

Series: *What Does It Mean to be a Scripture-Driven Church?*

Title: "Doctrine Decides"

Speaker: Rev. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 3/8/2009

Page 1 of 11

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These days a great many evangelicals are saying that doctrine is unimportant. Doctrine is dull. Let's not talk about doctrine. Let's concentrate on our service. Let's concentrate on our participation in the life and activities of the church. Or, more frequently these days, let's concentrate on success in life and feeling good about ourselves.

The theme of the television broadcast of the largest "evangelical" church in the United States (and I put the term "evangelical" in quotes) – the theme of that program is – "Discover the Champion in You." Over 7 million people watch this program every week. The focus of the service each week is not on the Word of God or the on Gospel of Jesus Christ. The focus is on being materially and psychologically successful in life. The focus is on what has come to be known as the "prosperity gospel" – that if you do certain things and have certain attitudes, God will give you health, wealth, and happiness. And each week, the pastor of that church leads the 16,000 people in attendance as they hold up their Bibles, and repeat this mantra:

"This is my Bible. I am what it says I am. I have what it says I have. I can do what it says I can do. Today I will be taught the Word of God. I'll boldly

Series: *What Does It Mean to be a Scripture-Driven Church?*

Title: "Doctrine Decides"

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Original Air Date: Week of 3/8/2009

Page 2 of 11

---

confess. My mind is alert. My heart is receptive. I will never be the same. In Jesus' name."

But then, for the next half hour, these people, and the millions in the television audience, do not hear instruction from the Word of God. No, they hear a pep talk that has little or nothing to do with the Word of God, and is often contrary to the plain teaching of the Word of God. Scripture is rarely mentioned, much less quoted. The name of Jesus is rarely mentioned. The Gospel is not preached. You wonder why these people bother to bring their Bibles to the service, except to hold them up while they repeat the deceptive mantra on television each week. The focus of this pastor's pep talk is all about you – your abilities, your capabilities, your self-esteem, your happiness, your material and financial success in life.

Not long ago, this pastor of the largest evangelical church in the United States was interviewed on the CBS television program *60 Minutes*. The interviewer, who was certainly not a Christian himself, asked this pastor some pointed questions. He asked this pastor, "Why so little use of the Bible in your sermons and your books? Why is it that you hardly ever mention Jesus Christ?"

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Series: *What Does It Mean to be a Scripture-Driven Church?*

Title: "Doctrine Decides"

Speaker: Rev. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 3/8/2009

Page 3 of 11

---

And the pastor's response was that he does not believe that it is his calling to explain the Bible to people. His calling, he says, is to be a "life coach" – to help you, according to the title of his latest book, to be "A Better You."

This same pastor was interviewed on CNN, and this pastor made it clear that he does not believe that Jesus Christ is the only way to eternal life. When the interviewer asked him, "What about the atheist?" this pastor responded that he didn't think it is his place to judge whether the atheist will go to heaven or not.

Dear friends, this is more and more typical of the nominally evangelical church in our day. That is the position. The Gospel isn't necessarily the only Gospel. Christ isn't necessarily the only way. And doctrine is dull. Doctrine divides. Doctrine is a de-motivator. We don't need doctrine. We need motivation. We don't need doctrine. We need to feel good. Doctrine is a negative message. We want to be nothing but positive. We don't need doctrine. We need to learn how to live the right kind of lives, the kind of lives that God will bless with health, wealth, and happiness.

But Scripture makes it clear that such a position is spiritually disastrous. You cannot learn about right living without learning right doctrine. You

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Series: *What Does It Mean to be a Scripture-Driven Church?*

Title: "Doctrine Decides"

Speaker: Rev. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 3/8/2009

Page 4 of 11

---

cannot learn right living unless God through Scripture puts the finger on the things in your life that aren't right.

God did not call anyone to be a pastor of a church who is not a preacher of the Gospel and an expositor of the Word. That is the preacher's job. In 2nd Timothy chapter 4, verses 1 through 5, the Apostle Paul challenges Timothy thus. He says:

"I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the Word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables [to human myths rather than the reality of God's truth]. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry."

Paul says to Timothy, preach the Word of God and nothing else! Stand ready to do it at all times and in every kind of situation – "in season and out of season." The force of the original language is this: "Preach the word when the

---

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Title: "Doctrine Decides"

Speaker: Rev. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 3/8/2009

Page 5 of 11

---

word is welcome in the ears of your hearers, yes; and also preach the word when that word is unwelcome in the ears of your hearers." But always, the Word! Your preaching, Timothy, is not about felt needs. Your preaching, Timothy, is not about success in human terms. Your preaching, Timothy, is not about self-esteem. Your preaching, Timothy, is not driven by what people want to hear or don't want to hear. Your preaching, Timothy, is to be Scripture-driven preaching. Preach the Word, Timothy! Preach that, and nothing else!

And Paul's challenge to Timothy comes immediately on the heels of those words we have read several times in this series of messages, that "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."

And here in the beginning of 2nd Timothy chapter 4, the Apostle Paul tells Timothy to "reprove, rebuke, and exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine."

The word translated "reprove" means to expose error. The word translated "rebuke" means to denounce error, to express strong disapproval of it. The word "exhort" means to earnestly beg and plead with people, to encourage

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Series: *What Does It Mean to be a Scripture-Driven Church?*

Title: "Doctrine Decides"

Speaker: Rev. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 3/8/2009

Page 6 of 11

---

them, to urge them in the right direction. "Reprove, rebuke, and exhort." How? "With all longsuffering and doctrine." Do it with patience. Do it without ceasing. Do it unfailingly. And do it with doctrine – instruct the people of God from the Word of God. Make sure your preaching of the Word, make sure your reproof, your correction, your instruction in righteousness, is from the Word of God and not the word of man.

