

The Importance Of Doctrine

The Church, the Pillar and Ground of Truth

John W. Ritenbaugh

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This sermon began to take shape rather vaguely about three months ago when I read a paragraph in a commentary about the importance of doctrine. Then it really leapt to the forefront of my mind about one month ago when I read an article in the *Sabbath Sentinel* publication. The *Sabbath Sentinel's* Purpose Statement claims to not necessarily agree wholly with the doctrinal position of those articles they choose to publish. They *do* agree with the author's position regarding the necessity of keeping the Sabbath, and that is why they choose to print any particular article.

They published an article of mine in which the Sabbath was used to indicate the wide difference of belief that separated those clergymen who participated in the service in The National Cathedral following the World Trade Center bombing. The question in my article was: "Because of the wide disagreements, including the very important Sabbath doctrine, how could all of these impressive clergymen be right?" Those clergymen all claimed to represent God, but their doctrinal disagreement portrayed God as being unconcerned about doctrine.

The Bible clearly states that God is not the author of confusion; therefore, God is not the author of *doctrinal* confusion represented by those clergymen with all the impressive letters following their names. Which one, if any, was God listening to, and responding to, since *none* of them advocated keeping the Sabbath?

The article that appeared in the *Sabbath Sentinel* about a month ago made the following statement regarding his belief about the church:

The point here is that I no longer believe that the true Church of God can be identified on the basis of organizational structure, doctrine, dogma, or by its leading personality. There certainly is no single doctrinal package that represents the absolute truth on the subject. Each group embraces true and false doctrines, true and false Christians, true and false ministers. Individuals are more or less led by the Holy Spirit. We all have varying degrees of understanding of Scripture. We all have blind spots, prejudices, flaws, sins, and hang-ups.

This came from a man whose name I think most of you would immediately recognize,

and who was of course a pretty high-ranking official in the Worldwide Church of God. [Understand that he is no longer in the WCG.] A paragraph or two later he went on to further explain the practical ramification of this notion that he put forth. He said:

I can now understand why former members of the churches of God are finding places within so-called "mainstream" churches. They know that Sunday is not the Sabbath, but they also see no harm in meeting on Sunday to learn the word of God, or to fellowship with brethren. To use a biblical expression—'Against such there is no law.' If they see the spirit of God working in a Sunday-keeping church, they are drawn to it rather than to a Sabbatarian church that displays carnality, party spirit, negative politics, and intolerance for differences of opinion. I know ex-ministers and lay people alike who are now attending, or even ministering, in Lutheran, Congregational, Nazarene, Orthodox, Presbyterian, and charismatic churches. I am acquainted with others who attend Messianic Synagogues or Church of God Seventh Day congregations. All are in some way finding their spiritual needs met in these churches. They are discovering parts of the truth that were suppressed in the churches of God. At the same time they are running into error, blind spots, politics, and all of the negatives that seem to plague the larger church. They seek the wheat, and reject the chaff. It's that simple. In the midst of it all, the Lord knows them that are His.

Apparently a fairly sizeable number of people have come to a similar conclusion to this man's, because I think we can all know people that we formerly fellowshiped with in the Worldwide Church of God who are now attending a Sunday-keeping church. But I want to more closely examine and compare with **biblical** statements and commands some of the thoughts expressed within these paragraphs, because I think it is very clear that these people have reached a wrong conclusion that is going to cost them **greatly** before this scattering is over.

I read to you only two paragraphs from this article, but these portions of the article make it very clear that this man **strongly** believes that it is a **proper** solution for anybody to believe that regular fellowship at any church calling itself "Christian" is okay with God, because (he says) God's spirit is in those churches too.

Now consider this question: Is the Bible not merely careless, but outright **wrong** when it twelve times names a *distinct organization*—the "Church of God,"—and not Methodist, Presbyterian, Catholic, Congregational, or you name it? This man, after all, called the people attending these churches with those names as "brethren." He also said that these

churches are repositories of the truth, and that by fellowshiping with these groups one avoids the suppression of certain aspects of biblical truth, and all of the negative aspects of offenses generated by political in-fighting within the churches of God.

