

RCF Covenant Classes

Session 4

“Doctrines”

I. Introduction

- A. Throughout most of Christian history, but especially since the reformation, the church has been in conflict over doctrines. Doctrines could be defined as: *Something taught as the principles or creed of a religion; tenant or tenants; belief; dogma*. In many instances, there have been divisions over doctrines within Christianity. Some divisions are necessary because the divisions are based on the essentials of the faith, while many divisions are over non-essentials. It is important to make the distinctions between what is essential to believe as a biblical evangelical Christian and what is nonessential and can be tolerated among believers.
- B. At the time of the reformation, Martin Luther and other reformers believed the Roman Catholic Church had embraced doctrines that were so false and egregious that they could no longer remain part of the Roman Catholic Church. Since that time, the church has been in the ongoing process of discovering what the teachings of the Bible are and what they mean to us. Many doctrines have developed out of this searching. Some of these doctrines have brought unity while others have produced division. It is the responsibility of all believers to know the doctrines to which you ascribe and why you ascribe to those doctrines.
- C. Division over doctrines should be much rarer than it has been in the last 500 years of the history of the church. Each time believers divide over non-essential doctrines, the church in general is weakened. There also arises a hostility based on nonessential doctrines that disallows believers to have any fellowship with other believers or churches. When we can fellowship together, we should.
- D. The doctrines expressed in this study are not meant to produce division. These stated doctrines are intended to bring clarity to what is an essential doctrine and what is nonessential. The end result should be a greater unity among believers and a better understanding of what is nonessential. Additionally, it is important for believers to know what is false and should not be embraced. It is the knowing and understanding of the Truth that will keep us from the error of the false.

II. Essential Doctrines

A. The Bible

1. The Bible is completely the Word of God. It was written by the hands of men but dictated by the Holy Spirit to those men. The Bible is the written foundation for the beliefs of the Christian faith. It is authoritative in all matters to which it speaks. This includes areas considered outside theology such as history and science. There is no book that compares with the Bible as to the authority or revelation of God and Truth (Proverbs 30:5; Romans 16:25-26; II Tim. 3:16, II Peter 1:20-21).
2. The Bible is to be considered authoritative in all matters. In that sense, it is the final Word of God to believers by which to measure all other matters of knowledge, wisdom and revelation. The Bible is infallible in its transmission from God to man and the transmission of the text throughout the ages. The Bible is inerrant in the original inspiration by the Holy Spirit to the writers.
3. The Bible consists of 66 authoritative books, 39 books in the Old Testament, and 27 books in the New Testament. The books of the Bible can be categorized as follows: **Books of the Law**—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy; **Books of History**, which include Joshua, Judges, Ruth, I & II Samuel, I & II Kings, I & II Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther. **Books of Poetry**—Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon. **Books of Prophecy**, which include Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. The New Testament includes **The Gospels** which are Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; the Book of History, which is Acts; **The Epistles** by Paul, including Romans, I & II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, I & II Thessalonians, I & II Timothy, Titus, and Philemon. There are 8 **general books**, including Hebrews, James, I & II Peter, I, II, & III John, and Jude. Lastly, one **book of prophecy**, Revelation. These books to the exclusion of all others are considered inspired, Holy, authoritative, accurate, and reliable with regard to all matters of faith and conduct. Other writings may have merit in regard to wisdom, history, or insight, but they should not be considered authoritative in comparison to the Bible.
4. We accept all scholarly translations of the Bible which have originated from the historic acceptable texts. Discussions regarding accuracy or authenticity of one translation over another are generally not productive. To some, the translation of the Bible has become a divisive issue. We believe all translations which have been carefully and faithfully are of value for the reader. Translations such as the

Jehovah's Witness' "New World Translation," and the gender neutral should be rejected as an attempt to change the scriptures for the devious purpose of human gain.

