***“In One Accord”: Bridging the Divide Between Doctrine & Practice***

By W. Jackson Watts[[1]](#footnote-1)

**Introduction (I)**

The apostle Luke described the earliest Christians using the phrase “one accord” (e.g.

Acts 1:14; 2:46, 4:24). The contexts in which such passages occur reveal at least two features of

the early Christian piety that sustained and spread the faith despite intense persecution. First,

they held radical beliefs about the identity of Jesus of Nazareth. In the face of imperial rule, they

confessed Him to be the Son of God who had come to inaugurate His kingdom. Second, they

were also set apart because of their peculiar practices. For many in the Roman Empire, the

Christians’ worship was bizarre because of how it differed from pagan worship practices. Some

ecclesial practices that elicited such confusion were love feasts, vocabulary such as “brother” and

“sister,” and worship of a resurrected Jew. There is no wonder they were thought to be cannibals,

sexual deviants, and even atheists. The connection between beliefs and practices was further

instantiated in other practices of the church such as their hymnody, testimony through baptism,

and their commitment to the burial of the dead.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Despite this clear, Scriptural unity between faith and practice, there is perhaps no

greater distinction made in evangelical life than the one between doctrine and practice. Though

many acknowledge that there is a biblical and logical relationship between the two, this

dichotomy remains intact in countless ways. It is perhaps rooted in a larger problem that drives a

wedge between theory and practice.[[3]](#footnote-3) Thus, in many academic settings, there are the “theoretical

disciplines” and the “practical disciplines.” Many institutions preserve the distinction in their

course titles.[[4]](#footnote-4) In a great deal of religious literature “theology” and “ethics” is the way the

separation between doctrine and practice is honored.[[5]](#footnote-5) Stanley Hauerwas, one of the more vocal

critics of this disjunction, puts it this way:

Indeed, I have been uneasy with the description of my work as ‘ethics,’ especially if ethics denotes a discipline separate from theology. I understand myself as a theologian and my work as theology proper. I have accepted the current academic designation of ‘ethics’ only because as a theologian I am convinced that the intelligibility and truthfulness of Christian convictions reside in their practical force.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Many church websites will list a doctrinal statement but then categorize their practices

under other headings such as worship or ministries. Additional polarities such as “Beliefs and

Behavior” or “Creed and Conduct” are other ways the doctrine-practice divide is perpetuated.

This distinction is further expressed in the varieties of definitions set forth for what

theology is. Lewis and Demarest note that, “theology is the topical and logical study of God’s

revealed nature and purposes.”[[7]](#footnote-7) Other theologians such as Wayne Grudem, Millard Erickson,

and Dale Moody define it using the language of “study,” “discipline,” and “an effort to think,”

respectively.[[8]](#footnote-8) Further, Alister McGrath says it is discourse.[[9]](#footnote-9) What all of these presentations have

in common is a firm connection between theology (doctrine) and what is rational or cognitive in

nature. Doctrine, it is said, comes in the form of ideas, concepts, and beliefs. Specifically, for the

Reformed and evangelical tradition, theology is closely connected with propositional revelation

that one uncovers from exegesis of Scripture.[[10]](#footnote-10) Practice, or what is also thought of as ethics, is

another matter. Behavior, conduct, and habits are terms that ultimately relate to the same general

notion of practice. These are concerned with the moral choices people make.[[11]](#footnote-11) Appropriate

moral action (practice) is thought to derive from right theory (doctrine). Theology, then, is about

what is known or believed, and ethics is about moral actions.

There is certainly a historic, biblical distinction between beliefs and practices. They do

address different, yet related realities. However, the account above is indicative of an outlook

that is pervasive in Christian life today—one that enlarges the divide between doctrine and

practice, particularly with respect to ecclesiology. The concern expressed here has been

increasingly addressed by theologians and other writers in recent years.[[12]](#footnote-12) By failing to recognize

the proper relationship between doctrine and practice, Christians fail to embody a holistic

spirituality. The church, in particular, falls prey to emphasizing doctrine or practice at the

expense of other. This type of error is often, though not exclusively, evidenced in Christian

worship. In some contexts it is reduced to a particular practice (singing) while other acts

considered more “doctrinaire” (preaching) are considered something else—essential, but

something different. More generally, the church fails to consider how a particular doctrine they

confess might constrain and shape a practice or ministry of the church.

This author shares the concerns cited above and writes with the conviction that the gulf

fixed between doctrine and practice can and must be bridged.[[13]](#footnote-13) This is a divide that the

theme of accordance in the New Testament beckons the church toward in the 21st century.

Otherwise, evangelical life is compromised in several fundamental ways. *Doctrine and practice*

*should be recognized as being equally important because they stand in a symbiotic relationship*

*to each other. Furthermore, the divide between doctrine and practice can be bridged by a*

*theology that emphasizes wisdom and desire as crucial features that link doctrine with*

*practice.[[14]](#footnote-14)* In order to defend this argument, the unity of doctrine and practice as a biblical issue

will be demonstrated. Additionally, reflecting on some practical ways that beliefs and practices

relate will reinforce our understanding of their relationship, and allow us to consider the role of

wisdom and desire in clarifying that relationship. Finally, some case studies of how this

argument might be manifested in the life and worship of the church will reinforce our

conclusions.

**Doctrine in Practice as a Biblical Issue (II)**

The apostle Luke is diligent to offer his readers insights into the patterns and

practices that characterized the early Christians, as well the context out of which they arose.

Determining what is intended to be *descriptive* in the Scriptures, especially in the book of Acts,

and deciding what is meant to be prescriptive (or normative) continues to be a robust

conversation among younger evangelicals, especially of the Reformed brand.[[15]](#footnote-15) However, one

thing that is beyond dispute is the portrait of unity in thought and practice in the early church.

Most English translations render these images of the church as being “together,” or in “one

accord.” The church was united in both its beliefs about the risen Christ as well as the

practices that accompanied and evidenced those convictions. Luke’s description is certainly not

intended to only be descriptive of religious phenomena, but to chart a course for the church

through a decadent culture.

The apostle Paul exhorted the Philippians to be of “one mind” and “one spirit” (Phil.

1:27). Additionally, he uses the language of accordance to exemplify the proper character

suitable to followers of the crucified Christ (Phil. 2:2). The general theme of unity will be

emphasized in other passages as well, but never at the expense of a) sound doctrine or b) sound

practice. For the apostles, these two were non-negotiable even amid all of the early conflict

concerning Jewish-Christian relations that had to be resolved (more on this later). Of course,

learning how the Gospel of Christ (doctrine) informs each particular step of ecclesial life

(practice) isn’t always obvious to see. One might think that it would have been better for the

new covenant to entail some elaborate system like the old so as to offer Christians a “practical

guide” for the decisions and situations they would encounter. And yet, the apostles argued that

grace and the Spirit are better teachers (Gal. 3:24).

