

Doctrine: What Is It?

I'd like to take the opportunity to discuss a very foundational subject today: the subject of doctrine. What is it? We talk about doctrine of the Church. Just what do we mean when we talk about doctrine? What comes to your mind when we address the subject?

I would like to look at the perception of doctrine today, in terms of how the "Christian" world perceives doctrine, and in terms of what should be OUR perception, by the way in which God's word presents doctrine.

The reason for this is that the end result of the two are diametrically opposed to one another. To give you a little insight, I will flesh out two concepts that divide us from the rest of the world when it comes to understanding doctrine. We are really going to deal with the most foundational aspect in terms of our calling.

How does the world define Christianity? If one wants a simple explanation, it does so by the use of a creed. "Creed" comes from the Latin; "belief." A "credo" is the first word of many of the creeds that have been translated into Latin. It simply means "I believe."

Christianity today is defined by creeds. It is defined by what it BELIEVES, not by ACTION. If you don't believe me, read the Nicene Creed ...

"We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of all things visible and invisible, and in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only-begotten of the Father, that is, of the substance [ousias] of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one substance [homoousion] with the Father, through whom all things came to be, those things that are in heaven and those things that are on earth, who for us men and for our salvation came down and was made flesh, and was made man, suffered, rose the third day, ascended into the heavens, and will come to judge the living and the dead."

If you were going to become a member of a Christian denomination, in most cases before you were confirmed, you would have to be able to repeat that verbatim, without any glitches.

I have spoken to various people who have grown up in the Catholic background. They have given me some interesting experiences of trying to learn, not necessarily the Nicene Creed, but the Apostles' Creed; the way in which they had to get a particular percentage on the test before they could be considered a good Catholic.

Catholics, Episcopalians and Lutherans all went through that type of thing. Many of you who grew up in the churches of the so-called "Christian" world, will probably find that you can cast your mind back to your own experiences. Judging from the smiles on some peoples' faces, you can remember it, oh so well! Having been able to recount it, you were suddenly "a good Christian," because you BELIEVED something.

Did you understand it? Some of you are shaking your heads! You were probably a teenager, and what teenager is interested in people being of the same substance, and the nuances between ousias on the one hand and homoousion on the other hand, etc, etc? It's not the normal type of substance that teenagers tend to be interested in these days!

Christianity is defined by creeds, and not just the Nicene Creed. Others have had an attempt at the Westminster Confession. Here's an interesting comment about the Westminster Confession from one of the luminaries of the evangelical Christian groups.

"[The Westminster] Confession was intended to amplify the Thirty-nine Articles, ... it is something of a masterpiece, "the ripest fruit of Reformation creed-making" as B. B. Warfield called it," [Packer, J. I. Concise Theology : A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs].

Aren't you glad you aren't a Puritan, because this was the Puritan creed, and there were 39 articles! All 39 are about as dense as the Nicene Creed but it was described as being the masterpiece, the ripest fruit of reformation creed making, as B. B. Warfield called it. J. I. Packer is one of the luminaries of the Evangelical Christian movement.

So the Christian world defines itself in terms of creeds. The Nicene Creed became a test for orthodoxy. What is orthodoxy? One of the Oxford Dictionaries defines "orthodox" as an adjective relating to the:

"Holding usual or accepted opinions, especially on religion, morals etc."

If you accept and believe in the Nicene Creed, or the Apostles' Creed, you are an orthodox. You may not think of yourself that way. Most people in the Methodist Church would not necessarily think of themselves as being orthodox, but in so far as they hold to a creed, they hold an accepted opinion. They are, therefore, orthodox.

The Oxford dictionary has a second usage of the term:

"Generally approved, conventional (*orthodox medicine*). [The Pocket Oxford Dictionary of Current English, © Oxford University Press 1996]

It is normally applied to the medical field. They go on to show that it is derived from the noun "orthodoxy," a Greek word. "Ortho" means "right or correct," and "doxa" is "opinion or thought."

So the world defines itself in terms of orthodoxy which is a CORRECT OPINION. You become a Christian by having a correct opinion, or you are a Christian because you have a RIGHT THOUGHT. Your mind is constantly going back to the Nicene Creed, and plumbing the depths of it. But every child who learned it forgot it as quickly as they possibly could, unless someone was standing over them with a form of reprimand to keep it in mind.

