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Doctrine, Dogma, Discernment — P2

“And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment” (Philippians 1:9).

Real knowledge comes by discernment. Using discernment to gain true knowledge is not the same as being indoctrinated (taught to accept a teaching uncritically). We are all indoctrinated as children in the dogmas of our cultures. A dogma is “a teaching laid down by an authority as indisputable and true.”

When we were young children, we were indoctrinated to accept that the Sun is in space and flowers come from seeds. However, as we grew older and matured, our parents and teachers led us from dogmas to critical understanding of teachings—critical in the sense that we are taught to **discern** the merits of these ideas: “Here is the evidence or testimony behind why we think the Sun is in space and flowers come from seeds—do you agree?” This is the way all real knowledge is discerned.

This is also supposed to be the case in the Church. Unfortunately, many Christians who think they know *the* truth have actually been kept infants, indoctrinated in men’s precepts without discernment. Speaking of the religious institutions of the day, Jesus warned that “*in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men*” (Matt. 15:9). These Pharisee “doctrines” were the “dogmas” of men—taught in the place and authority of God’s Word. The people were kept as spiritually indoctrinated “infants” with no discernment to grow. Similarly, many denominations teach the traditions, knowledge, and doctrines of men as indisputable, when **ONLY** the Word of God should be esteemed in this way.

Just like teaching children, the Church does *initially* indoctrinate “*infants in Christ*” (1 Cor. 3:1) with doctrine, but should only do so

with the goal of raising those “infants” to be mature and discerning on their own (1 Cor. 3). In this way, the Bereans are praised for having the maturity and discernment to test Paul’s doctrine by “*examining the Scriptures*” (Acts 17:11b). This highlights that **there is only one true dogma for the Believer—the Word of God**. The Prophets and Apostles conveyed only what God and the Holy Spirit taught them, and it was laid down by God (the ultimate authority) as indisputable and true. We know all truth is contained in the Scriptures, yet our personal understanding of that truth **IS** disputable in varying degrees. How? Doctrines derived out of Scripture may or may not be entirely true, because they are often built on men’s subjective interpretations, translations, and traditions. To remain dogmatic here is to potentially remain an “infant” indoctrinated in the precepts of men and not the truth.

So, while the central doctrines of the Gospel are crystal clear dogma—from God by way of the Prophets and Apostles, not everything in Scripture is clear and there is room for healthy debate in how we derive some doctrines from certain passages. We need to understand that saying, “All truth is contained in the Scriptures” is not the same as saying, “My understanding of the Scriptures is truth.” We need to examine and discern how we inherited or derived our doctrines, why we believe them, and if they are even Scriptural.

The Church needs to disciple Believers to “grow up” to discernment so that we will not cling to precepts of men or be “*carried away by varied and strange teachings*” (Heb. 13:9a). How? Give your doctrines and your understanding to God and let the Spirit cleanse them by washing them in the Word (Eph. 5:26). Seek always to be found “*accurately handling the Word of truth*” (2 Tim. 2:15b), “*examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things [are] so*” (Acts 17:11b). Even so, Amen.

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