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# Doctrine And Practice

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## I. Preliminary Comments:

A. **This study concerns the relationship between doctrine and practice.** Does doctrine have a higher priority in the life over practice? Can the Christian life be practiced apart from doctrine? Does the scriptures make a mechanical distinction between doctrine and practice? These are some of the underlying questions that will be explored in this study. Let me give a few brief definitions (these definitions will be expanded in the study below) to set the framework of the study. All definitions are in quotes and italics and are taken from Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, 1961 edition.

1. **Doctrine** refers to the "understanding" gained from the word.
2. **Christian practice** refers to "actual performance or application of knowledge; - distinguished from theory, or profession". It is in this sense that practice is a better word to use than morality for practice refers to the application of knowledge and morality refers to "conforming to a standard of what is good and right". Practice implies morality; for when you biblically practice what you know you will conform to a standard of what is right and good. There are many other biblical words that could also be used; walk, conversation, manner of life etc. Practice in a biblical context cannot be separated from a saving personal relationship with Jesus Christ. We love, serve and obey Jesus Christ not to earn salvation, but because he has loved us and given himself for our sins.
3. **Secular morality** refers to "conforming to a standard of what is good and right". This would include all groups and individuals that have not had eternal life applied to them by the Son (see [John 17:2-3](#)). They may make a real attempt to obey God from his word but have not been applied the benefits of redemption by the Spirit. Mormons, Catholics and Watch Tower Witnesses etc. attempt to do what is right, but this does not make them a true believer in Christ. They often stand for (sometimes under great persecution) and progress in their sect doctrine, but this does not make them a true believer in Christ. What distinguishes a true believer from these groups? This study will attempt to point out a few of those distinctions.

B. Biblically you cannot separate practice from doctrine and doctrine from practice. How could you possibly define practice apart from instructional revelation? Once you have defined what that doctrine is; the practice of that truth cannot be separated from it. To truly believe a truth is to practice that truth in the life. All truth however remote from practice should cause us to honor reverence and love God to a greater degree and therefore make us more practically obedient. All divine revelation that is savingly believed should have an impact in the person's life. Therefore all biblical revelation from God is intrinsically related to practice by virtue of faith and cannot be separated from it.

## II. Biblical Examples To Show The Relationship Between Doctrine And Practice:

### A. From the nature and primacy of saving faith

1. The command to believe in Christ is an ethical [of or relating to moral action, motive, or character] one. It's the very first issuance of divine life after regeneration and it permeates every endeavor a saint might possibly undertake. To say that doctrine has first priority in the Christian life is to undermine the very union the believer has with God through faith. It's a union in holiness, fellowship in obedience not disobedience. "The just shall live by faith" [Rom. 1:17](#); "without faith it is impossible to please God" [Heb. 11:6](#); "what so ever is not of faith is sin"; [Rom. 14:23](#). Therefore the first priority of the elect is to believe in Christ and since faith in God is an ethical command the first and continual priority must be obedience to God. As you have received Christ so walk ye in him [Col. 2:6](#). Faith is that which is included in all other spiritual activities. Therefore the pursuit of divine knowledge must be built upon faith; and as knowledge is practiced in the life faith increases. [II Peter 1:5-9](#) "add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they

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- make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”
2. The two aspects of saving faith.

**Saving faith =**

1. Intellectual assent unto the truth and claims of Christ in the Gospel. You must know who Christ is and what he has done before you can believe in him.
2. Submission and cleaving of the soul unto Christ for salvation and life.

