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A 6-SESSION STUDY
FOR DIALOGUE IN
COMMUNITY AROUND
THE SCRIPTURES



TEACHING THE FIRST PRINCIPLES

First Principles of Leading *The First Principles*

BY JEFF REED

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Published by BILD International, Ames, Iowa 50014. BILD International resources are designed to help churches train leaders.

All Scripture, unless otherwise noted, is from the New American Standard Bible.

ISBN 1891441094

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THE DIDACHE: RETRIEVING A THEOLOGICAL, HISTORICAL IDEA ①



Study the Scriptures

The following passages lay a foundation for the existence of a body of teaching that all churches and believers were to be taught. Read them quickly, rather than studying them, so you can get an overview of the idea. Then record your thoughts.

Traditions (i.e. instructions, commandments, teaching)—emphasized in Paul's Early Letters:

1 Thessalonians 4:1–2; 2 Thessalonians 2:15; 3:6 Especially note: “tradition” (from the Greek word *paradosis*)— Matthew 15:2–3, 6; Mark 7:3, 5, 8–9, 13; Galatians 1:14; 2 Thessalonians 2:15; 3:6; 1 Corinthians 11:2; Colossians 2:8; key paradidomi passages (i.e. verb form of *paradosis*)—Acts 6:14; 16:4; 1 Corinthians 11:2, 23; 15:3; Jude 3

Attitude, Pattern, Rule—emphasized in Paul's Early and Middle Letters:

Galatians 4:3, 9; 5:25; 6:16 Colossians 2:8, 20; Philippians 2:5; 3:15–17

Sound Doctrine, Principles, Words—emphasized in Paul's Later Letters:

1 Timothy 6:1–4; 2 Timothy 1:13; 2:2, 15; 3:10; Titus 2:1 1 Timothy 4:1–16; 6:1–10; 2 Timothy

Faith—emphasized in the General Epistles:

2 Peter 1:12–21; 3:14–18; Jude 3, 17–23

Record your thoughts on the importance of being founded in this body of teaching



Consult the Scholars

There is a body of teaching, delivered by Christ to the Apostles, that was intended to be followed by all the churches. It includes a core body of teaching as well as a way of life to be lived out by churches everywhere. This teaching should be carefully built into the infrastructure of the life of every new church and every new believer (“all the churches” cf. 1 Corinthians 11:1–2, 16; 7:17; 14:33; 2 Corinthians 8:16–24; 2 Thessalonians 1:4).

From its inception, the Church recognized the teaching of the Apostles (Acts 2:42). This teaching—which began orally and grew throughout the life of the Church in the form of letters written by the Apostles and their key fellow workers—was considered

authoritative for the churches and was referred to as *the Apostles' doctrine* or *teaching*, *the deposit of faith*, *the faith*, *the doctrine*, etc. The churches referred to the core gospel of this teaching as the *kerygma* and the teaching of ordered living in the community as the *didache*. Despite distinguishing the two by name, there was much overlap in these categories, both in the New Testament and in the writings of the Early Church.

Paul's Early Letters—*traditions, instructions, commandments, teaching*

As seen in his early letters to the churches, Paul understood that he was delivering to the churches a body of teaching that he received from the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:2) and that it was to be followed by all the churches. On several occasions he referred to the “traditions” that they had received from him. The term *tradition* (from the Greek word *paradosis*—“that which is passed on”) refers to the teaching delivered by Paul and the other Apostles. The term *tradition* seemed to be the way Paul summarized the body of teaching in his early letters. It is also a concept picked up in church history, especially by the Catholic Church when it refers to three authorities: the Bible, tradition, and the papal system (cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:15; 3:6; 1 Corinthians 11:2; also Colossians 2:8). *Paradosis* is not only found in his early letters; for instance, he also uses the term in Colossians. Therefore *traditions* is not a rigid category for his early teaching, but is merely Paul's emphasis of terms at that stage of his writing. Nonetheless, it shows a pattern that is very useful. He referred to people who would not follow this teaching as *unruly* (from the Greek word *ataktos*), which refers to someone who is “out of step” or “disorderly” (1 Thessalonians 5:14; 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 11).

