

The Whole Truth About God: Biblical Theology (Sound Doctrine)

Session Six: Sound Doctrine is for Unity

Getting Started

"Doctrine divides." Those two words have recently become a manifesto among those who think that what really matters is Christian unity and that doctrine only gets in the way.

Those who say this have a point. Christians throughout the ages have drawn boundaries over doctrinal issues, including everything from the Trinity and deity of Christ to such secondary issues as baptism and church government.

1. Which do you think is more important: unity or doctrine?
2. Do you think it's ever right for Christians to draw boundaries over doctrine? If so, when?

Main Idea

Sound doctrine is the ground of and motivation for Christian unity, and unity is one of the goals of sound doctrine.

Digging In

In Ephesian 4, Paul turns from expounding the riches of salvation in Christ to calling the Ephesian church to live in light of those truths:

Ephesian 4:1-16

1. In verses one through three, Paul exhorts the Ephesians to walk in a manner worthy of their calling, and then he specifies several specific ways they are to do this. In one sentence or phrase, how would you summarize what Paul is calling the Ephesians to do?
2. What does Paul stress about the Christian faith in verses 4-6?
3. How does this unity of the faith encourage us to pursue unity with one another? (Hint: If you want you can look back through the first three chapters of Ephesians and consider how the things Paul teaches there foster unity in the church).

Philippians 2:1-11 contains an exhortation similar to the one we just considered:

Philippians 2:1-11

4. What does Paul tell the Philippians to do in this passage (v. 2a)?
5. By what means are the Philippians to do this (vv. 2b-5)?
6. What threats to unity does Paul address in this passage?
7. List everything that Paul says Jesus did in this passage (vv. 6-8).
8. What has God done in response (vv. 9-11)?
9. How does Paul's teaching about Jesus in verses 5-11 address our temptations of pride, rivalry, and conceit?
10. Conceit, rivalries, and the threat of division are all very practical problems. Would you characterize Paul's instruction about these matters as purely practical? Explain.
11. In light of Paul's teaching in these passages, how would you respond to someone who said, "Doctrine is what divides Christians from each other. What we really need is to pursue unity."
12. In light of Paul's teaching in these passages, how would you instruct someone who loves sound doctrine but consistently causes divisions within the local church?
13. The doctrinal unity we share with other members of our church spills into other areas of our corporate and individual lives. How does doctrinal unity help:
 - a. When church members counsel one another?
 - b. When church members interact with one another's children?
 - c. When church members encourage one another through trials?
 - d. When church members keep one another accountable in fighting against sin?
 - e. When . . . can you think of other areas?