



## What Is Doctrine?

(Pastor Phil Thrailkill)

*Doctrine* is a “churchy” word, but simple in meaning. It means *teaching* (Latin *doctrina*). God showed up in history, and one of the responses was to reflect on the meaning of events and write them down. Finding out such a God exists and wants a relationship is a big deal!

This long history has two parts: 1) God’s call of his people (the Old Testament), and 2) God’s appearance in Jesus who creates a new community around himself (the New Testament). Official teaching summarizes insights and guards against distortion. Doctrine is conservative; it values what God has shown and preserves the gift intact for future generations.

The Bible is a big book, and so the necessity of brief summaries for teaching. The shortest Christian confession is “Jesus is Lord” (1 Cor. 12:3), and when you discover that *Lord* is the Old Testament name for God, you see how bold a claim it is. A longer creed is 1 Cor. 15:3-5. Here we learn that the Messiah died for our sins, was buried, was bodily raised, and appeared to many. Jesus is alive, and his Spirit is soon poured out on the church as a communications link. The Holy Spirit exposes intellectual and moral threats and preserves us in the faith. Bad doctrine is toxic.

The church’s formulation of its trust in God as Father, Son, and Spirit came to a stable form in the Apostle’s Creed, and a bit later in the Nicene Creed. Every line is a Yes to one idea and a No to another. Not many gods, but only One. Creation is not eternal; it was made. The church has a list of convictions. They are the classic content of this faith.

In the aftermath of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformation, Protestant teaching was often stated in numbered articles, as in the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England and in the revised version John Wesley sent to the American Methodists in 1784. And when, in 1968, the “Confession of Faith” was included from the Evangelical United Brethren, our new church found itself with two complementary sets of articles that preserve the faith of the early church, teach the Reformation doctrines of salvation, order the church’s life, and teach the Wesleyan distinctives of free grace and growth in holiness. Our Doctrinal Standards now consist of five documents: (1) the Articles of Religion, (2) the Confession of Faith, (3) the Standard Sermons of Wesley, (4) his Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament, (5) the General Rules. In a time of moral confusion and shrill voices, do your homework. Read and study our Doctrinal Standards! Dig down to the solid foundation.