

# Is Your Doctrine Getting in the Way of God?

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I had the privilege of studying theology full time, ending up with a degree with honours. The biggest thing I learned over those four years of study was how little I really knew about the depths of God's awesomeness. I also learned how knowledge can puff a person up (1 Corinthians 8:1). Don't get me wrong, we need true, biblical, God-centered doctrine in our lives. Throughout the Bible we see tensions like 'Faith vs. Works' that balance out truth. But this balance is hard to find, especially considering how the Bible prophesies that *'people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions.'* (2 Timothy 4:3).

My theology looks very different now compared to twenty years ago. My hope is that, throughout my life, my doctrine will keep growing and changing, getting closer and closer to the fullness of truth. I am confident that on the last day I will be like Jesus, because I will see Him as He is (1 John 3:2). Until then, one of the difficult questions that we must keep asking is: 'Is my personal doctrine getting in the way of God working in my life?'

## **The Post-Modernist Influence**

To answer this question, we need to firstly look at what could be influencing our thinking as Christians. Post-modernism is the most popular ideology of the 21st century, and it is growing in strength day by day and is becoming the lens through which society processes truth. In a nutshell, post-modernism teaches us that there is no absolute truth! It says: truth is what WE decide it is. At the end of the day, by thinking this way, we become our own gods, our own absolute truth! (Gen 3:5)

For example, sadly, if you look closely at the school shootings in America, they are almost always rooted in social Darwinism, a spin-off of evolution that promotes the survival of the fittest. I use this example because it's the nth degree of where post-modernism lands. According to this ideology, I can take someone's life if I don't believe that they deserve to live. In other words, 'What's right for me is right, and what's wrong for me is wrong.'

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You're probably thinking, 'But this is the way the world thinks, not the church!' It is true that the church should not think this way! However, because of the dominance of this belief system, added to the fact that many who call themselves "the Church" are compromising under pressure, sound doctrine is falling away in the 21st Century church.

## Peter's Lens of Doctrine

Peter, one of Jesus' closest disciples, allowed his doctrine to get in the way of God moving in his life. Peter's issue was food! In Matthew 15:10-11, we see Jesus teaching about what makes a person unclean. In verse 15, we see Peter asking Jesus to explain the parable. Jesus responds: *'Are you still without understanding?'*

Later in the Bible, Peter is praying on a rooftop, during which time he encounters God through a vision, three times. The vision was about different types of food and the freedom to eat them. Awesome, right? A deep revelation of God, face to face. But Peter replies: *'By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean'* (Acts 10:14). The Bible goes on to say that the vision was then taken up to heaven (verse 16) and Peter is left perplexed. He tries to process the meaning of this vision.

Later on, we read in Galatians 2:11-14 that Paul *'opposed Cephas (Peter) to his face'* over this same issue around food. Peter had slid back into his old way of thinking and acting, even though God had clearly revealed to him what was true.

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Peter's problem was that he was interpreting God's truth through his previous lens as a Jew. I believe Peter's intentions were sincere, but sometimes even in being sincere, we can be sincerely wrong. Peter's doctrine as a Jew forbade him to eat anything unclean. So even when God Himself spoke to Peter, Peter's past doctrine got in the way.

Sadly, Peter missed out on what God was wanting to do in this area of his life. If this could happen to Peter, who walked with Jesus, it could happen to any one of us. We need to keep in mind that God is God, and His ways and thoughts are different from ours.

## Signs That You Are Trapped

If you are saying or thinking things like:

- 'I never get anything out of the preaching in church.'
- 'Who are they to tell me any different?'
- 'I'm right, they're wrong and I'm **not** going to budge.'

You may have fallen into a trap. I'm noticing more and more, as I lead people in a church context, that those who have been Christians for a longer period often fall into self-righteousness and a proud way of thinking. You can pick it up when they start with:

- 'I've been a Christian for [X] years' or

- 'I **know** the Bible and...'

What they are saying is that they have more wisdom and understanding than others. The trouble is that if you have fortified your position with this attitude, you will be unwilling to open yourself to the chance that you may have missed the truth. When pride takes over, the heart becomes fortified. We must stay conscious of the fact that there is a danger of worshipping our personal doctrine over God's truth.

If you have a passion to honour God with your life.. then go ahead and ask the hard questions! Have the attitude of David, who said, '*Search me, O God..*'

If you are reading this and the Holy Spirit is opening your heart and you're realising that you have fallen into this trap, please be encouraged! Remember that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1). Remember that there is a huge difference between condemnation and conviction. Conviction is good. If you have a passion to honour God with your life, to hold on loosely to the ways of this world by dying to self (John 12:24-26) so that you can live a life that reflects God's glory in abundance (John 10:10), then go ahead and ask the hard questions! Have the attitude of David, who said, '*Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*' God promises to answer this prayer by blessing us with wisdom and discernment.