

# All Saints Anglican Church of Southern Arizona, Inc.

## Advent 3 Sunday Sermon on 2017-12-17

### The Relationship between Doctrine and Salvation by Fr Reed Merino

1 Timothy 4:16 *"Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you."*

From this passage it is very clear to Paul, that whatever HE calls "doctrine" is closely linked to what HE calls "salvation."

The word that is translated "doctrine" ("didaskalia") simply means "teaching." In our day, "doctrine" has taken on the meaning of "FORMALIZED" theological statements (such as the "doctrine of the Trinity"). But that is not what Paul was limited to saying.

If you are like most people, this passage probably sounds like Paul is saying things like: Salvation requires belief that He is both human and divine; that you must believe in the doctrine of the Trinity – that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are each fully eternal and equally divine, that Jesus was born of a virgin, and so on. If that is what you understand, you would be right – but only PARTLY right. Those and similar doctrines are the doctrines, or teachings, ABOUT God.

But PAUL's idea of "teaching" was more comprehensive than teachings ABOUT God. Paul's "teaching" included the teachings OF God, the teachings OF Jesus. In other words, believing the teachings that came out of Jesus' mouth are part of that "salvation" that comes from God (such as the Sermon on the Mount, of Matthew 5-7). The persons who joined themselves to Jesus as His disciples, were also committing themselves to surrender to His teachings. Apart from that commitment, your so-called "faith" is merely intellectual and abstract: the kind of belief that Simon the Magician had (Acts 8:9-24). Even SATAN believes that Jesus is the divine Son of God: he BELIEVES it, but he doesn't LIKE it, sort of like how conservatives really do believe, but don't like, that our previous president was Obama, and how liberals really believe (at least, MOST of them), but don't like, that Trump is the current president.

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So, if salvation requires true commitment to ALL the teachings OF Jesus, the question is "WHY?" After all, Paul teaches us that "8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Ephesians 2). Therefore, can't you call yourself "Christian," and consider yourself "saved," as long as you have come to believe that Jesus has come from God to take away the guilt and judgments that our sins deserve? The answer is, of course, a gigantic "NO!". If your boss or your drill sergeant required TWO things of you, will they keep you in their company if you fulfill ONE requirement and refuse to fulfill the other? Of course not!

Well, Jesus laid quite a demanding set of teachings upon those whom He called to repentance and discipleship: He "taught" that you are to actually have love and forgiveness for those who act badly toward you. To be very generous toward those in need (actually, DANGEROUSLY generous). To live under HIS sexual and marital discipline. To elevate His role in your life so that you determine to obey and surrender to Him before ANY other relationship: even your parents, your wife, your children, your work, your nation.

So, what IS the relationship between this kind of commitment to His teaching and whether you are headed for His paradise instead of that "Lake of Fire" about which we have studied?

I think the answer is as follows:

Almost EVERYone, for example, believes that they "love" their children (even people who abuse their children). But, just because we use the same WORD does not mean that we are living out the same REALITY. That is likely why Jesus, in John 15:12, said: "This is my commandment, that you love one another just as **I** have loved you." Jesus was saying in effect, "I want you to be walking in what **I** mean by love, not what YOU mean by it"

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Similarly, when Paul wrote that we are saved "through faith," he meant that we are saved through what HE called "faith."

And what HE means by "faith" is fashioned, in part, by the nature and intensity of the wrestling that you go through in response to what He taught.

Let's look at the Marine Corps again for an example of what I mean. Let's compare them to, say, the YMCA. Which one requires more of a thoughtful and costly commitment before you are permitted to be enrolled within their ranks? Which one threatens you with greater danger? Which one demands more of a separation from the world of "normal" people and "normal" society?

And which one is more beloved and trusted by its members?

The answer is obvious, isn't it! And yet both of the group's members might use the same words, like "love" and "commitment" to describe their attitude toward their group. Same words, but quite a difference in experience, no?

The same applies to that word "faith." Your "faith" in someone depends upon what you are forced to go through by that person. Suppose a person says, "I will let you join my country club, and enjoy all its golf, swimming and partying privileges; and all it will cost you is \$25 per month." How much "faith" is required to make that \$25 commitment?

But what if someone says, "Even though your spine is severed, I will turn you into an Olympic champion. But it is going to cost you 10 years of total dedication, and require you to go through all the strenuous exercising that I insist on, and it going to cost everything you have saved for retirement. Yet after you have won your Olympic medal I will refund what you have paid."

How much faith is required of you, to make THAT commitment?  
IMMEASURABLY greater, no?

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And what is the nature of your "faith" in Jesus if He just says to you, "I am going to admit you to countless billions of years in a paradise beyond your dreams. And all you have to do is admit that you are a sinner, admit that I am God's Son, become a great neighbor and citizen, and try to come to church as often as you can." What a DEAL, no?!!!

But, what is the nature of your "faith" in Jesus if He instead says to you, "Following me will indeed lead to a peace and paradise beyond your wildest dreams, but it will be necessary for you to move to a foreign country about which you have never heard, learn a whole new set of values, new definitions of good and evil, new prohibitions that will make your friends consider you to be nuts, new pleasures that will make your friends consider you to be even MORE nuts..."

Which Jesus will demand more of you and cause you to engage in a much deeper wrestling? Which Jesus will require a deeper "faith" in Him, in order to make that commitment?

Which "faith" corresponds to what HE and PAUL meant by "faith"? The first Jesus may cause you to say "I have faith in Jesus." So will the second Jesus.

Once again: same WORD, "faith," but very different REALITY.

Why?: because the wrestling you had to do over what He taught you was much deeper, and the "faith" you entered is what HE and PAUL meant by the "faith" that saves.

The "Doctrine/Teaching" is the difference between true and pretend "faith." Let God lead you to TRUE "faith." Wrestle WITH, and surrender TO, what Jesus ACTUALLY taught, and to ALL that He taught. Do that and He will be faithful to make it possible for you to actually fulfill all that you have committed yourself to. AMEN?

Come, Lord Jesus!