

## Does Doctrine Really Matter? (Part 8)

John W. Ritenbaugh

Given 22-May-04; Sermon #667

We are going to begin in I Timothy 4, with Paul's instructions to Timothy.

**I Timothy 4:6 (KJV)** 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, whereunto you have attained.

I think that translation, in the King James Version, is a little bit difficult to comprehend. And so I am going to give you the translation that is given in the New American Standard Bible, and it follows. Paul wrote:

**I Timothy 4:6 (NAS)** In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following.

Now, of particular interest here is the word "good." In Greek, it means a wide variety of things—depending upon the context in which this word appears. It might be translated beautiful, superior, excellent, pure, or honorable. In this particular context, it means affecting the mind agreeably. In other words, Timothy was carrying out this responsibility. He was affecting the minds of people agreeably by the doctrine he was teaching.

An additional word that I want you to pay attention to is the word "nourish." Again, in Greek, it means to feed, strengthen, promote health and growth. And in this particular context, it means to educate properly—to form the mind correctly. In the overall sense here, the apostle Paul was complimenting Timothy for faithfully following (that is, living by) what Paul had taught him. At the same time, Paul was exhorting him to teach those same sound doctrines that he had taught Timothy to the brethren.

The lesson is clear here. It takes certain words arranged in a certain form (that form would be true doctrine) to convert us to the place where we think like God, and therefore act like God. That is the responsibility of the local minister—to make sure that he gets across to people certain words arranged in a certain form (that is true, right, good doctrine) in order to make sure that those people who are hearing what he is saying are

Does Doctrine Really Matter? (Part 8) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

nourished. In other words, so their minds are strengthened and formed correctly—into the image of God.

Let us suppose that the ministry is doing this. Then, once the words leave the mouth of the minister, it becomes the responsibility of the brethren to believe those doctrines. But they do not have to. It is their choice. They can accept them, believe them, use them. Or they can reject them outright. Or they can say, "*Oh, I do not know*" and argue with them.

But I want you to see, as we go along here, that proper nourishment (assuming that you are receiving reasonably good teaching) becomes YOUR responsibility. That cannot be shrugged off. It cannot be blamed on the ministry. It becomes each person's responsibility to prove, to test things for themselves, and then permit themselves to believe it so that it can be put into action.

Timothy was accomplishing this. That is why the apostle Paul was complimenting it. He was not only pleased with Timothy. There was also a certain amount of pleasure with the people in Ephesus, which was where Timothy was the pastor. So Timothy was being complimented in following through with the truths that had been given to him by the apostle Paul.

I think that we all have to recognize that believing is not always easy. In fact, it is one of the more difficult responsibilities that falls on the shoulders of each and every one of us. Let me give you just an illustration from our day and time. Somebody recently informed me that they had read that various groups of the churches of God are using 15 different calendars. Did you hear that? Various groups of the churches of God are using 15 different calendars. Does that not strike you as interesting? For almost 2 millennia of time, the Church of God used the same calendar. And then suddenly, as we approach Christ's return, an explosion of differing calendars has occurred—throwing confusion into many, and thus creating division.

Does that not show to you that the hand of God is not doing this? God is not the author of confusion. Rather, God is the author of peace in all the churches of God. But what I am getting at here is that all of this confusion makes it very difficult for people to believe what is truth. And so, they are faced with making decisions in regard to what calendar they are going to follow.

I am continuing this series about "Is what we believe important?"—that I have titled DOES DOCTRINE REALLY MATTER? It began with the publication of that Barna Report, which concluded that American "born-again" people felt very comfortable with rejecting major biblical doctrines. However, this series is taking a turn here so that we

Does Doctrine Really Matter? (Part 8) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

can look into what happened in the first century church, in order that we might understand our individual position in light of the church's current state better.

What is it that motivated much of what is written in the Epistles? Was it not congregational problems that the apostles had to address? Of course it was. But what is the source of those problems? Were there any specific areas that disturbed the peace and the unity of the congregations? Yes, there were; and one of them is of particular concern to us today. Even though the group causing the problem in the first century no longer exists, some of their dangerous doctrines still survive.