So the aspect of orthodoxy is a means by which Christianity defines itself. We recently heard a lament from a lady in France relating to the lack of Christian education on television there.

At the same time, France has also introduced some draconian measures in terms of religion, so that everybody remains orthodox! They won't accept anything that is outside of orthodoxy, so to speak. They want the French to all think the same way. That's the world.

We know how the world perceives Christianity in terms of orthodoxy. What about us? How do WE perceive Christianity? To begin, let me make some statements for you in terms of doctrine, then we will come back and establish these from the Scripture.

- **The purpose of doctrine is to change the conduct of the individual, not just to provide a statement of belief.**

or:

- **Doctrine and the Bible exist to reveal the mind of God for us to emulate.**

As I said, the view WE hold of doctrine is diametrically opposed to the world. Our view of doctrine is that it is something you have to DO, not something you just have to THINK about when you are about to be tested on it. Doctrine DEMANDS something of us.

Let's have a look at these statements and see how they can be supported from God's word. Notice this example of Jesus Christ:

Matthew 7:28 (King James Version) And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine:

Stop and think; what is the context of this verse? Have you ever thought of the Sermon on the Mount as being doctrine? Does it fit your CONCEPT of doctrine? Most likely it doesn't, but it fits the biblical definition of doctrine!

Some modern translations play a game with us:

Matthew 7:28 (New King James Version) And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching,
Matthew 7:28 (New Revised Standard Version) Now when Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astounded at his teaching,

We can accept the word "teaching," but we don't generally consider the Sermon on the Mount to be doctrine! However that is wrong. "Doctrine" IS an appropriate translation.

The word "doctrine" does not come from the Greek. It actually comes from the Latin, "doctrina" which means "to teach." It's not a statement. It's not a creed. It is to do with TEACHING.

Another word may surprise you as well. We normally think of a "doctor" in terms of someone who fixes things, mostly the human body. But why did Luke talk about "doctors of the law" in chapters 2 and 5, and Acts 5? Why did Jesus' mother and father find Him in the temple with the "doctors of the law" as the King James Version describes it?

The word "doctor" comes from the Latin "docere" which means "a teacher." The original concept of a doctor was not one who repairs things, but rather a teacher! In the Greek the term that is translated "doctor" in the King James Version is "nomodidaskalov" (teacher of the law).

Doctrine versus Teaching

The concept of teaching is central to the aspect of doctrine. "Doctrine" or "teaching" is exactly the same word in the New Testament. There's no word in the New Testament that conveys the conception of doctrine as it is understood by the "Christian" world at this point in time. It doesn't exist!

I will show you a little later how some people TRY to get there. They try to fly, but it doesn't work very well.

With the concept of doctrine, the emphasis is on what is taught, or instruction. The Greek words that you find in Strong's Concordance 1317-1322 [Didache, didaskolon, didaskalia, etc] all have to do with the aspect of teaching and of conveying information, instruction.

This relates to the word "Torah." So often we think of the word "Torah" in a very, very limited sense because it was translated into the Greek as "nomos," and in the Greek, "nomos" simply means "law." But there is a problem. If you go through the New Testament you will find many words have much larger meanings than their Greek contemporaries.

I came across one this week, whilst looking at the word "and" in a Lexicon. It says that the New Testament usage of the word "and" is much more complex and much more widespread than it ever was in Greek literature. Why? Because it was the only word they could translate the Hebrew word "vav" (or "waw") into Greek. What did the Hebrew word mean? "And" is one of its frequent usages, so they translated and used the Greek word "kai" instead of the Hebrew word "vav."

Almost every Scripture in the Old Testament where God speaks, it begins "And the Eternal said to Moses." That is just the way Hebrew is.

So the word "Torah" has a lot more meaning than the Greek usage of the word "nomos," because it relates to instruction.

The word "Torah" is a word that is applied to the first 5 books of the Bible. When you last read them, I am sure you noted there was a lot more in there than law! There are accounts of people conducting their lives in a way that is pleasing to God, and there are accounts of people conducting their lives in a way that is abhorrent to God.