Paul's Middle Letters—*rule, the faith, rule of faith, pattern, elementary principles*

In his middle writings, Paul challenged the churches to stay with the system or standard of truth that he had taught them and that they saw in him. Two key words appear: *attitude* (from the Greek word *phroneo*), which refers to “a way of thinking or pattern of thinking and living” (Philippians 2:5; 3:15), and *standard* (from the Greek word *stoikion* or *stoikeo*), which refers to “the rule or standard of faith” delivered by Paul (Colossians 2:8, 20; Philippians 3:16; Galatians 4:3, 9; 5:25; 6:16). Paul also referred to this body of truth as *the faith*, which he was delivering (cf. with the Greek word *pistis* in Acts 16:5; Philippians 1:27; Colossians 1:23; 2 Corinthians 13:5). Again, Paul expected them to be obedient to the faith, to be solidly in it, and to strive for its preservation. It is interesting to note that the concept of *the rule of faith* was the first term that the second century churches used to describe their summary of the Apostles' doctrine, which later grew into the creeds.

Paul's Later Letters—*deposit of sound doctrine, sound principles*

In Paul's last letters, which were written to his two key leaders, Timothy and Titus, Paul focused more on the soundness of this doctrine or teaching. He knew that many would

come along after his death and try to distort the doctrine that he had left the churches—not only its accuracy, but also its soundness. This implies that he understood that this doctrine was not merely a system of truths, but also a way of life; the core truths of the faith could never be divorced from the conduct of the believers. Paul referred to this body of truth as a *deposit*, which he entrusted to Timothy. He told Timothy to retain *the standard* (from the Greek word *hupotuposis*—“outline sketch, ground plan, rough draft forming the basis of a fuller exposition,” Linguistic Key) of sound words of this deposit (2 Timothy 1:13). The main term Paul used in these letters is *sound doctrine* (1 Timothy 1:10; 6:3; 2 Timothy 1:13; 4:3; Titus 1:9, 13; 2:1–2). *Doctrine* is from the Greek word *didache* or *didaskolos*, which refers to the teaching that had been entrusted to Paul, which he passed on to the churches. It was now the responsibility of faithful men like Timothy and Titus to help preserve the deposit of sound doctrine and to entrust it to others who could in turn teach others (2 Timothy 2:2). The result was a perpetual preservation of the apostolic deposit. This deposit centered around the *kerygma*, which was the proclamation of the gospel, and the *didache*, which was the teaching that all believers and churches needed to orient their lives around.

The General Epistles refer to “the teaching” as *the faith*, which was delivered to the Apostles. A concern among these writers, especially Peter and Jude, was the preservation of the faith from false teachers. The spirit of these letters is probably best summarized by Jude who called the believers to “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). The writers of these epistles clearly understood the existence of a body of truth that had been delivered by the Apostles to the churches, once and for all, to be preserved and followed carefully.

The Role of the Apostolic Doctrine in Shaping and Stabilizing the Early Churches

Paul, his team, and the other apostolic leaders, saw that one of their primary responsibilities was to establish new churches in the body of teaching delivered to them. They referred to the teaching by many names: *the traditions*, *the faith*, *the apostolic doctrine*, etc., which are detailed above. In Paul’s work with the Thessalonians, we have one of the clearest pictures of how this body of truth shaped the early churches; how others came along to try to challenge this teaching; and how the Apostles fought this effort and used it to stabilize and establish the churches. This process is visualized on the chart “Establishing the Thessalonian Community.” Paul expected the churches to hold to *the traditions*—the teaching that he delivered to them that he received from Christ. Anyone who did not was considered unruly and eventually had to be dealt with firmly. These traditions included the gospel and all directives, both positional and ethical, conduct-type truth. As seen on the chart, there was a normal process that all churches went through in order to become established, a process summarized by Malherbe in *Paul and the Thessalonians: The Philosophical Tradition of Pastoral Care*.