Of particular concern is that these doctrines are very much alive in the "Christianity" of this world. They have continued to be believed, because they are very appealing to the carnal nature. And I fear that those believing these doctrines are virtually unaware of the source of these doctrines.

Perhaps I am being cynical; but, even if they are aware, I think that many people (because some of these doctrines are so appealing to human nature) still would not care—even though they heard the source, even though they heard the falseness of these teachings—because the teachings about Christmas and Easter are available to anybody; and what do they do? They just shrug them off.

But, brethren, we must be aware—because the affect (if one of us should adopt them) may very well destroy our salvation! Please understand that I am not talking about buying into their entire doctrinal package. I am talking here about perhaps adopting maybe only one of these major doctrines. It takes only one major doctrine to throw one off the track, because that will almost invariably lead to another doctrine, and on and on.

You might recall the map illustration that I gave in my last sermon. I only changed one major part of the directions of how to get from Scottsdale, Arizona to Glendale, Arizona (which are just on opposite sides of Phoenix, Arizona). But one would never arrive in Glendale because that one change was critical to the success of my arriving there. So, how many forks in the road—in the path to the Kingdom of God—do we have to take in order to be no longer following "the cloud"?

Back in 1987, when the Tkach group made their first major change public, I mentioned to Evelyn at that time that they were not going to be able to stop making doctrinal changes. Why? Other doctrines would no longer mesh with that change. Thus, it would be like knocking down a row of dominoes. The pieces of the doctrinal puzzle would no longer fit together. Thus they could not stop until the whole doctrinal picture changed, crashed; and the organization scattered into small pieces.

Turn with me to John 6. Jesus is speaking, and He says:

**John 6:63** It is the spirit that quickens [makes alive]; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.

One of the most helpful resources that any serious student of the Bible needs to have at his disposal and to use frequently is a dictionary. This is because understanding what God is saying depends upon whether we understand what individual words mean. The Bible is a spiritual tool—filled with words. God's words! And they are arranged specifically, because He inspired them.

As we see in this verse, words are spirit. Words are symbols. And in a narrow sense, they do not exist. That is, there is no material substance to them. Rather, they represent something that does have material substance. Those words convey an image to the mind in order that we might understand.

For instance, take the word "automobile." That word carries a conception, an image, to our mind of the vehicle that we use to transport ourselves from one place to another. The image formed in the mind of each individual who hears the word "automobile" will, in almost all likelihood, be different from what the person right next to them thinks of. To one person, the image might convey a red 1993 Oldsmobile convertible. To another the image is a 2003 silver Chrysler mini-van. To a third person it is a 2001 blue Toyota Camry.

The illustration begins to reveal one of the most serious difficulties in communication. To all three people a word may look the same on the pages of a book, or sound the same when spoken; but it does not always convey the same precise reality and (more importantly) understanding to every person seeing or hearing it, because their background with that word is THEIR history with it.

This reality is capable of producing very serious consequences in spiritual matters. This is because, in matters pertaining to spiritual truth and its application to relationship issues (to a greater degree than any other area of life), it is important that we understand **the intention** of the communication.

I remember something that I learned as a much younger man. One had to be very careful when reading Communist literature because, when they wrote words familiar to most Americans (like freedom, liberty, equality, economics, democracy, and so forth), they had a different meaning in mind for those words than an American would generally

conceive.

It is also interesting that, when Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, Eve changed the wording that God had commanded them (whenever Satan questioned her). She added a phrase, indicating that she apparently did not understand the command the same way that God had clearly communicated. Her mind was already going in another direction, as was Adam's.

This reality that I am speaking of produces especially grievous results in the area of religion because in religion, understanding is much more difficult because very frequently we are not speaking at all of anything that has any material reality to it. Instead, religious words portray abstract concepts, ideas, notions, impressions, theories, hypotheses and thoughts that have no material substance to them at all (like an automobile does).