Our reading of such texts, however, occurs within a particular religious landscape. For

many readers, that landscape is Protestant evangelicalism. In the wake of the debates over

inerrancy, evolution, and sexual ethics, right-thinking has often been emphasized more

frequently than right-practices.[[16]](#footnote-16) When we consider contemporary forces such as skepticism and

agnosticism, it seems essential to focus on beliefs since the challenges seem rational or

intellectual in nature.[[17]](#footnote-17) Yet Paul’s exhortation to

Titus is a great example of how we must find the “accord” between doctrine and practice: “But

as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine” (Titus 2:1)[[18]](#footnote-18).

In other words, there is a manner of life consistent with the beliefs of the church.

Together they form an indissoluble unity that, though distinct, is intended to be embodied. The

general structure of New Testament thought, James discussion of faith and works, Jesus in the

Sermon on the Mount further demonstrate this important dialectic.

The Structure of NT Thought

One of the more common ways that the relationship between doctrine and practice can be

observed is by attending to the very structure of many of the New Testament epistles. It is often

in the early chapters of epistles, namely Ephesians and Colossians, that the person and work of

Jesus Christ is addressed. Salvation in particular is unpacked in Ephesians 1-2. However, the

instruction to Christians households, for instance, doesn’t come until the later chapters of those

epistles. Romans is perhaps a better instance of the way doctrine (theological foundations) is

given before ethics (practical implications/exhortations) are given. First come the indicatives,

and then the imperatives. Many New Testament surveys reflect this understanding.[[19]](#footnote-19)

Two important observations should be made here regarding this. First, it is clear that

doctrine and practice are deeply important to the Christian outlook. Christians follow “the way,

the truth, and the life” which entails both clear ideas about who Jesus is and a manner of life to

which He calls His followers. There is no dispute over this. The question is over the nature of the

relationship between the two. The problem being addressed here is how to bridge the divide that

often seems to keep the two from flowing in and out of one another. The second observation is

that the shape of the New Testament is helpful in shedding light of this divide. On the one hand,

it does distinguish between the two, so one could potentially possess the right belief, but the

wrong practice, or vice versa. Believing in the generosity of God but not understanding how that

informs Christian giving is an actual dilemma that a believer may experience. Thus, we have

Paul’s reminder to the Corinthians: “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that

though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become

rich” (2 Cor. 8:9). On the other hand, acknowledging the distinction too readily can allow a form

of separation between faith and practice inconsistent with Christian spirituality.

The New Testament teaches exemplifies balance between the two. Consider Colossians

3:1 as a case-study: “If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above,

where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.” Paul is arguing for a particular way of life

(“seek the things above”) on the basis of the transformation that Christ has wrought in their lives.

It obviously relates to the affections (more on this later), but he is reminding them of a state of

affairs that they *believe* to be true about themselves by virtue of their profession. F.F. Bruce,

then, helpfully relates this dynamic to our present discussion. He argues that the reference to the

exaltation of Christ in the later part of the verse is not intended for an “ornamental purpose.”

Rather, didactic (*paraenetic* is his word) sections

regularly presuppose the content of the apostolic preaching. What God has done for his people in Christ is the grand argument and incentive for Christian living. The apostolic teaching or *didache* may be distinguished from the preaching or *kerygma*, but it is founded on the preaching—and in any case the distinction between the two should not be pressed too sharply.[[20]](#footnote-20)

Here Bruce is not only acknowledging observable, conceptual distinctions. There is also an

implicit warning to those who would separate apostolic doctrine and moral instruction.

James on Faith & Works

The book of James has often been referred to as the “proverbs” or “wisdom literature” of

the New Testament. The book is often presented as one whose chief purpose is to address

practical concerns over and against theological ones. The main reason for such a perception is his

unique emphasis on the role of works in the Christian life. It is no wonder, then, that Martin

Luther was so anxious about the canonicity of James’ epistle!

The heart of this brief epistle is in 2:14-26. Prior to this, his argument builds upon the

danger of being a hearer of the word but not a doer of the word (1:19-25). He offers tangible

examples such as the sin of partiality to show how one might not appreciate the relationship

between what God has done (choosing the poor in the world to be rich, kingdom heirs) and the

way Christians actually treat the poor. Yet this paves the way for the apex of James’ theological

argument about living faith when he says that this sort of faith that doesn’t produce good works

is in fact dead (2:14-17). He is trying to persuade his readers to not pit faith against works,

and instead to see the superiority of a testimony that demonstrates real faith through good works

(v. 18). True faith only knows works that accompany it. His letter upends the hypocrite who

would say, “I have faith,” or, “I believe in the Christian God,” while their life is absent of any

visible, active faith. Even demons are orthodox in their beliefs! (v. 19).

James goes as far to contradict, at least at first glance, Paul’s cry of *sola fidei* in verse 24:

“You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone” (No wonder Luther was so

anxious about James!). James is simply explaining and emphasizing the organic link between

saving, authentic faith and grace-oriented works. This tension is, of course, evident when

juxtaposed with Paul’s emphasis on justification by faith (Rom. 2:23-26; 4:3). Yet upon closer

inspection, Paul’s account of faith frees one up to being a slave to a new way of life filled with

good works (Rom. 6:15-22). Study of Paul’s circumstances in Romans and Galatians shows

them to be unique contexts that required a presentation shaped by different literary and

theological concerns.

James leaves the reader with a very precise argument: An affirmation of belief (*assensus*)

is much more than mere mental assent. It must include something deeper (*fiducia*) that issues

forth in good works. This is what true religion is all about. As ethicist Mark Liederbach puts it,

“stated beliefs plus actual practice equals actual belief.”[[21]](#footnote-21) This formulation leads us to consider

the danger of hypocrisy in a new light. Although the divide between doctrine and practice is

characterized differently by James than say Jesus, the Sermon on the Mount performs the same

bridging function designed to address the gap between doctrine and practice.

The Sermon on the Mount

One of the aims of Scripture is to help people encounter the God who “discloses the

purposes of the heart” (1 Cor. 4:5). As C.S. Lewis once said, “Human beings judge one another

by their external actions. God judges them by their moral choices.”[[22]](#footnote-22) Jesus is uniquely capable

to do this because in Him the fullness of God dwells bodily (Col. 1:19; 2:9). His most famous

section of discourse, the Sermon on the Mount, still receives scholarly and popular expositions

by evangelicals.[[23]](#footnote-23) However, many times those studies do not situate themselves within the

context of this discussion. In the earlier section, namely 5:21-48, tries to help His disciples

rethink the true depth of righteousness and obedience concerning the Old Testament law. He

hints at this when he speaks about His fulfillment of the law as opposed to abolishing it, and

indicates that a new covenant morality reaches deeper (5:17). It is, in no way, “relaxed” (5:19).

