

The Nature of Divergent Beliefs and the Role of Sound Doctrine in the Church

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BI 323 New Testament Epistles

November 3, 2018

The original audience to which the writer to the Hebrews wrote was clearly facing several challenges. In the early part of the letter, the author is keen to demonstrate that Jesus is superior to even the greats of the Old Testament. Also, the letter goes on to talk a lot about the need to persevere and endure in the Christian life, and that happens by appropriating and realizing the supremacy of Christ and his sustaining and motivating to the end: "who for the glory that was set before him endured the cross." That is the model that Christians follow. And, also, you have that list of the greats in the past who have, by faith, persevered to the end. And that is what the Hebrew Christians need to be doing.

When we think about the book of Hebrews, we need to understand that it was a letter. It was written to people, written to people in a situation. And when we look through the book of Hebrews, we recognize that the Christians at that time were up against some difficult odds. This book was especially written to those Jews who had become Christians, and because of their claiming Christ as their Lord and Savior, they encountered various problems. The Jewish people were ostracizing them. They were no longer allowed to be a part of that community... And that created a lot of difficulty for them, and they were in a lot of difficulty, wrestling with, "Should we continue on with Christ?" In other words, "Our life was so much easier and better when we were not following Christ. If we would just give up on Christ, we could get our families back, perhaps we would have a better standing in society." Because Hebrews specifically tells us that they had lost property; that they had been thrown into prison... In other words, they had been up against all kind of harm; "If I just give up Jesus, then maybe my life would be the way it used to be." And that is why the author of Hebrews continues to set forth Christ as supreme, continues to encourage them to keep their eyes on Jesus, reminds them if they turn away from Jesus, there is

no sacrifice of sins. When they turn away from Jesus, there is no life in that. So, these people are really battling real-life stuff, and they are trying to find their way through it.

Sound doctrine is important because our faith is based on a specific message. The overall teaching of the church contains many elements, but the primary message is explicitly defined: “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures [and] . . . he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.” This is the unambiguous good news, and it is “of first importance.” Change that message, and the basis of faith shifts from Christ to something else. Our eternal destiny depends upon hearing “the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation.”

Sound doctrine is important because the gospel is a sacred trust, and we dare not tamper with God’s communication to the world. Our duty is to deliver the message, not to change it. Jude conveys an urgency in guarding the trust: “I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.” To “contend” carries the idea of strenuously fighting for something, to give it everything you have. The Bible includes a warning neither to add to nor subtract from God’s Word. Rather than alter the apostles’ doctrine, we receive what has been passed down to us and keep it “as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus.” Sound doctrine is important because what we believe affects what we do.

Behavior is an extension of theology, and there is a direct correlation between what we think and how we act. For example, two people stand on top of a bridge; one believes he can fly, and the other believes he cannot fly. Their next actions will be quite dissimilar. In the same way, a man who believes that there is no such thing as right and wrong will naturally behave differently from a man who believes in well-defined moral standards. In one of the Bible’s lists of sins, things like rebellion, murder, lying, and slave trading are mentioned. The list concludes with “whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine.” In other words, true teaching promotes righteousness; sin

flourishes where “the sound doctrine” is opposed. Sound doctrine is important because. “Many false prophets have gone out into the world.” There are tares among the wheat and wolves among the flock. The best way to distinguish truth from falsehood is to know what the truth is.

I believe that in the modern church, there is a problem that is prevalent. That being “the walk” of the Christian believer. The Bible tells us in Ephesians 4:1-6, that the “believer is to walk worthy of his calling.” Once a person believes in Jesus Christ and becomes a member of God’s people and of God’s church, what must he do to walk worthy of God’s great calling—to bring honor to the name of Christ and His Church?

- 1) The believer must walk with all humility (Ph. 2:3).
- 2) The believer must walk with all gentleness (Gal. 5:22-23).
- 3) The believer must walk with patience (Gal. 5:22-23).
- 4) The believer must walk bearing with one another in love (Gal. 5:22-23).

We can do very little in paying God back for what He has done for us, but we can, and we must walk worthy of the honored position to which God has exalted us.

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