

The Gospel and the Doctrine of Christ 08-06-17AM

The book of 2 John seems to have but one idea central to its teaching. It revolves around how we are to receive those who teach any other doctrine than the doctrine of Christ. Specifically, it states in verse 10 *If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting.* This straight forward teaching limits the local church on whom it is to receive (within the local church this is called “membership”, as discussed in 1 Cor. 12, Rom. 12). The term used here, “teaching” or “doctrine” (depending on your Bible translation) is the Greek word “*didache*”. It is used in the following instances:

The Sermon on the Mount – Matthew 7:28

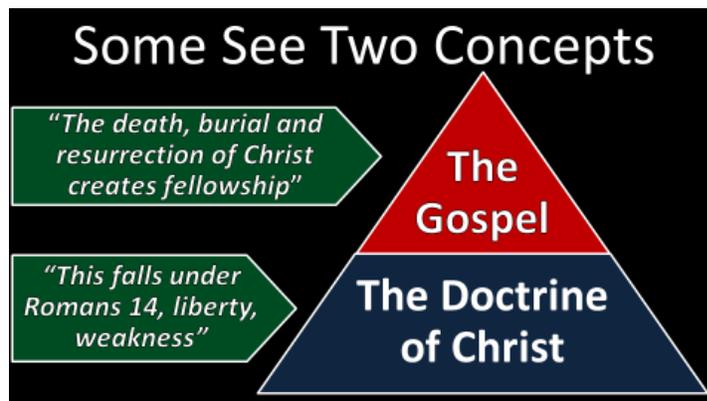
The message of the Gospel – Acts 13:12

The message of baptism – Romans 6:17

The teachings of the Apostles – Acts 2:42

Since the Doctrine of Christ is any teaching of Jesus or His disciples, doctrine can be summed up as the New Testament.

This seems fairly clear and straightforward. But there are some today who teach that we only need to agree on some concepts of Christianity to be received within a local congregation. They might say that we need to agree only on the purpose of baptism or grace, or the teaching of the cross or the Gospel. Often those who teach this simply refer to the Gospel or the Cross as the totality of our need to be in agreement in order to be received within a congregation.



Does the New Testament teach that there are two legal concepts in Christ, one being the message of the Gospel/Cross, and the other being the doctrine of Christ?

First of all, when we examine the Scriptures, we will find that “Gospel” and “Doctrine” are used interchangeably in the New Testament. For example, in 1 Timothy 1:8-11 Paul discusses the Doctrine of Christ, and makes it clear in verse 11 that this is the same thing as the Gospel of Christ. As well, we are told in places such as 2 Timothy 3:16-17 that ALL Scripture is doctrine. This would include the Gospel message.

When the Apostles referenced the message of the cross, they did so as though it is a doctrinal message. In 1 Corinthians 1:18 it is described as that which prevents division; in Galatians 5:11 Paul tells us that the Gospel is the doctrine which ends circumcision. In Philippians 3:18 Paul tells us that those who do not

walk (according to the doctrine of Christ) are enemies of the cross. Thus we see that the Gospel/Cross is not separable from the doctrines of Christ.

Third, it is clear in the New Testament that the Doctrine that the Apostles taught, the Doctrine of Christ, was the basis of fellowship among Christians. In Acts 2:42 and Romans 16:17 we are told that it is the doctrine of the Apostles that was the source of unity in believers. To be clear, fellowship in Christ is created by our obedience to Christ (1 John 1). The membership in the local church is based in large part on our fellowship in Christ (1 Corinthians 5:11). Therefore, there can be no doubt that any distinction between the Gospel, the message of the Christ, and the doctrine of Christ. To divide these things is to unrighteously divide the truth (2 Tim. 2:15). The Gospel is PART of the Doctrine of Christ.

Why then would there be a distinction among some between the Gospel of Christ and the Doctrine of Christ? It is not a natural conclusion, but instead is presupposed and then “justified” by out of context applications. We can see that in times past, a similar distinction has been made by some between the Law of Moses and the Ten Commandments. Scriptures reveal that the Ten Commandments were part of the Law of Moses, but some made them distinct in order to apply them separately to us today (i.e. Sabbath keeping). This doctrinal teaching (The Gospel is not part of the Doctrine) originated in the mid 20th century by a Church of England theologian¹ who, because of his disbelief in the inspiration of Scriptures, needed a means to ignore the miracles and claims of Scripture but retain the hope of salvation. He determined that the Gospel needed to be separate from the Scriptures. In the latter part of the 20th century, brethren began to teach that this idea was valid in order to justify associations with denominations.

Today this doctrine is being used to justify associations that Scriptures (such as 2 John 10) clearly consider inappropriate. For example, if someone teaches error on church membership or withdrawal (1 Cor. 5-6), on marriage and divorce (Matthew 19:1-12), or church purpose and design (Ephesians 4), they can be received on the basis that there is fellowship based solely on the merit of the Gospel. In the same manner if someone does not believe Genesis to be true, or denies a second coming, these matters can be overlooked in order to permit them to teach. Sometimes, congregations simply state that they are not permitted to teach on those things which they hold in error.

The word of God is perfectly clear on this matter. First of all, we have no choice in this matter. A congregation cannot accept those who teach false doctrine (Galatians 1:6-9, 2 John 9-10, Revelation 2:14-15). There is no such thing as a partial acceptance or partial reception. Second, a congregation cannot accept those living in sin (1 Corinthians 5:11, 2 Thessalonians 3:6, Revelation 2:20). This denial of the need for admonishment utterly fails the test of love by denying the opportunity to repent.

¹ Modern references trace the supposed distinction between gospel and doctrine to a Church of England theologian and pastor, Charles Harold (C. H.) Dodd. A prolific writer, Dodd authored over 50 books, pamphlets and lectures while Professor of Divinity at Cambridge. He became a tremendous influence through his printed works and, consequently, upon brethren who have researched his material. It should be pointed out that Dodd (1884-1973) did not believe in the inspiration of the Scriptures. He accepted German form criticism with its attendant dependence on redactors, oral tradition and misplaced documents. - By Tom M. Roberts, Guardian of Truth XXXVIII: 12, p. 13-14 June 16, 1994