Now answer this question: Were not the New Testament epistles written to address problems in **church of God** congregations, and to instruct, exhort, and encourage those sons of God as to how to overcome those problems?

Another question: Were not the messages to the Seven Churches in Revelation 2 and 3 all written to congregations of the Church of God, and not to Jewish synagogues or temples of paganism?

Another question: Have any of you, at any time, in **any** New Testament epistle, or in **any** Old Testament book, of **any** author, ever seen it written that one possible solution is to start fellowshiping with those meeting at the local high place, or the local idol's temple, because there you will have your spiritual needs met?

I and II Corinthians are especially good examples of what I'm talking about here. That congregation seemed to contain just about every bad quality that one can imagine the Church of God having, and yet Paul **nowhere** in those epistles advanced the possibility of going to another church to relieve the pressure and get spiritual help.

When Paul and the others wrote those epistles to the organized corporate body of the Church of God, there is absolutely not one indication that the authors expected Christians to be in other corporate bodies. These people were gathered together in *one spiritual and physical* organization. The General Epistles of James, Peter, John, and Jude directly addressed a division and scattering that occurred in the first century, and was caused by false ministers from **within** the Church of God, and yet none of those authors even remotely suggested fellowshiping with the competition for a while.

Every false doctrine that was used to scatter the church by destroying our unity of belief is to be found in full force in those competing spiritual groups. To go to them is to run into the arms of the major human source of the very thing that **caused** the division and scattering: false doctrine.

This "solution" supported by this author to providing for one's spiritual need is very similar to what some psychologists give when telling dysfunctional married couples that the solution to their marital problems is to commit adultery. Spiritual adultery is exactly what Israel was committing when they fellowshiped at the local high place of Baal following the making of the Old Covenant at Mount Sinai. What kind of faithfulness does

that kind activity show? Well Jeremiah makes it very clear. It directly led to Christ divorcing Israel.

Let's begin with Deuteronomy 13:1-5.

Deuteronomy 13:1-5 If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto you, saying, Let us go after other gods, which you have not known, and let us serve them; you shall not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the LOORD your God tests you, to know whether you love the LOORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. You shall walk after the LOORD your God, and fear Him, and keep His commandments, and obey His voice, and you shall serve Him, and cleave unto Him. And that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death; because he has spoken to turn you away from the LOORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed you out of the house of bondage, to thrust you out of the way which the LOORD your God commanded you to walk in. So shall you put the evil away from the midst of you.

Brethren, when fellowshiping with those who are not named "The Church of God" and who keep Sunday in obvious defiance of the Fourth Commandment given as a sign, is this not going to result in being taught doctrine the Lord has not commanded? That seems to me to be so logical, I don't know how anyone can deny it. We're going to see as we go through here place after place after place where God warns people, commands people: ***"Don't do that!"***

We are being tested, and these people who are running to these other groups are failing the test. They are showing that they cannot be faithful to the One they have been affianced to—Jesus Christ—and that they can find their needs met elsewhere, apart from Him.

Deuteronomy 6:12-18 Then beware lest you forget the LOORD, which brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. You shall fear [respect, reverence, stand in awe of] the LOORD your God, and serve Him, and shall swear by His name. You shall not go after other gods of the gods of the people which are round about you; (For the LOORD your God is a jealous God among you) lest the anger of the LOORD your God be kindled against you, and destroy you from off the face of the earth. You shall not

tempt the LOORD your God, as you tempted him in Massah. You shall diligently keep the commandments of the LOORD your God, and His testimonies, and His statutes, which He has commanded you. And you shall do that which is right and good in the sight of the LOORD: that it may be well with you, and that you may go in and possess the good land which the LOORD sware unto your fathers.

