truth, the stronger we should oppose its opposite.

Examples:

- If I favor a democratic republic, I must *oppose* dictatorship.
- If I favor life, I must *oppose* death.
- If I favor light, I must *oppose* darkness. The more I value the one, the more I must *object* to the other.

Error is the *opposite* of truth. If I appreciate truth, then I must *oppose* error. To suggest that false practices do not matter much is to necessarily imply that truth does not matter much!

Every passage that emphasizes the importance of **truth**, simultaneously emphasizes the **danger** of error. The more we care about truth, the more firmly we will oppose error.

“The fear of the Lord *is to hate* evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I *hate*” ([Proverbs 8:13](#)). “Through Thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I *hate* every false way” ([Psalms 119:104](#)). See parallel passages at: [Psalm 119:128,163](#); [36:4](#); [97:10](#); [101:3](#); [Amos 5:15](#); [Micah 3:2](#); [Zechariah 8:17](#); [Matthew 6:24](#); and [Romans 12:9](#).

## WHO, WHAT IS BEHIND THE DECEPTION OF FALSE DOCTRINE?

As we know, “... that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan... *deceiveth* the whole world” ([Revelation 12:9](#)). To deceive means to cause someone to believe something that is not true; to trick, mislead, falsify, dupe, defraud, or victimize.

Going on to [2 Corinthians 11:13–15](#), “For such are **false apostles, deceitful workers**, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.”

Reading on to [Ezekiel 22:25–26](#), “***There is a conspiracy of her prophets*** in the midst thereof, like a roaring lion ravening the prey; they have *devoured* souls; they have *taken* the treasure and precious things; they have made her many widows in the midst thereof. Her priests have violated My law, and have profaned mine holy things: they have put no difference between the holy and profane, ***neither have they shewed difference*** between the **unclean and the clean**, and have **HID their eyes from My Sabbaths**, and *I* am profaned among them.”

We are warned, “*Submit* yourselves therefore to God. *Resist* the devil, and he will flee from you” ([James 4:7](#)).

## CONCLUSION

“For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect” ([Matthew 24:24](#)). In [1 Corinthians 10:12](#) we are warned, “Let him who *thinks* he stands, *take heed* lest he fall.”

When someone tells you that false teaching is *not* a big problem and you *don't* need to be very concerned about it—just love the brethren and don't worry about wrong doctrine—he is teaching you **a false doctrine** when he *says* it! And it is just a matter of time before he will try to get you to accept *other* false teachings! Not every false teacher will belittle the danger of false teaching. But anytime a man does tell you that false teachers are *not* a serious danger, you can be sure he is telling you that either because **he is** a false teacher or because he is **under the influence** of false teachers!

*What should we do about it?* How can we escape the danger of false teaching?

(1) LOVE THE TRUTH. We have seen that the people who are most likely to accept error are the people who are not sufficiently dedicated to the truth.

“For the *mystery of iniquity* doth already work: only he who now letteth [restrains and hinders] will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie” ([2 Thessalonians 2:7–11](#)).

(2) STUDY GOD'S WORD DILIGENTLY. “Prove all things” ([1 Thessalonians 5:21](#)). If we proved a doctrine once, we can prove it over and over! The way to *recognize* error is to compare it to the truth ([Acts 17:11](#); [2 Timothy 2:15](#); [3:16, 17](#)). “Thy Word *is* truth” ([John 17:17](#)).

(3) HONESTLY EXAMINE EVERY DOCTRINE AND PRACTICE before we accept it ([2 Corinthians 13:5](#)). Further, if we can't teach it to others *from the Bible*, we don't know it well enough ourselves!

(4) LET GOD'S WORD BE THE STANDARD for all our spiritual decisions ([Galatians 1:6–9](#); [2 Timothy 3:16, 17](#); [Matthew 15:9](#); [2 John 9](#); etc.)

God's Word says, “For I give you good doctrine, forsake ye not My law” ([Proverbs 4:2](#)).

“*If you put the brethren in remembrance of these things, you shall be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, which you have attained*” ([1 Timothy 4:6](#)).

What about *you* and *me*? How much do *we* care about truth? Do we care enough to study diligently, to remove error from our lives, and serve God faithfully? If you *know* the truth, have you *obeyed* it? Are you *living* a faithful life as a Christian?

Beware the dangers of drifting! Beware of Christian compromise!

In this article we've talked about sound doctrine. We are *told* to do so ([Titus 2:1](#)). This should be our central focus, first, last, and always, *testing* our beliefs to see if they truly do line up with what God has said about Himself in the Bible.