In stunning fashion, He explains the remarkable ways in which verbal and intellectual

affirmations are enjoined to actions, intentions, and desires.

Consider Jesus’ words about adultery in Matthew 5:27-30. As He spoke (“you have heard

it said”), His listeners no doubt affirmed the truthfulness of the commandment to not commit

adultery and rested confidently in the fact that they had never broken it. Yet Jesus heightens the

drama by saying, “But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has

already committed adultery with her in his heart.” The eye’s activity, coupled with the heart’s

intent, proves to violate this seemingly external command. Jesus’ morality, in other words, deals

with the intellect and the body. It goes beyond our knowledge about right and wrong (beliefs)

and our bodily conduct (practice) to deal also with our affections or desires (“lustful intent”).

True morality has to do with our beliefs, our behavior, and our desires. What we want or love

matters. We might also say what our affections are directed toward or shaped by is of great

concern to Jesus. More will be said concerning the role of desires later.

This latter concern will come as no surprise to many familiar with the larger corpus of

Western thought. Ethical theories or outlooks often address notions such as desire and not

merely conduct.[[24]](#footnote-24) But the attitude of the heart emerges as a pattern in other portions of this

sermon as well. Jesus suggests that anger against one’s brother violates the spirit of the

commandment not to murder (Mt. 5:21-26). Likewise, other earthly relationships where

agreements might be forged (marriage, oaths) are subject to a particular form of moral judgments

and action if one is to truly fulfill the law. In Richard Hays’ words, “where the Law poses

regulative limitations on divorce and revenge, Jesus calls his followers to renounce these options

altogether.”[[25]](#footnote-25) In sum, our real theological commitments are evidenced and measured by, and in

some sense, coequal to our ethics. These claims are controversial—and rightfully so. Knowing

that one’s works and desires are just as important as his beliefs is a threat to human self-

sufficiency. Yet it is consistent with the moral vision of the New Testament.

Summary

The structure and content of much of the New Testament displays this dynamic between

doctrine and practice. On the one hand, they are distinct. On the other hand, too wide a

distinction often results in thinking that they can exist apart from one another in the Christian

life. This in turn fosters a spiritual hypocrisy repudiated by Christ and the apostolic message. It

then becomes crucial that the relationship between doctrine and practice be further examined.

Reframing the relationship between doctrine and practice certainly warrants the attention

it is receiving in academic circles. Yet it unquestionably deserves more attention in the local

church—a crucial hub for cultivating Christian virtue. As Dorothy Bass contends, practices are

“patterns of cooperative human activity in and through which life together takes shape over time

in response to and in the light of God as known in Jesus Christ.”[[26]](#footnote-26) If this is true, then this means

that focusing on practices invites “theological reflection on the ordinary, concrete activities of

actual people—and also on the knowledge of God that shapes, infuses, and arises from these

activities.”[[27]](#footnote-27)

It is when we reflect on the actual realities of contemporary experience as well as

corporate life in the church that we see the relationship between doctrine and practice as a

*symbiotic* one. It is one that, for all our efforts to manage them, will manage us if we do not

attend to them thoughtfully. The biblical testimony says they belong together. What does

contemporary practice today and in the past tell us?

**Doctrine in Practice as a Practical Issue (III)**

In order to better understand how belief and behavior relate, we might look to an

unexpected place to find anecdotal evidence. The late twentieth century gave rise to an

unprecedented amount of pornography. “*Porne”* (fornication) has always existed in various

forms. But the rise of print and online pornography has been something of an epidemic.

Gradually many researchers have published their findings, and the results have been astounding:

men who frequently view pornography begin to demonstrate adverse behavior toward women.

They are also generally more abusive toward women. The research further shows that

pornography not only affects their attitude and actions, but their very beliefs. Their estimation

of women’s worth and value is diminished as a result of their engagement with pornography.[[28]](#footnote-28)

Similarly, practices and habits reinforce beliefs, attitudes, and dispositions. But they also

create them as well! The relationship is symbiotic (not strictly cause-effect). Like traditional

Christian thought, this study shows that humans’ rational and moral capacities are tied to their

bodies, and more specifically their behavior and affections. This then discredits the sharp

distinction often drawn between beliefs and behavior, or from seeing the former as necessarily

prior. It also challenges that paradigm that allows us to conveniently separate what we know

from what we do.

Tim Lane and Paul Tripp extend this argument by demonstrating that the experiences that

human beings experience are hermeneutical in nature. In their words, “they become lenses we

use to interpret life.”[[29]](#footnote-29) They explain it this way:

Very few people wake up one morning and decide to change their theology. Changes in a person’s belief system are seldom that self-conscious…The emotions we feel as we first go through difficult experiences are not static. They morph into subtle but extremely influential conclusions about God, ourselves, others, and life. Yet these major changes in what we believe have not been well thought out…Rather, our unresolved feelings become our interpretations of life. Emotions morph into conclusions, and we end up not believing the things we say we believe.[[30]](#footnote-30)

Tripp and Lane write from the perspective of those with a background in psychology. Yet they

argue that this insight is crucial to understanding the nature of sanctification and human change.

Another instance in which we glimpse this symbiotic (mutually-reinforcing) relationship

between beliefs and practices is the phrase *lex orandi, lex credendi* (Latin;“the law of prayer is

the law of belief”). It refers to an ancient Christian principle which is concerned with the

relationship between worship and belief. Though more influential in the thought of Catholic and

Anglican traditions, *lex orandi lex credendi* provided a means for developing ancient creeds, the

canon of Scripture, and other doctrinal questions on the basis of the church’s prayer texts

(liturgy). In the early church, a liturgical tradition predated a common creed and an official

biblical canon. However, this ancient principle signaled how liturgical traditions provided a

framework for making such decisions. In the words of Proper of Aquitaine, “Let us consider the

sacraments of priestly prayer, which having been handed down by the apostles are celebrated

uniformly throughout the whole world and in every catholic Church so that the law of praying

might establish the law of believing.”[[31]](#footnote-31) Furthermore, according to the official *Catechism of the*

*Catholic Church*, “the Church’s faith precedes the faith of the believer who is invited to adhere

to it. When the Church celebrates the sacraments, she confesses the faith received from the

apostles…The law of prayer is the law of faith: the Church believes as she prays.”[[32]](#footnote-32)

This ancient principle informs our present discussion in this way: it demonstrates a

precedent in Christian history where practices informed beliefs. It also emphasizes the intimate

relation between the two.[[33]](#footnote-33) *Lex orandi, lex credendi* is a useful principle for reflection because it

enables Christians even in the 21st century to realize that the practices of the church, particularly

in the theological language that is used, reinforce and shape certain beliefs. One might think that

we needn’t worry about such a possibility since we have the Scriptures directly to inform our

ecclesiology. However, there are so many extra-biblical practices beyond the immediate worship

service that constitute the church’s life that have the capacity to reinforce or undermine particular

beliefs. The challenge is for those living beyond the apostolic era to consider all that might

“accord with sound practice,” to use the words of the apostle Paul to Titus.