Are you aware that the people of the land that God is talking about here called their major god "Baal," and that Baal means the same thing as our English word "lord"? They worshipped "the lord." Is that not similar to what we have here today where there is a play on a name? Those people in those churches call God "the Lord," but as we go along you're going to see very clearly it is not the same God with the same teaching, and is not the same Lord they are worshipping. So often, brethren, we are deceived by our eyes, and rather than rely in faith, trusting confidently the word of God, we instead rely upon what we *think* we see and perceive in the people.

Matthew 7:21 Not every one that says unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that does the *will* of my Father which is in heaven.

We have to ask ourselves a question: Are those people doing the *will* of God? They aren't, and we have an obvious area (the Sabbath and the Holy Days) which shows very clearly that they are not keeping them, even though very many of their theologians will admit that the Sabbath is the only day commanded in the Bible. They will *admit* it, and still not keep it. There is defiance there. There is an enmity there.

Matthew 7:22 Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name? And in your name have cast out demons? And in your name done many wonderful works?

They may do many wonderful works, especially in some areas of society.

Matthew 7:23 And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, you that work iniquity.

They may call out "Lord, Lord," but they are workers of iniquity, and iniquity means

lawlessness, and lawlessness is commandment breaking. So don't be deceived by appearances. They might look as though they are very fine people and that they are doing wonderful social works, but they are **commandment breakers**.

There are clues all through the Book that they are wrong in their response to this scattering. Does one simply throw out clear warning patterns that God established in His dealings with Israel in the Old Testament? How, brethren, are people going to have their spiritual needs met by doing such a thing? Is the way to win a war to join with the enemy's camp? Is fellowshiping with the enemy the way to correct doctrine and truth so that one is equipped for every good work? These are questions with obvious answers.

Let's go to I Timothy 3:14-15.

I Timothy 3:14-15 These things write I unto you, hoping to come unto you shortly: But if I tarry long, that you may know how you ought to behave yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the **living** God, the pillar and ground of the truth.

Paul is writing here of a specific organization which is the support [the **pillar** which upholds] and is also the foundation (the **ground**) of the truth. How can one know that it is a specific organization? Actually, that is very easy. It's because of the pattern that God establishes, and because of God's use of symbolism and metaphor.

We're going to go back to the Old Testament again to establish something in the book of Amos, chapter 3, verses 1 and 2.

Amos 3:1-2 Hear this word that the LOORD has spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying, *You **only** have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.*

God made the Old Covenant with only one nation. We all understand that He uses the metaphor of a marriage between a young man and a young woman in order to establish one aspect of that covenant, and He gives the ideal: **one** man, **one** woman for life. That's the ideal. Not one man, two women; one man, three women; one man, four women. Spiritually, God is not a polygamist. He makes a covenant only with **ONE** organization. The Old Covenant was made with only **ONE** organization—the nation of Israel.

That agreement was the type that laid the foundation and set the pattern for the New Covenant. The Israelites were not [initially] scattered. They were all located in one geographical area. They were one organized unit, distinct from all other nations. They did not become scattered until they broke the covenant through poor performance, and God divorced Himself from them and scattered them. When they were scattered, they became lost within the pagan nations around them, and they lost their identity, forgetting to this day who they are. ***Do you understand what I am saying?*** These people who are leaving the Church of God are going over to this other group in their scattering, and they are setting the course so that they become lost just like the Israelites.

Let's go back to the New Testament again to I Corinthians 12:12.

I Corinthians 12:12 For as the body is **ONE**, [just like Israel was **one** nation, even though it had twelve family groups amongst it. Israel had many members, but it was **one** body, **one** nation, and so is the church.] and has many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ.

I Corinthians 12:27 Now you are the body of Christ, and members in particular.

Is Christ's body scattered all over the place? It's an *organized* body.

I Corinthians 12:28 And God has set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.

In the New Testament the human body is a type of the church, and the human body is highly organized. It's parts are not scattered in many bodies. There is absolutely no permission given for one even to begin to think that he is helping things by fellowshiping with another organized spiritual body. If one does, the Old Testament already shows the result. Those people will become lost, absorbed in those religious organizations, and they will lose their distinctive identity. Where then, brethren, is the witness going to come from?