These two aspects are inseparable. The first part relates to the understanding; the second to the will. Precisely how much teaching about Christ the Spirit needs in order for conversion to take place is not revealed in scripture. The scriptures are clear and simplistic “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved”. Assent unto the truth is but an act of the understanding which devils have; but true saving faith has its seat both in the understanding and the will. It is called in Acts 8:33 a believing with all the heart and in Rom. 10:10 a believing with the heart. Faith is the divinely given perception of things not seen, wrought through the word of God by the Spirit. In other words faith apprehends as a reflex what is not revealed to the senses. What practically distinguishes Peter’s faith in the Son of God from the demons who believed Jesus was the Son of the most High? Understanding alone cannot adequately distinguish; but the will as it relates to submission to Christ can.

a. **Saving Faith** - The elect of God

Heb. 10:36-39. Believe to the saving of the soul

Heb. 11:1. The evidence of things not seen. Faith is not sight dependent.

I Peter 1:8. Whom not seeing believe.

Heb. 11:6. Faith towards God = belief that God has substantive existence and that God rewards those that come to him.

Rom. 10:17, Rom. 4:18,

Eph. 2:8

b. **Demonic Faith** - Satan and his demonic horde James 2:18

Three types of false faith in man resemble demonic faith. There is understanding but no movement of the will towards Christ in submission.

(i) **Temporary Faith** - those who believe for a time then turn away from Christ. John 6:64-66, 8:30-48, Luke 8:11-15., II Peter 2:20-22, Heb. 10:26-31.

(ii) **Miraculous Faith** - Judas and others who had faith in Gods miracles and believed Gods word to be true. Matt. 10:2-8, Heb. 6:4-8,

(iii) **Historical Faith** - Catholics, Mormons etc. They believe in Christ as a historical figure. They have an understanding of who Christ is but no movement of the will is made toward submitting unto Christ as Lord and Savior for their personal salvation.

**B. From a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ and God the Father.**

1. The knowledge the regenerate elect have of Jesus Christ is not merely an intellectual understanding of his person and work on the cross. That could be termed a static or one dimensional or nominal knowledge of Christ but it cannot constitute a saving knowledge of him. That saving knowledge is characteristic of a vital union and RELATIONSHIP with Christ. We belong to Christ and are his intimate possession. The very reason Christ gives us eternal life (John 17:2-3) and understanding (I John 5:20) is that we will know him.

I John 5:20, cf. 11-13, He has given us an understanding that we may know him.

Matt. 11:27 All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.

John 17:2-3 This is life eternal that they may know the only true God and him whom thou hast sent Jesus

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Christ.

John 10:3-5, 14,15, 27

I John 4:7 Knoweth and loveth him are born again

I Peter 1:2-3 Through the knowledge of Him.

Col. 1:9-10 Increase in the knowledge of God

Phil. 3:8 I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Eph. 4:13, Unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God

Eph. 1:17 Revelation in the knowledge of him.

2. Knowledge ABOUT God without a saving relationship will save no one.  
Matt. 7:21-23, Using Gods name is no indication that there is a saving relationship with God. According to his omniscience God knows all things, but this is a relationship based upon the person and work of Christ.  
Titus 1:15, Profession of knowing God = the fruit of that profession. No truth in that profession = no fruit.( see context and how Paul defines sound doctrine and good works).  
II Peter 2:20-21 Some profess to know Jesus Christ; but it doesn't last.
3. A true saving knowledge of God will issue in fruit (obedience) to God.  
Titus 1:15 False profession = false fruit. True profession = real fruit. You CANNOT separate faith in Christ and the effect of that faith in a persons life.  
John 10:3-5, 14, 15, 27 The sheep follow Christ in his example bearing fruit to God.  
I John 4:6, 7, 8, (cf. 3:18), 20, Take careful note of the context.  
II Peter 1:8, What things is Peter speaking about? He's talking about faith and all things that are added to faith. If these things be in you, you will not be unfruitful in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.  
II Peter 3:18 Grace and knowledge are mutually co-extensive. You cannot have growth in a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ without having a corresponding growth in grace.  
Col. 1:9-11 To walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, bearing fruit in every good work, and increasing in the Knowledge of God.
4. The essence of eternal life = a saving relational knowledge of the Father and the Son. Therefore any interpretation of scripture regarding a knowledge of God that excludes this fundamental aspect is unscriptural and anti-Christ.