While more on the worship of the church will be considered later, the example of

how pornography works helps show that the relationship between beliefs and behavior is not

quite as simple as it is often thought to be. In other words, it isn’t always an issue of possessing

right beliefs and right behavior will naturally follow. Behavior also has a direct bearing on the

moral vision or disposition of an individual—which we might associate with beliefs. This

coincides with a crucial question that Leroy Forlines asked several decades ago: “If orthodox

thought is necessary for sound morality, the question might be asked if a sound morality is

essential for orthodoxy?”[[34]](#footnote-34) Forlines goes on to answer that by explaining that it is, indicating that

in American culture the decline of morality is certainly related to a broad rejection of biblical

authority. Yet, he also argues that certain forms of behavior render particular beliefs all the more

implausible. He uses the example of sin, for instance, as something that prevents one from

forming a right perspective on hell and judgment.[[35]](#footnote-35) He concludes his reflections by saying that,

“Orthodoxy and morality [orthopraxy] are inseparably bound together. Each needs the other.

Anemic morality cannot continually support orthodox theology and orthodox Christian

experiences.”[[36]](#footnote-36)

Additionally, *lex orandi, lex credendi* shows the historic and practical relationship

between doctrine and practice in the life of the church. It further confirms Forlines’ contentions

that what we do shapes what we believe as do our beliefs shape our behavior. The dilemma that

evangelicals inherit is a circumstance where so much of the emphasis has been placed on

beliefs. Thus it is quite easy for them to only be concerned about sound doctrine in the church

while “what accords with sound doctrine” (practices) is not given its due attention.[[37]](#footnote-37) So what is

more important—orthodoxy or orthopraxy?

The answer is not to privilege practice over doctrine. After all, because legalism is such

a default religion of the human heart, attention to Christian practices will already exist without

carelessly swinging the pendulum of emphasis away from beliefs to practices. What is needed,

however, once we understand practices exist in a symbiotic relationship with doctrine, is to

refocus the angle of the lens through which we see doctrine, or theology broadly speaking. There

are two components of a well-orbed theology that helps us think of doctrine in a symbiotic

relationship with practice. These two are wisdom and desire.[[38]](#footnote-38)

**Toward a Solution A: Theology as Wisdom (IV)**

Theology since the Enlightenment has been frequently framed in distinctly rational

terms. In contending with the dueling outlooks of empiricism and rationalism, theologians have

felt compelled to frame their work to respond in such terms. To borrow a common metaphor,

orthodox Christian theologians have been the “away team,” trying to compete for intellectual

plausibility. In the process, they have often forfeited many of the typical advantages associated

with home-field advantage: traditional categories and language, broad institutional support, and

the social and phenomenological strength of incumbency.[[39]](#footnote-39) Before passing judgment, of course,

we should be slow to criticize our forebears since theology throughout the centuries has been

contextual. In other words, the nature of the debate has always shaped theology’s function and

presentation.[[40]](#footnote-40) Yet what has been lost in modernity’s obsession with the conditions of knowledge

(epistemic concerns) is a focus on how Christian truth claims about reality (ontology) assumes

form in the church and the world (ethics). Ellen Charry says that theology in the modern age

came to be thought of as the intellectual justification of the faith, apart from the practice of the Christian life. The wisdom of God has ceased to function in the church as the foundation of the good life. Theology is no longer expected to be a practical discipline, burdened as it is in the modern period with the awkwardness of speaking of God at all.”[[41]](#footnote-41)

In other words, there is historic evidence that theology (doctrine) came to be severed from

practice. Some argue that theology was reduced to metaphysics, while others say apologetics.

However, in either case the result was the same: church dogma was no longer doctrine in service

to the church’s practices, viz. its worship.

Ellen Charry in her book *By the Renewing of Your Minds* argues that theology has

historically always related knowledge to practice. Charry develops this argument through a close

reading of several biblical and classical texts, including Paul, Augustine, Athanasius, Basil of

Caesarea, Anselm, and Calvin. She points out the pastoral and moral aims that shaped the

teachings of these theologians on a wide range of doctrines. Charry argues that “taking the

doctrines of the Christian faith seriously was assumed to change how we think and act—to

remake us.”[[42]](#footnote-42) Thus, Charry calls for theology to recapture the “pastoral function” that

historically it possessed. Doctrine, she believes, should be considered an “aid in cultivating a

skilled and excellent life.”[[43]](#footnote-43) Practically, this means that it is considered as a means to lead

believers into a life of wisdom (what Augustine called *sapientia*). David Clark picks up this

same point and explains further:

Augusine preferred the word ‘wisdom’ (in Latin, *sapientia*) to ‘knowledge’ (in Latin, *scientia*; basically *episteme* in Greek and *Wissen* in German) as a description of the Christian reflection about God. *Sapientia* is contemplative understanding of divine and eternal things. *Scientia* is active knowledge of mundane and temporal things….in Augustine’s sense, theology goes beyond mere science to wisdom as the believer orders or applies knowledge according to the highest good, namely, the love of God…It is information applied for the purpose of transformation.[[44]](#footnote-44)

This outlook held great sway over many who followed Augustine, and is being emphasized by a

number of contemporary theologians. In this Augustine steered Western Christianity to the view

that by knowing God we come to love him, and by loving him we come to know him.”[[45]](#footnote-45)

Though we will say more about how love relates to this perspective in section V, here it

is crucial to note that Augustine calls our attention to something that is crucial for bridging the

divide between doctrine and practice. It is not enough to recognize that the relationship between

what we believe or know and what we do is not as tidy as it is often thought to be. It is another,

however, to introduce this vision of wisdom. It reframes “knowing” as not just an exercise in the

intellect, but a disposition of the heart that seeks transformation and renewal. For Aquinas, moral

transformation came from knowing God and virtue was acquired by practice. Augustine nuanced

this perspective by arguing that knowing God was essential, but insufficient apart from loving

God. In Clark’s words, “*scientia*, isolated by itself, is a *truncated theology*.” He argues that “the

definitive purpose of theology is the knowledge of God applied as wisdom. It forms godly

character in Christians as they live in community, and it governs the loves and the lives of

faithful Christians who serve God and transform culture.”[[46]](#footnote-46) Doctrine, then, is knowledge about

God that is aimed toward loving Him (i.e. living for Him). Seeing the relationship between

doctrine and practice this way seems to correspond to the clear link that the apostle Paul makes

between sound doctrine and godliness (1 Tim. 1:10; 4:6; 6:3). Moral change is always in view,

not doctrine for the sake of doctrine.