These people are naively brave and foolish. They think that they are going to be a part of these organizations without absorbing the teaching and without becoming just like those who are in them. It will happen that way. Wherever you are as an American, you

are distinctive, unless you are in America. Then you blend right in. The same thing is true in regard to spiritual organizations. You come in there different, and you are distinctive, but after a while you blend right in.

This sorting out the wheat and the chaff is an idle dream. It won't happen, and that's why we are urged all through this Book in different ways, in different forms of commands, the simplest being, "**Come out of them!**" If you stay in amongst them, you're going to be like they are. They won't be able to be a witness to God. Not at all.

I want you to reflect back on a scripture I used before in I Timothy 3:15.

I Timothy 3:15 But if I tarry long, that you may know how you ought to behave yourself in the house of God, which is **the** church of **the** living God, **the** pillar and ground of **the** truth.

In this scripture we have definite articles appearing before every one of those nouns, making them all very specific. I'm going to be focusing on "**the truth**." From here though, I want us to go to Galatians 6:15. We just read in I Corinthians 12 that we make up the body of Christ Jesus. We are **in** Christ Jesus. We are part of His body.

Galatians 6:15 For **in** Christ Jesus neither circumcision avails anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.

Circumcision is unimportant. What is important is the **new creation**. That's the emphasis in what Paul is saying here.

Galatians 6:16 And as many as walk according to **this** rule [what was given in verse 15] peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the **Israel of God**.

Christians are those individuals who have made the New Covenant with God, which in turn unites them with others who have done the same. They are then placed into an organized unit or body called **the church** (the body of Christ), or in this place **the Israel of God**. Even that is interesting, because it separates, makes distinctive one Israel from another. There are at least two Israels. One of them is distinctive, and that distinctive one is **the Israel of God**, which is **spiritual Israel**, which is **the Church of God**, which is highly organized, just like a human body.

Paul goes on to say that those individuals who make the covenant are those who walk according to the principle (the rule, as it is stated there) of the **new creation**. What Paul is implying is a *way of life*. When he talks about the *new creation*, he is implying a way of life, truth, rules, principles, doctrines, and tradition that will enable one to progress within the new creation.

Back away for just a second here, and I want you to reflect on just very generally the kind of fruit that those organizations (the competition people are being persuaded to fellowship with to fill their spiritual needs) have produced. What have they produced? What is their fruit?

This western world (primarily Europe, the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa) is largely the product of its spiritual efforts. Is it filled with every good thing God promises, or with every filthy thing that He warns us against? You know what the answer to that is.

God's organized body (the church) has a very clear and specific sign given by God to those who have made the covenant with Him. All of these other spiritual organizations are **NOT** the **pillar** and **ground of the** truth. These people are fellowshiping with the enemy, and the enemy has rejected the clear sign given in Exodus 31. I'm going to read that to you even though you know what it is.

Exodus 31:13-17 Speak you also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my Sabbaths you shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations [meaning forever and ever, as long as there are human beings] that you may know that I am the LOORD that does sanctify you. You shall keep the Sabbath therefore: for it is holy unto you: every one that defiles it **shall surely be put to death**: for whosoever does any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the Sabbath of rest, holy to the LOORD: whosoever does any work in the Sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant. It is **sign** between me and the children of Israel ...[those who are part of **the Israel of God**]...**FOREVER**: for in six days the LOORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed.

That's pretty clear.

I'm going to go back to the New Testament once again as we continue to show that fellowship with those people is totally unacceptable in God's eyes. It is **NOT** the solution to the scattering by which He is testing us, and these people are failing it miserably. Turn to James 3:11.

James 3:11 Does a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?

This man admitted in his article that you're not going to get the truth there.

James 3:12 Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? Either a vine, figs? So can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.

The people who turn to that solution have really given themselves a spiritual Mount Everest to climb. "Reject the chaff; separate out the wheat," he said is that simple.

