**A “Buffet Style” Christianity: Negotiables & Non-Negotiables of Christian doctrines (JD11)**

It’s the dreaded “D” word! What is it? Doctrine! A study indicates that 36% of conservative Protestant youths think it’s okay to pick and choose parts of the faith they agree with. The number may not improve much with the adult Christians! In some ways, this is a reaction against intolerance that some Christians exhibit against other believers on account of not-so-essential doctrines. For instance, in 2005, *International Mission Board* of Southern Baptist Convention decided to no longer accept missionary candidates who speak in tongues; the vote was 50-to-15. As if that wasn’t intolerant enough, shortly thereafter, the General Association of Regular Baptist Churches severed ties with Cedarville University, a Christian school in Ohio, on account that the college decided to receive support from Southern Baptist Convention. Why? One reason was that although the Regular Baptists deemed that the Convention’s vote against speaking-in-tongues was a “step in the right direction,” it still wasn’t unanimous. Wow, isn’t this enough to forget about doctrines! So what should we do who are caught between the paleo-fundamentalists who knit-pick over every doctrine, and the postmodernists who hardly care about it?

**D**

**Q:** Have you been in a situation where too much or too little emphasis was made on doctrines? Share it.

**A. In order to truly understand this study, we need a perspective.**

1. In 2 Sam. 6, we read about King David’s attempt to bring back the ark of God to Jerusalem.

However, the man who tried to keep it from falling from the cart that had stumbled was instantaneously killed. As a result, “David was angry” (2 Sam. 6:8) mainly because he couldn’t understand why his good intention was met with God’s searing judgment.

**Q1:** First, how was the ark carried (2 Sam. 6:3) and who brought it (2 Sam. 6:1-2)? Is that important?

**Q2:** Why was God not content with the 1st attempt to bring the ark to Jerusalem (1 Chron. 15:13-15)?

2. When the doctrine of how the ark ought to be carried & who should carry it was violated, God didn’t turn relativistic & said, “It’s OK, whatever way will do?” No, the ark wasn’t going anywhere until it was handled in the prescribed way! It was a non-negotiable.

**B. Read 17:1-13.** How did each person handle the doctrines of Torah, the first 5 books of the OT? They appear quite religious but looking

closely we find that they were re-shaping the faith & doc-trine of Torah according to any way they saw fit. It’s like, *Gospel according to*

*Me* where key doc-trines are reconfigured to please whatever I deem to be right! Let’s evaluate what each person did.

1. The elated mother, after recovering her silver, consecrated it to God (17:3)—that’s a good move.

**Q:** But what makes her next move a violation of an important doctrine of the OT (18:24, Ex. 20:4)?

2. Observe what her son did (17:5); obviously, he was religious, having built a shrine in his home.

**Q:** But which doctrine/regulation did Micah break when he built his own shrine (Ex. 29:42-43), in-stalled his son, an Ephraimite as

priest (Num. 1:50, Deut. 17:9), & made an ephod (Ex.39:1-2)?

3. Chapter 17 ends with a wandering Levite who leaves his home to live elsewhere (17:7-13).

**Q:** What doctrine/regulation did this Levite break? Note that 48 cities with adjoining pastures were given to the Levites as their

dwelling places (Jos. 21:1-42; Num. 1:50-53)

4. Micah, after breaking God’s doctrines & regulations, showed his spiritual obliviousness when he said: “Now I know that the LORD

will be good to me, since this Levite has become my priest.”

**Q:** He really believed that God approved of what he was doing! What does this reveal? (Hos. 4:6)

5. How did the writer of Judges sum up this period?

“Everyone did as he saw fit” (17:6b). This is to say, “Everyone questioned universalism & the belief in ‘objective reality,’” which is

how one intellectual described postmodernity. Yes, postmodernity has gone right back to premodernity!

**Q1:** Would you like to live in a society where anything goes? Give some examples from today’s world of everyone doing what he sees

fit? (i.e., it was never like that before but now it is). **Q2:** Can you think of any other examples?

**C. 1st: We need to discuss what are the negotiables & non-negotiables of the Christian doctrines?**

1. Example of a negotiable doctrine (ND): In the church in Rome, a dispute arose bet. those Jewish Christians who wanted to keep the Jewish festive days (Feast of Tabernacles) & kosher law (no pork) & those who didn’t because of the freedom they now had in Jesus.

**Q:** It was a delicate matter but let’s see how Apostle Paul handled it? (Rom. 14:1-6)

2. Example of a non-ND: 1 Jn. was written at the end of the 1st cent. to combat *Docetics* (meaning *appear* in Greek) who taught that while Jesus appeared to have come in the flesh, he was all spirit in reality. (Its full-blown version in the 2nd cent. was *Gnosticism.)*

**Q1:** Was this OK with John? How did he respond to this way of thinking (1 Jn. 4:3, 6)?

**Q2:** If this issue didn’t affect the matter of salvation, would John have an issue of it (Gal. 1:6-7)?

**Q3.** In what sense does 1 Tim. 4:16 hold up the importance of keeping the non-negotiable doctrines?

3. An example of a non-negotiable doctrine being negotiated: We may not understand the Trinity very well but it is clearly an essential doctrine of the Bible. We believe that there are 3 persons (i.e., God the Father, Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit) in one God-head. However, the famed Fuller seminary professor (now retired) Peter Wagner said the following in 2004 book *Changing church:* “The wording of the doctrine of the Trinity—which states that the Godhead is made up of 3 Persons—needlessly excludes Oneness Pentecostals [who deny the Trinity] and prevents many Muslims and Jews from converting to Christianity.”

**Q1**: Why is Wagner trying to redefine Trinity? **Q2:** Why would his effort be futile? Should the change be made to the doctrine of Trinity, is that sufficient to bridge the theological gap among Christians, Muslims, and the Jews?

4. Meaning? With respect to negotiable doctrines such as the rapture and spiritual gifts, the Bible believing Christians ought to show tolerance and liberty. But with respect to non-negotiable doctrines, the church must show unity in her assertion of the biblical truth.

**D. What is going on in the church today?**

1. It was said earlier that the dreaded “D” word among Christians is doctrine!

**Q1:** Why do you think doctrine is not popular in the church today?

**Q2**. What is the most dangerous thing that can happen when doctrine is rarely taught in the church? Before responding, consider the 2005 Time Magazine survey in which evangelical Christians were asked, “Can a good person who does share your religious beliefs attain salvation or go to heaven?” 68% of them said yes, which was only 5% higher than what non-Christian said.

2. Practical suggestion: If this study made any sense, then start reading the Bible seriously, starting with the most significant theological book in the Bible: Romans then read John and Galatians.

**E. Some key essential doctrines of the Christian faith are** (as the writer sees it):

The Trinity (and all that this doctrine entails such as the nature of God and the HS), the deity & humanity of Christ (Virgin birth implied),

the resurrection of Christ, his physical return to earth; salvation by grace through faith in Jesus as the only redemptive sacrifice for men,

the sinfulness of men, the reliability of the inspired Scripture, the reality of a literal heaven and hell, etc.