These things greatly affect belief—and therefore conduct, and attitudes, and goals for life. So we end up fighting one another, because our notions or concepts of an abstract idea are far different—even right within families. Husbands and wives have different backgrounds. Things mean different things to them, and they battle over them.

Is it any wonder at all that churches split, and split, and split, and split, and split, and split? Is it any wonder that, in the United States, the divorce rate is about 1 out of 2? Two people who supposedly begin loving one another, suddenly cannot understand each other and cannot stand each other. And the solution may be as simple as understanding what a word means.

Now be aware that, in this sermon, I am going to give you about a half a dozen more definitions of words that are critical to religion. Though these words may also be used in other areas of life, I am going to emphasize the usages of those that apply to religion as spiritual things.

There is a word that sooner or later, if you are at all studying and thinking about spiritual materials, you are going to run across this word. It is not a word that is used very much in daily life. But what it means, nonetheless, has had great impact already on your life—regardless of how old you are. It has had great impact on the history of the world, because it has great impact on how each person sees or understands the events of life. The word is *cosmology*.

Most of us know the word *kosmos* is the Greek word that is translated into English as "world." The "-ology" suffix on the end essentially means "study of." Thus, study of the

Does Doctrine Really Matter? (Part 8) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

world. Biology is the study of life, or theology is the study of God. Therefore cosmology is usually defined as the study of, science, doctrine, or theory of the nature of the world.

The root word "*kosmos*" can be used as referring to the created heavenly bodies—like planets and stars. In other words, the heavenly system or order of things. Or it might be applied to the organized systems of the earth's various cultures. Usually the Bible uses it in the latter sense—as applied to the organized systems of the earth's various cultures.

**I John 2:15** Love not the world [There is that word, *kosmos*.], neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

John is using it in the sense of applying it to the earth's various systems. That is, the cultures. However, when you read other material apart from the Bible, the authors are usually not using the word in the narrow biblical way but in the more comprehensive way—thus including elements that are both physical and spiritual. The more comprehensive way is the way that I am using it here at the beginning of this sermon.

I am doing this because that is the way that almost all Greeks commonly used the word. They did not use it in terms of the cultures or systems of the world. That is a biblical—that is a Christian apostle—usage of the word. When they used the word *kosmos*, they were talking about everything (but mostly those things that were heavenly).

The reason we are concerned so much with the way Greeks used it is because the Greek language and Greek thinking had a very great deal of impact on what is written in the New Testament. Remember how I started this sermon. The apostles wrote on things that were disturbing the congregations. They were dealing with problems in the congregations, and the Greek culture had a great deal of affect on that. The New Testament is even written in Greek.

Now, why is cosmology important? A person's cosmology pretty much determines, and forms, and shapes his perspective. **Perspective** is the way one looks at and perceives the events of life. Therefore, it greatly determines one's conduct.

The Greeks looked upon cosmology as the science, or the study, of the nature of the structure and function of the *kosmos*—including and especially the heavens and all of its systems. What I am laying the foundation for will not really become important until the

Does Doctrine Really Matter? (Part 8) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

next sermon, but I have to get this in here in order to provide a good foundation.

Since cosmology is the doctrine or theory of the nature of the world, what does the word "nature" mean? **Nature** is defined as the innate or essential character or basic constitution of a person or thing.

I used the word "constitution." Most governments have a constitution. The United States of America has a Constitution. What does the word **constitution** mean? It means structure. The Constitution is the structure of our government and of our liberties and responsibilities as American citizens. It is all structured there, for us to read.

Cosmology, therefore—this definition keeps getting longer and longer—is the doctrine of the innate or essential character, composition, or makeup of the world. One more thing has to be added to this whenever religion is involved. This is because the *kosmos* contains a spiritual dimension to it. This was very important to the Greeks. Since it was important to the Greeks, it found its way into the Bible. *Biblical cosmology*—this is my final definition here—is the doctrine of the innate or essential character, composition, and spiritual and physical makeup of the systems of the created world.

Whether people realize it or not, every person has a cosmology. It can be anywhere from simple to complex. It is how people understand the elements of their cosmology that determines their belief systems.