I'm going to go to another place to give you God's answer. David Grabbe went through this in a sermonette, and I thought I would read through it. We're going to go to Proverbs 7. I'm going to read most of that chapter because here we have types and symbols being used, and the woman in this picturesque story represents the false churches.

Proverbs 7:4-18 Say unto wisdom, You are my sister; and call understanding your kinswoman: That they may keep you from the strange woman, from the stranger which flatters with her words. For at the window of my house I looked through my casement, and beheld among the *simple* ones, I discerned among the youths a young man **void of understanding**, ...[Translate this into the article that I read.] ...Passing through the street near her corner; ...[It's interesting that many churches are on corners.] ...and he went the way to her house, In the twilight, in the evening, in the black and dark night: And, behold, there met him a woman with the attire of an harlot, and subtil of heart. (She is loud and stubborn; her feet abide not in her house: Now is she without, now in the streets, and lies in wait at every corner.) So she caught him, and kissed him, and with an impudent face said unto him, I have peace offerings with me; this day have I payed my vows. Therefore came I forth to meet you, diligently to seek your face, and I have found you. I have decked my bed with coverings of tapestry, with carved works, with fine linen of Egypt. I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon. Come, let us take our fill of love until the morning: let us

solace ourselves with loves.

Brethren, if any of you can think back on many of the particulars when the Worldwide Church of God was falling apart in the early nineties and up to the middle nineties, how **ardently** the Protestant churches **pursued** the Worldwide Church of God, to break it up. They sent their representatives to counsel with the Tkachs and all that other gang out there, and lead them and guide them along the way as to what they needed to do in order to divorce themselves from the heresies (they say) of Herbert Armstrong and the Church of God.

Proverbs 7:18-27 Come, let us take our fill of love until the morning: let us solace ourselves with loves. For the good man is not at home, he is gone a long journey: ...[Yes, he's dead, if we think of Herbert Armstrong as the *good man* of the house.] ... He has taken a bag of money with him, and will come home at the day appointed. With her much fair speech she caused him to yield, with the flattering of her lips she forced him. He goes after her straightway, as an ox goes to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks: Till a dart strike through his liver; as a bird hastes to the snare, and knows not that it is for his life. Hearken unto me now therefore, O you children, and attend to the words of my mouth. Let not your heart decline to her ways, go not astray in her paths. For she has cast down **many** wounded: yes, many strong men have been slain by her. Her house is the way to hell [the grave], going down to the chambers of death.

Turn now to Jeremiah 2:13.

Jeremiah 2:13 For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.

God and His church is the fountain of living waters, and He fellowships with the Israel of God.

Let's go back to the New Testament again to II Corinthians 6:14.

II Corinthians 6:14-18 Be you not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship has righteousness with unrighteousness?

And what communion has light with darkness? And what concord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has he that believes with an infidel? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God; as God has said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them: and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come **out** from among them, and be you separate, says the Lord, and *touch not* the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.

Paul is asking, "What do we have in common with these people?" The answer is **nothing**, except those things that are carnal. Those who have chosen to fellowship with the world's churches are giving clear evidence of their carnality. It may well be that they were simply unconverted tares who were sown amongst us and fellowshipped with us for a time. They may have been very nice people who agreed intellectually, were sociable and are quite cultured, but nonetheless unconverted. They are giving evidence that *they are rich and increased with goods*. They are saying that they have no further need of the spiritual help God provides through the Church of God—His spiritual help that will enable them to walk according to the principle of the new creation. This is going to become increasingly important as we go through this end of the sermon.

The Church of God is the **pillar** and the **ground** of **THE truth**, and **THE truth** is contained within the doctrines that were given to us. I am not saying that as they were given to us, they were given to us in their fullness and with complete understanding. There is always more that we can know, because God is so deep. I am saying that we were given the basics. We were given all that was necessary for salvation. We were given **all** and **more** that is necessary to begin to prepare us for salvation.