## C. From the nature and end of the Gospel.

1. The Gospel, as it is truly believed brings forth fruit as a necessary result. The result of the Gospel believed is obedience unto God {not just doctrine force fed into the brain}. Christ did not come to save us in our sins but from our sins.  
Col. 1:6, The gospel bears fruit  
I Corinth. 15:1-4

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Text	Christ Came/Gave	Purpose/Intent	Result In Our Lives	Exhortation To Obedience
<b><u>I John 5:20</u></b>	He has come and has given	us understanding	that we may know Him that is true	Here by do we know him if we keep his commandments. <u>I John 2:3-6</u>
<b><u>I Peter 2:24</u></b>	Bore our sins in his body	that we will die (both judicially and experientially) unto sin	and live unto righteousness	See example of Christ from context. v. 13-23
<b><u>Titus 2:14</u></b>	He gave himself for us	redeem us from all iniquity	purify his people for good works	Be careful to maintain good works <u>Titus 3:1, 8, 14</u>
<b><u>Heb. 9:14</u></b>	Christ offered spotless to God	purify your conscience from dead works	that we will serve and worship the living and true God.	See context
<b><u>I Peter 1:21</u></b>	Manifested for your sakes	who by him do believe in God	That your faith and hope might be in God	Obedience to this truth = unfeigned love of the brethren <u>.I Peter 1:22</u>

2. Looking back at Christ's cross work or looking ahead to the appearing of Jesus Christ is not an end in itself but a means to direct us to God and to obedience.
  - Col. 3:1-8
  - Titus 2:11-14 What does Gods grace teach us?
  - I Corinth. 6:19, 20
  - II Thess. 2:13-15
  
3. The word of God or teaching about that word is never viewed as an end in itself but as a means to direct us to Christ and to serve him. Love, obedience and reverence to God are the primary by-product of the word in our life. It's that which gives honor to his work and glory to the holy God. Obedience to his doctrine flows from our relationship with him. Whatever is taught should direct us to Christ and hence to godliness.
  - a. QUESTION: Can faith in any creed or doctrine save a man? Can faith in the bible as Gods inspired word save a man? ANSWER: No for that which is the means of something (i.e. salvation) can never be that which is the source or cause.
  - b. The basic principle in the word is divine revelation of God = self revelations/convictions = godly sorrow/repentance = salvation/deliverance from sin (see Matt. 11:27, Job 42:5-6, Isaiah 6:5).  
John 5:39-40, Life is in the Son not in the scriptures. Ye search the scriptures for you think in them you have eternal life but they testify of me.  
Col. 3:1 When Christ who is our life shall appear.  
Luke 2:27-32 Christ not the bible is our Savior  
John 6:29, This is the work of God that you believe.  
John 11:23-26, Martha needs to believe in Christ who is the resurrection and life and not just about the doctrine of the resurrection.  
Titus 1:1, Doctrine which is according to [ kata with the accusative shows direction and end in view] godliness or doctrine that leads to or has as its end godliness.  
I Tim. 6:3, What is the sound doctrine in this context and in I Tim 1:9-13, and Titus 2:1-10.  
Eph. 4:13, Elders work till we all attain to a complete knowledge of Christ. Is that an intellectual knowledge or a relationship? 4:15 that we may grow up unto him in all things.  
II Tim. 3:16-17, The scriptures are the means to perfect the man of God unto all good works.  
John 7:17, Practice Gods will to validate the teaching of Christ.  
Col. 2:6,7, As you have received Christ so walk you in him, rooted and built up in him as you were taught.

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James 3:1 As truth has its effect in the life so does unrighteousness

- Note: The scriptures need interpretation. The Lord is the only one through his Spirit who can give it and direct it back to himself. Luke 21:27 "and beginning from Moses and from the prophets he interpreted to them in all the scripture the things concerning himself." Please notice their response in Luke 24:32 And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures? May the Lord give us the same burning desire for Himself and His interpretation of his word?

