

Live it or Lose it

Today we live in a time when the varying practices and beliefs of professing Christians makes one wonder and question, "Who is right?" Can some be more right than others? How do I know if my church is teaching and living the truth? Well, the answer comes from our Lord in John 7:16,17. Here Jesus tells the listening Jews how they can discern if doctrine is from God or not. He explains very simply the path to correct preaching and practice.

I. True doctrine is centred in the Person of God.

Jesus' point in this passage is, the Son of God is revealing God the Father. He is teaching what He knows of the Father even as God the Spirit exalts the Lord Jesus. He is teaching about God, it is not a selfish and self-glorifying teaching. Now you would think that a such a statement, true doctrine is centred in the Person of God is obvious, but unfortunately not. Theology literally means, the study of God. Today, even in Christian circles there is a totally new emphasis, theology is man-centred. Christianity is said to be irrelevant and impolite if we speak on God and His will and His purposes. In a seemingly good argument, the emphasis is on how do we apply or relate it to human beings. So we find secular psychology, New Age mind techniques, and Eastern philosophies creeping into the church. Now it is obvious that God's truth must be used practically in our lives, but that is not the same as making man the point and purpose of God's revelation to man.

Consider some examples. How much of Christianity today focuses on self, healing your own wounds, developing self-esteem, making a success of your business, having contentment, joy or peace. It revolves around us, using God to make your life problem-free, joyful or even prosperous. Like the people of old who thought the sun and stars revolved around the earth, people today believe a theology that seems to say God serves us.

It even bleeds into the salvation message. All it becomes is God providing a fire escape for all as long as they "accept it". No mention of turning away from self and sin falling at the mercy and authority of God. How uncomfortable Christians are with words like submission, surrender, yield, repent. Words like "accept" sound more comfortable. Like God is our cosmic bellhop, waiting hat in hand to see how He can serve us. But Scripture explicitly states that God's driving purposes are for His glory. Jesus 1st point is that doctrine which makes my experience, my benefit the centre around which God revolves is faulty at its core. True doctrine is God,centred.

II. True doctrine is developed and understood by obedience.

A principle in Scripture is God reveals more truth to those who obey what they have been already given. Why must God fill heads with more orthodox theology if we are not in the slightest bit interested in yielding to Him presently? Consider Eli and Samuel. Eli was the high priest. Though we would call him religious, or knowledgeable, he was disobedient in that he refused to discipline his sons. His sons were committing wicked acts, but he did nothing to stop them. He knew the truth, but held back. The consequences are that God refused to speak to him, but instead spoke to Samuel who the Bible says did not let one word of God fall to the ground. God reveals truth to those who value it enough to obey it. Likewise Jesus says after explaining how the Word can be received or rejected in the

parable of the sower, Luke 5:18. God will remove even the little truth that an unbelieving heart thinks that it has, He will give more truth to the believing, obedient heart. In fact as James points out, you cannot truly believe and not behave in a corresponding way. The point is that as we obey what God clearly reveals in Scripture, God confirms it by His enabling grace and teaches him more, to build him up. But let's reverse the process. Say a Christian or even a whole church refuses to obey the clear, literal teaching of the Bible, what will happen? Well, Jesus says that they will lose what they thought they had. What can result?

Man-centered, man-focused experiences, teachings that have no basis in Scripture, designed only to appeal to the flesh and glorify men. Such aberrant teachings will produce aberrant experiences. Is it a surprise then to hear of stranger and stranger experiences being reported from professing churches? Experiences that find no Scriptural basis. Where does it start? Moving away from God-centred theology. Christ is no longer pre-eminent in the church. Such a shift produces selfish doctrines. Selfish doctrines produce selfish experiences. And that's the problem. Just as Jesus said that one doing the will of God as revealed in Scripture will have the doctrine confirmed as being from God as he obeys, one who is deceived or disobedient will seemingly have his false teaching backed up by experience. The human selfish motive, combined with Satan and his forces can produce any desired effect to confirm a teaching that has God revolving around men. So long as we do not turn to God as His bond servants, Satan knows we will serve self and consequently him. You say, "it's too strong a statement". Read Matthew 7:21-22. Notice the miracles were happening, according to Jesus, no denial of that. Jesus doesn't say, "no it didn't happen". He desires involvement in what does happen, therefore if Christ was not involved, be sure there was power coming from another source to accomplish these acts.

III. The Bible says that a punishment for disobedience can be deception.

Listen to 2Thess 2:10-12. "And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. ¹¹And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: ¹²That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness."

Also Romans 1:24 and 26: "Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: ²⁵Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature."

There comes a point where refusal of the truth brings God's punishment. God strives with men, but God can at some point hand them over to what they want to believe. Someone said there are two types of people in the world, people who say to God, "Thy will be done" and people to whom God says, "Thy will be done."

People who hate submitting to God's word will find the worst possible consequence, God allows them to endure the consequences of a life lived by self and for self. There is

nothing more destructive to yourself than your sinful nature. What a terrible thing for professing Christians to be given over to strong deception because they would not obey the truth to start off with. There's a progression, begin to disobey or refuse, be given over to what you want to believe. Begin to believe what you want to believe, receive a strong delusion to help you believe that lie.

But put it positively, test doctrine to see, is God's glory, His Person, purposes, ways and will the centre? Is man submitting to Him in the teaching? If it is biblical, when obeying God will give grace and so confirm that the command is from God. And then listen to Jesus in John 8:31,32: "Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, *then* are ye my disciples indeed; ³²And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." Continuance proves conversion was genuine. Such a state produces a knowledge of the truth which sets us free from sin and self to be a slave to Christ.