

# The Harvester



## Preparing Souls

## To Serve The Lord



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# The Doctrine of Christ Is Neither "White Doctrine" nor "Black Doctrine"

By Brian R. Kenyon

When discussing the Bible with those opposed to God's truth, it is common for people to commit informal fallacies in dealing with issues being discussed. Two types are often involved: (1) a "red herring," in which "attention is deliberately deflected away from the issue under discussion;" and (2) an "appeal to the populace," in which "the support given for some conclusion is an appeal to popular belief" (Copi, et al. 62, 64). Each of these fallacies, along with perhaps others, is involved when someone asserts that a doctrine being discussed is merely a "white doctrine" or a "black doctrine." For example, when brethren from different cultures discuss issues such as whether the preacher or eldership has oversight over the local church or whether baptism makes a person's current marriage acceptable to God no matter how many times or for what reasons the person was divorced and remarried prior to baptism, some will say that the doctrine in opposition to theirs is simply "white" or "black doctrine," as if doctrinal truthfulness is culturally derived. The last time this writer checked, the Bible nowhere distinguishes a "white doctrine" or a "black doctrine," but only the "doctrine of Christ" (and equivalent terms)! By such appeals, the person claiming such cultural distinction is committing the fallacies mentioned above. Why not simply examine a doctrine based on how it measures up with Scripture (cf. Mt. 18:18; 1 Cor. 14:37; 2 Tim. 3:16-17)?

The purpose of this article is not to address who has oversight over the local church or to settle the

marriage, divorce, and remarriage issue, but to show that doctrinal truth is not dependent on culture, but on the word of God. While it is true that culture plays a role in some expedients (cf. 1 Cor. 6:12; 8:1-13), culture is not the deciding factor in such things as who has oversight over the local church or God's law on marriage, divorce, and remarriage.

## The Doctrine of Christ

The explicit phrase "doctrine of Christ" in most translations appears only in Second John 9, although it appears in some translations in Hebrews 6:1 (KJV, ESV). The former passage reads, "Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son" (2 Jn. 9, NKJ). The word "transgresses" is from *parabainō* (παρβαίνω) in the "received text" upon which the KJV and NKJ are based. The word means to break, disobey; turn away, leave. In the UBS text, the Greek word is from *parago* (παράγω), translated "goeth onward" (ASV); "goes too far" (NAS); "goes on ahead" (ESV). There is one definite article that governs both participles, "transgresses [or goes on ahead, ESV]" and "does not abide." Thus, "the clause must be understood as one concept," which means "'going ahead' and 'not remaining' go together" (Kistemaker 382). Thus, John is not condemning "all progress ... but only such progress as does not fulfil the added condition of 'abiding in the teaching'" (Stott 214).

The standard of what constitutes transgressing, or going too far, as well as abiding, is found in the doctrine of Christ. While some view the “doctrine of Christ” as the teaching about Christ (i.e., that He came in the flesh), when considering the rest of John’s writings, evidence favors the view that the “doctrine of Christ” refers to the teachings Christ taught (cf. Jn. 7:16-17; 18:19-20), such as “what you have heard from the beginning” (1 Jn. 2:24 cf. 1 Jn. 2:7; 3:11). It refers to the totality of what He taught, not just a particular teaching or two (Rengstorf 164). Of course, the difference in understanding “doctrine of Christ” as the teaching about His nature or what He Himself taught is of little importance because both must be accepted to be pleasing to God (cf. 1 Jn. 2:22-24). People must know, believe, and apply both Jesus’ nature as well as His teachings (cf. Jn. 8:24)!

Thus, the doctrine of Christ is neither “white” nor “black doctrine”! It is simply the teachings of Jesus Christ! It should also be noted here that the doctrine of Christ is not limited to the material covered by the “red letters,” as some Bibles distinguish the words Christ spoke. Paul said, “If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord” (1 Cor. 14:37). Thus, the entire New Testament, accurately handled (2 Tim. 2:15), constitutes the doctrine of Christ! Why seek to dismiss doctrine based on the culture of those holding it? Why not impartially measure everything taught by the God-inspired Scripture?

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## Insight from Paul’s Defense

In the Book of Galatians, Paul defended himself and his work against those who attempted to undermine his apostleship. Those opposing Paul are sometimes called Judaizing teachers, or Judaizers, because they insisted on binding parts of the Law of Moses (cf. Acts 15:1, 5). Paul’s initial defense to the Galatians sheds light on the subject of this article.

After stating his concern about the Galatians’ moving away from the Gospel due to the influence of these Judaizers (Gal. 1:6-10), Paul began his defense, “But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ” (Gal. 1:11-12). The Gospel Paul preached was not of human origin! He did not learn it by human authority, transmission, or teaching. Rather, he received the Gospel through “the revelation of Jesus Christ”! Then, after recounting his former life, his commission by God, and his conversion to Christ (Gal. 1:13-16a cf. Acts 9:1-18), Paul showed how he could not have received the Gospel from the apostles or other leaders in the early church. It was “three years” after his conversion before Paul even met Peter (Gal. 1:18), and then “after fourteen years,” Paul “went up

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again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and also took Titus" with him (Gal. 2:1). Whether the fourteen years were after the three years or included them, the point is clear: Paul could not have received nor relied upon the human element for the Gospel he preached!

