

# Are We Saved By Jesus or Doctrine?

By J. Scott Sheridan

I was first made aware of the issue back in 1985 at the Florida Christian Convention/National Missionary Convention. The speaker was my professor, Roger Chambers:

A round of applause awaits the convention speaker who will announce that we are saved by Jesus, not doctrine. Brotherhood scholars impressed by German theology are throwing up a wall between Jesus and doctrine. This one-eyed theology is catchy; it breathes rhetorical authority. By design it eases the force of doctrine, mitigates the raw authority of Scripture, accredits human testimony, and expands the range of union. But it won't work. Jesus does not descend in euphoric mystery; He comes clothed in the Apostles' Doctrine and dwells in our hearts by faith. The Bible does not elevate the Person of Christ over the doctrine of Christ.<sup>1</sup>

About two years later I was at a Men's Retreat in Lake Aurora, Florida, only to hear a prominent popular preacher announce to all in hearing distance that we are saved by Jesus, not doctrine. He went on to teach that baptism is OUR doctrine (meaning Church of Christ/Christian Church doctrine) and that we did not have the right to impose OUR doctrine upon those who may not hold to OUR doctrine. He went on to say that the Lordship of Jesus is what we could unite upon, because we will never completely agree upon doctrine. (Unfortunately this session was not recorded).

The two issues are connected. The issues are 1) Saved by Jesus, not doctrine, and 2) Uniting upon the Lordship of Jesus alone, even while we have glaring doctrinal disagreements. In either instance, doctrine is shoed away like an unwanted stray cat.

The second issue is the premise behind most interdenominational programs, such as Promise Keepers. It is thought that as long as we can accept Jesus as Lord, everything else is irrelevant. That's not the case in reality, nor is it the case Scripturally. Ephesians 4:1-6 states:

Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. *There is* one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

The command there is to diligently preserve the unity of the spirit. We do so by acknowledging the seven pillars upon which we must unite, namely, 1) One Body, 2) One Spirit, 3) One hope, 4) One Lord, 5) One Faith, 6) One baptism, and 7) One God. Please notice that the Lordship of Jesus is ONE of those things we must be able to unite upon, but there are six others. Observe that unlike the popular preacher mentioned earlier, the Scriptures declare that baptism is one of those uniting pillars. The unity is there for those who believe these doctrines, and is to be maintained not discovered. But there is no unity with unbelievers.

The effort to unite upon just one of these pillars is a blatant attempt to wrestle away the sheer authority of Jesus from salvation, just so we can get along. Throughout Old Testament history, the temptation to "get along" was always there, but God was ALWAYS more concerned with the faithfulness of His people than He was with how they socialized. The people wanted a king so they could be like the other nations. Balaam's wicked temptation to the people of Israel was to mingle with the locals. In Ezekiel they had actually brought in Egyptian religious art and writing into the Temple itself. In each of these examples God was greatly displeased and would have preferred faithful obedience.

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.faithfulpreaching.com/Trends\\_In\\_The\\_Restoration\\_Movement2.pdf](http://www.faithfulpreaching.com/Trends_In_The_Restoration_Movement2.pdf)

But what about this idea of being saved by Jesus, not doctrine? As mentioned before, doctrine has become an unwelcome visitor in many congregations. To quote Roger Chambers again, "Doctrine is an embarrassed intruder in many modern congregations. Barely tolerated, it cowers on the back pew; the territory around the pulpit has long since been claimed by commanding personality, practical mysticism, professional music, and pop psychology."<sup>2</sup>

First, this is a false dichotomy. There is no choice of Jesus on the one hand or doctrine on the other. Those who make such claims are, once again, trying to wrestle the authority of Jesus away from Him. It may sound spiritual to say, "We're saved by Jesus!" But think about it. Which Jesus? Any Jesus? Does my belief in someone named Jesus save me? In Acts 16 the Philippian Jailer asked, "Sirs, What must I do to be saved?" In verse 31 the reply was, "They said, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.'" But as any Bible School drop-out knows, that was not a complete answer. They had not yet taught (aka, indoctrinated) him about who Jesus was. Imagine that this pagan jailer had said, "Alright, I will believe!" without any knowledge of who Jesus is or what He did. Talk about blind faith. Instead, the Scriptures tell us in verses 32 and 33, "And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house. And he took them that *very* hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his *household*. Without a proper knowledge (doctrine) of who Jesus is, then a person ends up placing his faith in anything. You may call it Jesus, but what's to keep us from calling it the boogey man, Fred Flintstone, or Elvis? Nothing, except the proper understanding of who the Person is.

Many will push doctrine aside to promote their own agendas. Salvation is a relationship, but it is one built upon a series of propositions. If a person believes, repents, confesses, is baptized, lives faithfully under grace, then there is the hope of salvation. Jesus comes to us with a set of propositions, called doctrine, that we are to abide by. Many would try to sidestep that a little. Rick Warren, in his book, *The Purpose Driven Life*, tries to do just that. He writes:

One day you will stand before God, and he will do an audit of your life, a final exam, before you enter eternity. The Bible says, "*Remember, each of us will stand personally before the judgment seat of God.... Yes, each of us will have to give a personal account to God.*" Fortunately, God wants us to pass this test, so he has given us the questions in advance. From the Bible we can surmise that God will ask us two crucial questions: First, "*What did you do with my Son, Jesus Christ?*" **God won't ask about your religious background or doctrinal views.** The only thing that will matter is, did you accept what Jesus did for you and did you learn to love and trust him? Jesus said, "*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*" Second, "*What did you do with what I gave you?*" What did you do with your life—all the gifts, talents, opportunities, energy, relationships, and resources God gave you? Did you spend them on yourself, or did you use them for the purposes God made you for?" Preparing you for these two questions is the goal of this book.<sup>3</sup>

However, the Scriptures teach us that there is more than just whether or not we "accept" Jesus or not.<sup>4</sup> In Matthew 7:21ff give clear warning that even doing many things in the name of Jesus, even good things, is not what saves us. It is putting into practice the doctrine of Jesus Christ - Mat 7:24 "Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock."

If a person studies the Word, and gets deep into doctrinal matters, He is only learning more about Jesus. It has been said that Church leaders that spend more time arguing about points of doctrine than winning people to Jesus are wrong to be doing so. And there may be a time when that is true. But deep study into the nature of Jesus, the Person of Jesus, the incarnation, Jesus the Word, Jesus our Savior, or any other aspect of the doctrine of Jesus, or His Bride, the Church, or the Father, or Holy Spirit, or a million other things, is not disconnected from Jesus. We do not know anything about Jesus that

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*, p. 21 (Ebook) Bold letters were added for emphasis.

<sup>4</sup> The phrase "Accept Jesus" is not a Scriptural phrase. The Bible never asks us to "accept" Jesus. We are to Abide in, Obey, Submit, Honor, Love, Believe, et al. But it never tells us to "accept" Jesus.

is not the doctrine of Jesus. Yes, we should be winning souls for Jesus, but we must also KNOW Jesus. It is not an either/or proposition. It is both knowing doctrine AND winning people to the Lord.

To try and separate Jesus from doctrine would be like trying to separate water from wetness. It cannot be done.

If we were to somehow, mystically, separate Jesus from doctrine, then Jesus becomes whatever we want Him to be. We could fill in the blanks ourselves creating Him in our own image. I've a hunch that that's what these fellas who say we're saved by Jesus, not doctrine, are wanting to do anyway. Preach a Jesus of their own design.

Gal 1:6-9 I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is *really* not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!

Saved By Jesus, Not Doctrine!!!!—Not Possible.