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Evangelical Christianity is theological in its character, biblical in its substance, and fundamental in its emphasis.

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A warm spirituality without the apostolic and evangelical substance may seem attractive to many—what is called undogmatic, or even unconscious, Christianity. It will specially appeal to the lay mind, in the pulpit and out. But it is death to a Church.

That an evangelical renaissance is occurring today, partly in reaction to the secularization of faith and life in the modern world, can no longer be doubted. Yet it is well to ask whether the same secularistic influences are present in evangelicalism, whether true Christianity is diluted even in that branch of the faith which ostensibly holds to the fundamentals. It is incumbent upon us to determine what is or is not authentic in the resurgence of conservative religion today, and this means to be cognizant of the dangers as well as the opportunities in the current evangelical revival.

DONALD G. BLOESCH

How Orthodoxy Includes Practice

Tom Wells

The word *orthodoxy* has an uninviting look, but it is a perfectly good word. It means *right teaching*, the kind of teaching you get in any field when you consult the best authorities. To say that someone is orthodox is to say that he holds and teaches the things that are considered correct in the subject he teaches. That is the kind of teacher and teaching that, presumably, we all want to have.

Like every definition, orthodoxy or right teaching raises questions, especially the question: "In whose opinion is the teaching right?" Or put another way, "What standard must we use to know that this person is accurate in what he or she teaches? Can we rest on his opinion of his own accuracy? Is he the standard?" In the eighteenth century Bishop William Warburton said to Lord Sandwich, "Orthodoxy is my doxy; heterodoxy is another man's doxy."[1] Was he serious?—probably not. Was Lord Sandwich naive enough to believe him? I doubt it.

For the Christian, however, the question of orthodox teaching is settled by using a God-given standard, the Bible, God's own Word. Orthodoxy is everything that conforms to the truth in the Scriptures.

I think most Christians, including myself, tend to hear the word *orthodoxy* in a more restricted way, however. We tend to hear and use the word only in reference to theology or doc-

trine. In our practice, the way we live, we often draw a contrast with doctrine. This is, of course, in keeping with the English usage of these two words. But we must be careful that in our own minds we do not divorce these two. The Christian faith includes the way we live as well as what we believe.

This truth did not come home to me with power for many years. It took preaching through the book of Jude to show me that I had gone astray in this matter. Let me tell you how that came about.

One of the best known verses in Jude tells us "to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" (v. 3). Having grown up in fundamentalism I suppose I heard that verse quoted umpteen times in the battle against modernism. And each time I am sure I heard it say something like this: "Don't let them get away with attacking the deity of Christ, the inspiration of the Bible, and the doctrinal truths we all love!" Oddly enough, when heard in that way it was, in fact, good advice. So when I came to expounding Jude for my people I assumed that I would find that very theme in the rest of the book. In that I was mistaken.

Jude is indeed about combating false teachers. But much to my surprise I found that the thing that interests him in his small book is the teaching about the way a Christian ought to live. To put it in simplest terms, the faith for which Jude contends is the Christian teaching about godliness. Let's look at this together, taking verses 3–4 as set out in the NIV as our starting point.

> Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints. For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.

Jude tells his readers that he had hoped to write to them about the salvation that Christians share with one another,

but it had become urgent to write instead about godliness and Christian morals. Now of course salvation includes more than theology, but "the salvation we share" majors on facts about the character and works of God and of Christ, the things we commonly call "the faith." It is *the faith* that is enshrined in the historic creeds of the Church, starting with the Apostles' Creed and running through a large number of other standards that direct us in our thinking about the Trinity, Father, Son, and Spirit, and about how we have come to be Christians in the first place. Christian morals and ethics do not, generally speaking, play as great a role in those creeds and confessions, though the subject is not ignored, especially in sections that expound the doctrine of sanctification. But again, the phrase "the faith" tends to bring doctrinal and theological issues to our minds. Jude's focus, however, was on combating ungodliness and immorality with every weapon he could bring to the battle.

The very last words in verse 4 might suggest that I have overstated the case. Jude speaks against those who "deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord." Doesn't this show that his interest here lies as much in theology as in the way the false teachers taught men and women to live? After all, to deny the sovereignty and lordship of Christ is certainly a theological issue if ever there was one.