Our failure as a corporate body was not due to having wrong doctrines. Like ancient Israel, it was due to poor performance in using the doctrines that we were given. Poor performance in any area of life might be due to any number of factors. Poor performance in relation to God is almost always due to a lack of faith—the faith that God is really aware of and concerned with us individually and intimately. This lack of faith is always almost due to a lack of really knowing God, combined with an equal or greater lack of understanding of the practical application of His way.

To help us overcome is why God has provided so many gifts and offices that are named in I Corinthians 12. I just want to go over some of the gifts that He gives.

I Corinthians 12:6-11 Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.

And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to **every** man to profit withal. ...[That is, so all may profit.] ... For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom: to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit: To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another different kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues: But all these work that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.

Every once in a while we would hear a report either from Mr. Armstrong or one of the others who traveled to some of the other areas of the world. It always impressed them, that no matter where they went in the world, whether the people were black or brown or Caucasian, whether they spoke Spanish, French, Nigerian, or whatever it was, the spirit that was in the congregation was always the same. It's not that way when one goes to these other organizations.

I do not mean that you can't go to, let's say, a Methodist church all over the world, and that they wouldn't have the same spirit. I think that they probably will. What I am saying is that there is not the same spirit in the Church of God that there is in the Methodist church. There is not the same spirit in the Church of God that there is in the Presbyterian church. I would also say there is not the same spirit in the Presbyterian church as there is in the Methodist church, or in the Presbyterian church as there is in the Catholic church, or whatever.

The spirit that is in the Church of God is **distinct**. It **has** to be that way, because it is the spirit of God, and that spirit is in every one of the congregations to a greater or lesser degree regardless of where we are in the world, and regardless of the language.

The remainder of this sermon is going to be devoted to helping us understand the importance of right doctrine, because it was given to us in a package. There is absolutely no doubt about that. Doctrine is available to the sons of God in a specific package that is in agreement with God's purpose and leads to the correct conclusion for life **only** in the churches of God. We're going to see this especially in the book of Ephesians.

There are six words in the Bible translated *doctrine*: four in the Old Testament, and two in the New Testament. Two of the ones in the Old Testament are each translated as

"*doctrine*" only one time. These words actually have a stronger sense of being an announcement or a warning. That leaves us with four to deal with: two in the Old Testament, and two in the New Testament. All four of those words mean exactly the same thing. They mean "*instruction*." Doctrine is instruction. We can say doctrine is teaching, or doctrine is learning. Every one of those uses fits, depending upon the context in which it appears. Therefore, there is nothing hidden, mysterious, or ambiguous about the terms. They are all straightforward and can be used for either good instruction or for bad instruction. They can be used for the Lord's instruction, Satan's instruction, the world's, father's, mother's, friend's, priest's, or minister's instruction. There is nothing unusual about any of these four words. They all simply mean ***instruction***.

We're concerned with the importance of the Lord's teaching as contrasted with everybody else's, because that is the issue in the Bible. It was bad doctrine believed by many deceived people that is at the foundation of the scattering, and is continued to be used to increase the scattering. Turn to Ephesians 4:14.

Ephesians 4:14 That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.

Ephesians 4:16 From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplies, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, makes increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

These two verses show that it is very clear that bad doctrine deceives. People get blown about by it. You can think of leaves scattering in the wind. It deceives, and it destroys both godly maturity and unity.

I'm going to back off just a little bit because I want to give us all a bit of an overview of the book of Ephesians. The overall theme is ***unity***: how our (the Church of God's) particular unity came about, why it is essential, and how to maintain it.

In Ephesians 1 Paul instructs us that our unity came about because of God's merciful purpose, and His calling and forgiveness has placed us within the body of Jesus Christ.

In Ephesians 2 Paul charges us to know that we are saved by grace through faith, and we are ***purposefully*** being created for doing good works. He reminds us briefly that this

very racially and ethnically diverse group has been unified around Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ broke down the middle wall of partition that divided us.

In Ephesians 3 Paul explains his special assignment to the Gentiles, that he has been gifted by God to make known the arrangement of God's plan for salvation, and that it is through **the church** that it is going to be witnessed to the principalities and powers in heavenly places. This is a **very** important chapter in terms of the purpose of the church and why it has to be organized.

