

Threefold Emphasis

2 Timothy 3:16-17

In 2 Tim. 3:16 Paul speaks of the inspiration of the Scriptures, but he also instructs us about the kinds of emphasis we must have in our lives. Applying this verse requires that the people of God emphasize three things: 1. Doctrine: Learning the teachings of God. 2. Morality: holy conduct, instruction in righteousness. 3. Service: Being complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. In this lesson we will consider the need for these three emphases in the church.

Doctrine

In Matt. 28:20 when Jesus gave the great commission he emphasized the need for His disciples to learn and to obey all that He commanded. When people believe in the gospel they can be saved by obeying the gospel (Mark 16:16), but salvation does not stop there. Learning the doctrines of Christ is an essential aspect of discipleship. It ought to be the mission of every individual in the church. The great commission teaches us that doctrine is essential to the life of a Christian.

According to Rom. 6:17-18, Christians are delivered to that doctrine. That doctrine or teaching becomes the standard for Christian life. It is the pattern which all who love God strive to conform their lives. When one obeys the gospel, they make a commitment to learn and do the will of God. That doctrine contains the *“the words of eternal life”* (John 6:68).

Jesus further emphasized the need for doctrine in John 8:31-32 when He said, *“the truth shall make you free.”* In that passage He was talking to His disciples. More specifically, He was talking to those who abide in His word. Therefore, freedom is granted to those who devote themselves to learning and abiding in His doctrine, which is truth.

After Peter’s sermon in Acts 2 we see the apostles and disciples pursuing Christ’s doctrine with great zeal. As it says in Acts 2:42, *“They continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine...”* The new Christians followed the pattern that Jesus established. They were learning to obey all that He had commanded.

God’s people today need to emphasize the importance of sound doctrine, just like they did in the New Testament. It is true that interaction between brethren includes social activities. In fact, it is good for Christians to be involved with one another on a social basis. But churches must not get so caught up in the social activities that they neglecting their responsibility toward doctrine. If we want to be pleasing to God, we must emphasize doctrine in our lives. Without doctrine, we can never learn to please God. But, when we are devoted to it, we can be *“transformed by the renewing of our minds”* (Rom. 12:2).

Morality: Holy Conduct

According to 1 Tim. 1:8-11, doctrine alone is not enough for Christian life. Doctrine must be emphasized, but we must also emphasize the need to live according to that doctrine. Christians must emphasize the need to abstain from immorality and to be holy in their conduct. *“Set aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness...be doers of the word and not hearers only”* (James 1:21-22).

In Rom. 8:16 Paul teaches that when we obey the gospel we are made children of God through Christ. In 1 John 3:8, John teaches that we are manifest as God’s children when we no longer live in sin. Since God does not sin, if we are to be His children we must flee sin. We must strive to imitate Him as *“dear children”* (Eph. 5:1). We are also commanded, *“Be holy, for I am holy”* (1 Pet. 1:15-16).

We live in a world where immorality runs rampant. It is because of that sinfulness that Jesus is going to destroy the world (Eph. 5:6). Therefore, God's people must emphasize the need to flee immorality; to flee everything that is contrary to sound doctrine according to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Service

When we learn to flee immorality we will be prepared to serve God in righteousness. According to Titus 2:11-14, Christ purifies us with His blood in order to prepare us to serve the Lord. He sanctifies us and sets us apart for the Master's use (Heb. 10:10). Doctrine and holy living are necessary, but the life of a Christian is only complete when he learns to serve God in an acceptable manner.

In Rom. 6:22 Paul says that when we are freed from sin we become slaves of righteousness. As slaves, we must also be active and productive in that which is good and right in the sight of God. In John 15:1-2 and Luke 13:6-9, Jesus teaches us the need to bear fruit in His kingdom; to be active in our service for Him. *"Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away."* It is not enough that we be a branch or a tree in the Lord's vineyard, but as such, we must be actively bearing fruit. If we fail to emphasize faithful service in the church then we are as barren trees worthy only to be cut down and burned in the fire.

Our service to God includes our worship. According to John 4:24, God is looking for those who are willing to worship Him in Spirit and in truth. This requires that we focus on having the right attitude in our worship and that we do it the way God specifies. Many Christians emphasize having the right doctrine, many Christians flee sin, but many also fall short when it comes to their service and worship of God. They do not bear much fruit and therefore are not serving their master the way they ought to.

In the Old Testament service consisted of animals, grain, tithing, feast days, etc. Today it is different. In Heb. 13:12-17 we learn that Christian service consists of praise to God, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks, doing good, sharing, and living in submission. If we are to be pleasing to our God, we must emphasize the need to be active and diligent in all of these things.

The Jews in the Old Testament were punished for neglecting or altering their service to God. How much worse will our punishment be if we neglect or alter our service to God, since we have been taught by the Son of God (Heb. 12:25)? If we are going to live as the church which Jesus established with His own blood, then we must devote ourselves to serving Him diligently and acceptably. When we are doing this, then our lives as Christians can be complete.

Conclusion

Many in the church are content to neglect one or more of these criteria, and therefore neglect their salvation. If we desire the salvation that is in Jesus Christ, then we must learn from the Scriptures all that God has for us. As Paul said, *"I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God"* (Acts 20:27). Let us strive to be the New Testament church, pressing on *"that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me"* (Phil. 3:12). Are you willing to devote yourself to learning the doctrine of Christ, being holy in your conduct, and serving the Lord in an acceptable manner?

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