Establishing the Thessalonian Community

Founding the Community	Shaping the Community	Stabilizing the Community
Conversion	Concept of Traditions (Commandments, Instructions)	Challenge to Traditions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not in word only, but in power, in the Holy Spirit, and with full conviction 1 Thess. 1:5 • The word of the Lord sounded forth from you 1 Thess. 1:8 • You turned from idols to serve a true and living God 1 Thess. 1:9 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proved to be gentle among you as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children 1 Thess. 2:7 • We were exhorting...as a father would his own children 1 Thess. 2:11 • You received from us the word of God's message, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God 1 Thess. 2:13 • You received from us instruction as to how to walk...for you know what commandments we gave you by the authority of Jesus Christ 1 Thess. 4:1-2 • Stand firm and hold to the traditions you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us 2 Thess. 2:15 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For we wanted to come to you...when we could endure it no longer...we sent Timothy...to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith, so that no man may be disturbed by these afflictions 1 Thess. 2:18; 3:1-3 • That you may not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us 2 Thess. 2:2 • Appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord, and give you instruction 1 Thess. 5:12 • Admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak 1 Thess. 5:14 • Keep aloof from any brother who leads an unruly life, and not according to the tradition which you received from us 2 Thess. 3:6 • We have confidence...that you are doing and will continue to do what we command. And may the Lord direct your hearts...into the steadfastness of Christ 2 Thess. 3:4-5

The Process of Establishing the Early Churches in the Apostles' Doctrine:

1. **Founding the Community.** In this stage, a group of believers responded to the gospel as it was proclaimed (the kerygma). After they believed, their conversion was reinforced by careful instruction in the gospel. The conversion needed to be reinforced, not as a desire to reform, but as a *dynamic conversion*—a transfer, on the basis of God's work, from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of God (1 Thessalonians 1:1–2:12).
2. **Shaping the Community.** In this stage, the church was instructed in the traditions (the teaching, the didache) of the Apostles. This was a body of teaching delivered by the Apostles, which all churches and individual believers were to follow. Paul established the churches in this didache through three means:
 - a. by teaching the church initially (2:1–12).
 - b. by returning to visit the church (2:13–20).
 - c. by sending a team member if he was not able to go himself (3:1–10).
3. **Stabilizing the Community.** Since many followed Paul around, or followed after him, trying to get the churches out from under his influence, he had to reinforce his teaching by clarification and exhortation. This stage seemed inevitable for every church to pass through—almost as if a necessary part of the maturing process. Again, Paul followed the same pattern to try to get the churches to hold fast to the Apostles' teaching. He challenged them to hold to his teaching (1 Thessalonians 3:1–5:28; 2 Thessalonians):
 - a. by sending letters that clarified his teaching and challenged them to hold firm.
 - b. by sending men from his team with the letters and authorizing them to deal with those who would not conform.
 - c. by visiting them himself if possible.

The Essentials of the Apostolic Doctrine

The apostolic doctrine itself now needs to be summarized. The Early Church did this in two categories: the kerygma, which centered on the gospel and its core truths, and the didache, which centered on the core teaching delivered to the Church and shaped their community belief system and life together. The following is a summary of the essentials of this body of truth, which was deposited to the churches. In one sense, the two categories—the kerygma and the didache—are arbitrary and overlap or may completely include the other in some texts. But these categories are useful for summary purposes and are fairly reflective of the order of the delivery and the early categorization of this deposit as it was made. Besides careful review of the New Testament letters in the order they were written, two books have greatly influenced this summary:

- *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Development*, by C.H. Dodd
- *Gospel and Law*, by C.H. Dodd

The Kerygma:

1. This gospel was prophesied beforehand in the Scriptures in the form of a New Covenant in which there would be forgiveness of sin and a placing of God's Spirit within man, as part of God's unfolding plan to bless the families of the earth through the seed of David.
2. This gospel was fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the seed of David, the King of Kings, born of the Holy Spirit, who came in the flesh, lived a sinless life, died, was buried and rose again on the third day according to the Scriptures, and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
3. This Jesus will come again to judge the earth and to set up the kingdom of God for all time, and after having abolished all rule and authority, He will reign forever and ever.
4. Those who hear this message and believe will receive forgiveness of sins and be given the Spirit of God as a pledge of their inheritance, as they eagerly await the Savior who will return for them (Galatians 1:1–5; 3:1–18; 1 Corinthians 15; Romans 1:1–7; 4:24–25; Ephesians 1:1–3:21; Colossians 1:9–14; 1 Timothy 3:16; 1 Peter 1:1–5).