5. We should also recognize that the Bible is truth, but that Jesus is the fullness of Truth. *"Therefore, we see but a poor reflection, but someday we will see Jesus face to face,"* – I Cor. 13:9-12. It is God's intent to grant revelation to His people through His Spirit by various means in addition to the Bible. All of these means of revelation should be carefully weighed in comparison to the Bible in order to not fall into error. In this sense, the Bible is the measuring line for all truth. I Thes. 5:19-21; II Tim. 3:16-17.
6. The Bible is not a book that is confusing and full of contradictions. Instead, it is a series of letters from God to man that the average man can understand when he is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. The Bible contains both simple truth and profound wisdom. These truths are all accessible to people without being learned theologians. One area of great error for the historic church is that it made the Bible the book of the intellectually elite. Everyone should seek out the truth of the scriptures and not simply take what they hear from someone as authoritative—Acts 17:11. It should also be said, however, that scriptural interpretation is best understood from a historic and authoritative model. No individual believer should think that he alone has special scriptural revelation or the ability to interpret scripture separate from the Body of Christ at large or historic and orthodox evangelical Christianity.
7. We believe that it is incumbent upon every believer to take personal responsibility to study, know, and apply Biblical truth to their lives. The problem for most people is not what the Bible says, it is that they do not read, believe, or live it. For people who cannot read, the personal knowledge of the scriptures and daily meditations upon them would be good reason to learn to read. Many Bible translations are also available on audio tape or CD.

B. God

1. God is eternally existent as one true God in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Gen. 1:26, 11:7; Is. 48:16, Psalm 110:1, Matthew 28:19, and Ephesians 4:5-6.
2. God the Father takes the lead role in the Godhead. He is the will of God and the One who directs the actions of the Son and the Holy Spirit. While the Son and the Holy Spirit are eternally equal with the Father, each has a different role within the Godhead. See Matt. 6:10, 7:21, 10:29, 12:50, Mark 14:36, John 4:34, and Acts 1:4-5.

3. Jesus Christ is both fully God and fully man. He is eternally existent, the creator of the world, of the full nature and deity of God and the eternal Word – Jn. 1:1, Phil. 2:5-11, Col. 1:15-20, 2:9. Jesus was perfect in His life as a man on earth and without sin. He also has reconciled all true born again believers to God through the shedding of His blood and the resurrection from the dead.
4. The Holy Spirit is of the full essence and nature of God. He is called both the comforter and the counselor. He comforts us when He indwells us at the point of new birth in Christ, and He is the counselor when He convicts of sin and leads us to becoming conformed to the image of Christ; John 4:24, 15:26, 16:7,13; Romans 8:11.

C. Man

1. Man was created by God in the image and likeness of God. God meant for man to have eternal relationship with Him, but man chose to break the law of God and, therefore, separate himself from God. Since the fall of man, all people inherit a sinful nature that drives them toward rebellion and disobedience (Genesis 1:27-28; Romans 5:12; 8:5-7).
2. All people except Jesus have sinned and are considered unrighteous before God. There is no work that man can do that will make him acceptable to God. Man is naturally in a fallen and separated condition without a remedy within himself (Romans 6:23).

D. The Virgin Birth

1. Jesus Christ was conceived by the Holy Spirit, not by any man, in the womb of Mary, the virgin (Matt. 1:18, 20; Luke 1:35).
2. Jesus is called the Son of God because He was conceived by God the Holy Spirit. Jesus as a man (incarnate) had a birth but He is existent for all eternity as God in His pre-incarnate condition (Is. 7:14; Matt. 1:23, Luke 1:27-35).

E. Sin

1. Sin is a violation of God's character and His holy, eternal law. Every person, except Jesus, is a sinner and as such worthy of judgment and damnation. All people are born with a nature that is prone toward sin and disobedience toward God. See Rom. 3:10,23; Rom. 8:6-8; Rom. 14:23; James 4:17; I Jn 1:8-10, 3:4, 5:17.
2. Sin causes eternal separation from God—death, in hell, forever. Romans 3:23.

F. Redemption

1. We are redeemed from sin, that is, made right with God, only when our sins have been cancelled. This redemption is possible through the blood of Jesus. Col. 1:20, Heb. 9:22, 10:12, Eph. 1:7, I Pet. 1:18-19, Rev. 1:5-6.
2. There is no means of redemption other than by the blood of Jesus. Hebrews 9:26.