For example, if a person believes in evolution as an element of his cosmology, he believes that every material substance that occupies his world came into being without a Creator. This effectively eliminates God, angels, and demons from the way that he perceives life and its purpose. And that person's belief system is based entirely upon material things. And from this theory can come all kinds of social and cultural evils, because it also effectively makes each person his own authority concerning ethical and moral practices. A person whose cosmology includes evolution is thus lead to conclude that there is no moral, spiritual, or ethical authority any higher than man.

If you think that does not affect the way people LIVE, if you think that does not affect the way they ACT, I am sorry I lost you. Man is the pinnacle of moral, spiritual, and ethical thinking. There is no God, and man becomes God. That is shaped by his cosmology.

Now, at the foundation of every culture on earth—whether it is American, British, Indian, Russian, German, Indonesian, Chinese, Japanese, Dutch, or South African—is a cosmology. And each one of those has some similarities but, at the same time, distinctive differences of understanding that in turn make them differ from each other. Is

Does Doctrine Really Matter? (Part 8) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

it any wonder that we have wars, when everybody is looking at things differently; and each is saying, "My way is better than yours."

Now turn with me to Genesis 11:1-9. Listen to the wording here.

**Genesis 11:1** And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech.

I would have to take it, at this point in time, that since they all spoke the same language they did not have a great deal of trouble communicating with one another, and they all had essentially the same cosmology.

**Genesis 11:2-6** And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they dwelt there. And they said one to another, "Go to, let us make brick, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar. And they said, "Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded. And the LORD said, "Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do."

Now, it is obvious that God did not have the same cosmology as these men did. God, in His wisdom, could see where this was headed. These people, with their unrestrained freedom to communicate, could communicate the same perverse cosmology from one to another. But God put a stop to it, because it was out of sync with His cosmology. And so He says in verse 7:

**Genesis 11:7** "Go to, let Us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech."

And just that quick, their cosmologies changed. They could not understand one another the same any more.

**Genesis 11:8-9** So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth; and they left off to build the city. Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the LORD did there confound the language of all

Does Doctrine Really Matter? (Part 8) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

the earth: and from thence did the LORD scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth.

And here we are now, where we are, as a result of this act. So here were people who had a similar cosmology to begin with, and they are rapidly producing an altered hybrid cosmology that God very definitely did not want to continue.

There is a time coming when all will be one. Everybody will have the same cosmology shaping his views on life. But then it will be a oneness from God. For now it has suited God's purpose to have us all different, and to make us work on our relationships, and to get along together even though the way we look at things is not exactly the same. That is a battle we have to face, and we have to overcome it. Somewhere along the line our cosmologies are wrong, and they need to be altered—to be made in harmony with God's.

**Job 42:2-6** "I know that You can do everything [he is talking to God], and that no thought can be withheld from You. Who is he that hides counsel without knowledge? Therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not. Hear, I beseech You, and I will speak. I will demand of You, and declare You unto me. [Listen to verse 5.] I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees You. Wherefore I abhor myself."

He is saying, "*I abhor the way that I formerly looked at things.*" He is saying, "*My cosmology was all out of shape.*" It was out of whack, and it needed to be brought into alignment with God's. So now he could see things a great deal better, because now a part of his cosmology was brought into harmony with God's.

What we can learn from this is that cosmologies can be shaped and reshaped as our understanding of the nature and character of the world changes somewhat throughout our life. Added to that, also working to change our cosmology is God Himself. He very much, greatly, wants to change the way we look at things. That is the only way there is going to be peace and harmony in the Family of God—when we look at enough things the same way that God does so that we are one with Him.

Job took a giant step forward, but look at the battle he had to go through in order to be brought to this place where now he could see the glory of the mind and of the character of God, and the reason for trials—things that he did not understand before. Now he

Does Doctrine Really Matter? (Part 8) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

could look at life differently than what he did before.