And why is the preacher to do this? Because, Paul says in verse 3, "the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine." People won't want to put up with it. They will want to hear what they want to hear. They will want the service and the preaching to appeal to the natural man, the man who cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God because the Spirit of God isn't living in him. They will want to be the purpose-driven church, driven by man's purposes, not by God's purpose.

And it's interesting to note that Paul by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit uses the phrase "sound doctrine." Sound doctrine. The Greek word that is translated "sound" is the word from which we get our English word "hygiene." The word in the Greek has the meaning, "healthy." And it also carried the meaning "accurate." The sense of the phrase "sound doctrine" is,

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Series: *What Does It Mean to be a Scripture-Driven Church?*

Title: "Doctrine Decides"

Speaker: Rev. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 3/8/2009

Page 7 of 11

---

"teaching that is free from any mixture of error." "teaching that is free from any mixture of error." Sound teaching. Healthy teaching.

A preacher who is not preaching sound doctrine from the Word of God, is no preacher at all. Ephesians 4:11 – the role of the pastor is shepherd/teacher. The job of the shepherd is to lead the sheep in the path of sound doctrine.

Doctrine, teaching, instruction. That is the preacher's job. That is his life's work. And we note in the pages of the Word of God that doctrine, teaching, instruction always has two parts – there's the doctrine itself, and then there's the application of the doctrine. The pattern we always see in the Bible is doctrine first, then the application for living. You can't have proper application until you have a proper grasp of sound doctrine. In Exodus, the law comes first, that great thundering standard of God. That's doctrine. People, this is how you are supposed to live. Here is God's moral law. And then in the rest of the Pentateuch comes the civil law for Israel that is rooted in and based upon that moral law. That civil law is the application of the moral law to the circumstances of the nation of Israel, and God's plan and purpose for them. And then also comes the sacrificial system to deal with violations of God's moral law, and violations of the civil law code.

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Series: *What Does It Mean to be a Scripture-Driven Church?*

Title: "Doctrine Decides"

Speaker: Rev. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 3/8/2009

Page 8 of 11

---

We see the same pattern in the teachings of our Lord in the Gospels and in the first chapter of Acts. We see the same pattern in the apostles' teaching through the rest of Acts. And we see the same pattern in the epistles.

It is always interesting to note how the Apostle Paul, for example, presents his arguments under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The pattern is always the same. His standard procedure is to begin with right doctrine. He reminds Christians of what they already know. Then he teaches and instructs them further. He takes them deeper. And he constantly draws from other Scriptures to make his points. And he constantly uses the conjunction "therefore" to lead us on, point by point by point – 105 times in all.

But as he leads you along, you always come to a vital "therefore" that indicates that Paul is moving from the presentation of doctrine to the application of doctrine.

Romans 12:1 – "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice..."

2 Corinthians 6:17 – "Therefore come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord."

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Series: *What Does It Mean to be a Scripture-Driven Church?*

Title: "Doctrine Decides"

Speaker: Rev. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 3/8/2009

Page 9 of 11

---

Galatians 5:1 – "Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free."

Ephesians 4:1 – "I, therefore...beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called."

Colossians 2:20 – "Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why...do you subject yourselves to [legalistic] regulations?"

Colossians 3:5 – "Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry."

Colossians 3:12 – "Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering."

2nd Thessalonians 2:15 – "Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions that you were taught [by the Word of God]"

*Therefore, therefore, therefore* – In light of all these wonderful truths, in light of these great doctrines of the faith – in light of all that, brothers and sisters – *Therefore* this is how you are to live. That is the pattern. If you truly *believe*

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Series: *What Does It Mean to be a Scripture-Driven Church?*

Title: "Doctrine Decides"

Speaker: Rev. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 3/8/2009

Page 10 of 11

---

these doctrines, the inevitable next step is that you should *live* according to these doctrines. Right doctrine produces right living. Right doctrine demands right living.

Right living is not based on mere feelings. It is not subjective. Right living is objective – there is a standard of measurement. But it is not comparing yourself with yourself, or comparing yourself with someone else. It is comparing yourself with the Word of God – objectively.

And these things also apply to the church as a body. We are not to become subjective and introspective. We are not to compare ourselves with ourselves. And we are not to compare ourselves with other churches – what they do, how they do it, the results they get or don't get. No, instead we are to be objective. We are to evaluate the life and ministry of the church based on the standard of the Word.

And these principles further apply not only to the individual and to the local church, but also to denominations and councils of churches.

The Apostle Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit concludes his discourse here in First Corinthians chapter two with these words in verse 16: "But we have the mind of Christ." That really says it all. The force of the word

---

Series: *What Does It Mean to be a Scripture-Driven Church?*

Title: "Doctrine Decides"

Speaker: Rev. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 3/8/2009

Page 11 of 11

---

"mind" in the original is that we as Christians have a different power of perception, a power of perception that the world does not have – the power of God the Holy Spirit, the "One called alongside to help," the One that Christ has sent as our Comforter.

And how does He comfort us? In Romans chapter 15, the Apostle Paul says this – "For whatever things were written before were written for our learning" – Why? – "that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." Our comfort comes as the Holy Spirit illuminates Scripture for us. And in Romans 15, verse 5, Paul goes on to say this: "Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." The word like-minded in that passage means "to think and to act with one purpose or impulse." That is what it means to be a Scripture-driven church. Being of one mind, one purpose, one impulse.

And what is that one mind? It is the mind of Christ, not the mind of man.

And what is that one purpose? It is the glory of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, not the glory of man.

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