The Didache:

1. Every believer is instructed to lay aside his old life, renew his mind in the teaching, and conform his new life to the will of God (Ephesians 4:22–24; Romans 12:1–2).
2. A set of virtues, only possible through God's resources, are to characterize every believer (Galatians 5:22–33; Colossians 3:12; 2 Peter 1:1–11).
3. Individual households must be ordered properly, consistent with God's created design for man and for the Church (Ephesians 5:22–6:9; Colossians 3:18–4:1; 1 Peter 3:1–7).
4. God's household, the Church, the pillar and support of the truth, must be properly ordered according to the sound doctrine received from the Apostles, especially Paul (1 Timothy 3:14–16; Titus 1:5–2:15; 2 Thessalonians 2:15; 3:6; Ephesians 3:1–13; Colossians 1:24–29).
5. Every believer must be committed to do his part, both generally in one another ministry and specifically in the use of his gifts in the building up of the church (Romans 12:3–16; 1 Corinthians 12:4–6).
6. A pattern of relationships within the church must be observed—characterized by love, brotherhood, mutual acceptance and respect—in which each is to diligently pursue unity in the bond of peace (Romans 12:9–15; 14:1–7; Philippians 1:27–2:4; Ephesians 4:1–6).

7. A pattern of relationships in the world must be observed—characterized by respect for government, employees, and other authorities; and love and good deeds toward neighbors and those in need (Romans 13:1–7; Titus 2:14; 3:1, 14).
8. Individuals must lead responsible and sober lives—working hard, providing for their own, making the most of the time (because the days are evil), and keeping on the alert for Satan and his strategies in their lives (Ephesians 5:1–21; 6:10–18; 1 Thessalonians 4:9–12; 2 Thessalonians 3:6–15; 1 Peter 5:6–11).

Down Through the Centuries

Down through the centuries the Church built upon this foundation. In the first few centuries after the Apostles, the Early Church created creeds and didache manuals to establish believers in the faith. The creeds were attempts at summarizing the essence of the kerygma. The didaches were attempts at summarizing the Apostles' teaching. In the Reformation era, they developed confessions and catechisms. The confessions were like expanded creeds and the catechisms were like expanded didache manuals. Today, however, we have no serious, ordered way of helping people get established in the teaching.

The above material is taken from BILD's *Leadership Series*' course *Understanding the Essentials of Sound Doctrine*, in which you actually do your own work in the passages to summarize the kerygma and the didache.

Record your thoughts:



Think Through the Issues

Today we are not carefully founding people in the Apostles' teaching—in what the Early Church called “the didache.” We have fill-in-the-blank discipleship manuals, which do not require you to think, or we have dry, systematic theology manuals, which actually fragment the teaching. Reflect on how you were founded in the faith.

ISSUE: Contemporary approaches to founding believers in the faith

Think Through the Issue Before Discussion:

1. How were you founded in the faith? Were you carefully founded in the Apostles' teaching?
2. What might be some of the implications of not laying a careful foundation in a new believer's life? In the life of our churches?
3. How would you go about creating a process for establishing a new believer in the Apostles' teaching?
4. What might a relevant, effective, modern-day didache manual look like?

Record your initial thoughts on the issue before discussion:

Discuss the issue in your small group.

Record your initial thoughts on the issue after discussion:



Apply the Principles

Write your story of how you were founded in the faith. Also list experiences of others whom you know. How were they founded? Reflect on the implications of being left on your own to figure things out. How important is it for believers and churches to be properly founded in the faith?