Two things, I think, will bear out what I have said. To begin with, Jude describes these false teachers as having "secretly slipped in among you" (v. 4). This shows that these teachers did not get access to the congregations by openly denouncing the sovereignty and lordship of Jesus Christ. It suggests rather that they appeared perfectly orthodox in their theology to those who first heard them. Their denials were *practical* denials. That is, they led believers into the kinds of actions that were a practical denial of the lordship of Jesus over his people. In addition to that fact, the rest of the book bears out this focus—an intense focus indeed—on the ungodliness these men were promoting. The intruders are described as "godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for sin" (v. 4). Beyond that, Jude repeatedly compares

them with ungodly men and angels from the Old Testament, such men as the people of Sodom and Gomorrah who "indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural lust" (v. 7). They are slanderers who won't be controlled (v. 8). They follow the examples of Cain and Balaam and Korah in their ungodly ways (v. 11). Nor does Jude stop here, but we will do so, in the interests of time and space.

Jude, then, profusely illustrates the point of this article. For the writers of the New Testament, *orthodoxy includes our practice*, the way we live. This point is important. For too long many of us have thought we were orthodox because we thought that what we called our "doctrine" was on target. Without minimizing the importance of doctrine and theology, when those words are used of the facts concerning God and Christ, we must expand them to take in all of life. It is not only true now, but it has always been true: orthodox theology—what we call "the faith"—includes our practice.

At this point we might ask ourselves, "Why didn't the other writers of the New Testament highlight this same truth? Why did they leave it to the tiny book of Jude to bring this home to us?" There is a simple answer to these questions. They didn't leave it to Jude. They are eloquent on this point. Our problem has been twofold: We have made a false dichotomy between doctrine and practice, and the historic creeds have unintentionally aided us, by emphasizing the "doctrinal" side of Christianity. I do not fault them for this; I simply note it as an element in my own failure to grasp the comprehensive nature of theology.

The earliest preaching of the gospel in the New Testament took the following form: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near" (Matthew 3:2). These were the words of John the Baptist. Jesus took up the same theme: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of heaven has come near; repent and believe in the good news" (Mark 1:15). Of course, God had always been King. There could be no doubt about that. But the kingdom of God announced by John and Jesus was the realization of the longings of men under the Old Testament and the fulfillment of the promises of a Davidic king, the

Messiah. We meet him in Jesus, the Messiah or Christ in the four Gospels.

Though Jesus came ultimately to die and rise again, he spent his public years in teaching his disciples and other listeners. And he taught them theology. He gave them large doses of what is sometimes called "theology proper," descriptions of God and especially of the Father. We may cite as an example Matthew 6:25–33, where he tells us not to worry, an easy enough thing to say, but we want to ask on what basis we may avoid worry and he goes on to tell us that the basis is the character of his Father. If we understand the Father's knowledge and love we will see that we may trust him completely. If we strive for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, we will have whatever we need. Having a proper theology, a proper view of God, is extremely important.

How important is conduct and morals to this King? Let's listen to him as he prepares to say good-bye after his resurrection. What must his disciples do? They must bring other men and women to discipleship (Matthew 28:18–20). Will that involve theology? Certainly, but—that is not where Jesus the King puts the emphasis. Instead, he tells the eleven to teach—not theology—but to teach "them to obey everything that I have commanded you" (v. 20). Pass on my teaching, he says, teaching that must be practiced!

Let's look a bit closer at this. In the Gospels the Lord Jesus joins as one what we believe and how we live. For example, "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I tell you?" (Luke 6:46). Here he marries correct doctrine about himself—Jesus is Lord—to correct practice in the most intimate way.[2] In Matthew 7:21–23 he speaks similar words in the context of future judgment where it will be clear to all that he is Lord in the fullest sense. But again he makes it plain that orthodoxy includes the way we live. These two things are like Siamese twins.

An interesting feature of the Gospels is the way prophecies about the future are joined with exhortations about how we must live. These prophecies tell us, for example, about the return of Christ and judgment to come. Those are clearly the

kinds of things we call doctrines. As doctrines they give us a basis for the blessed hope we have in thinking about Jesus coming again. But the Lord Jesus does not leave us with mere prophecy. He repeatedly applies it to the way we live out our lives. In Matthew 24 Jesus speaks extensively about his return. Then he adds:

> Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.
>
> But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.

These verses show Jesus' twofold concern in his prophetic teaching. First, he laid out important facts about the future, what we call doctrine. But he obviously has another concern here as well, how his followers must live in the light of his prophetic words. There are hints of this in the phrases he chooses: "Keep awake," and "you also must be ready." Why must we do these things? Because as he shows in the mini-parable about the house being broken into, we are responsible in the interim for the way we live.

