

18 July 2018

Life Seminar: Disciple

Session Two: What does a disciple believe?

“To any sober-minded person, the importance of thinking rightly and seriously about God is obvious. Certainly, no intelligent mind in past generations would ever have suggested that what we believe about God doesn’t ultimately matter much. Study the history of philosophy, and one feature that stands out most prominently is this very theme. Philosophers have always been obsessed with God. Whether they have assumed His existence, questioned it, denied it, or looked for rational arguments to prove or disprove it, they have universally understood that what a person believes about God is basic to everything else.

Of course, one of the central themes of the Bible is the importance of believing the truth about God. This is not something that the Bible merely hints at or lightly glosses over. Statement after statement in Scripture emphatically declares that our view of God is the most fundamental spiritual issue of all: ‘Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him’ (Hebrews 11:6). ‘He who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God’ (John 3:18). ‘We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error’ (1 John 4:6).”

John MacArthur, *The Jesus You Can’t Ignore: What You Must Learn From the Bold Confrontations of Christ* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2008), xix-xx.

We are going to look at doctrine, what a disciple believes. Before we dive in, I want to discuss this matter in a little more detail.

**On a scale of 1 to 10, how important do you think doctrine is?**

To the Church: 1—2— 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

To the Christian: 1—2— 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

A disciple believes what the Bible teaches. This is a very simply way of answering the question. However, we must look beyond the simple and get our hands dirty by working through this with more detail. Last week we answered the question, “Who is a disciple?” and we addressed the issues of the Gospel and an overview of what a disciple is. For the next four weeks we will break that overview down into more manageable parts.

One facet that makes up the diamond of a disciple is belief, or doctrine. Now, for many today the word doctrine brings up a mental image of a dusty room, locked far away in an actual ivory tower (can you imagine the expense of that?), filled to the brim with books one day away from dust, away from people, churches, and common life experiences. If that is your own picture, can I suggest that that is an erroneous and harmful view of doctrine? Doctrine, as I hope to show you from the Scriptures, is exciting, life-giving, and absolutely essential to the disciple.

### **How would you define doctrine?**

#### **What does doctrine mean?**

It comes from the Greek word διδασκω, meaning

- “to provide instruction in a formal or informal setting”<sup>1</sup>
- “active: instruction, act of teaching; passive: what is taught, teaching, doctrine”<sup>2</sup>
- “teaching, instruction”<sup>3</sup>

The word *doctrine* appears eleven times in the English Standard Version of the Bible: Job 11:4; Romans 16:17; Ephesians 4:14; 1 Timothy 1:3, 10; 4:6; 6:3; Titus 1:9; 2:1, 10; and Hebrews 6:1. I want to walk through these, and my goal in this introduction is to change the way you view doctrine. My goal is to show you, from the Scriptures, that rather than being boring and dull doctrine is life-giving and life-transforming.

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<sup>1</sup> Johannes E. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.* (New York, NY: United Bible Societies, 1989), no. 33.224 διδασκω.

<sup>2</sup> Barbara Friberg, Timothy Friberg, and Neva F. Miller, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2010), no. 6561 διδασκαλια.

<sup>3</sup> Grimm’s Wilke’s *Clavis Novi Testamenti*, translated by Joseph Henry Thayer (Stockholm, S: International Bible Translators, 2000), no. 1389 διδασκαλια.

Job 11:4: Zophar is quoting Job as describing Job's belief and life (note that connection, Job is written in Hebrew. The word translated *doctrine* is the Hebrew word דָּבָר and is one of the parallel words for the Greek word διδασκω. It has the same definition.)

Romans 16:17-18: Paul exhorts the believers to avoid those who prevent doctrine from being received, and warns them of their lifestyles (note that connection)

Ephesians 4:14: Paul describes the importance of leaders in the church (verse 11) for the development and growth believers (verse 12) to avoid false doctrine, which translates into the life of the church (chapters 4:25-6:18, again note the connection)

1 Timothy 1:3-7: People that hold to false doctrine live unrighteous lives, as Paul reminds Timothy, the purpose of sound doctrine is to live a righteous life in obedience to God and for the help of fellow humanity (note the connection)

1 Timothy 1:10: See the connection to illicit lifestyles with false doctrine (the connection again)

1 Timothy 4:6: Paul encourages Timothy that if he teaches the church the truth he will be "a good servant of Christ" (note the connection)

1 Timothy 6:3-10: Sound doctrine is connected with a virtuous life; unsound doctrine is connected with a wicked life (note the connection)

Similar to Sherlock Holmes and John Watson, doctrine and life are inextricably linked and cannot be separated. One cannot hold sound doctrine and not live a righteous life; nor can one live a righteous life without sound doctrine.