We might wonder why such emphasis on wisdom moves the discussion along. After all,

much ado continues to be made about the religious significance of the wisdom literature in

Jewish and Christian publications.[[47]](#footnote-47) Ironically, the moniker “wisdom literature,” for all its

pedagogical benefits, often muddies our ability to discern the broader dimensions of wisdom.

Simply put, some form of wisdom is guiding all decisions of how beliefs should inform

behavior, and determining what kind of behavior is consistent with a particular belief. This task

is much broader than the message of three books of Scripture, but involves the entire canon as it

forms and shapes its readers. This does not mean, of course, that practicing wisdom is efficient

or obvious in our experience. Determining what it means, for instance, for a church to embody a

belief in penal substitutionary atonement or justification by faith in its practices is not always

clear-cut. Besides the immediate verbal proclamation of such doctrine, how these beliefs actually

shape the communal practices and worship of the church is an ongoing effort of reflection guided

by a Christ-centered, biblical worldview. But because it is a challenge in contemporary culture

to adjudicate between a range of appropriate practices, whether in ecclesial life or our

engagement with the world, this provides all the more reason to envision our doctrine as a form

of wisdom.

Along these lines, one might argue that the Scriptures do not speak univocally about all

of the practices of the community, which is evidence for the primacy of beliefs. After all, the

example in section II concerning Jewish-Christian relations seems to prove this. Paul sets forth a

theology of grace in Galatians that reframes the debate over whether or not the appropriate

practice that follows will be circumcision or not. In this example, it seems that the case for

orthodoxy is foundational for orthopraxy, and thus is logically and spiritually prior. However,

right thinking about grace and the law (orthodoxy) *requires* wisdom if the appropriate action

(orthopraxy)—whether circumcision or not—is an action to be taken or not. Paul is absolutely

concerned with orthopraxy because it is the very practice of circumcision that is the immediate

cause of Paul’s message! There is a sort of ethic, namely wisdom and love, that is essential to

guiding the New Testament church in certain situations that arise.[[48]](#footnote-48) Once again, right doctrine

and right practice are equally important because they are mutually reinforcing aspects of the

Christian experience—and especially the church’s life.

In the Free Will Baptist tradition, Leroy Forlines is an example of one who helps unveil

this dynamic in his *Biblical Ethics*.[[49]](#footnote-49)In outlining the necessary considerations of biblical ethics,

Forlines says “all morals and ideals are reducible to four basic values.”[[50]](#footnote-50) Among these is

wisdom. Wisdom, he says, has to do with “doctrinal, moral, and spiritual truth” being translated

into “practical truth for real life situations.”[[51]](#footnote-51) It is the concrete shape of not only the lives of

individual Christians, but the church’s life and worship that requires such wisdom. The

Scriptures do not come to readers in the form of a 21st century ecclesiology monograph. Rather,

it comes to the church in proverbs, narrative, poetry, epistle, and other dynamic genres. Because

the demand is for wisdom to shape the church’s practices, the temptation to draw from the

norms, models, and liturgies of the world will always linger. But seeking biblical wisdom is the

only recipe for spiritual vitality.

Our emphasis here on wisdom is founded largely on an Augustinian approach that

emphasizes *sapientia* over *scientia*. Christian doctrine is intended to lead one to know and love

God. This prepares us to consider the affective function of Christian doctrine, which is connected

with a concern for wisdom and its goal to guide believers to right practice.

**Toward a Solution B: The Affective Function of Christian Doctrine (V)**

What happens when right beliefs don’t lead to right behavior? Using New Testament

language, this might simply be called “hypocrisy.” The problems with separating theology

(doctrine) from ethics (practice) has been expressed already. Because these two belong together

biblically, effectively divorcing them renders Christianity incoherent. They flow in and out of

one another. And yet the problem remains that for all the right beliefs one might possess about

God and the world, a gaping divide between those beliefs and moral conduct still lingers. What is

the culprit for this spiritual deficiency? Why do many Christians have so little to show for all

their sound theology? The unexpected answer to this question can be found by asking a more

fundamental question: “What is a person?” In order to answer this question, we must consider

the important role love or desire plays in bridging the divide between doctrine and practice.

James K.A. Smith’s *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* is a

helpful guide. [[52]](#footnote-52)

Smith’s book is specifically intended for those engaged in Christian education. He asserts

that one reason why so much teaching fails is because it is predicated upon an incorrect view of

what human beings are. Because people are primarily *lovers*, education is primarily a formative

enterprise rather than an informative one. While he doesn’t reject the importance of ideas or

beliefs, neither primarily define nor move people. Smith argues that people are primarily shaped

and directed by their *desires*.[[53]](#footnote-53) Often we think that beliefs are primary, while behaviors are

secondary (which explains why inconsistent behavior is tolerated more than bad doctrine is). Yet

this assumes that people are primarily *thinkers*—“knowing” or “believing creatures.” Instead,

Smith argues that we are primarily *lovers—*beings defined by desires.[[54]](#footnote-54) Practically, it is more

useful to ask what someone *loves* or *wants* as opposed to what they believe if you really want to

know someone*.* The heart is the center of man, biblically-speaking. Often in Scripture one’s

true character is associated with their desires, and not merely beliefs.[[55]](#footnote-55) Yet if this is true, where

does this leave the significance of beliefs? More importantly, how can seeing humans primarily

as *lovers* help bring doctrine and practice together?

Smith argues that *desires* constitute a crucial link between beliefs and behavior. Amy

Plantinga Pouw echoes this perspective when she says, “thinking of these three collectively helps

us attend to the gaps between beliefs and practices.[[56]](#footnote-56) We may know what is right, but desires are

pivotal to ethics. Rightly-ordered desires can help our actions to be consistent with our beliefs.