4. Jesus Christ is the incarnate embodiment of truth and wisdom.

I Corinth. 1:30-31

Eph. 4:18-19, 21

John 14:6; 1:14, 17; 8:32; 18:37.

Col. 2:2-3

## D. From the exhortations to follow the example of Christ.

1. The exhortation is to follow his example not just in what he knew, but in how what he knew was assimilated into his life for obedience unto the Father. Christ came with the intent to do the Fathers will John 6:38. Eph. 4:20-22 Notice in context what we have learned from Christ. We did not come to know Christ to sin like the Gentiles.

I Peter 2:20-24, 5:3 What specifically is the example in this context we are to follow? Is it not that Christ (a). Committed no sin, or deceit and (b). Committed himself to God who judges justly; always obeying God.

I John 2:5, 6, 9, If we abide in him we ought to walk even as he walked. Note context and see I John 1:6-7

Matt. 11:29 Take my yoke ( the yoke of submission ) and learn of me.

Matt. 16:24 Take up your cross and follow me.

Phil. 2:5 Having this mind in you that what was also in Christ Jesus.

John 13:15, 15:10

## E. From the doctrine of sanctification

The gospel deals with the sinners' justification and acceptance before God through the person and work of Christ; sanctification is the fruit of the gospel and deals with the Spirits progressive work in those persons so justified to separate them from sin to serve God. Since sanctification is the fruit of the gospel I should expect to see corresponding relationships between the basis (justification) and the effect (sanctification). Where is the corresponding relationship in the gospel when doctrine has first priority? The intent of Christ in the Gospel was to save his people from their sins both judicially and experientially so that when we stand before God we will be holy and without blemish. There must be a corresponding basis of the particulars of sanctification in the gospel. Does doctrine having first priority have a corresponding basis in the gospel? The Spirits work to impart faith so that the saints might master the scriptures must have a corresponding basis in the work of Christ.

1. It's the word the Holy Spirit uses to sanctify his people. Why? Because the word is that which testifies of Christ. (John 5:39-40) Christ sends the Holy Spirit to testify of him using the word to sanctify his people.

Acts 20:32

John 17:17 cf. John 18:37; 14:6; Eph. 4:20-22

I Thess. 2:13

Eph. 5:26

John 15:3

Rom. 10:8, 17

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2. The Pharisees and Sadducees have doctrines that they believe are accurately taken from the word. The Lord refers to it as leaven; the doctrines and commandments of men. Such should be a warning about drawing unbiblical non-explicit precepts mandating and requiring obedience to these precepts.
  - a. Matt. 16:6 Take heed and beware.  
Matt. 16:12 Beware of the doctrine of P + S.(cf. Mark 8:15; Luke 12:1)  
Matt. 15:9 Teaching as their doctrine the precepts of men.  
Isa. 29:13  
Titus 1:14 Jewish fables and commandments of men.
  - b. Col. 2:22 precepts and commandments of men. This can include ANY precept or command required by man not explicitly stated in the word. How can we possibly assess the validity of the command if we can not find it in Gods inspired word? (see II Tim. 3:16-17)
3. From the truth that the Holy Spirit sovereignly teaches all saints certain fundamental and basic doctrine (remember practice is hopelessly intertwined with doctrine). **QUESTION:** What does God in general sovereignly teach every saint in sanctification? **ANSWER:** Truths relating to the true and proper reverence and worship of God and all that it entails.

This is consistent with the intent of our salvation by God in our:

- Depravity Rom. 3 10-15 We see ourselves as personally offending God.
- Election Eph. 1:4 - Holiness before God
- Redemption Titus 2:14 Christ gave himself that he might redeem us from all iniquity.
- Sanctification II Thess. 2:13 The Spirit separates us from sin to serve God.