There are genealogies. There are events where God intervened. Those first 5 books contain a lot of diverse material, not just law - history, narrative, genealogy, legal - you can find almost every genre of writing contained within the Torah. Today people come to understand the word Torah as meaning not just "law." Law is too narrow. Torah, in fact, means "instruction or teaching." This is the BASIS of God's instruction to humanity.

Jesus Christ's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount is very foundational teaching, from which God's Word is based.

We talk about the law. Notice this comment about Jesus' teaching from the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament:

"A novel feature in the Gospels is the absence of the intellectual emphasis which is common everywhere else among Greek writers (classical, postclassical, Hellenistic, and even Jewish Hellenistic), and which develops in rabbinic exegesis in an effort to check the disintegrating force of Hellenism."

So it says the gospel doesn't have this sort of intellectualism involved in it. It is common. It is essential. It is axiomatic to Greek literature, and even the rabbis have to get involved in it at one point in time to preserve what they have. It continues ...

"... so that in some circles studying the law can be ranked higher than doing it."

In "The Fiddler on the Roof" Tevye just wanted to sit in the synagogue and discuss the law with the rabbis. That was his highest goal in life. It became more important to just study it than to do it.

The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament carries on ...

"In this respect Jesus with his total claim represents what is perhaps a truer fulfilment of the Old Testament concept."

Jesus Christ was teaching the people the right way, the godly way of living, which the rabbis and the other teachers of the law at that point in time were unable to do, because they were caught up in other arguments.

What was the purpose for Israel? The following Scripture sums up God's dealing with Israel, and the entirety of the Torah, the entirety of God's Word, whether we call it Old Testament, New Testament, or all combined. Here is the bottom line of being part of the people of God:

Leviticus 20:26 (New King James Version) 'And you shall be holy to Me, for I the LORD am holy, and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be Mine.

"I am holy. You are to be holy, like Me." That's the object of being a Christian, to become holy, like God. As Jesus Christ said ...

Matthew 5:48 (New King James Version) "Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

You can replace "perfect" with "holy." In God's mind they are the same thing. We could say, "Be you therefore holy, even as My Father in heaven is holy." Nothing is lost.

Central to the whole revelation of God is for the people who God calls - who respond to that revelation, who are chosen and who are faithful - to become like God. This is what Jesus Christ was leading people to. This is what the writer of the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament is alluding to, when he said that Jesus, in His teaching, really comes to what the Old Testament was all about.

Just before the end of the blessings in the "Blessings and Cursings" chapter of the Bible, it says ...

Deuteronomy 28:9 (New King James Version) "The LORD will establish you as a holy people to Himself, just as He has sworn to you ...

How does one become part of this holy people?

9 ... if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God and walk in His ways.

That was the purpose for Israel.

Let's look at something that Jesus Christ said that ties in with this. Again, this is from the New King James Version which was not averse to using the Latin word when a good Greek word would have done, just to keep us confused!

John 7:16 Jesus answered them, and said, My doctrine (My teaching) is not mine, but his that sent me. 17 If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.

Something that has to be associated with doctrine is that it has to be DONE! It can't just be said. It has to be done! It can't be recited! If you are to know of the doctrine of God, you've got to do it! The doctrine of God involves doing. It involves living.

The apostle Paul said:

Romans 15:4 (New King James Version) For whatever things were written before were written for our learning (our doctrine), that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.

Everything exists for our learning, to teach us something, to teach us a way to live.

Notice Paul's instruction to Titus:

Titus 2:1 (King James Version) *But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine:*

That's an interesting aspect. It shows there is such a thing as sound doctrine and unsound doctrine! How does Paul define sound doctrine?

2 *That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience.*

Is that intellectual? We could intellectualise away the sober, grave and temperate. These are antiquated words. This person is not flippant. This person takes life seriously. They are concerned about where their lives are going. They are temperate. They are not given to flights of fancy. They are not given to excesses in any way whatsoever. They are sound in faith, in charity, in patience. We will pick up on some of these concepts as we continue, but perhaps there's even more so laid out for us when it comes to ...

