

Balance Doctrine and Understanding

Let us begin with the truth: **the doctrine of Christ is indispensable!** Timothy was told – “Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you” (1 Tim. 4:16). On the “soul-saving” front, many have attempted to water down the message. Sadly, some members of the church have sought to defuse a gospel sermon or Bible class, taught kindly but firmly, by apologizing to their non-Christian visitors for the distinctive message of the New Testament. If a candidate for baptism must be won through such conniving or coddling, he or she will be converted to the wrong person or thing --- not the Lord.

Having said that, let it also be observed that **doctrine must be balanced with an intelligent-- even sensitive – approach to soul winning.** By ‘sensitive’ is meant, not the paranoid fear of offending which has brought on the political correctness currently distorting the American mind, but a clear awareness of those whom we are trying to win to Christ. By “intelligent” is meant particularly using common sense with which God equipped us to use wisdom in winning souls (Prov. 11:30 – “He who wins souls is wise”). I want to make three points about discernment:

1. Use Discernment to Get Them “In the Door.”

That necessitates being approachable, living in such an exemplary way that people recognize a distinctiveness about you, being friendly, and being bold enough to offer an invitation. If you try to mow them over with doctrine before you lay a foundation of trust and genuine concern, they will “turn you off” on the subject. You must also “be hospitable” (1 Pet. 4:9). Allow your home to a place where they will feel welcomed and they will see Christian entertainment, Christian family, and Christian living. “Clean fun,” genuine concern, and agape love demonstrated before people will get them in the door and create opportunities to teach.

2. Use Discernment While They are “Inside.”

When people visit the assemblies, see them as magnets. Build a desire to want to make them feel “at home.” This may not initially be comfortable for you. But, let no one blame God for not making contact with visitors. Too many say, “It is not my personality to ‘go up’ to others.” If that’s so, modify your personality. Also, if you are in a teaching or preaching position, speak the truth in love (cf. Eph. 4:15). It is never necessary to be insulting or belligerent in plainly presenting the gospel message in a firm manner. Watch how you interact with others ---there’s no place for bullies in the Lord’s church (cf. 3 John 9-11). Use more self-control in your dealings with everyone (cf. 2 Tim. 3:3).

3. Use Discernment After They Become Part of the Household.”

Remember, babies cannot eat meat. There needs to be Bible classes appropriate for growing spiritual babes (cf. 1 Peter 2:2). Also, exercise patience liberally (cf. 1 Thess. 5:14). There should be considerably greater intolerance for the social drinking, dancing, cursing, doctrinally distorted views, and similar sins of those who have been members of the church for a long period of time for those who are “young in the faith.”

The saints are summoned by the Savior to be soul-centered (cf. Matt. 28:19-20). Understand that the lost are just that—lacking direction as they walk around in darkness (cf. 1 Pet. 2:9). After Paul asked for prayers so that he would know the way he ought to speak to the lost, he charged Christians, like you and I, to “walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time. Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned

with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each other” (Col. 4:4-6). Let not one iota of doctrine suffer in that effort, but may we use common sense in delivering it!

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