You can see in this book that he looked upon life for himself as being a victim of circumstances. Now, he was a victim in the sense that things were out of control. But there was Somebody controlling the forces that were beginning to shape Job's mind—reshape his cosmology—until he looked at things differently than he did before. Also, that he could be at peace that God was not against him, but was actually shaping and forming his mind into one that would be in harmony with God.

It is this very fact that makes conversion possible. When God, by His grace, initiated a relationship with us—our cosmology changed forever.

**I John 3:1-2** Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God. Therefore, the world knows us not, because it knew Him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be. But we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him.

Please do not limit your thinking to the fact that we will have glory like Him. Certainly we will, but we will not have that glory until we *think* like Him! That is what He is reshaping, so that when we look at something, it is as though we are looking through the eyes—through the mind—of God. We are coming to have the same cosmology—the same sense of the universe, the same sense of creation, of why it is here and what our place in it is.

We will quit seeing ourselves as victims of circumstances. Instead, we will see that we are going through a creative process that is changing our outlook on life, and ourselves, and other people, and teaching. So I am certain that we will continually undergo changes until God is satisfied that our mind is in good enough alignment with His that we will look upon things as He does. Until then we are still somewhat at the mercy of what has formed and shaped that view of things that we held before conversion.

**I John 4:5** They are of the world. Therefore speak they of the world...

That is the way they see things. Their cosmology is forcing their conduct, their thoughts.

**I John 4:5-6** ...and the world hears them. We are of God. He that knows God hears us...

Boy, there is a bell ringer. The "us" there, brethren, is the apostles—and, of course, Himself directly. They hear "us."

**I John 4:6** ...he that is not of God hears not us.

The mind simply rejects. They simply cannot see it.

We are really getting down to a basic issue here; and we have to look at what formed the minds that they have and that we have. We have undergone something that they have not yet undergone. And it is very easy to understand why they do not get it. Their mind just does not think within the parameters that ours do. It has been shaped by a different spirit. So it perceives things within a different framework than ours does.

This is one of the truest tests of conversion—whether we really see things the way God does. And it means that we are gradually assimilating and using His cosmology. So, whether a person has religion or no religion at all, it will play a major role in shaping that person's cosmology. This is why it is so important that we come to know God. To know God is eternal life. So, brethren, if I can put it as simply as I possibly can—our job is to allow our minds to become like God's mind. It cannot be put any more simply.

It is sometimes easily overlooked that the church has not operated in a vacuum through the centuries; that it is not, and never has been, isolated from the activities of the cultures that members find themselves living in. This is because members bring the world—and thus their cosmology—right into the church. If this were not true, God would not admonish us to come out of Babylon.

This can be a source of major conflicts within the church, because everybody in the church does not perceive things exactly the same way. The major problem in the world that we must come out of is that, in an overall sense, the world does not believe God. It is that simple. There is nothing complex about this.

Now, witness the Barna Report that I gave you so many things from. These "born-again Christians"—in a sense, they believe almost anything they want. They actually create their own religion. Some of it, indeed, does come out of the Bible. But a lot of it simply comes out of the culture. And it is something that is acceptable to the group that they move in, work with, play with, socialize with.

For the most part, people in the world believe that God exists. But they do not believe

Does Doctrine Really Matter? (Part 8) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

what He says. Here comes another simple statement. It is what one believes that shapes his cosmology. There is nothing complex about what shapes the way we think, and therefore the way we act. It is what we believe. And we DO what we believe. And what we do proves what we believe!

It is the evidence in our life that we are submitting to God that proves to God that we really do believe Him. Is that not what James said? "*I will show you my faith by my works.*" Let me change the wording. James said, "*I will show you what I believe by what I do.*" What was shaping what he did was his cosmology. These things are all tied together. It is like you get into a circle that never ends.

Now we find the church in the twentieth century of its tumultuous existence. It is helpful for us to know that history, especially the church's, follows well-established patterns that are maintained by God for faith-building instruction. That is, something to help us along the way. Patterns that, if we are aware of them and we look for them, we can know that something that we can believe in is working.