3 *The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness ...*

What's true for a woman, is also true for a man. What's good for the goose is good for the gander! This cuts both ways because what sound doctrine deals with is the aspect of holiness. How is it that an elderly woman can become holy?

3 ... *not false accusers ...*

They don't go around accusing other people falsely.

3 ... *not given to much wine, teachers of good things;*

What are we talking about? Are we talking about their intellect? Or are we talking about the way they live their lives? The latter wins hands down! Because if we continue in chapter 2, through the other examples of people that Paul addresses, every aspect that he addresses in terms of church members, in relation to sound doctrine, relates to the way you and I conduct our lives, the way we behave, the way we conduct ourselves one with the other. He goes right down through the line; the old men, the old women, the young men, the young women, the servants.

We are all called to the line, to measure up to a standard that God has set, which He defines as holiness. That's what sound doctrine becomes.

How were the Christians noted? At the beginning of Acts chapter 2, the apostle Peter, in speaking to the people in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost referred to David:

Acts 2:28 (King James Version) Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance.

As one goes through the book of Acts, this reference to "ways" is used extensively. We have already touched upon it once this afternoon ...

Deuteronomy 28:9 (New King James Version) The LORD will establish you as a holy people to Himself, just as He has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God, and walk in His ways.

One of the essential things here is following God's ways. The concept of a way of life was fundamental to the understanding of God's law. It was a way that was to be lived. So throughout the law, the Psalms and the prophets, we find the way of God is being extolled. People are being called back to "the way."

As Jesus Christ said, NARROW is the way that leads to life eternal, and FEW there be that enter in, but broad is the way that leads to destruction. He gave that contrast.

So this concept of a way of life is very important. It is a way of life that is characterised and established by God Himself, that enables us to be considered to be holy, just as He is holy.

Saul, not yet Paul, saw Stephen stoned to death ...

***Acts 9:1 (King James Version) And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest,
2 And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way ...***

... what way? The Christian way!

2 ... whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.

Just an aside, when the separation came between the church and the synagogue in the latter part of the first century, it was the synagogue that expelled Christians. Christians didn't go around trying to spout what they believed that the Jews didn't and trying to become obnoxious, as people so often do when they "get religion," becoming "better than thou."

The Jews literally had to resort to a credal situation to find out who really were the Christians in their midst, so they could expel them from the synagogue. That's rather interesting! The end result of being a Christian was a way of life that the Jews themselves could not gainsay. The only reason they could get them was on the Christian's belief: that Jesus Christ WAS the Son of God. That's the area in which they had to eventually try and trip them up.

Christianity would have you believe that the Church left the Jews! If you go through the book of Acts, most times you find Paul and the others being tossed out of the synagogue on their ear, having to go and find some other venue in which they can preach.

There is a requirement in terms of action as opposed to knowledge.

Romans 3:17 (King James Version) *And the way of peace have they not known:*

Humanity doesn't know the way of peace. This is God's way. It is a way that leads to a conclusion, to a fulfilment. We will see that as we proceed.

There is a way to peace. Humanity has never found it. We know how to get to war very quickly. We know how to get to the edge very quickly - just go into any household and you'll find it very quickly revealed.

Romans 11:33 (King James Version) *O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!*

There is so much TO the way of God! It is not just something that can be encapsulated in a belief statement. It has to be lived. It has to be dug. It has to be mined - by living, meditating and seeking to understand what God requires, and what demands God places upon us.

Paul, speaking to the Church in Corinth said ...

1 Corinthians 4:17 (King James Version) *For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ ...*

"My ways are in conformity with Christ's ways - which were in conformity with His Father's ways." Paul told the Church that Timothy was going to bring them into remembrance of his ways which be in Christ ...

17 ... as I teach every where in every church.

There is a standard to be held to. There is action that is required, not just knowledge.

Let's look at some of the dictionary definitions of "doctrine." Here is a quote from the New Bible Dictionary:

"In the New Testament two words are used. *Didaskalia* means both the act and the content of teaching.

"This is the same word that is translated as "doctrine."