G. Salvation

1. We are saved by grace (which is undeserved and unearned) through faith in Jesus Christ and His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 10:9-10; Ephesians 2:8-9; Galatians 2:16; 3:8, Titus 3:5; Hebrews 9:22).
2. Salvation is a supernatural experience that everyone must go through in order to be eternally with the Lord in Heaven (John 3:5-6).

H. Judgment

1. Each person will face judgment after physical death (Hebrews 9:27).
2. Those who are adjudged righteous through the regenerative work of the blood of Jesus will be with the Lord eternally in a glorious state of life. Those adjudged unrighteous will suffer an everlasting experience of death and anguish along with Satan and the fallen angels – Daniel 12:2, Matt. 25:41, Mark 9:43-48; II Cor. 5:1, II Thess. 1:7-10, I Peter 1:4, Rev. 20:10, 14-15.

I. The Resurrection

1. Jesus was physically resurrected from the dead in a glorified body three days after His death on the cross (Luke 24:36,39; Jn. 20:26-28; 21:4).
2. One day, all believers in Christ will also be physically resurrected in their glorified bodies to their eternal reward in Heaven with God (Philippians 3:21; I Corinthians 15:42, 44).

J. The Second Coming

1. Jesus will physically and visibly return to the earth for the second time to establish His Kingdom. Nobody knows this date except the Father in Heaven (Matt. 24:30; 26:63-64; Acts 1:9-11; I Thessalonians 4:15-17; II Thessalonians 1:7-8).
2. When Jesus returns the second time, every eye will see Him; Revelation 1:7.

K. The Holy Spirit Indwells Believers

1. When someone is born again (regenerated), they are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. With the indwelling comes the promise of eternal life and the ability to live the Christian life (John 14:17,23 & 15:4; Rom. 8:16).
2. It is impossible to be a regenerate Christian or to live a godly life without the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:1-11).

III. Nonessential Doctrines

There are many nonessential doctrines that are embraced by various denominations, individual churches, and individual believers. The list of nonessential doctrines below represents only a few of those doctrines. This list of nonessential doctrines contains some of the most often discussed nonessential doctrines.

A. Baptism

1. There are four different baptisms mentioned in the New Testament. Each has a significance and purpose in our walk with God.
2. The first baptism is the **baptism into Jesus**. This is simply another term for being born again or regenerated by the Holy Spirit. This is the most significant baptism. It takes place when a sinner repents, confesses his sin, asks for the salvation and Lordship of Jesus and is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. No water is needed for this baptism. Ephesians 4:5 mentions one (essential) baptism. Being baptized into Jesus is that one (essential) baptism. Also see Acts 19:3-5, Romans 6:3-4, Galatians 3:26-27; I Cor. 1:17, 12:13.
3. The second baptism is the **baptism of water**. This baptism is a command for those who believe in Jesus. It would not be appropriate to water baptize anyone who has not been born again because water baptism symbolizes what takes place through the baptism of Jesus. Water baptism should never be considered the actual regeneration experience nor should it be used as an entry point into membership into the body of Christ. It is a public and external declaration of an internal regeneration. Water baptism is often named as an ordinance of the faith. Matthew 28:19; Acts 10:47, and I Peter 3:21.
4. The third baptism is the **baptism of the Holy Spirit**. This baptism was foretold by John the Baptist as something he could not do but Jesus would do for His followers. The baptism of the Holy Spirit has two aspects: 1. The supernatural impartation of the Love of the Father. 2. The empowering of the saints for service in the Kingdom of God. This baptism takes place by a person seeking God for all His work in the believer's life. We ask and receive. Matthew 3:11, Luke 11:13, Acts 1:5-8, 2:1-21, 8:17, 10:44, 19:6.

