

this explicit: "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you." That the leaders being spoken of in this passage are spiritual leaders (rather than political or familial leaders) is obvious from verse seven of the same chapter: "Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith." Thus, those same Christians who are instructed not to forsake the assembling of themselves (Heb 10.25) are instructed to submit to the leaders of their assembly. In fact, these leaders are entrusted with *keeping watch over our souls*, an undeniably heavy responsibility. The very fact that the New Testament church is to be centered around the proclamation of the Word of God necessitates an attitude of submission on the part of those who listen. While our modern pastors and teachers are not speaking new revelation from God, inasmuch as their teachings coincide with the intent of the inspired texts they do speak the Word of God to us.

Scripture is clear that a disposition of submission to our church authorities is good, and therefore we must actively and intentionally cultivate such a disposition in ourselves and our families. It must be cultivated because it is not natural. We chafe when given instruction. We rebel when given teaching that we do not understand. This tendency is easy to observe in our lives. How many times do we brush off the morning sermon with a dismissive, "I see what he is saying, but I just don't agree"? Rarely are such deflections supported by solid exegetical or logical backing.

Instead, we ought to discipline our natural inclination to assert our autonomy. Our first tendency ought to be submission, rather than rebellion. Practically, this obviously demands faithful attendance to church, placing ourselves under the authority and discipline of the local assembly. When disagreements over doctrine or practice do arise, we must carefully consider the source of our objection. Do we have a legitimate scriptural basis for the position we have adopted? Unless there is good biblical reason to disagree, we should want to agree and submit to the preached Word of God.

However, there is an obvious and important distinction between the submission to

human authority and the submission to Christ: the human authority is fallible. Human mistakes and outright depravity cloud the thinking of even the best of human rulers, whether they be in the home, the school, the church, or the workplace. This raises for us the uncomfortable tension between our typical attitude of submission and the exceptional case in which we must reject the direction of our authorities.

We must actively and intentionally cultivate a disposition of submission to our church authorities.

In the cases where our human authorities are leading us away from the truth, it is obvious that we must not follow. The classic example is that of Peter, who insisted that Christians "must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5.29). The apostolic letters give repeated warnings against false teachers and commands to reject their false teachings. We have every reason to suspect that we will encounter some sort of false teaching during the course of our spiritual pilgrimage. Should such false teachings gain ascendancy in our church, we have no choice but to refuse to submit our minds and our lives to that which is unbiblical.

Yet, if we consider the biblical admonitions regarding our attitude of submission, this should be done only after serious and considered reflection. Our decision should not be flippant or rooted in an undue pride in our own understanding, for often our most clever insights are really misunderstandings of Scripture. Consider again the example of Luther. Despite having a clear biblical mandate to break from his church, he was slow to do so, because he respected its God-given authority in the life of each believer. We would do well to emulate his example.

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Published by First Baptist Church, Rockford, Illinois, in association with the Ekklesia Consortium. For free subscriptions: sa@fbcrockford.com. For archives of past *Sola!* articles, visit the web site of the Ekklesia Consortium, www.ekkleisia.io.



Putting Theology Back in the Pew

April, 2005

Theology Matters

Scott Williquette

The battle cry of theological liberalism is "Christ unifies, doctrine divides." The implication is that if we are going to serve Christ we must jettison doctrine. "We unite around Christ," they say. "What a person believes does not matter." For a Bible believing Christian such a notion should be horrifying. Biblical Christianity is truth based. However, it is becoming increasingly true that those within Christian circles are also minimizing, down-playing, and even rejecting the doctrines of Scripture. Christians of previous generations understood the necessity of doctrinal purity. There was a day when doctrine mattered and when the truths of God's Word were guarded. That is not true today in many segments of Christianity and even in some segments of Baptist fundamentalism. There was a day when the Baptist movement was a theological movement. Baptist pastors and leaders authored and used very detailed, thorough, and scholarly statements of faith. These men understood the need for their people to understand and proclaim the doctrines of Scripture. They understood that the pastoral task involved preaching the Word (2Ti 4.1-4), bringing God's people to "unity in the [Christian] faith" (Eph 4.13), and contending "for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" (Jude 3). These men realized that even though the Bible is not a theology book *per se*, it unfolds a body of truth that God's people must understand, live out, and defend. The fundamental Baptist movement today is spiraling downward—it has evolved into a much less theologically astute movement than it once was. I say that for four reasons. **First**, whereas Baptist doctrinal statements 200-300 years ago were thorough, detailed, and schol-