What I mean by *patterns* is that, in principle, in all of man's history basically the same things happen over and over again. The names of the personalities change. The geography, in which the events take place, changes. But the events are, in principle, almost exactly the same. To put this in simple terminology: History keeps repeating itself.

This is because, first of all, God Himself never changes. And God's purpose never changes. His character is always the same, and the way that He makes decisions is going to be the same; and His purpose is therefore going to be worked out along the same general lines. This has been going on since the beginning.

In addition to this, Satan never changes from his determination to frustrate God's purpose. On top of that, human nature never changes—because, unless God intervenes, it is virtually helplessly subject to Satan's manipulation.

I bring this up because I want us to understand why the first century cosmology fits into this series in the twenty-first century. That is, this series that I have been going through regarding the importance of correct doctrine, and because God gives a great deal of instruction in His Word about what happened to the first century church. It is very interesting.

First century church history, therefore, applies in principle to us. Things are going to keep repeating themselves. What began happening not long after the church came into

Does Doctrine Really Matter? (Part 8) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

existence is recorded in the Bible almost exclusively in the epistles. There is very much that we can learn about what happened to us because it happened to them. I mean what happened to us following the death of Herbert Armstrong.

Jesus warned of what was going to happen. Almost from the beginning of His ministry, He said, "Beware of false prophets." He said, "Beware of the doctrine of the Pharisees." He said, "Beware of the doctrine of the Sadducees." James wrote about what went on in the first century. Jude wrote about it—a whole book, one chapter long, is about what was going on. Peter wrote about it. Paul wrote about it. John wrote about it. And especially Paul wrote about it.

For many years I have known the things that I am going to go into, but it was greatly disorganized. I read a book that I am still reading. It is called "Primitive Christianity in Crisis" by Alan Knight. It has helped greatly to put things in order. Mr. Knight is a Sabbath keeper. He is a member of the Church of God Seventh Day.

And, as far as I am concerned, he has done a valuable service by providing a clear connection between first century beliefs and events, and the present condition of the greater Church of God. Not just the Church of the Great God. I am talking about United. I am talking about Living, Philadelphia, and the whole thing out there.

But, in order to provide a foundation, we have to go back in time, in thought, to the seventh and sixth century B.C. axial period once again that I spoke about several months ago. This is where this started. That is where this story has its roots.

You will recall that I stated several times in that series that this was the most tumultuous period of time in man's history in terms of our present day world. This is because, as historians have shown, it was during this period of time—the seventh and sixth centuries B.C.—that our present day world (with all of its governmental, economic, and religious systems) appears to have been conceived.

I showed you that God's prophets were right in the mix of things, and that the work of Jeremiah was especially important. And he appears—as far as the work of the true God is concerned—to have been God's axial man. But false prophets were also working to advance their ideas at the same time. However, it was through Jeremiah that God chose to prophesy of the New Covenant, around which much of our—present day Church of God—cosmology is formed.

The false prophets were also being inspired by their leader to devise a new cosmology for the pagan world, to compete with God's truth for the minds of mankind getting ready

Does Doctrine Really Matter? (Part 8) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

for the first appearance of Jesus Christ—and also to lay the groundwork for our day and age, just before Christ returns.

It took centuries for this cosmology to form. No one man contributed the whole picture, but form it did. And it became the focus of the Hellenistic world. That is important, because this is the world that the first century church had to deal with. This is the world of the Epistles of the Bible and, of course, the four Gospels and well.

The new cosmology began in the seventh and sixth century B.C., and it transformed pagan religions by structuring them to be far more spiritual than they formerly were. Over the course of several hundred years, men such as Orpheus, Pythagoras, Socrates, and Plato contributed greatly to its formation and became its chief promoters through their philosophies.

The same sort of intellectual movement was taking place all over the world. It was taking place in China, in Japan, in India, Indonesia, Polynesia. It was taking place in Mexico and in South America as well. The same basic form of thinking—most of which was wrong—was arising almost everywhere in the world simultaneously during that period of time.