But if this is true, how are desires ordered in the first place? Smith believes it is through

cultural liturgies in the course of life. While ‘culture’ has often been a notoriously difficult

concept to define, Smith offers this simple definition: Culture is “the work that we do that

unpacks the potential of the world.”[[57]](#footnote-57) We should see culture as the stuff humans make.[[58]](#footnote-58)

But this is only the first part of the argument. The second is that as we create culture, it in

turn shapes us. Cultural artifacts function as “liturgies of desire.” These are formative practices

that orient us to the world and direct our loves. While “liturgy” connotes religious overtones,

it pertains to all of life.[[59]](#footnote-59) Our experience with all aspects of culture implicitly educates us. These

may be social habits, the places we frequent, or the tools we use. Practices, institutions, and

artifacts all comprise ‘culture.’ These elements of culture influence us, mold us, and direct our

desires. They influence what we want. Practical engagement with culture creates habits, and

those habits lead to desires.

Smith uses a fascinating illustration about visiting a shopping mall to illustrate his

argument. Visiting a mall can be exhilarating for some people. An elegant banner hanging from

the ceiling, an attractive figure in a storefront window, or an aroma of the food court—each of

these envelope people subtly. The mall then becomes a “religious,” “liturgical,” and even

“pedagogical institution,” since it teaches us what we should want.[[60]](#footnote-60) The mall’s images, sounds,

and aromas portray a vision of “the good life.” On an instinctual level they say to customers,

“Try this! Experience this! Desire this! This is what will satisfy!”[[61]](#footnote-61) This cultural experience

orients individual desires to a certain pattern of life. With this, the relationship between what one

believes and what one does is complicated because evangelical thinking often ignores how

human desire figures into that relationship.

This leads to the final component to Smith’s argument that brings us back to the original

question: How can beliefs and behaviors be consistent in our daily experience? Understanding

the primacy of desire or love, and how practices shape them is crucial. But a final question is

also important—namely, what should we want and how does it make a difference? Even if some

are skeptical about the proposition that we are *primarily* lovers, it isn’t difficult to acknowledge

that what we love is an enormous component of who we are. Furthermore, our passions and

desires are strong, driving many of our actions. However, if there are countless institutions and

practices at work in our lives that are forming our habits of desire, it is crucial to consider which

*direction* they are being pointed. As implied in Smith’s title, he argues that everyone *desires a*

*kingdom*. The kingdom is whatever constitutes human flourishing. Whatever is imagined to be

“the good life” is a conception of this kingdom. And because all human beings love or desire

something, whatever they love or desire *most* is their kingdom. It is their ultimate, highest

aspiration. It is what their heart is set upon. It is also what they believe to be real.[[62]](#footnote-62)

Admittedly, Smith’s anthropology is complex.[[63]](#footnote-63) In fact, if were were to adopt his

approach entirely it would undermine the very argument of this paper! The aim of uniting right

doctrine with right practice requires that we attend to the pivotal role that desire or affections

plays within the faculties of a Christian. Furthermore, Smith’s anthropology also deals with the

desires in such a way as to help us think more deeply about practices as being *formative* of

desires, and not always simply a studied, logical movement one makes as a result of possessing

the right belief.

An emphasis on the primacy of love and the importance of its *direction* or orientation

combines with wisdom to promote “accordance” between doctrine and practice. If what we love

is tied to what we believe in the depth of our being, it will inevitably result in a certain kind of

behavior or ethics. It is then our charge to be more attentive to the formative liturgies of life—

our practices, habits, and cultural influences. As Smith cautions, “these practices [cultural

influences] are not neutral or benign, but rather intentionally loaded to form us into certain kinds

of people—to unwittingly make us disciples of rival kings and patriotic citizens of rival

kingdoms.”[[64]](#footnote-64) It is through the rhythms of constant practices that our understanding and desires

are formed and directed toward a biblical vision of kingdom life. Craig Dykstra and Dorothy

Bass illustrate this principle by speaking about the Sabbath. They argue that

Christians who keep holy a weekly day of rest and worship acquire… an embodied knowledge that the world does not depend on our capacity for ceaseless work and that its life is not under our control. Observing Sabbath on the Lord’s Day, Christian practitioners come to know in their bones that creation is God’s gift, that God does not intend that anyone should work without respite, and that God has conquered death in the resurrection of Christ.[[65]](#footnote-65)

Beliefs and behavior go together Yet *desire* is often the missing link in theological reflection.

Thus, the rituals which form and aim desires deserve just as much scrutiny as beliefs.[[66]](#footnote-66)

When we take this proposal seriously, we begin to appreciate the complexity of the

Christian life, which in turns better prepares us embody sound doctrine. To return to Forlines’

approach to ethics, his proposal also links wisdom with love.[[67]](#footnote-67) In another work, he argues that

the heart must be addressed in a discussion of orthodoxy and its relationship to morality.[[68]](#footnote-68) It is

easy to reduce this discussion of the heart to what is commonly referred to as the moral nature of

man. “Heart” then is reduced to only referring to the human conscience. And yet we know that

regeneration includes a renewal of the whole self. Scripture in addressing our imaginations,

“speaks to our minds, wills, and emotions alike.”[[69]](#footnote-69) This is why the Lukan account of the early

church being “in one accord” is so important. Those accounts don’t only presuppose mutually-

held convictions about Christ and appropriate practices. Such accounts also speak about the

joy and gladness that characterized such a community (Acts 2:46-47). They were united in their

loves or desires such that they could agree on doctrine and engage in practices together.

In considering this portrait of the early church’s accordance, it leads the 21st century

church to evaluate its corporate life, viz. its worship. What practices are being pursued that

reinforce and instantiate the doctrine of the church? How does a thicker account of wisdom and

desire inform one’s theology so as to link sound doctrine to sound practice? In section VI, some

final case studies will be considered.

**Implications for the Church (VI)**

Geoffrey Wainwright says in the preface to his well-known book *Doxology* the

following: “My conviction is that the relations between doctrine and worship are deeper rooted

and further reaching than many theologians and liturgists have appeared to recognize in their

writings.”[[70]](#footnote-70) Christian worship is a helpful place to evaluate the dialectic between doctrine and

practice. Amid the “worship wars” waged in churches, much has been lost. While unity and

witness are among them, the true purpose and nature of worship is often obscured. Additionally,

attempts to relate practices to beliefs or convictions is also given little reflection. Here we will

consider three examples in Christian worship today where some correctives might be found in

light of the proposal advanced in this paper.[[71]](#footnote-71)

Singing the Word

Due to the rhetoric regarding church music (“praise and worship”), it isn’t difficult to

overlook the affective and doxological dimensions of Christian worship. These are typically the

themes that resound in popular treatments of the subject. However, thanks to hymnody in the

early church and through the Reformation era, the pedagogical aspect of singing has been

emphasized as well.[[72]](#footnote-72) In reality, the Christian tradition has simply tried to embody the principles

taught in Scripture. Colossians 3:16 says, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching

and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with

thankfulness in your hearts to God.” In the same verse, there is an emphasis on doctrine (word of

Christ), practice (singing), and affection or love (thankfulness to God). The function of song is to

enable God’s Word to dwell in the body of Christ so as to create an environment of gratitude.