Jesus fleshes this out in the following paragraph. He addresses us as his stewards or managers. "Blessed is that slave whom his master will find at work when he arrives" (v. 46). We want that blessedness, but what will he do with the unfaithful manager? "He will cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (v. 51). Clearly Jesus here uses prophecy as a prelude to practice. We might say, "In light of what the future holds, this is the kind of person you must be!" And Jesus immediately reinforces this idea by telling the story of the ten bridesmaids in Matthew 26:1–13. Some of the bridesmaids were not ready for the bridegroom's return. They cried out for entry to the wedding banquet, "But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I do not know you'" (v. 12). It is fun to make prophetic maps and charts about the future. This may even be done

legitimately, but prophetic doctrine has a higher purpose, to cultivate in us an urgency to serve our Lord.

Before we turn from the teaching of our Lord in his earthly ministry, let's look at what may be the most far-reaching demand Jesus has made on his followers. In John 13 Jesus speaks:

> I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

Students have often noticed that the Gospel of John has very little ethical instruction when compared with the other three Gospels. John, more than any other New Testament book, is a book of doctrine as we commonly use that word. Commands to be practiced are few and far between. Nevertheless, the whole book with its talk of the love that exists between Father and Son, and the love of Jesus for his disciples, is like the velvet that surrounds this rare diamond, "Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another." And how had Jesus loved them? "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for his friends" (15:13). No marriage could be more intimate than this marriage between a Gospel filled with theology and this demand of Jesus for practice.

The book of Acts clearly shows this marriage between doctrine and practice in a striking way, by emphasizing the Lordship of Jesus Christ. For Jews the very word *Christ* (=Messiah) would convey the ideas of authority and power. To most Gentiles, however, the word would have conveyed very little. In Acts we meet the word *Lord* repeatedly associated with Jesus Christ. Here was a word that helped both Jews and Gentiles to grasp doctrine about who Jesus was with the ideas of authority and power thrown in. This orthodoxy, or good teaching, again wedded doctrine and practice. In calling Jesus *Lord* the apostles alerted their audiences to the fact that commands about practice would immediately follow. Note the reaction of the Jewish crowd at Pentecost to Peter's words, "God has made [Jesus] both Lord and Messiah . . . " (Acts 2:36). "Now

when they heard this, they . . . said to Peter and to the other apostles, 'Brothers, what should we do?'" (Acts 2:37). When they saw Jesus to be both Lord and Messiah, they knew that how they lived would be part of the package we have come to call right teaching or orthodoxy.

When we turn to Paul we find important evidence of the unity of doctrine and practice in the form his letters often take. More than once he writes a two-part letter in which doctrine forms the first division and practice the second. As an interpreter of Old Testament Scripture and the subsequent life and teaching of Christ, Paul reminds us of the way his fellow Jewish interpreters treated the Hebrew traditions. They used two categories, *haggadah* (what one ought to believe) and *halakah* (how one ought to live).[3] Paul uses much the same form in Romans and Ephesians, as well in portions of his other letters.

In Romans Paul divides his book between chapters 11 and 12. Chapters 1–11 are doctrinal and chapters 12–16 are practical, thus illustrating both sides of orthodoxy. But we must not misunderstand this. The two sets of chapters also illustrate the unity of orthodoxy.

Chapters 12 through 16 are not a postscript to the great theological discussions in chapters 1–11. In a real sense the entire letter has been directed toward the goal of showing that God demands our action as well as our believing and thinking. Faith expresses itself in obedience.[4]

The connection between doctrine and practice is explicit in the opening verse of chapter 12: "I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice. . . ." What we should believe is summed up in the words, "the mercies of God," a phrase that might have stood over chapters 1–11 as a title. What we must do is summarized in the words "present your bodies as a living sacrifice." When Paul unites them in the one sentence that forms the transition from faith to duty, he puts us on notice that these two things belong together. Orthodoxy includes both.

We see the same division in Paul's Galatians. There, however, he postpones it to get some important personal matters out of the way in chapters 1–2. As in Romans Paul discusses the basic content of the gospel in chapters 3–4, including the sacrificial death of Christ and how it bears on justification before God. Because of some who showed an unbiblical attachment to the Mosaic law, Paul sets forth his view that the Mosaic law has passed away in its *direct* bearing on Christian ethics. (Like other New Testament writers, he sees all of the Old Testament, not as irrelevant but, as finding its fulfillment in the Lord Jesus.)

After he has laid this doctrinal foundation, he turns in chapters 5–6 to Christian practice and summarizes what he has to say under the banner of *freedom*. In the opening verse of chapter 5 Paul again makes a transition from faith to duty as in Romans 12:1 discussed above: "For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery" (5:1). Paul does not use the phrase "the mercies of God" here, nor the words "a living sacrifice." Instead he speaks of Christ who sets us free (doctrine), and our responsibility to show that freedom in the way we live (practice). The most significant point Paul makes ties faith and duty together once more: "The only thing that counts is faith working through love" (5:6).

