

Orthodoxy (How to Discern 3)

by Anton Bosch

We must be careful not to formulate our own 'new' doctrine and instead learn from 2,000 years of church history and accumulated wisdom.

Scripture: Exodus 20:16, Job 8:8, Jeremiah 6:16, John 5:31, 2 Corinthians 13:1, Galatians 1:12, 2 Timothy 2:2

Topics: "Biblical Interpretation", "Orthodox Doctrine"

Description

Anton Bosch addresses the issue of individual interpretation of the Bible, emphasizing the importance of aligning our understanding with orthodox doctrine that has been established over centuries. He warns against the dangers of personal interpretation leading to false teachings and heresies, highlighting the need to rely on credible witnesses and reputable sources for doctrinal confirmation. Bosch stresses the significance of learning from the wisdom and mistakes of past generations to ensure our teachings are in line with the foundational truths of the faith.

Transcript

The Roman church has for a long time believed that only the "clergy" may interpret the Bible. In fact, until recently, they did not even allow translations of the Bible into the common language of the people because they did not believe that ordinary people were equipped to read the Bible, let alone interpret it.

Since the Reformation, the Bible has been made available to ordinary people and now anyone in the free world is able to read, study and own Bibles. But the pendulum has swung to the other extreme so that today every Tom, Dick and Harry feels he has the right to interpret the Bible as he feels fit. This is an equal but opposite error to that of the Roman clerical system.

It is therefore important that we understand that while each of us has the privilege of reading the Bible for ourselves, no individual has the right to interpret the Scriptures as he wishes. We can all understand the Bible, and the Spirit will lead us into all Truth, but it is not up to us to formulate our own "new" doctrine. There is a body of truth that is not open for reinterpretation. We refer to this as "orthodox" teaching. "Orthodox" means "conforming to established and traditional doctrine". (Not to be confused with Eastern Orthodox churches.)

Over the last 2,000 years of Christianity the church has endured countless errors, counter-errors, over-corrections, church councils, remarkably gifted teachers and heretics. Through all these processes the basic tenets of our faith have been established, tested and proven. We have the advantage of learning

from 2,000 years of experience. Yet, many fools have risen in these days who feel they are wiser than all the great men who came before and have the right to attack or add to orthodox and established doctrine. Anyone who feels they have a "revelation" that goes against orthodox teaching needs to be very sure of his facts.

Is there Biblical proof for the statement that no individual has the right to interpret the Bible without reference to orthodox doctrine? Yes indeed.

Paul quoted a principle established in the Law that "By the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established" (2Corinthians 13:1). This principle applied to every area of Jewish life and is carried forward into the life of the church. Even Jesus applied this principle to Himself. Jesus Himself said: "If I bear witness of Myself, My witness is not true" (John 5:31). He then named four witnesses who testify to His claims. These are John the Baptist, Jesus' works, His Father, and the Scriptures (John 5:33-39). Thus Jesus honored the principle that no individual can make a claim that is not able to be substantiated by multiple witnesses.

There are two essential qualifications for witnesses. They must agree and they must be credible (Exodus 20:16). The Jewish council found two witnesses to testify against Jesus, but they were false witnesses. So whose testimony should we believe concerning Jesus? Should we believe the testimony of John, Jesus' works, His Father and the Scriptures or that of two rogues from the back streets of Jerusalem? Most false teachers may be able to quote others who believe like they do, but who are those witnesses? Are they people who have a reputation for correct theology or are they just as confused as the one who finds support in their false teaching?

The great Apostle Paul received his revelation and doctrine directly from Jesus Christ Himself (Galatians 1:12). In spite of the magnitude of this revelation, Paul felt the need to check his doctrine with Peter (Galatians 1:18). Then fourteen years later he again went to Jerusalem to check that he was indeed preaching the truth: "And I went up... and communicated to them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to those who were of reputation, lest by any means I might run, or had run, in vain" (Galatians 2:2). Notice that he checked with "those who were of reputation".

When building a wall it is no use checking the wall with a spirit level that is not correct. The level may indicate that the wall is plumb when it is not. Too many Christians check their doctrine with the wrong people and the wrong standards. Any doctrine has to be confirmed by those who have a reputation for Truth and correct doctrine. Far too many preachers are like King Ahab. Ahab gathered a team of 400 prophets who would tell him what he wanted to hear but he rejected the one man who he knew spoke truth (1Kings 22). Thus every heretic has a list of names of those who believe like he does, but will not listen to those who hold to orthodox doctrine.

When pilots bring ships into the harbor at Durban in South Africa, the channel through which they must pass is very narrow and disaster waits a few feet on either side. So to navigate safely they watch three lights on the distant shore. When these three lights line up, the ship is on the right course. The problem is that the shore is littered with thousands of lights. Only a fool will choose any three that line up. If it is imperative that a ship's pilot has to make sure that he gets the right three lights to line up, then it is even more incumbent on us to make sure our teaching lines up with the right reference points.

Paul told Timothy "And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2Timothy 2:2). Notice how Paul reminds Timothy that

there are witnesses to his teachings. Also, he does not instruct Timothy to formulate his own doctrine but to simply carry forward those truths that had already been established by Paul.

Jude says: "Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). Jude does not instruct us to establish or formulate doctrine but rather to contend for what was once for all delivered. Jude's reference to "the faith" refers to a body of established truth and doctrine.

Job said: "inquire, please, of the former age, and consider the things discovered by their fathers; For we were born yesterday, and know nothing, Because our days on earth are a shadow. Will they not teach you and tell you, and utter words from their heart?" (Job 8:8-10).

In this generation, our doctrine should be the purest, the most accurate and the most orthodox because we have the benefit of 2,000 years of church history. But instead of learning from the mistakes and discoveries of those who have gone before, this generation seems hell-bent to disregard the benefits of accumulated wisdom and rather to invent their own peculiar brands of heresy. These are indeed the people Jeremiah prophesied about when he cried: "Thus says the Lord: "Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; Then you will find rest for your souls. But they said, `We will not walk in it." (Jeremiah 6:16).

(To Be Continued)

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