

## Integrity in Doctrine (July 13)

**Scripture:** Titus 1:5–9, especially verse 9: ...holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.

**Introduction:** This passage has to do with the qualifications for church leaders, and the overall requirement is blamelessness. Elders must be blameless in family life (v. 6), personal character (vv. 7–8) and doctrine (v. 9).

1. **Leaders Must Be Committed to Sound Doctrine—“*Holding fast the faithful word. . . .*”** The same verb was used in Luke 16:13 where Jesus said we cannot be *devoted* to two masters. An elder must be exclusively devoted to the faithful word. The Greek for “faithful word” is π\_\_\_\_\_ (pistoo-logoo) the faithful word or trustworthy saying. This phrase is unique to the writings of Paul and specifically to the Pastoral Epistles. (See 1 Tim. 1:15; 3:1; 4:9; 2 Tim. 2:11; Titus 3:7–8.) Paul and the apostles had provided authority for the early church, but they were growing old. In future years where could the church turn for authority? Paul was saying, “When I’m no longer here, you still have the authority—it is the authority of the word of God. Hold it firmly.”
2. **Leaders Must Be Committed to Public Proclamation of Sound Doctrine—. . . *as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict.*** The public proclamation of the word of God is a central focus of the church. This is one of the major themes of the Pastoral Epistles. (See 1 Tim. 3:2; 4:13; 5:17; 2 Tim. 2:1–2; 2:15; 2:25; 4:1–2.)
3. **Leaders Must Make Practical Application of Sound Doctrine—. . . *both to exhort and convict those who contradict.***
  - A. The leader must exhort and encourage by sound teaching. The word encourage is the word π\_\_\_\_\_ (para-ka-le-o). The preposition para means “along side of something,” the stem means “to call.” Teaching and preaching is not merely the dissemination of theological truth or the passing out of information. We are to communicate God’s truth so as to call people along side of the truth of God. How does God’s Word apply to our lives?
  - B. **The Leader Must Convict by Sound Doctrine.** We are to refute those who oppose the truth. The word “refute” means to bring to light, to expose, to set forth, or to convince and convict. We must teach God’s Word clearly enough to expose error and to allow the Holy Spirit to convince and convict those who oppose it.

**Conclusion:** Let me suggest, by way of application, that there are three dimensions or categories to our doctrine:

- *There is absolute truth*—the truth that draws a line between believers and non-believers. These are essential doctrines necessary for salvation, such as the person of Christ, the power of His shed blood for the remission of sins, His bodily resurrection, etc. We adhere to these truths because we accept the authority of inspired Scripture.
- *There are convictions*, which do not have to be accepted in order to go to heaven. These are our beliefs about things such as details about baptism, the gifts of the Spirit, or the return of Christ.
- *There are preferences.* Different Christians and different churches enjoy different styles of worship or types of music, for example.

There are three dangers in the area of absolutes, convictions, and preferences. Number one is to take everything you believe and elevate it to an absolute. A second danger is to so focus on one of the convictions to the exclusion of all the others. Danger number three is saying, “We just believe in Jesus. Doctrine is really not all that important. After all, doctrine divides and love unites.” May I suggest that *lack* of doctrine divides. When everyone believes whatever they want without a commitment to doctrine, then you have division. As pastor of this church I have a personal commitment to doctrine, to publicly proclaiming it, and to applying it to my life and, hopefully, to the lives of our attenders. I’m also committed to our heritage here of absolutes, convictions, and preferences. That is who we are. It is incumbent upon leadership to keep these things in balance while at the same time loving those outside our congregation who are brothers and sisters in Jesus who differ with us in our convictions and in our preferences.