This interpretation is relatively benign, and could be agreed upon by all parties engaged

in “the worship wars.” However, countless decisions are and will always have to be made

concerning music. Which instruments will be used? How will acoustic concerns be managed?

Will the church use hymnals or sing the lyrics from a screen? The list of questions could go on

endlessly. Many will be tempted to do is look outside of Scripture and the broader Christian

tradition for wisdom to make such decisions. But deliberate reflection (applied wisdom) must be

given to such issues if the church’s confession is to translate into sound practice. Rendering all

decisions not explicitly addressed in Scripture as “gray” ultimately will allow preference to be

the final arbiter of such decisions. However, how would wisdom inform such a discussion?

Consider the volume of the church’s music. In many cases, a music director will make

this determination based on the harmonization of the instruments, the particular song, or any

number of other factors. However, wise reflection enables us to make a practical decision in this

area by considering Colossians 3:16. If singing is to be instructive and also to build up the

church, then those singing must be able to hear their neighbor sing. Likewise, being able to hear

oneself sing is a practical necessity if the purpose of singing (a doctrinal issue) is to be

accomplished: instruction and encouragement. How can a spirit of thankfulness to God percolate

among God’s people when created instruments eclipse the only natural instrument given to the

church: the human voice?

It is certainly true that no specific decibel level is mandated by Scripture. However, in

this small example we see how applied wisdom enables the church to embody its biblical beliefs

through a practice. Particularly, it causes us to give attention to how various worship practices

form and shape participants, and in turn directs their hearts toward Christ.

Reading the Word

1 & 2 Timothy and Titus are commonly referred to as the pastoral epistles because Paul

addresses themes that have direct bearing on the pastoral leadership of Timothy and Titus. He is

also seeking to address the organization and form that a healthy Gospel community assumes. In

the midst of 1 Timothy, Paul instructs a young pastor to be devoted to the public reading of

Scripture (4:13). Hearing the word in such a manner has enjoyed a long tradition within the

church. Even as far back as the Old Testament do we observe reading of the Scripture

accompanying exposition of the Word. Moses’ dispensation of the law in Deuteronomy and the

ministry of Ezra are classic examples. It is then the intention of the New Testament writers to

facilitate the church’s worship by using multiple means to emphasize the hearing of the Word:

singing, preaching, praying, and public reading. Aside from “ornamental purposes,” to use the

language of F.F. Bruce, the Word is to be heard in this latter fashion. It was to not only impart

information, but to produce transformation as evidenced by the weeping of those hearing Ezra’s

public reading (Ez. 8:8-9). It reinforced the belief that Israel’s God was holy, and His words

were to be revered.

It is along these lines that the formative power of Christian worship should be given some

consideration. Worship is meant to form and mold worshippers into the kinds of people who not

only adore and praise God on Sunday mornings, but who worship Him in all of life. This is why

the Bible can speak of worship in a narrow sense (the corporate gathering), as well as a broader

sense (Rom. 12:1-2). Formation means that worship isn’t only something we do. It actually does

something to us as well. It refers to the gradual, embodied acts experienced and inculcated in

worship. Every time someone stands listening to a Scripture reading, writes a tithe-check,

handles a hymnal, or prays publicly, they are being molded to think, act, and feel certain ways.[[73]](#footnote-73)

While boredom and apathy are temptations, weekly practices can reinforce theological

convictions about praying, singing, and giving, whether we realize it or not.

This is why typically reading Scripture should include listeners standing out of reverence.

Standing and bowing both typically connote attentiveness, reverence, and awe. In these bodily

actions a worshipper can demonstrate and learn a deeper humility and spiritual interest in God’s

truth. This corresponds with James’ emphasis on humility which is a disposition essential for

receiving the Word. (Jas. 1:21). Standing can be a practice that honors the belief that God’s

mighty word is an extension of himself. Timothy Ward summarizes this well:

To disobey God himself, and to refuse to submit to the command God utters is simply to break one’s relationship with him. Thus (we may say) God has *invested* himself in his words, or we could say that God has so *identified* himself with his words that whatever someone does to God’s words (whether it is to obey or to disobey) they do directly to God himself.[[74]](#footnote-74)

It then becomes reasonable for the church to represent such a conviction in its worship.

Worship is indeed adoration, as well as pedagogical. Yet it is a way of embodying,

displaying, and appropriating the church’s theological claims. A psalm sung in a moment of

anguish is our tongues’ way of saying that our “head-knowledge” of God’s attentive ear is

inadequate by itself. No, our theology maps onto both body and mind.

Seeing the Word

A final example that Free Will Baptist are acquainted with shows how we might not only

“see the Word” in worship, but it is a practice that links beliefs with the heart: the ordinance of

feet washing. *The Free Will Baptist Treatise of Faith and Practices* states, “This is a sacred

ordinance, which teaches humility and reminds the believers of the necessity of a daily cleansing

from all sin.”[[75]](#footnote-75) This statement strikes at the heart of wedding theology to practice. Feet washing

teaches and reminds, apart from words, that Christ condescended to our lowly estate to serve,

and not to be served. While the Scriptures entail words of institution in connection to the Lord’s

Supper (1 Cor. 11:23-26), John 13 is absent from such a formula. The practice does the work

itself (though certainly couching it in Scriptural teaching is appropriate and helpful). Feet

washing makes humility intelligible in a unique way. It is certainly no sure-fire guarantee of

humility, but it is a reasonable, biblical approach for cultivating a particular disposition of the

heart as well as reinforcing the belief that God’s sanctifying work is a daily, ongoing process.

This goes much deeper than the simple intellectual affirmation of so many non-feet washing

traditions that would simply affirm the value of humility and the need for sanctification, while

not adopting practices that reinforce those beliefs.

Conclusion

In an edited volume, theologian Miroslav Volf offers what may be the most common,

observable example of what has been presented in this paper:

As attested by the accounts of those who have experienced conversion through reading the Bible without having had previous contact with Christians, one can accept Christian beliefs without previously engaging in Christian practices or even observing Christian practices. A person can start engaging in Christian practices because he or she has found Christian beliefs intellectually compelling. In such cases, Christian beliefs come first and Christian practices follow. As a rule, however, this is not how things happen. People come to believe either because they find themselves already engaged in Christian practices (say, by being raised in a Christian home) or because they are attracted to them. In most cases, Christian practices come first and Christian beliefs follow—or rather, beliefs are already entailed in practices, so that their explicit espousing becomes a matter of bringing to consciousness what is implicit in the engagement in practices themselves.[[76]](#footnote-76)

Despite our ability to identify with Volf’s example, such an observation doesn’t pit beliefs

against practices, nor practices against beliefs. Both constitute crucial parts of Christian

spirituality and worship. However, the divide that separates them often results in right practices

without right convictions, or right convictions without right practices. Because they will always

reinforce one another—resulting in authenticity or hypocrisy—the need to envision doctrine as

wisdom and to heed the way desires are shaped by practices is paramount. When such an

approach is adopted, Scripture and the Christian tradition combine to help bridge a perennial gulf

between doctrine and practice.