But it was especially among the Greek people who were growing to their heights of their economic and military powers among the nations of the Mediterranean world three or four centuries before Christ came to earth. And even though the Roman Empire was the world's leading power, by the time Christ was born and the church began (rooted in the teachings of Jesus Christ of Nazareth) the Romans were very much enamored of things Greek and so were many Jews. Pay attention to that.

So dominant was Greek philosophical and religious thinking that, when the Bible speaks of "the world," it is primarily speaking of the Hellenistic world—not the Roman world. This is because Roman philosophy and religion was not at all attractive to the Jews. And who were all the first converts to Christianity? They were Jews! Many of them were steeped in Hellenism. Steeped in the writings of Socrates. Steeped in the writings of Plato, and others.

To the Jews, Rome represented a dominant, idolatrous, and brutal military power; and that was it. Things Roman were an aversion to them, but things Greek were for the most part attractive, appealing, and worth pursuing.

Did you ever notice, in the book of Acts, how many of the first converts have Greek names? Some day, look. There are very many of them. And, when they were converted,

Does Doctrine Really Matter? (Part 8) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

they brought their worldly cosmology right into the church with them. The Jews! You would expect that the Gentiles would do that. But it was the Jews who were causing the problems, because they were so infected with Greek thinking.

Much of the development of Greek philosophical and religious thinking through the years was aided by not the world of religion but the world of science. Their doctrines were not formed by revelations of the Creator, but by means of the observations and conclusions of men.

I want you to turn to Romans 1, beginning with verse 18. What we are going to look at is the cosmology of very much of the world at the time that Christ and the apostles were teaching.

**Romans 1:18-19** For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold [suppress] the truth in unrighteousness; because that which may be known of God is manifest [it is evident] in them; for God has showed it unto them.

Now, what is God reporting to us through the apostle Paul? He is saying that He did not deliberately hide Himself from men. Rather, men looked out into the heavens, or men looked at things created on earth; and they suppressed what they really saw there.

**Romans 1:20** For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.

Just because a person is unconverted does not mean that he cannot learn a great deal about God, because he can. But what is he going to DO with what he learns about God. Paul is telling us what they did. They suppressed it. They turned away from it.

The same thing is happening today. Astronomers look out into the heavens, and they see an awesome creation out there. They recognize that there is a tremendous orderly Mind that somehow or another is behind all of this, but they will not permit themselves to believe that there is a Creator God.

The same thing is happening today with large numbers of scientists who look at the creation; and, instead of allowing their mind to be led to and submitted to the fact that a great, awesome, loving, providential Mind—a beautiful Mind—created all of these

Does Doctrine Really Matter? (Part 8) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

things, they turn away from it. And, even whenever they admit it to themselves and others that there seems to be a God out there, they do not allow it to affect their life.

Even Einstein gave an answer that I thought was very interesting. He looked out into the heavens; and I do not remember exactly what the question was that came to him, but his answer was a classic. He said, "*God does not play dice. God does not gamble.*" "There is a Creator," is what he was saying, "who ordered all into existence and is continuing to run things." But his perception of God apparently stopped right there—with a well deserved admiration of the order that he saw in the heavens, and the power that it took to make such a thing. He was suppressing (just what Paul was writing about here).

**Romans 1:21-25** Because that, when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves. Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature [creation] more than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

The important element for the purpose for this series is the overall instruction that Paul gives. That is that mankind—every single person—is without excuse before God for not acknowledging Him as God, because His eternal power and divine nature are clearly seen in the creation. No matter what part of the creation man observes, it witnesses to him of a Creator of awesome and endless intellectual power—who made, rules, sustains His creation with overwhelming abundance in beauty and lovingkindness.

The Greeks did the same thing. As we can see from verses 22 through 25, it testifies of their response. And, instead of seeking a God of the nature that I just described above, they devised a pantheon of mythological god-figures—such as Zeus, and Herra, and Athena, and Diana, and Demeter, and on and on—that exhibited all the characteristics and foibles of men. And what is more, they created a large bundle of myths and doctrinal conclusions to support their philosophical and religious nonsense that included such things as—listen to the doctrines that the Greeks came up with: the immortality of the soul, reincarnation, evolution, eternal security, antinomianism, purgatory, and continual personal revelation.