"It is used of the Pharisees' teaching (Matthew 15:9; Mark 7:7). Apart from one instance in Colossians and one in Ephesians, it is otherwise confined to the Pastoral Epistles (and **seems** to refer often to some body of teaching used as a standard of orthodoxy).

As I said earlier, these people have got to get to orthodoxy somehow!

They make a very tendentious statement. Stating they SEEM to refer often to some body of teaching used as a standard of orthodoxy, implies that at other times they don't!

The writer continues:

"... didaché is used in more parts of the New Testament. It too can mean either the act or the content of teaching. It occurs of the teaching of Jesus (Matthew 7:28, etc.) which he claimed to be divine (John 7:16-17).

We have looked at those Scriptures already.

Continuing about the aspect of the development of doctrine, remember he said that it SEEMS to refer to some body of orthodox teaching. The same author continues ...

"After Pentecost Christian doctrine began to be formulated (Acts 2:42) as the instruction given to those who had responded to the kérygma (Romans 6:17) [New Bible Dictionary 3rd edition Page 280].

These are the only 2 Scriptures they give to support their idea that an orthodox doctrine occurred within the Christian church. Let's look at them:

Acts 2:42 (King James Version) And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

All the "Christian" writings would like you to believe that this is the inception of the Eucharist, or of Holy Communion. They believe that something new is happening here.

The problem is, it isn't! Every Jewish meal was like this! This was the hallmark of Jewish meals. If you want to find out a little more about it, you can look at the Dead Sea Scrolls and see the way in which the Essenes (if they be the writers of that material), looked upon it. Because they, together with certain elements of the Pharisees, looked upon a meal as being a DIVINE EVENT in which the eaters of the meal were partaking of and fellowshiping with God.

Acts 2 is talking about something that is decidedly Jewish! This is not talking about Eucharists or Holy Communion at all. It is talking about something very, very important that the apostles and the people had learned from being Jews. It derived from the temple itself whereby someone going to offer a peace offering or a thank offering was able to participate in that offering with the priest - and with God!

So the Pharisees, who had it in for the Sadducees who ran the temple, said, "Let's make a meal in the house, like an offering in the temple. Let's make this an opportunity of communion with God."

Acts 2:42 is not talking about some new Christian thing coming along which eventually was called the Eucharist. You would be surprised how many gallons of ink have been spent, and how many trees and forests have been cut and used, to try and expound on this Scripture being some new Christian Eucharistic event!

The apostle Paul, talking to the Church said ...

Romans 6:17 (King James Version) But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.

What is he saying? I don't know quite how this develops doctrine, but this sounds a very Jewish idea of doctrine to me, because the end result of these people receiving doctrine was that they changed their conduct. Action was involved. This wasn't just a passive belief process. These people "obeyed from the heart." They gave themselves totally to it! They sought that.

So the development of doctrine is not a real feature of the New Testament despite the argument of the New Bible Dictionary.

As we said earlier, **the purpose of doctrine is to change the conduct of the individual, not just to provide a statement of belief.**

That is to be axiomatic to our understanding of doctrine. Doctrine and the Bible exists to reveal the mind of God for us to emulate! Paul said:

Philippians 2:5 (New King James Version) Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,

Why did he say that? Why is it important for us to emulate that? Because the mind of Jesus Christ was a mirror image of the mind of God! You and I have to emulate that mind.

A good friend made a comment a few years back when we were discussing some of these things:

"Doctrine is what doctrine does" [S. Andrews 1997].

If doctrine doesn't DEMAND something of your life, it is not doctrine at all! It's nothing! It's just words. It may be orthodox, but it's not doctrine in terms of God.

Compare that with the Apostles' Creed. As we look at the 1st 3 points, ask yourself, "What does this demand of me?"

1. I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of the heavens and earth,

Does that require anything of you? What is belief? What way does it change your life? In most cases, it doesn't.

2. and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord;

3. who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary ...

... it carries on for another 9 points, which some of you once learned. You may be amazed at how much you can remember of it, but at how little it has done in terms of your life.

I say this because it is a trap for us. Mr Armstrong avoided the development of a statement of beliefs. I have never heard why he did that. I do know one of the reasons he did it. It wasn't because he wanted to have a loose-leaf form of doctrine that could be changed every week!