arly documents, most produced in the past 100 years have been very general one or two page documents that leave their churches open to compromise, ecumenism, and liberalism. Recently I came across the doctrinal statement of a leading fundamental Baptist church which consists of seven very short belief statements (only 160 words in all). It says nothing about basic, important biblical doctrines such as God's attributes, repentance, conversion, depravity, and others. Additionally, there are no Scripture references to support the belief statements. Many churches are governed by similar short and shallow statements. Such statements communicate that we care little for the doctrines of Scripture and leave churches open for compromise and apostasy.

Theology matters because Christianity is an organized, cohesive body of truth.

Second, in many fundamental Baptist churches, members rarely see their church's doctrinal statement and thus are less familiar with the doctrines of Scripture. (In order to remind the people in our church of the doctrines of Scripture, we read a section of our doctrinal statement once a month as part of our worship service).

Third, I know of many fundamental Baptist churches that have an excellent doctrinal statement but do not live by it. I personally know of Baptist churches governed by the New Hampshire Baptist Confession of Faith that teach what is contrary to it. Years ago these churches voted in the New Hampshire Baptist Confession, but today the pastors believe and teach things contrary to it.

Fourth, often in Baptist churches today theology is downplayed or even openly criticized. Often the practical has been elevated above the doctrinal, when in truth the practical must always be based upon the doctrinal. Orthodoxy (right belief) is always the foundation of orthopraxy (right practice).

Theology matters. Christianity is a system of beliefs. It is an organized, cohesive body of truth. How do we know that Christians and local churches are responsible to learn, proclaim, and protect the doctrines of Scripture? In this article I offer four reasons.

Pastors Are Commanded to be Nourished by and to Proclaim Sound Doctrine. The Pastoral Epistles are replete with references to the acquisition and proclamation of sound doctrine. Space limitations do not allow us to list all such passages, but take the time to examine the following examples: 1 Timothy 4.6, 13, 16; 2 Timothy 3.16, 4.2-3; Titus 1.9, 2.1, 2.7.

Much of the New Testament Was Written to Defend Specific Doctrines. Galatians was written to defend the doctrine of salvation. 1 & 2 Thessalonians were written to defend the doctrine of Christ's future coming. 1 Corinthians 15 was written to defend the doctrine of the resurrection. 1 Corinthians 5 was written to defend the doctrine of holiness within the local church.

The New Testament Commands Believers to Separate From Those Who Reject Sound Doctrine. *Believers should expose and rebuke other believers who teach false doctrine.* In Galatians 2.11-14 Paul confronts Peter because of his unbiblical action and because of the doctrine which that unbiblical action taught. Through his actions, Peter had communicated to the Gentiles that in order for them to be acceptable to God they had to add Jewish practice and custom to Christ. Paul responded by exposing Peter's sin and rebuking him publicly. He did not, for the sake of unity, just let this slide. Paul had no idea whether or not Peter would accept or be offended by his public confrontation and rebuke—and Paul did not care! Paul was more concerned about truth than he was about unity and friendship.

Believers should muzzle those who teach false doctrine. In Titus 1.9-11 we are commanded to do all we can to close the mouths of false teachers. The Greek word translated "silenced" (ἐπιστομίζω) in verse 11, literally

means "to put something in the mouth." It was often used of the muzzling of an animal. God cares so much about sound doctrine that He wants His people to muzzle any who teach doctrinal error. There are only three ways to muzzle a false teacher. First, you passionately teach the truth so that your people develop discerning minds. Second, you forbid the false teacher from teaching in your church. Third, you expose the false teacher's error and thus discourage others from following him.

Only true doctrine engenders genuine unity.

