

The Gospel/Doctrine Distinction

Over the years, the distinction between the gospel and doctrine has become more and more popular with some brethren as a basis of broadening fellowship. The basic idea being that the gospel is the real basis of fellowship and not doctrine. One might be accursed for preaching a different gospel but not for teaching another doctrine. So more and more brethren are calling for us to overlook our "doctrinal" differences and unite in the "gospel."

Not only is there no distinction between gospel and doctrine, but there are four terms frequently used to refer to the same system. They are "the gospel," "the doctrine," "the truth," and "the faith." Each term refers to the Christian system and is used interchangeably by the New Testament writers.

The Colossians, in the same verse, were admonished to continue in "the faith" and not be moved away from the hope of "the gospel" (Colossians 1:23). Paul tells Timothy about things contrary to "sound doctrine according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God" (1 Timothy 1:10-11). Paul wrote of "the truth of the gospel" (Galatians 2:5, 14).

Obedience is demanded no matter which term is used. The gospel must be obeyed (2 Thessalonians 1:8). The form of doctrine must be obeyed (Romans 6:17). One must be obedient to the faith (Acts 6:7; Romans 1:5; 16:26). One must obey the truth (1 Peter 1:22). Likewise, the consequences of departing from or disobeying the system are the same no matter which term is used. The Lord will take vengeance upon those who "obey not the gospel" (2 Thessalonians 1:8). Those who abide not in the "doctrine of Christ" and follow "another doctrine" do not have God (2 John 9-11; 1 Timothy 1:3). Indignation and wrath await those who "do not obey the truth" (Romans 2:8). Paul said one must be obedient to the faith (Romans 1:5) and tied his assurance of eternal salvation to his having kept "the faith" (2 Timothy 4:7-8).

One needs to be very careful in trying to isolate any one of these descriptions of the system into a separate entity and making it the sole basis of fellowship. Whether this system is spoken of as "gospel," "doctrine," "truth," or "faith," it must be obeyed to please God. So, the gospel/doctrine distinction has no basis in scripture. It is an artificial distinction to serve whatever agenda men might have at the time.

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