5. The fourth baptism is the **baptism of fire**. This was the experience Jesus went through in Matthew chapter 4 when he was led into the desert and tempted by the devil in every way. Jesus gained victory over temptation and the flesh while experiencing the baptism of fire. The baptism of fire gives the believer the ability to be an overcomer in this world, not being subject any longer to the passions of the old nature or the temptations of the evil one. Sometimes this baptism is a single experience but more often seems to be progressive and life long. Mt. 4:1-11, Luke 3:16, I Peter 1:7, Rev. 3:18.

B. The Lord's Supper

1. We believe that the Lord's Supper, or "Communion," was given to the church as a time of remembrance and commitment. In this sense, it is similar to the Old Testament feasts the Jews celebrated that reminded them of God's intervention in their lives and pointed them to the coming of the Messiah. The Lord's Supper is often considered an ordinance of the church.
2. The Lord's Supper should be observed as often as desired and may be done in a public or private setting. The two elements used for the observance of the Lord's Supper are the fruit of the vine and unleavened bread. The fruit of the vine is representative of the blood of Jesus which was shed on our behalf for the remission of sins. The unleavened bread is representative of His holy and undefiled body that went to the grave but was resurrected to new life. Each time we observe the Lord's Supper, we are, in essence, recalling the redemptive work of Jesus on our behalf and renewing our covenant with Him as our Lord and Savior. Mt. 26:26-29; I Cor. 10:16-17, and I Cor. 11:23-26.
3. It is quite important that we not partake of the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner. To do so means the likelihood of sickness or perhaps death. It is therefore a serious matter before the Lord when we partake of the Lord's Supper. Two requirements for participation in the Lord's Supper are clear: 1. That the person is a born-again believer who has experienced the reality of the renewing blood of Christ and the hope of the resurrection of our bodies. 2. That the person has rightly recognized or related to the Body of Christ, that is, the church. Being an independent believer or rejecting authority are two examples of not rightly recognizing the body and therefore drinking judgment onto one's self. I Cor. 11:27-32, John 3:3.
4. There are two belief systems about the Lord's Supper that we do not embrace. The first is that the fruit of the vine and the bread are literally transformed into the physical blood and body of Jesus. This belief is called transubstantiation. The second belief system, which is called consubstantiation, states that the substance of the bread and the fruit of the vine exist alongside the literal substance of the body

and the blood. We believe that anytime two or more are gathered in the name of Jesus, He is present with us (Mt. 18:20). The bread and fruit of the vine are simply representations of His literal body and blood, which we celebrate.

C. The Gifts of the Spirit

1. As a result of being baptized with the Holy Spirit, the believer is given gifts of the Spirit for the work of the ministry. Gifts of the Spirit are such things as prophecy, speaking in tongues, healing, discernment of spirits, etc. These gifts are available to all believers who earnestly seek the Lord and ask for them. These gifts were given to the church in these “last days” beginning at Pentecost. Luke 11:13, Acts 1:4-5,8, 2:16-21, I Cor. 12:4-11.
2. We believe that all the gifts of the Spirit are available to every born-again believer as the Spirit so determines. The gifts are, therefore, given in each situation as God sees the need. We do not determine when or how the gifts are to be used; it is for the Lord to choose. Some people may function more strongly in one or two gifts of the Spirit than in others, but all the gifts are available to them. Gifts are primarily for the purpose of endorsing the message of the Gospel and building up the body. Mk. 16:15-18, I Cor. 12:7,11.
3. Some in the Christian faith believe that the gifts of the Spirit are no longer useful for the Christian faith. They believe that after the initial apostles laid the foundations of the faith there was no need for the gifts of the Spirit to function. This is called the cessationist doctrine. We reject that doctrine as not biblical or fundamentally accurate. Acts 2:17, Romans 12:6-8, I Cor. 14:1.

D. Salvation Doctrines

There is an ongoing and classical struggle between the Calvinists and the Arminianists. RCF believes that people who hold to these different views can worship together and labor together in the Lord. These are the main points of these views.

1. The Five Points of Arminianism

- a. God from eternity past determined to save all who believe in Jesus and to “leave the incorrigible and unbelieving in sin and under wrath...”
- b. Christ died for and obtained redemption and forgiveness of sins for all, but these benefits are effective only for those who believe on Christ.
- c. Man cannot “think, will, nor do anything that is truly good,” and that includes saving faith,” but must be regenerated.”