### **Initial objections:**

Does Matthew 7:21-23 teach that you can do right things without believing right? To briefly address this, they appeared to practice good deeds, but the fact that Jesus never knew them meant they did not repent and believe the Gospel. Or, as James discusses in his epistle, their works were dead because they lacked faith (see James 2:26).

Can't we all push aside "doctrinal differences" and just worship God? This is one that tends to be more popular within the larger community of churches. The basic premise is that the church is to be unified. "After all," they say, "Jesus prayed for our unity! (John 17:21)" However, Jesus wasn't praying for blind unity. Jesus demanded people believe certain doctrinal issues. One must believe that Jesus is God in

order to be a disciple. There are ‘churches’ that deny the divinity of Jesus, and according to Scripture we are to avoid them (2 John 7-11). Along similar lines, Paul curses people who preach a Gospel different than the Gospel preached by Jesus (Galatians 1:8-9).

### **Doctrine and Life**

Without a doubt, doctrine is essential to following Jesus. If you remember, we learned that a *talmid* seeks to learn the beliefs of the rabbi.<sup>4</sup> Abraham Cohen, author of *Everyman’s Talmud*, discusses the study of the Torah, “Obviously, if the Torah is to become the rule and guide of life, it must first be known before it can exert such an influence....The superiority of study, over all else, springs from the fact that knowledge of God’s precepts must precede their performance.”<sup>5</sup>

We see, then, that in order to *live properly we must believe properly*. Let me give you an example. If I believe that human life has no intrinsic value, then it does not matter what I do with myself or any other human being. Slavery is permissible, murder is permissible, and so on. The main take away is that I am not responsible to help another human being because they are like ants, they have no value. If, however, I believe God created humanity in his image, then they have intrinsic value and it is our responsibility and privilege to help my fellow human being.

J. I. Packer opens his book *Knowing God* with this statement, “ignorance of God—ignorance of both his ways and of the practice of communion with him—lies at the root of much of the church’s weakness today.”<sup>6</sup> A disciple, then, is one who is learning about God and then transforming that knowledge into every day life.

Doctrine informs life, and without doctrine, we have no idea of how to live. We are going to touch on a few highlights of doctrines that disciples must believe.

\*As I mentioned earlier, right doctrine does not bring salvation and right lifestyle does not bring salvation. I will not be repeating this point, but I do want you to keep that in mind.

#### I. Disciples believe in the Bible

Disciples believe in the Scriptures as the very words of God. We read 2 Timothy 3:16-17 last week, but it

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<sup>4</sup> Craig Hartman, *Through Jewish Eyes* (Greenville, SC: BJU Press, 2010), 47.

<sup>5</sup> Abraham Cohen, *Everyman’s Talmud: The Major Teachings of the Rabbinic Sages* (New York, NY: Schocken, 1975), 135.

<sup>6</sup> J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 12.

bears repeating, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”

A. Disciples believe the Bible is God’s Revelation- Romans 16:25; Luke 2:32; John 21:25

\*Revelation is God’s communication to an individual or groups of people

\* General and Special Revelation

B. Disciples believe the Bible is Inspired- 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 1 Timothy 5:18; 2 Peter 3:16; 1:21

C. Disciples believe the Bible is Inerrant- 2 Timothy 3:16-17; John 17:17; 2 Peter 3:16; Matthew 4:4

\*Disciples believe the Bible

II. Disciples believe in God- Jeremiah 9:23-24

“Ultimately, the goal of reading and teaching Scripture is to love God and our neighbor better. And the way to love God more is to know God more. It’s true that a person can learn theological facts about God without loving him. At the same time, you cannot love God without knowing him. And to know God, you have to know things *about* him....That’s why sound doctrine is an important goal of Bible reading. Sound doctrine summarizes and synthesizes the Bible’s teaching into a coherent whole.”<sup>7</sup>