He realised, I think more than anybody else, that doctrine had to be LIVED, not SAID. I think that's one of the reasons why he avoided that. He realised the end result of being a Christian was that you had to live a way of life. A way of life can so easily be devalued if it's just committed to paper. Yet today when anyone comes into contact with us, almost the very first question they ask is; "Can I have a copy of your statement of beliefs?"

Why? Because they want to see whether we are an "orthodox" Church of God or not! Do you realise that there is now an orthodoxy in terms of the Church of God! On the Internet there are people who consider a church "orthodox" because it holds to the "18 truths" that Mr Armstrong re-established in the Church. "They are good guys and if you don't hold to the 18 truths, you are bad guys."

I am not saying that to belittle the 18 truths in any way whatsoever, but the question they ought to ask is, "What CHANGES have those 18 truths made in your life?" It's not just whether you believe them or accept them.

People get into many doctrinal arguments and disputations. Let's take one of those 18 truths: "Born Again." There are those who believe, as Mr Armstrong emphatically taught, that we are born again at the Resurrection. There are those who believe that it could be another time, and oftentimes are willing to consign others to hell for holding their belief!

If you believe in being born again, what sort of person should that make you? How should you perceive other people? For the last 20 years of Mr Armstrong's life, he employed a man in the ministry who was at times hostilely opposed to Mr Armstrong's view of being born again! Mr Armstrong allowed him to stay in the ministry. He may have wished otherwise, but his handling of that individual was very, very different than that of many people today.

The trap is that people just want to put down on paper what they believe, and they forget that what it really needs, is a DEMAND on your life.

"What sort of person have I become as a result of keeping the Sabbath day? Am I more like God?" I hope so! Because I have met people who have kept the Sabbath day JUST TO BE DIFFERENT from everyone else! That's not a reason for keeping the Sabbath day, but some people will do that just to be different! You might say it becomes a statement of belief.

One of the great traps we can find ourselves falling into is that a statement of beliefs or a list of something else becomes a creed in its own right, and becomes the standard of righteousness by which we judge everybody else.

That's not godly. Jesus Christ gave the standard by which we are to judge other people:

Matthew 7:16 (New King James Version) "You will know them by their fruits ...

We did have to put a statement of beliefs together. It takes up less than one sheet of paper. In terms of belief it simply states:

"The Church's central belief and doctrine is based on the righteousness of, and obedience to the law of God. That law is love. It is not human love. Human love cannot arise above the level of self-centredness. It must be the love of God, shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5). This basic teaching includes, therefore, the development of the fruit of the Holy Spirit; love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and self control (Galatians 5:22-23). The teachings of the Church are derived from living by every word of God as revealed in the Holy Bible (Matthew 4:4)."

That is our statement of belief! The Bible is our statement of belief - go live it! Go and learn the lessons that it teaches and apply them in your life.

So even amongst the churches of God, we find a problem where people develop creeds of their own. Some sadly even find themselves getting caught up in using the language of orthodoxy in describing their statements of belief. It's very, very sad.

The books of Acts, the book of the Church, is simply described as "praxis" in the Greek, if you were to transliterate it into English. It's the Greek word from which we get practice or action. Hence the "Acts" of the apostles. I think it is rather interesting that God did not inspire the book to be called the "thoughts" of the apostles, or the "doxa" of the apostles. It was called "praxis," the acts - what they did, what they taught.

The apostles James describes the Christian calling. He says:

James 1:21 (English Standard Version) Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

If you are going to be a Christian, you've got to get rid of something. Something has to be removed from us, and something has to replace it - the word of God. The word of God takes care of that filthiness and rampant wickedness. As a result of the word of God abiding in us, we can have the promise of eternal life.

22 But be doers of the word (action, praxis!), and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

If all you do is hear, you deceive yourself. David Stern's Jewish New Testament says:

James 1:21 (Jewish New Testament) So rid yourselves of all vulgarity and obvious evil, and receive meekly the Word implanted in you that can save your lives.

Get rid of all vulgarity and obvious evil. That is not of God.

