

## Balance in Doctrinal Purity 2-26-17AM

One of the purposes of the church found in the New Testament is the pursuit of doctrinal purity. It is clear from Acts 2:42 that this was a goal and purpose of the church immediately upon being opened. There are at least 30 times where there is an admonition of some type to the church to pursue the Doctrine of Christ; perhaps the most direct is 2 John (particularly verses 9-11) which makes it clear that the church cannot accept anything other than the pure doctrine of Christ (which is the applied teachings of the New Testament).

<p><b>Passages That Promote Doctrinal Purity in the Church:</b></p>
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<p>Acts 2:40, Acts 15, Acts 20:28-30, Rom 6:17, 16:17, 1 Cor. 4:17, Gal 1:21, Eph 4:14, Col 2:22, Tit 1:9, 2:1, 1 Tim 1:3, 1:10, 4:11, 6:3, 2 Tim 4:3, Heb 6:1-3, 13:9, 1 Pet 2:2, 2 Pet 2:1-4, 1 John 2:19, 2 John 9, 3 John 3, Jude 17, Rev 2:14</p>
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In Revelation 2, there are two churches that make an important point about doctrinal purity. First, the church in Pergamum (Pergamos) in 2:12-17 was found faithful in persecution (and endurance), but is given a failing grade for not maintaining doctrinal purity. Particularly, by tolerating the false teachings of the Nicolaitans they had broken faith with God and were in danger of being cut off as a church (i.e. they would not longer be a church that belonged to Christ).

In contrast, in Revelation 2:1-7 we read about the church in Ephesus. They were diligent in keeping pure doctrine, to the degree that they are commended for hating the deeds (teachings) of the Nicolaitans. Their obsession with doctrinal purity is commended.

However, the church in Ephesus also does not receive a passing grade. They have left their first love (which is not identified), and are in danger. To them the exact same commandment is given as to the church in Pergamum: REPENT. The point is this: We cannot be the Lord's church without a pursuit of doctrinal purity, but we must also know that doctrinal purity is not everything.

What may be present here is a dilemma that is like a tug of war between two virtues that the church is meant to possess: doctrinal purity and spiritual vitality. Spiritual vitality is descriptive of the love we ought to have for the weak (1 Corinthians 12:22, Romans 14:1) and for the lost (Matthew 9:36). Sometimes we fail to understand that the pursuit of doctrinal purity pulls against spiritual vitality. In other words, the more we grow with weak members (the church NEEDS weak members, in order to grow them into strong members) and the more we grow from converting the lost (who are by default weak members, 1 Peter 2:2), the weaker we are on doctrinal purity, as we necessarily have members who are not doctrinally strong. We need to acknowledge that doctrinal purity is a pursuit as much as an accomplishment, and that it pulls against spiritual weakness, which is present in a growing church. A church that has 100% doctrinal purity (every member has complete understanding) is almost certainly not growing. A church that is 100% new members is almost certainly lacking any doctrinal purity. These things are in a tug-of-war against each other, and we need to understand that we are trying to balance this. Both sides MUST be pulled, but we must ensure neither side is overcome. This is the lesson of Ephesus and Pergamum.

There are evidences within church that one side has overcome the other, and that repentance is in order. When a church does not worry about what teachers or preachers they bring in (i.e. bringing in a teacher who is wrong on MDR or institutionalism, but has a great ability to reach the lost) for the sake of reaching the lost, they have erred and have dragged doctrinal purity in the mud. They must repent. When they use terms like "legalism" (a made up term found NO WHERE in the bible) or "ultra-conservative" or "anti" to describe other churches, there is a strong likelihood that they have dragged doctrinal purity into the mud.

Conversely, when a church attempts to drive away members who are doctrinally or practically weak Christians, they have dragged spiritual vitality into the mud; they have lost their “first love” (John 3:16, the first love God extended was to the lost). When they fear conversions or fear people coming from weak congregations because of the doctrinal problems that might come with them, they have lost their first love. When there is no room for weak members in a church, they have dragged spiritual vitality into the mud, and they need to repent.

Any assembly of Jesus Christ needs to be mindful of the balance of doctrinal purity and spiritual vitality. We need to pull with all of our strength at both ends; one cannot defeat the other. Both are divine church purposes. We need to remember that churches are for weak members, or more specifically, churches are meant to create strong members and need weak members for that purpose.