*Westminster Shorter Catechism* asks, “What is God?” in question four. The answer is, “God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.”<sup>8</sup> Supporting Scripture: Deuteronomy 4:15-19; Luke 24:39; John 1:18; John 4:24; Acts 17:29; 1 Kings 8:27; Psalm 139:7; 145:3; 147:5; Jeremiah 23:24; Romans 11:33-36; Deuteronomy 33:27; Psalm 90:2; 102:12, 24-27; Revelation 1:4; Psalm 33:11; Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 1:12; 6:17-18; 13:8; James 1:17; Exodus 3:14; Psalm 115:2; 1 Timothy 1:17; 6:15-16; Psalm 104:24; Hebrews 4:13; 1 John 3:20; Genesis 17:1; Psalm 62:11; Jeremiah 32:17; Matthew 19:26; Revelation 1:8; Hebrews 1:13; 1 Peter 1:15-16; 1 John 3:3; Revelation 15:4; Genesis 18:25; Exodus 34:6-7; Deuteronomy 32:4; Psalm 96:13; Romans 3:5,

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<sup>7</sup> Bobby Jamieson, *Sound Doctrine: How a Church Grows In The Love and Holiness of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 30.

<sup>8</sup> Robert B. Balsinger, ed., *Westminster Shorter Catechism: With Proof Texts (ESV)* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 20.

26; Psalm 103:5; 107:8; Matthew 19:7; Romans 2:4; Exodus 34:6; Deuteronomy 32:4; Psalm 86:15; 117:2; and Hebrews 6:18.

*The New City Catechism* asks, “How many persons are there in God?” To which is answered, “There are three persons in the one true and living God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. They are the same in substance, equal in power and glory.”<sup>9</sup> 2 Corinthians 13:14; Matthew 28:19-20

III. Disciples believe in Sin- Genesis 3:17 (Genesis 2:17); Romans 3:9-17; Ephesians 2:1-3

Sin is such an underrated biblical doctrine, and one that the *Church* has failed to discuss. Anglican minister J. C. Ryle, in his series of sermons on holiness, discusses sin before he addressing his main topic. He writes, “He who wishes to attain right views about Christian *holiness*—must begin by examining the vast and solemn subject of *sin*. He must dig down very *low*—if he would build *high*. A mistake here is most mischievous. Wrong views about *holiness*—are generally traceable to wrong views about *human corruption*....The plain truth is, that a right understanding of SIN lies at the root of all saving Christianity.”<sup>10</sup>

Disciples believe in Sin, because without sin Jesus wasted His life and the Scriptures are false. We also would call man’s nature prior to salvation *total depravity*. R. C. Sproul writes, “The term *total depravity*...refers to the effect of sin and corruption on the whole person.....The total or whole person is corrupted by sin. No vestigial ‘island of righteousness’ escapes the influence of the fall. Sin reaches into every aspect of our lives, finding no shelter of isolated virtue.”<sup>11</sup>

IV. Disciples believe in Heaven and Hell- Matthew 11:23; 23:15, 33; 25:41, 46; Luke 10:15; 16:23; Revelation 21:1-22:5

“Just like one holding a dirty spider by the web over a fire, God holds you over the pit of hell. He abhors you; His anger is provoked; and His wrath burns against you like fire. He looks at you as worthy of nothing but to be cast into the lake of fire. His eyes are too pure to have you in His sight. You are ten thousand times more detestable to Him than the most hated venomous snake is in ours. You have

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<sup>9</sup> Collin Hansen, general editor, *The New City Catechism Devotional* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 25.

<sup>10</sup> J. C. Ryle, *Holiness!* (Memphis, TN: Bottom of the Hill Publishing, 2012), 17.

<sup>11</sup> R. C. Sproul, *What Is Reformed Theology? Understanding the Basics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997), 118.

offended Him infinitely more than any criminal has offended a judge, and yet it is nothing but His hand that keeps you from falling.