Although the Gospel was offered to the Jew first, then to the Gentile (Rom. 1:16), it did not originate with any particular human culture, but with the impartial God! After those fourteen years, Paul went to Jerusalem in order to present the true, unadulterated Gospel (Gal. 2:2). He spoke with influential members of the church privately, probably so as not to incite the Judaizers who looked for every opportunity to discredit him and the message he preached. The term "of reputation [seemed influential, ESV]" (from *dokeo*, δοκέω), as an intransitive verb, means to seem; be recognized, have a reputation (Gal. 2:6, 9; Mk. 10:42). The word is used here in the sense of "authorities," those who are in "positions of honor" (Rogers and Rogers 423). Paul feared that if the Jerusalem church disapproved his Gentile mission, his work would be in vain. If the truth of the Gospel were not upheld, unity would be broken and the formation of a "Jewish church" and a "Gentile church" could result!

Paul thus demonstrated through Titus that there is only one genuine Gospel.

Yet not even Titus who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised. <sup>4</sup>And this occurred because of false brethren secretly brought in (who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage), <sup>5</sup>to whom we did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you. (Gal. 2:3-5)

Titus was "Greek" and would be a primary example of those whom the Judaizers would say needed to be circumcised (cf. Acts 15:1, 5). However, Paul did not force Titus to be circumcised! The reason why was because "false brethren" (i.e., Judaizers) were trying to enslave Christians to the Law of Moses (Gal. 2:4)! Unlike Timothy who was circumcised as an expedient to labor among Jews (Acts 16:1-3), in Titus' case, having him circumcised would have made it look like Paul was binding the Judaizers' requirements. Paul demonstrated that the church must not yield itself, "not ... even for an hour," to false doctrines, even those that are culturally based (Gal. 2:5)!

Even though Paul received the Gospel he preached independently from the leaders in the Jerusalem church, it was still the same Gospel. As Paul

reflected on his visit with them, he realized they added nothing to the Gospel he already taught. What the Jerusalem leaders "seemed to be" to the Judaizers or anyone else mattered nothing to Paul because it mattered nothing to God, who "shows personal favoritism to no man" (Gal 2:6). Rather than making up for an insufficiency in Paul's Gospel, the Jerusalem leaders were in total agreement with it! What Paul's ministry in the one Gospel was to the Gentiles, Peter's ministry in the one Gospel was to the Jews (Gal. 2:7-8). The terms "gospel for the uncircumcised" and "gospel for the circumcised" refer to the same Gospel, but applied to different cultures, Gentile and Jewish (Gal. 2:7 cf. 1 Cor. 9:19-23). There is no separate Gentile Gospel or separate Jewish Gospel. God is the one who commissioned and empowered both Paul and Peter and their respective ministries (Gal. 2:8), as He does (through His written word) concerning preachers today (cf. 2 Tim. 4:1-5).

Furthermore, The Jerusalem "pillars" acknowledged the sameness of Paul's ministry in the one Gospel by extending fellowship. Paul wrote:

And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. <sup>10</sup>They desired only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do. (Gal. 2:9-10)

"James, Cephas, and John" were metaphorically viewed as "pillars" (from *stulos*, στῦλος). This term was used in Jewish circles to refer to the "great teachers of the law" (Rogers and Rogers 424). The order of names seems deliberate: when speaking of missionary activity among the Jews, Peter is most prominent, thus his name is listed first (Gal. 2:7-8); but when speaking of matters in the Jerusalem church, James is prominent, thus his name is mentioned first (cf. Gal. 1:19) (Boice 444). The "right hand of fellowship" extended to Paul and Barnabas is significant! The clasping of right hands was a sign not only of unity in the Gospel, but also of friendship and trust, which was a blow to the Judaizing teachers (Cole 110). The only things these "pillars" mentioned was they wanted Paul to "remember the poor," which he was already eager to do (cf. Acts 24:17; Rom. 15:26; 1 Cor. 16:3-4; 2 Cor 8-9).

Four truths particularly stand out from Paul's defense against the Judaizers. First, because a person has been comfortable in his religious culture for a long time does not make his religious culture right.



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The Judaizers were comfortable in the Law of Moses, but that did not make the Law binding today. Some people are comfortable with their “cultural take” on doctrine, but that does not make that “take” correct! Second, the Gospel, or doctrine of Christ, is not according to man (Gal. 1:11). Thus, it does not come from culture, but from the revealed mind of God (cf. 1 Cor. 2:7-13), recorded in Scripture (cf. Eph. 3:1-7). Third, God does not want two or more churches based on culture. That is, God did not want one church founded on Jewish culture and another founded on Gentile culture. Christ only has one church, and that one church has been founded by Him (Mt. 16:18)! Terms of admission and continued faithfulness are the same, no matter the culture of any individual (1 Cor. 12:13; Col. 3:1-11). Fourth, those seeking to be guided by truth recognize the same Gospel, are unified by it, and happily extend “the right hand of fellowship” to each other!

### **Conclusion**

In the Lord’s church, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus”

(Gal. 3:28). The standard that holds Christians together is the doctrine of Christ, or the Gospel (and equivalent terms), not culturally based doctrines. When faced with different beliefs, may God’s people never forsake studying the Scripture by claiming any view contrary to theirs is merely culturally derived doctrine! Let each abide in the doctrine of Christ! 🙏

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