In the beginning of Ephesians 4 the unity theme really leaps to the fore, because this is where he says, "*There is one body, one spirit, one hope of our calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God who is above all and through all, and in us all.*" **All of us** have been given gifts to enable us to live, work and unify within the Church of God. He then charges that some have been gifted as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers, and that their purpose is to help in equipping the saints for service and maturity that we might be unified rather than immature and scattered.

It's right here, in Ephesians 4:14-16, that the instruction makes a **major** significant turn from what I call *foundational doctrine* or *conceptual doctrine* intended to enable us to envision broad overall concepts explaining how we got here and where we are going. From this point on, beginning in verse 17, Paul gives a much more narrow practical application doctrine that will enable us to meet and fulfill our responsibilities in daily life. In other words, verse 17 and on contains *what we must do* in order to carry out our part in the outworking of God's great purpose, thus ensuring that we are not causing disunity.

Paul is a very careful teacher. He doesn't simply announce great principles, and then leave it there. He always applied his teaching. He doesn't merely leave things on an intellectual level. He preaches "*because of this, we must do that,*" and thus he exposes us to our duties, our obligation, and our responsibility. Do you know why he does this? He does this so that we have absolutely no excuse for failing. We have been told. In John 13:17 Jesus said, "Blessed are you if you **do** them."

Knowing what we know is a great responsibility, because if we know without applying it, we're going to have to answer for it. In Luke 12 Jesus said, "To whom much is given, of him much more is required." In the light of what we have been given, our responsibilities are enormous.

Let's look at Ephesians 4:17-20.

Ephesians 4:17-20 This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them because of the blindness of their heart: Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But you have not so learned Christ.

That word "therefore" begins Paul's two-chapter long conclusion. He begins by telling us that there is no separating what we know from daily life. There is not one life *inside* the church and another *outside*. Both are one. We must "*walk the walk*." Church is not something that one puts a suit on for and goes to on the Sabbath, and then goes back to the same old "same olds" the rest of the week. As part of *the body of Christ*, a person *is* something. He is a **Christian**, and he is to be a Christian at home, at work, at play, driving his automobile, interacting with the husband or wife, in childrearing practices, in the marketplace. It matters not where. One who is a part of the body of Jesus Christ is *always* a Christian *wherever*.

Because of the tremendous, overwhelming important doctrines taught in the first three and one-half chapters of this epistle, a person cannot allow himself to live as the unconverted live because of the futility of *their* mind, which is subject to ignorance and hardness of heart.

Now this is what a Christian must do:

Ephesians 4:21-24 If so be that you have heard him, and have been taught by him as *the truth* is in Jesus—[a specific package of truth], that you put off concerning the former conduct the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that you put on the new man, which after God is created...[the *new creation*]...in righteousness and true holiness.

The Christian, as he has learned Christ—that is, the truth contained in the doctrines taught through the apostles—must be actively taking off and putting aside the old conduct, and putting on the conduct and attitudes learned through the Church of God. In other words, Paul is saying that there must not be any difference between the major conceptual doctrine and practice. Conduct must always arise from, be dictated by, and controlled by these Christian doctrines.

Now listen to what I have to say here. Christian practice is not merely a code of conduct imposed on us. There is conduct that we must do, and there is conduct that we must not do, **but we must know why**. The conceptual doctrines tell us why, and they give us understanding. Doctrines give logical sense to the things of Christianity. I know that one of the things that impressed me, as I learned from Herbert Armstrong, is how logically everything fits together just like a picture puzzle. It is the broad conceptual doctrines that teach us the who, what, where, why, when, and how of life from God's perspective. As we learn it, it begins to dissolve the mysteries of life. Paul charges that we be no more children. We must learn, we must grow, we must understand our responsibilities. Our practices in life must always be such that is inevitable because of what we believe. In other words, believing this will inevitably lead to doing that.