22 Don't deceive yourselves by only hearing what the Word says, but do it!

Be doers!

James 1:23 (English Standard Version) For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror.

24 For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like.

That is of no value. God is only interested in doers! The chapter continues talking about what pure religion before God and the Father is:

27 Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

... to live a new way of life! Notice what Paul said:

1 Thessalonians 1:3 (American Standard Version) remembering without ceasing your work of faith and labor of love and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, before our God and Father;

Notice his choice of words. He refers to our work of faith, our labour of love, our patience of hope. How are those traits described? They are described in a very active manner! Work and labour refer to a very laborious way. They are not just something that are throw asides. These are words that talk to a commitment on the part of the individual.

Note David Stern's translation:

1 Thessalonians 1:3 (Jewish New Testament) how your trust produces action, your love hard work, and your hope perseverance.

He really gets a little more active. Your trust or your faith produces action. In his commentary, David Stern says:

"Sha'ul has a very Jewish view of trust (or "faith") as being not merely a mental attitude or belief in a creed ...

Point number 1: don't forget the aspect of faith! What was the problem that Martin Luther had with the book of James? James said, "Show me your faith without your works (he knew he wouldn't see any), and I will show you my faith BY my works."

Inherent to the New Testament, inherent to the whole Word of God, is the fact that faith is coupled with work! Faith isn't an intellectual concept that you can pluck out of the air, plug it into your mind and say, "I've got it!" That's why people have such difficulty. Faith is shown through what you do!

Hebrews 11:6 But without faith it is impossible to please Him (God), for he who comes to God must believe that He is ...

... but it doesn't stop there, because that belief then produces action in a person's life. He continues ...

6 ... and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

There is action required. David Stern continues:

"Sha'ul has a very Jewish view of trust (or "faith") as being not merely a mental attitude or belief in a creed, but a firm reliance which produces action; compare Acts 3:16 & Note. Likewise love is not only a feeling; it results in hard work."

It's not the romantic ideal that everyone envisages! There's a lot of hard work. When Tevye asked his wife if she loved him, she said, "For 40 long years I've washed your sheets, ironed your clothes, cooked your food, and you say, 'Have I loved you?'" Hard work was supposed to be a manifestation of that.

David Stern continues:

"And hope is not a vapid wish but the expectation, grounded in God's Word, that he will fulfill his promises to his people (see Romans 9:1 - 11:36 Note); as such, it produces perseverance, patience, endurance (compare Romans 5:2-5, 8:20-25; Hebrews 6:11) Jewish New Testament Commentary.

So these guys were really into works in one great big way. They weren't "good Christians" at all. They belonged to a different school of thought altogether.

You see, doctrine is what doctrine does! Does it produce good works? That's a good question for us.

Paul, giving a defence of himself before Felix ...

Acts 26:20 (American Standard Version) but declared both to them of Damascus first and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the country of Judaea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, doing works worthy of repentance.

Paul's approach to repentance and baptism was exactly the same as John the Baptist's. "Bring forth fruits, evidence of repentance, in your life." Repentance is supposed to bring about a change in a person. It's an active event. And it is the start of a very active way of life, a way of life that demands something of us in a very different way than that of humanity.

Bringing some of these thoughts together, Paul says:

Romans 13:8 (American Standard Version) Owe no man anything, save to love one another: for he that loveth his neighbor hath fulfilled the law.

The law was not just an end in itself. The law was a means whereby people could learn to love one another; where we could learn to relate to one another. Paul said we are not to owe anyone anything except to love one another. He that loves his neighbour has fulfilled the law. A little later he says ...

10 Love worketh no ill to his neighbor: love therefore is the fulfilment of the law.

... taking care of one another.

John addresses the same aspect in ...

***1 John 4:18 (American Standard Version) There is no fear in love: but perfect love casteth out fear, because fear hath punishment; and he that feareth is not made perfect in love.
19 We love, because he first loved us.***

God has loved us. We have to learn to love one another as a result of that.

20 If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar ...

It's as simple as that, because you can't intellectualise these things. If you say you love God, you've got to show that love of God in the way in which you relate to one another, otherwise the one making that comment is no more than a liar.