Does Doctrine Really Matter? (Part 8) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Now, it is no wonder what Paul states in I Timothy 6:20. This is practically the last thing that Paul wrote. He wrote II Timothy after this. But I am sure that Paul felt as though he was being attacked on virtually every side; and he says to Timothy:

**I Timothy 6:20** O Timothy, keep [guard] that which is committed to your trust...

What was committed to Timothy's trust? It was the teachings the apostle Paul passed on to him—the doctrines that were passed on to him.

**I Timothy 6:20** ...avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called.

I said, just a little bit earlier, that what helped the Greeks shape their philosophies was not the world of religion. It was science—primarily astronomy. The gods and myths may have been attractive to them; but, in reality, they were nothing but the fictional ramblings of intellectual vanity.

They did not come up with all of these doctrines at once. It took centuries of time. But it remained for philosophers—like Pythagoras, and Socrates, and Plato among others—to systematize centuries of thought and form it into a sort of theology. It still was not a theology. It was still a philosophy—a love of human wisdom.

**Jeremiah 10:1-2** Hear you the word which the LORD speaks unto you, O house of Israel: Thus says the LORD, "Learn not the way of the heathen, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven; for the heathen are dismayed at them."

The Greeks (like the Babylonians and Egyptians) were very interested in studying the heavens and astronomy and its ridiculous, ludicrous, nonsensical, philosophical stepchild—astrology. Astronomy is defined in my Reader's Digest Great Encyclopedic Dictionary as "the science that treats the heavenly bodies, their motions, magnitudes, distances and physical constitution" (There is that word again.) In the same dictionary, astrology is "the study professing to foretell the future and interpret the influence of the heavenly bodies upon the destinies of men. (Still continuing that definition, from that dictionary.) Originally the practical application of astronomy to human uses."

Does Doctrine Really Matter? (Part 8) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

It is right here, in the ancient study of the heavens, that several widely held notions are brought together. The father of lies convinced Adam and Eve, with his first sermon, of the natural immortality of mankind when he said, "You shall not surely die!" Why do you think this was the first sermon that he taught human beings? That doctrine is the cornerstone of all of paganism. It is the cornerstone of all apostasy from God! It is the foundation upon which all of these other false doctrines find their roots.

What he essentially said was that it is not that mankind must be given everlasting life. He already has it! And it is not that God-quality life must be created in him. Rather, it is imprisoned within him from birth, and needs to be let free.

Now, if you can remember another sermon that I gave not too long ago, about the way Socrates looked at death compared to the way that Jesus looked at death. Who was living and telling the truth about death?

I will end with this. The foundation of Greek philosophical and religious teaching—the immortality of the soul—is built upon a simple dualism. Notice I used the present tense verb "is." That doctrine is still believed, right to this day; and it is practiced by most of modern Christianity.

The dualism is this: The theory (Notice the word "theory.") that the universe is composed of two principles. That is, that man's body and his mind are two different entities; but intimately correlated and interacting. It is the doctrine that there are two eternal and opposing principles or beings—one good and the other evil.

What the Greeks did is that they divided the universe into matter and spirit. Matter (they determined) is bad, spirit is good. This concept is false right on the face of it. What did God say in Genesis 1:31? This is truth! God looked at everything that He had made. Everything He had made was material. It was the earth, and mankind. And what was God's conclusion? **"It was very good."**

But the Greeks said, "No. All of this material stuff is no good at all. It is evil. The good part is inside of you, and needs to be released from its prison. And that good part is your immortal soul." There are lies all over the foundation of paganism. And if something is rooted right in a lie, what do you think the fruit is going to be? The fruit is going to be doctrines that are also lies.

Does it matter what we believe? Who are you going to believe? Are you going to believe the doctrines of modern Christianity? Or are you going to believe the doctrines that are in this Book? That is what we are responsible for choosing to do.