In 2 Corinthians 13:5 Paul tells his readers to "Examine yourselves to see whether you are living in the faith." Given the way we have often used the phrase *the faith*, we might think that Paul wants us to review our theology or doctrine, to make sure we are orthodox in our understanding of God, Christ and salvation. But that is not his point. His point has to do with how we live. The Corinthian Church had more than its share of sexual immorality and other sins within it. "I fear," Paul wrote, "that when I come, I may not find you as I wish. . . . I fear that when I come again, my God may humble me before you, and that I may have to mourn over many who previously sinned and have not repented of the impurity, sexual immorality, and licentiousness that they have practiced" (12:20–21). That is the context in which he calls for self-examination. *The faith*, orthodox faith, includes practice.

The other writers of the New Testament reflect the same concerns we have seen in the Gospels, the Acts, and in Paul. When James speaks of "the testing of your faith" (1:3), it is not doctrine that primarily concerns him. In its context the test is the test of endurance in temptation. It is true that temptation comes in many forms, including the temptation to renounce the things one once held. We never want to forget the importance of enduring in those things we believe. But James envisions another kind of testing of our faith. "But one is tempted by one's own desire, being lured and enticed by it . . . " (1:14). Couldn't this apply to our doctrinal beliefs? It could and it does. We must not lose sight of that, but that is not James' primary target. Instead he urges his readers to be "doers of the Word" (1:22–25). Then he sums up by describing true religion: "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world" (1:27). For James, as for Paul and the other writers of the New Testament, *the orthodox faith* includes practice.

Many years ago, when I worked in Cincinnati, Ohio, with Youth for Christ, there was a young lady who made a promising profession of faith in Jesus Christ. She went on for many months taking an active role in our programs and Bible clubs. And she was faithful to the church that she attended. One day, however, after what was probably several years, I met her and found that she had drifted back into the world in a decisive way. The old, evil habits were back. When I spoke to her about the way she was living she had a ready retort. "I know the gospel as well as you do," she said. "It's 'believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.'" In saying that, she quoted the words of Acts 16:31 accurately.

I am ashamed to say that I did not know then what to say to her. Since we remember the events that bring us shame far longer than we remember many other incidents, that conversation is still vividly before me.What should I have said? I might have chosen different words in 1960 than I would choose today, but it is not hard to know what the content should have been. This young lady had denied the bond

between doctrine and practice that the New Testament goes to great pains to affirm. To allude to something Paul said in writing to Titus, "God's grace instructs us in godly living. It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodly behavior." Where it doesn't do that, it isn't the grace of God (see Titus 2:11–12).

Someone may ask, "Do you mean that this girl was lost even though she depended on Acts 16:31 to make her right with God?" That *may be* what I am saying; it depends. All of us who are believers in Jesus Christ have failed the Lord severely and repeatedly. We have to hang our heads at the memory of our own defects and sins. But when the Bible speaks of the necessity for godly practice by Christians, it does not assert that we must be perfect. It is not meant to suggest that we are on the verge of perfection. Rather, the Bible speaks of being "doers of the Word" as a way to characterize the lives of Christians over the long haul, the years and years that pass while we profess our faith.

I must say, then, that I do not know whether the girl in my story was really a Christian or not. It depends on whether her apparent indifference to sin was the habit of her life or the unhappy attitude of an exceptional moment. I cannot know which it was these many years later. God knows; that is enough.

But I know now what I did not know then. God has joined doctrine and practice in an inseparable marriage. What God has joined together, let no man put asunder. Doctrine and practice are, like husband and wife, one body. And orthodoxy is that body's name.

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Notes

1. Cited in *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* (London: OUP, second edition, 1955), 559:31, from Priestley, *Memoirs* (1807), 1:372.
2. Often the New Testament use of "Lord" means only, "Sir," a polite form of address. But it is evident that this is not the case here, since Jesus is clearly "Lord" in such a way that he reasonably expects obedience to his words. This makes him Lord in a Master/slave or Rabbi/pupil relation.
3. There is an important difference, however, in how Paul and his fellow Jews used these two categories. For Paul, as all Christians agree, doctrine is extremely important, of equal importance with practice. For Judaism past and present, the question addressed by *halakah*, how one ought to live, greatly overshadows *haggadah*, what we ought to believe. See the internet discussion at: <http://www.ao.net/~fmoeller/zchxxix.htm>
4. Walter W. Wessel in *The NIV Study Bible*, Kenneth Barker, general editor (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1985), 1724.