

Take Heed unto the Doctrine

“Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.” 1Timothy 4:16

The above exhortation that Paul wrote to Timothy is but one of many examples of that Apostle’s insistence on right doctrine. He is instructing the young elder brother to pay attention to right doctrine, and make sure he adheres to it continually. Moreover, Paul states that Timothy’s very salvation, and the salvation of those who listen to Timothy, depends upon this. Later on, in this same epistle (1:6:3) Paul follows up by saying those whose teachings do not consent to the “wholesome words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness”, are proud, know nothing, and must be avoided.

Such strong statements can hardly be considered an exaggeration when we consider how often and how clearly this topic is emphasized throughout the New Testament. There are many passages¹, which make it plain that the Apostles labored to make the church strong by making it certain of its doctrine. The truth had to be kept, and they were ever vigilant against efforts to introduce false teaching.

Their emphasis can also be seen in the writings of Luke. It is fascinating to think that Luke wrote two lengthy treatises for the benefit of a single man. Both the Gospel account that bears his name and the book of Acts, 52 chapters in total, were written for the express purpose of strengthening one disciple named Theophilus. To put it in Luke’s words, it was so that he would “know the certainty of those things wherein thou hast been instructed”.

Of course, we would expect nothing less from these men of God since they were warned by the Master to beware of deception. Matthew 7:15-23; Matthew 24:3-5, 11, 23-25

Even the Lord Jesus Himself was so very careful to fully deliver the teachings exactly as He received them from His Father. John 7:16; John 8:28; John 12:49-50; John 14:10,24;

From the Father to the Son; from the Son to the Apostles; from the Apostles to those who would follow, there was great attention placed on the faithful passing down of the Words of Life. Nothing was to be added or removed. What carefulness was exercised! What importance these Words must have!

This need to maintain doctrinal clarity was not to diminish with the passing of time. This becomes especially obvious when we consider the proliferation of both deliberate heresies and unintentional error. Disagreements on what the Word of God means have brought us to this point in church history where irreconcilable differences exist between professing Christians. Doctrinal plurality and the resulting disunity have led to widespread confusion and frustration. It is systemic within the contemporary Christian Church.

The Apostolic Christian Church (Nazarean) is a small, individual fellowship of believers. Our brothers of previous generations sought to protect us from these things by insisting we continue in the sound doctrines we have learned. For this reason, though our forebears have always maintained the full authority of the Holy Bible, they also understood the value of a written statement of their doctrinal understandings. Such statements were not intended to be complete expressions of every doctrinal belief and position of the church: their value was that they clarified the doctrinal understandings that were core and essential to the brotherhood. Special efforts were made to defend doctrinal points that were not commonly upheld by the broader Christian community.

Subsequent statements were not meant to repudiate previous statements, but “to restate doctrinal positions in terms relevant to today’s issues”. In this way, the former efforts have led to the two principal statements that we currently use: The 18 point Statement of Faith as printed in the ACCF Church Directory and the more detailed “We Believe” document (second revision 1987). As expressed in the latter, it is “a reiteration of the past statements of faith within the Apostolic Christian Church (Nazarean)”.

Today, our desire to keep 1 Timothy 4:16 by upholding these two expressions of faith continues to be tested. In particular, those beliefs that are distinctive from mainstream Evangelical Christianity are challenged.

The rationale behind marginalizing distinctive doctrines may range from the desire to improve unity to the desire to be more successful in reaching the lost. However, we must closely examine these assumptions. Does doctrine really divide? Are “relationships and results” more important than doctrine? Is unity somehow weighed against doctrine? Is our commitment to Bible teachings that are no longer popular a hindrance to evangelizing the lost?

Our commitment to 1 Timothy 4:16 will help us to see through the false dilemmas that are presented us. Sound doctrine *does* divide, but only from that which is not sound. Relationships and results that develop *only after* commitment to sound doctrine is set aside should not expect the blessings of God, even if they receive the accolades of men. Our desire for improved unity and fruitfulness in reaching the lost *will be blessed* if we honor the Lord by “taking heed unto the doctrine and continuing in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.”

Luke’s desire was to assure Theophilus of “the certainty of those things wherein thou hast been instructed”. We are also certain that the things wherein we have been instructed are sound, not only for our forefathers, but also for our own generation and for our children’s, and shall be until the Lord returns.

¹ Acts 20:28-31;
Romans 16:17-18;
1 Corinthians 11:19;
2 Corinthians 11:13-15;
Galatians 1:6-9;
Galatians 5:7-9;
Ephesians 4:14;
Ephesians 5:6;
1 Timothy 4:1;
1 Timothy 6:3-5, 20-21;
2 Timothy 2:16-19;
2 Timothy 3:1-5, 13-14;
2 Timothy 4:2-5;
Titus 1:9-14;
Titus 3:10;
Hebrews 13:9;
2 Peter 2:1-3;
2 Peter 3:16-18;
1 John 2:18-19;
1 John 4:1;
2 John 6-11;
3 John 9-11;
Jude 3-4;
Revelation 2:2;