There is no other reason that you were allowed to wake up this morning and did not go to hell last night after you closed your eyes to sleep. There is also no other reason that you have not dropped into hell today, but that God's hand has help you up. There is no other reason why you have not gone to hell since you have walked into church today when His eyes saw the wicked way you have attended His worship.

O sinner! Consider the fearful danger you are in. It is a great furnace of wrath, a wide and bottomless pit full of the fire of wrath. You are held over that pit in the hand of God. His anger is provoked and incensed as much against you, as against many of the damned in hell."<sup>12</sup>

In Edwards message he gives four considerations that I think will prove of inestimable worth:

- A. Whose wrath it is? It is the wrath of the infinite God.
- B. It is the fierceness of His wrath to which you are exposed.
- C. God is standing right now ready to pity you. Today is a day of mercy.
- D. It is an everlasting anger.<sup>13</sup>

On heaven, Edwards writes, "O how infinitely great will the privilege and happiness of such be, who at that time shall go to be with Christ in his glory. [It is] the privilege of being with Christ in heaven, where he sits on the right hand of God, in the glory of the King and God of angels, and of the whole universe, shining forth as the great light, the bright sun of that world of glory, there to dwell in the full, constant, and everlasting view of his beauty and brightness, there most freely and intimately to converse with him, and fully to enjoy his love, as his friends and spouse, there to have fellowship with him in the infinite pleasure and joy he has in the enjoyment of his Father, there to sit with him on his throne, and reign with him in the possession of all things, and partake with him in the joy and glory of his victory over his enemies, and the advancement of his in the world, and to join with him in joyful songs praise, to his Father and their Father, to his God and their God, forever and ever."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Sinners In the Hands of An Angry God: And Other Great Sermons by Jonathan Edwards* (Alachua, FL: Bridge Logos Foundation, 2003), 47-48.

<sup>13</sup> Edwards, *Sinners In the Hands of An Angry God*, 48-52.

<sup>14</sup> Dane Ortlund, *Edwards On the Christian Life: Alive to the Beauty of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 169.

V. Disciples believe in Church- Ephesians 2:20-22; 4:11-16; 5:25-33

We will discuss this in more detail in the future, but for now I want to highlight just a few thoughts:

A. A Church is a People, not a Place- Ephesians 5:25<sup>15</sup>

B. A Church is a Mandate, not an Option- The New Testament (\*note the instances of “the church,” or letters written to “churches”)

After surveying the New Testament and presenting his findings regarding the church and the Christian, Jonathan Leeman writes, “Adding all this up, one thing is obvious to our Jerusalem research committee: to be a Christian is to belong to a church. No one gets saved and then wanders around by him or herself, thinking about whether to join a church. People repent and are then baptized into the fellowship of a church. Looking to Christ as Lord means being united to Christ’s people. It’s automatic, like being adopted means you’ll quickly find yourself at a dinner table with brothers and sisters.”<sup>16</sup>

VI. Disciples believe in The Gospel-1 Corinthians 15:1-8; Ephesians 2:1-9

### **What do disciples believe: The Apostles’ Creed**

“I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit  
and born of the virgin Mary.  
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried;  
he descended to hell.  
The third day he rose again from the dead.  
He ascended to heaven  
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.  
From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,

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<sup>15</sup> Mark Dever, *What Is A Healthy Church?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 34.

<sup>16</sup> Jonathan Leeman, *Church Membership: How The World Knows Who Represents Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 46.



the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting. Amen.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Taken from Christian Reformed Church, <https://www.crcna.org/welcome/beliefs/creeds/apostles-creed>, accessed 18 July 2018.

*Recommended Resources:*

*Books*

Collin Hansen, general editor, *The New City Catechism Devotional* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017)

*Westminster Shorter Catechism* (available for free online)

*Westminster Confession of Faith* (available for free online)

Randy Alcorn, *Heaven* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2004)

James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ: A Treatise On the Nature, Powers, Ordinances, Discipline, and Government of the Christian Church* (Edinburgh, SCT: T&T Clark, 1923)

Mark Dever, *What Is A Healthy Church?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007)

*Sermons*

Jonathan Edwards, "Sinners In the Hands of An Angry God" (available for free online)