Believers should reject those who teach false doctrine. Titus 3.9-10 tells us how to respond to a "divisive person." From verse 9 we see that this man is causing division by teaching false doctrine. The implication of these verses is that only true doctrine engenders genuine unity. What should be our response to those who disrupt the church's unity by teaching false doctrine? We are commanded to admonish them twice, and then if they refuse to stop teaching their heresy, we are commanded to "have nothing to do with" them. The phrase "have nothing to do with" translates one Greek word (παραιτέομαι) that means to "reject, dismiss, discharge, drive out." Here it probably refers to removal from the church.

Believers should never support those who teach false doctrine. In 2 John 9-11 John is dealing with those who are denying cardinal doctrines of Christ and salvation. According to verse 9, because they deny Christ and His gospel, they "do not have God." In other words, they do not have a saving relationship with God. They are outside of God's family. Therefore, we should in no way support or help them. In John's day Christians would lodge and support traveling missionaries. When John states that we should not "take him into your house or welcome him" he is referring, not simply to letting him come in to speak or to have over for a meal, but to allowing him to live with you.

The New Testament Commands Believers to Hold Fast To Sound Doctrine.

He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can

encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it. (Tit 1.9).

Paul commands Titus to hold fast to doctrine, so that he might be able to use "sound doctrine" to exhort the false teachers like those described in verses 11-13 of the same passage. In light of the fact that the end times are filled with those who have departed from the faith and who teach the doctrine of demons, Paul commands Timothy in 4.13-16 to "devote" himself to teaching and to "watch" his doctrine closely.

Conclusion. Fundamental Baptist churches must be doctrinally strong. There are doctrinal battles that must be waged and few pastors and churches are rising to the challenge. Few are contending "for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" (Jude 3). Although we may not desire such a battle, we must not shun it. Pray that your pastor will faithfully, firmly, and humbly contend for the truths of the Christian faith. Pray that the people of your church will value the doctrines of Scripture and treasure doctrinal preaching. Pray that God will give our churches a heart for truth.

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Submission to the Church

Michael Riley

Perhaps no single figure in church history has cast off the authority of his church as spectacularly as did Martin Luther, the chief figure of the Protestant Reformation. However, his decision to openly oppose the Roman Catholic Church was not arrived at lightly. Luther was torn between the implications of his re-discovery of the glorious truth of salvation by grace alone and his duty to submit to the human authority structure of the church, a church of which he considered himself a faithful member. Even as late as October of 1519, a full two years after nailing the Ninety-Five Theses to the Wittenberg cathedral door, Luther wrote to Pope Leo X: "Before God and all his creatures, I bear testimony that I neither did desire, nor do desire to touch or by intrigue to undermine the authority of the Roman Church and that of your holiness." Yet eventually Luther realized that he had no

option but to reject Catholicism. Its error was too pernicious to hope for reform from within.

While Luther struggled with his disagreement with the Church, even over a most vital doctrinal concern, I believe that today we are far too comfortable with the rejection of the doctrines and applications that our spiritual authorities derive from Scripture. We never agonize over these differences; rather, we expect them, and we expect our opinions to be respected as the unquestioned equal of any other. After all, we have "studied it out" for ourselves; who has the right to say that we are wrong?

We are far too comfortable with the rejection of the doctrines and applications that our spiritual authorities derive from Scripture.

This individualistic approach to Christianity is not surprising, given our culture. Our society demands that every point of view get an equal hearing, regardless of the actual merits of the position. This democratization of the realm of ideas naturally results in an inordinate affection for one's own position. We are told that we must be authentic, that we must be true to ourselves. However, I contend that this is an outlook derived more from the existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre than from the teachings of John and Paul. In stark contrast to the unconstrained individualism of our day, Scripture enjoins submission and humility.

The degree of submission to our human authorities that Christ demands of us is staggering. Have you ever given serious consideration to the command that wives must submit to their husbands in the same manner as the church submits to Christ (Eph 5.24)? Obviously, submission to human authority is not limited to women; Paul speaks in Romans 13 of the necessity for all believers to submit to government. Like the submission of wives to husbands, our obedience to our civic leaders is linked to our obedience to God: "Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God" (Ro 13.2).

In the same way, the Christian is told to submit to his church. Hebrews 13.17 makes