***20 ... for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, cannot love God whom he hath not seen.
21 And this commandment have we from him, that he who loveth God love his brother also.***

So we have this challenge - we have to be people of action.

Earlier I gave you an definition of orthodoxy. I left out one of the uses of orthodoxy at that point in time - for a good reason. The Oxford Dictionary gives a 3rd usage of orthodoxy. You've probably heard of the orthodox Jews. You can identify them by their curls, their beards, their hats and coats. Notice what the Oxford Dictionary says about orthodoxy. This is the 3rd usage:

"Jewish orthodoxy is committed to practice.

It's the exception to the rule.

"Piety takes the form of ritual observance rather than credal correctness ...

It seems the Jews can't agree on anything! They can't agree on a creed. But one thing you can get them to agree on is that they are supposed to be involved in DOING something.

Another Oxford resource says:

"The faith of the Hebrew Bible is the moral virtue of faithfulness, conceived as loyalty, which like the biblical ideas of blessing, grace, joy, favour, and love, involves a mutuality between humanity and God, which is echoed in human fellowship [Jewish Philosophy, Oxford Companion to Philosophy].

That is a round about way of describing what John has already said in 1st John chapter 4. It's a rather interesting concept; so totally different to that which the world knows. Likewise you and I have to be different, because our calling and our doctrine is also rooted and grounded in that fellowship between God and man. It's rooted and grounded in that same faithfulness and loyalty. It's rooted in the same concept of blessing, grace, joy, favour and love, because they come from the same source; God's Word.

There is contrast with this in terms of the world. As I said, there were 2 concepts:

- **Grace as opposed to Works.**

Grace is not a New Testament term. Grace pervades every page of the Bible from Genesis 1:1 throughout. It's just that the Catholic Church and their Protestant successors have redefined the term. Rather than being people of action, they want to be people of thought, or creed. So works gets frowned upon because works speaks to a way of life which is contrary to them.

The second aspect that we should bear in mind is:

- **The definition of Faith WITHOUT any Works.**

The correct understanding to both of these concepts are foundational to the doctrine of Christianity. There is nothing in the creed people have to DO. Yet they are absolutely axiomatic to us. Let's compare them.

Creed versus God's Way:

We have ORTHODOXY on the one hand, which we can define as being RIGHT THINKING, or correct opinion. The summation of it is WORDS; the ability to recite those words. It is, at best, KNOWLEDGE; knowledge, which as the apostle Paul says, puffs up. It does nothing for a person.

On the other hand, we can have ORTHOPRAXY, RIGHT ACTION. As a people we should be known by our orthopraxy, our right action. How do we relate to one another? How do we relate to God? Who defines it? Me? Or the Eternal? It had better be the Eternal, because I will get it wrong!

Who defines how we relate to one another? The Eternal does. He establishes very clearly how we relate to Him as well. So right action is the summation of God's way of life. It is based upon doing. It is based upon action. It is not based upon words.

The end result of it is THE LOVE OF GOD. It's as simple as that, and that is the difference. To summarise:

<u>Orthodoxy</u>	<u>Orthopraxy</u>
Right Thinking	Right Action
Words	Doing
Knowledge	Love of God

True Identity

Mr Hulme has talked about identity, so let's tie it into that. What is the true identity of a Christian? What did Jesus say to His disciples?

***John 13:34 (American Standard Version) A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; even as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.
35 By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.***

You are going to be identified by the relationship you have with one another. On another occasion, another time, Jesus Christ made this comment:

Luke 6:46 (American Standard Version) And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?

The world is full of people who take the name of Christ and who don't DO what He says. Matthew 7 speaks rather tersely about that. What's the true identity of a Christian? The one who DOES!!

Matthew 7:21 ... he who does the will of My Father in heaven.

How can you sum it up? Simply by an old adage:

"ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS!"

What's the doctrine of God's Church? How is the doctrine to be declared to other people? The apostle Paul said to the Corinthians, "You are our epistle in Christ."

We might parody that and say:

"YOU are our living, walking, breathing, statement of belief. Your life, your action, the way in which you conduct yourself IS our statement of belief!"

...Peter Nathan
22 Feb 03

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