Other Related Areas

- Seeking the Lord Heb. 11:6
- Conviction of sin Psalms 51:1-19
- Desire to please the Lord and give him glory I Corinth. 10:31
- Love for the Lord I John 4:7-12
- Love for the saints I John 4:7, I Thess. 4:9
- Love and hunger for his word I Peter 2:2-3
- Humility before the Lord I Peter 5:5-7

The above list could be greatly extended. The saints do not learn these truths just from a detached independent study of the word. The Holy Spirit applies the truths of the gospel to effect change in believers hearts and minds.(cf. Rom. 12:1-2)

- a. I Corinth. 2:10-14  
John 8:33-47 Notice their perception is only in the natural realm. How much of our understanding in the natural realm needs to be changed?  
John 3:1-8 Unless the Spirit regenerates we only see and know in the natural or fleshly realm.  
I Thess. 4:9 God teaches us how to love one another.  
John 6:45  
Eph. 4:20-22 Teaching is done by Christ though the work of the Spirit.  
Titus 2:11-15 Gods grace instructs us. Notice that the intent of Christ purifying his people is that they would be zealous of good works.( arrive at a def. of good works from the context)  
Psalms 25:5 Lead in thy truth and teach me; v.8 He will teach sinners in the way; v. He will guide the meek in judgement; v. 12, 14.

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- b. Historical affirmation of the answer above. There is one thing that all the men below have in common. God instructed them how to walk before him. John Calvin, Martin Luther, John Bunyan, Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, Charles Spurgeon, Arthur Pink.

## F. From General Exhortations and Statements In Scripture.

I Tim. 4:8-9 Godliness is profitable unto ALL things. Godliness or reverence to God is that humble virtue which permeates all duties and activities a believer might engage in. The text does not say that doctrine is profitable unto all things which is absurd. It merely states that piety towards God should affect every thing in our lives; which includes the study and practice of Gods word.

Ecc. 12:12-14 Fear God and keep his commandments for this is the whole duty of man.

I Thess. 4:1-2 As you have received how you ought to walk, and to please God so you should abound more and more.

I Thess. 2:11-12 We exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, that you would walk worthy of God.

Col. 3:17,23 What so ever you do in word or in deed do all in the name of the Lord Jesus giving thanks to God the father through him.

Phil. 4:13, 3:4-16

John 13:7 If you know these things blessed are you that do them.

Gal. 6:7-8 Whatsoever a man sows he reaps.

Rom. 6:11-23; 7:4-7, 22, 25; 8:13; 12:1-2; 13:8-10; 15:2-4, 6.

I Corinth. 16:14 Let all things be done in love. Our love is to influence all that we do.

Eph. 4:15 Speaking the truth in love. Love influences the how, when, where, why in communicating truth. Love dominates.

I Corinth. 10:31 Do all to the glory of God.

I Corinth. 13:1-7.

James 1:23-26 Only doers will be blessed not the hearers. (cf. Luke 11:28, John 13:17)

James 2:22 By works faith (before men) is made perfect.

John 15:1-14

John 6:29 This is the work of God that you believe on him whom he hath sent.

I John 2:28 Our confidence is in Christ Jesus not in ourselves.

John 15:5 Apart from me you can do nothing.

Phil. 4:13 I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me.

## G. From Paul.

1. The example of Paul

I Tim. 6:11-12

I Tim. 4:6 Timothy followed the doctrine in his life.

I Tim. 4:16 Take heed to your self and to thy teaching. As you consider teaching you should be intensely considering yourself.

II Tim. 3:10 This verse literally says "but thou has closely followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith etc..

Phil. 3:17

Phil. 4:9 Do ( or practice) these things, not just understand them.

I Corinth. 4:16; 11:1-2

I Thess. 1:6

II Thess. 3:6, 7, 9; 2:15

2. The prayers of Paul

Col. 1:9-11

Phil. 1:9-10

II Thess. 1:11-12

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Paul prays in II Corinth. 13:7 that the Corinthians do no evil.