There is a difference between mere morality and Christian living. The world's morality is concerned about the goodness and rightness of behavior mostly in terms of its social consequences. This is important for us to understand, because there are many people like this, and there is nothing wrong with this as far as it goes, but it can also be deceiving us. I know that some of these people who are going to these Protestant churches especially, are being deceived by *nice* people, *moral* people who are in them. Like I said, this is good as far as it goes, but mere morality is **not** what the Bible is concerned about in terms of Christian living, because Christian doctrine shows that this world's approach to morality doesn't go anywhere near far enough for a Christian.

Christian doctrine shows that Christianity is primarily interested in us, and in our conduct and attitudes, not in and of themselves and their social consequences. It is interested in our conduct and attitudes because of our interest in Christ, in the Father, in the Church, in God's plan of redemption, in the Kingdom of God. By that, as Paul shows in this epistle, God is going to **astound** the principalities and powers.

It is not merely conduct in and of itself, but conduct **within** this vast scheme of God nullifying the works of Satan, and restoring and uniting all things in Christ. In other words, Christian conduct and attitude is seen in the Bible as relating to God's new creation, and having little or nothing at all to do with the world itself. Where, brethren, are you going to get teaching like that, except in a Church of God that **knows** what the purpose of life is, that we were born *to be God*? We weren't born just to be good. We weren't born just to be moral. **We were born to glorify Christ, to glorify the Father, and to be prepared when Christ comes!** That's why He wants us to be moral. He wants us to **witness** for His way. He wants us to witness and to be moral because of His plan of redemption so that we're prepared when the Kingdom of God comes.

All of the teaching of the Church of God bears directly upon preparation for and the

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establishment of His government and His religion on earth. Everything in Christianity is attached to that. In one sense Christianity doesn't give a hoot about our social consciousness. That's going to be taken care of in God's good time.

Now we aren't blind to what's going on. I realize that. But it's the focus that counts. It's the *why*. It's the *understanding* of why we are required what we are required. That's what those big conceptual doctrines that appear in the first three and one-half chapters of Ephesians and Romans (the first eight chapters) are about.

Turn to Galatians 1:6.

Galatians 1:6-7 I marvel that you are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ.

Those people aren't being given the Gospel.

Galatians 1:8-9 But though we, or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. [Sounds like Deuteronomy 13.] As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you than **that you have received**, let him be accursed.

"That which you have received." Just like we did in this generation.

Galatians 1:10-11 For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men I should not be the servant of Christ. But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man.

It is very true that Herbert Armstrong's gospel is not the same as the gospel that is preached in all those Protestant and Catholic churches. They are preaching **men's** gospels **about** Christ.

Galatians 1:12 For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Brethren, those people are not receiving doctrines that have to do with God's new creation, but a perversion that focuses on one aspect of the true gospel, and so they have doctrines like going to heaven, having an immortal soul, the trinity, keeping Sunday, keeping Easter, keeping Halloween, going to Purgatory, and ever-burning hell. They don't know what the true purpose of life is, or that we are regenerated by God's spirit and that begins a long period of preparation that is creation. They think that they're already complete and they're ready for God's reward. They believe in death-bed repentance that's going to usher one into heaven without preparation.

Brethren, their focus is on this world, not the Kingdom of God. You know very well I could go on and on about the differences between the truth that came to us as a package and what those people are being taught in those churches. Those unfortunate people, subject to the influence of those false doctrines, are on an entirely different path and it is going to end at an entirely different destination because belief gives birth to conduct, and they will follow the way of their beliefs.

Brethren, Revelation 2 and 3 show the Church of God is not perfect, and neither is doctrinal makeup or its practice, but it is so far ahead of whatever is in second place there is no comparison. Going to those other churches is either an excuse for Laodiceanism, weakness, or is an admission of unconversion. Those who allow themselves to come to believe and follow false doctrine because they deliberately put themselves in harm's way by fellowshiping with false churches will **not** be part of the first fruits, because they won't be prepared through obedience to the true doctrine. So don't allow yourself to be deceived. Doctrine does make a difference.