- d. That God's grace is absolutely essential for salvation, but that it may be resisted.
- e. That those truly saved through faith in Christ are empowered by the Holy Spirit to resist sin; but whether they could fall away from the faith "must be more particularly determined out of the Holy Scripture, before we ourselves can teach it with full persuasion of our minds."

2. Five Points of Calvinism

- a. Total depravity emphasizes that natural, unregenerated man is never able to do a single good thing for even a fraction of a second. He is dead to good actions. If he is ever to believe, or to do anything that is good, it will come about only when God causes him to do so.
- b. Unconditional election teaches God's sovereignty by pointing out that God's selection of man for life eternal is not based on anything in man. His choice is not conditioned by His foreknowing who would cooperate with Him and accept the sacrifice of Christ. It is an unconditional election. The reason for the sovereign choice is found in God alone and not in anything man is or does.
- c. Limited atonement is the belief that Christ did not make atonement that saves all the world, but rather one which saves only those who have been chosen by the Father. The Son died for those whom the Father loved.
- d. Irresistible grace states that just as nothingness cannot refuse to be created or born, just as the dead cannot resist being made alive, so the spiritually dead and unborn cannot resist the omnipotent Spirit of God being born again. And if anyone does have spiritual life, it is because the Spirit is carrying out the sovereign choice of the Father. Man can do nothing about being born again.
- e. Perseverance of the saints is the belief that God will not allow any of the elect to lose the salvation which He has sovereignty given them.

E. Church Discipline

- 1. One of the travesties of the church today is that those who are a part of the church and become disobedient or rebellious do not face the consequences of church discipline. Often the rebellious saint simply leaves one congregation and goes down the road to another. Usually the pastor and congregation welcome the "new member" with open arms and ask few questions about the reason the person has left his

last church. This has caused much harm both in the life of the rebellious believer and in the local church in which they usually stir up division and rebellion among other saints. Just as the civil government is charged with disciplining law breakers, so is the church charged with disciplining the rebellious saints. Rom. 13:1-5, I Corinthians 5:6.

2. It is incumbent upon the church of Jesus Christ to break this pattern of sin, rebellion, and rejection of discipline. Those who are involved in such wickedness are harming the Body of Christ and despising the authority of God. This sin may not seem so great in the eyes of men who are focused on self rights, but in God's eyes this is a most grievous sin. Deepest darkness is reserved for those who are involved in such activities. II Pet. 2:10, Jude vs. 8, 13.
3. It is the policy of RCF to communicate with the former pastors of those believers who come to our fellowship. If there has been dissention, rebellion, or division produced by the believer in his previous church, he will be asked to repent and make right his actions before God. If he refuses to be repentant of rebelliousness, then he will not be embraced into our fellowship. Matt. 18:17.
4. If a person is already a part of the RCF body of believers and becomes rebellious or divisive, discipline will be implemented. The mandates of Matthew 18 to approach the sinful person and call them to repentance will be followed. If the person refuses to repent, they will be put out of the fellowship and disassociated until repentance does take place. This means that those at RCF should not have Christian fellowship with the rebellious saint any longer. Prov. 6:19, Rom. 16:17-18, I Cor. 5:9-13, I Tim. 5:19, Titus 3:10-11.
5. Sometimes, disciplinary actions seem harsh and hard to obey. However, it is important to remember that the disciplines that God prescribes are always intended to be redemptive. It is, therefore, important for us to follow God's commands regardless of how we feel. Many times, well-meaning saints have failed to follow the discipline of the Lord their leaders prescribed because they didn't want to hurt someone or they wanted to leave the door open for reconciliation or they weren't personally hurt by this person, so why should they treat them any differently. It must be understood that such attitudes are self-centered, not fully concerned about the entire body of Christ and Jesus as the head. The best way of discipline is always God's way. It is the only way that, in the end, may lead to healing and restoration. I Cor. 5:4-5, II Cor. 2:5-9, Heb. 12:8-11, and Heb. 13:17.