Paul prays in I Thess. 3:10 that he may be instrumental in perfecting that which is lacking in the Thessalonians faith. Remember there is no way we can say this is just speaking about objective faith. Faith whether objective (the doctrine believed) or subjective ( the faith that does the believing) cannot be separated from practice.

**H. From The Teaching That Christian Practice Is The Chief Sign Or Manifestation Of Grace In A Professing Christian.** Deeds are a better indication of men's minds than mere profession of doctrine believed. Practice does not exclude doctrine; it assumes it; for the two cannot be separated. Biblically there are two ways to manifest the grace (or lack of it) in our lives; what we say and what we do; the latter is by far better evidence for it is an indication of the former. See what any man does and you can tell what he really believes { see Jonathan Edwards VOL. I p. 321 } in his heart.

1. Manifestation to others.

Matt. 7:16 Ye shall know them by there fruits; v.20 repeated.

Matt. 12:33 Tree corrupt = corrupt fruit.

Luke 6:44 Tree known by fruits.

Matt. 5:16 Light shining = good works.

Titus 1:15 The test of a true saving knowledge of God = practice manifested in the life.

James 2:18 Show faith by works.

2. Manifestation of others.

Phil 2:21-22 Ye know the proof of him.

3 John 3-6 Testified of the truth that is in thee.

Heb. 6:9 We are persuaded better things of you, and the things that accompany salvation.

3. Manifestation to myself.

John 7:17 practice the will of God to validate the teaching of Christ.

II Corinth. 13:5 Christ is in you except you be reprobate.

Rom. 8:9-16

I John 1:6, 10; 2:3,5,19; 3:14-19, 4:1-3, 13.

## III. Closing Comments

Doctrine and practice cannot be biblically separated. Many positions exist in this area. One position may play down doctrine and emphasize Christian practice or experience. Another might emphasize doctrine to the point of negating the practice or experiential aspects of the Christian life. If we make practice merely the do's and don'ts of the bible we have then put sanctification into a legal format. We obey God because of what he has done for us. It's Christ in the life; in the doctrine; in the practice that is the proper format for sanctification. Take the Lord out of doctrine (= philosophy) and practice (= morality) and you will have teaching that is essentially no different in substance than other sect groups. Please give the Lord his proper throne in your theology, your bible studies and in your life.

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**Definitions** - All definitions taken from "Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary" 1961 edition.

- Nominal - 2. Existing in name only; not real or actual; hence, so small, slight, or the like, as to hardly worth the name; as in nominal price.
- Relational - 1. Of or pertaining to kinship.
- Kin - 1. A group of persons of the same stock, race, or family.
- Empirical - 2. Pertaining to, or founded upon experiment or experience; as empirical knowledge.
- Intellectual - 1. Belonging or relating to, or performed by, the intellect or understanding; as intellectual process.
- Intrinsic - Belonging to the constitution, nature, or essence of a thing; essential; inherent.
- Actual - Existing in act or reality; real; - opposed to potential, virtual, theoretical, hypothetical.

## Quotes

MILTRON - "The end of all learning is to know God, and out of that knowledge to love and imitate him."

E.P. WHIPPLE - "Knowledge like religion, must be "experienced" in order to be known."

HERBERT - "Knowledge is but folly unless it is guided by grace."

TRYON EDWARDS - "Mere knowledge is comparatively worthless unless digested into practical wisdom and common sense as applied to the affairs of life." "Doctrine is the necessary foundation of duty; if the theory is not correct, the practice cannot be right. Tell me what a man believes, and I will tell you what he will do."

**Books Relating To The Subject** - Not at all a complete listing but surely indicative.

Author Pink - "Profiting From The Word" see chapter on knowledge of God. "Doctrine Of Sanctification"

Jonathan Edwards - "Complete Works Of" Vol. I p.321, Vol. II p.157-163 (spec. Sect. II p.158); p578-595 on faith;

John Bunyan - "The Saints knowledge Of Christ's Love."

John Owen - "The Grace And Duty Of Being Spiritually Minded."