1. W. Jackson Watts is the pastor of Grace FWB Church in Arnold, Missouri, and a managing editor of the Helwys Society Forum ([www.helwyssocietyforum.com](http://www.helwyssocietyforum.com)) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Robert Louis Wilken’s *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003) is still a classic work that offers such as portrait. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Until the 2007-08 school year, Welch College listed their church growth course as two separate sections; The first was Introduction to Church Growth (PT 231) which dealt more with philosophy and theories about growth, and the second was Strategies for Church Growth (PT 232), which dealt with practical issues such as methods and “step by step plans.” (Catalog 2006-2007, pp. 66-67). The current church growth course is entitled Church Growth: Theory and Practice (PT 233). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Theologian Stanley Hauerwas has arguably been the most influential voice in the last 25-30 years rejecting this dichotomy. He recently retired from teaching theological ethics at Duke Divinity School. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest, *Integrative Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 21. Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 17. Dale Moody, *The Word of Truth: A Summary of Christian Doctrine Based on Biblical Revelation* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1981), 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 102. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Carl F.H. Henry’s six-volume magnum opus *God, Revelation and Authority* is arguably the most definitive and comprehensive evangelical work on this subject (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1999). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Scott’s Rae’s *Moral Choices* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000) bears the subtitle, “An Introduction to Ethics.” To his credit, however, he avoids divorcing ethics from conceptual theological categories in his actual argument. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. These critiques have arisen from many Christian camps. Such examples: Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame: The University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 50-55. Miroslav Volf & Dorothy Bass, eds., *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2002); Bonnie Miller-McLemore, *Christian Theology in Practice: Discovering a Discipline* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012); David Clark represents a Reformed evangelical assessment: *To Know and Love God: Method for Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Vanhoozer also uses topographical imagery in describing this situation by saying that “the mortal fault line” that separates theory from practice runs through the academy and the church. See p. 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. “Symbiosis” is a term with several meanings depending on which discipline uses it. However, in this paper the psychiatric notion of the word is meant. It refers to a relationship between two things in [which](http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/which) each is dependent upon and receives reinforcement, whether beneficial or detrimental, from the other. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Justin Taylor’s well-known blog on behalf of the Gospel Coalition is one representation of this ongoing dialogue. <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justintaylor/?s=normative+in+acts> Accessed on 3 October 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. When one surveys the evangelical literature, books on “basic Christian doctrine” far outweigh books that survey “basic Christian practices.” This is *not* considering books that focus on an individual topic, such as prayer or Bible study. These books are framed as “topical studies” more often than not. Perhaps more significantly, evangelicalism has witnessed a tremendous emphasis on “worldview *thinking*” in the last 15-20 years. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Kenneth A. Myers, “Waiting for Epimenedes,” *Touchstone Magazine* (July/August 2009): 9-11. The notion of ‘symbiosis’ adopted in this paper is to be credited to Myers’ use of it in his article. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. All Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. “Part I covers 1:1-8:39 and deals with the development of the doctrine of justification by faith and its implications…Part III concludes the book and includes 12:1-16:27. Its contents are practical and personal.” F. Leroy Forlines, “A Survey of the Book of Romans,” in *A Survey of the New Testament: A Panoramic View of God’s Unfolding Revelation*, ed. Harold Harrison (Nashville: Randall House, 1983), 82. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. F.F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 134. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Mark Liederbach is the Vice President of Student Services and professor of Christian Ethics at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. This quotation comes from course notes for his introductory ethics course: “Ethics as Worship” (Fall, 2006), 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2001), 91. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. For example, D.A. Carson, *Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount and His Confrontation with the World: An Exposition of Matthew 5-10* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004). John R.W. Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount* (TBST: Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1985). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Examples like hedonism or emotivism may come to mind since these ethical systems say more about passions, desires, and emotions than others. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (New York: HarperOne, 1996), 96. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Dorothy Bass, “Introduction,” in *Practicing Theology*, 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Judith K. Balswick & Jack O. Balswick, *Authentic Human Sexuality* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 282-286. These authors provide an expanded summary of the research associated with these conclusions. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Timothy S. Lane and Paul D. Tripp, *How People Change* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2008), 95. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Lane & Tripp, 95-96. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. *Patrologia Latina*, 51:209-210. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (New York: Doubleday Religion, 2003), 318. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. John Henry Newman is an extremely important voice from the 19th century who speaks to how certain implicit beliefs become explicit over time. His notion of the ‘development of doctrine’ is one beyond the scope of this paper, but his argument is worthy of consideration even today. See *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1960). [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. F. Leroy Forlines, *Morals and Orthodoxy* (Nashville: FWB Commission on Theological Liberalism, 1974), 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. *Morals and Orthodoxy*, 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Ibid., 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. It is worth clarifying here that legalism is indeed a danger. That is, we can also be anti-intellectual in our faith and excuse our ignorance of doctrine because of participation in the right practices: church attendance, tithing, participation, etc. Yet the way so much contemporary ecclesial life is being framed today it seems that doctrinal statements have eclipsed the role of church covenants. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. In section V, I will use the terms desire, affections, and loves in a synonymous fashion. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. To put this latter point more simply, reigning religious/philosophical and scientific paradigms aren’t toppled overnight. For instance, see Thomas Kuhn’s *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1962). [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. David Clark’s survey of various concepts of theology since the patristic age demonstrates the often *ad* hoc nature of the theological enterprise. *To Know and Love God*, 33-42. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Ellen T. Charry, *By the Renewing of Your Minds: The Pastoral Function of Christian Doctrine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Charry, 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Charry, 225. Charry also emphasizes the role of happiness and love in this framework. This is explored further in her *God and the Art of Happiness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010). [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Clark, 36-37. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Charry, 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Clark, 37. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Craig Bartholomew and Ryan O’Dowd, *Old Testament Wisdom Literature: A Theological Introduction* (Downers Grove, Il: IVP Academic, 2001); Robert Alter, *The Wisdom Books: Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Adopting a Forlinesean model would require us to say more about holiness in this discussion. I am taking for granted that Spirit-led wisdom, rightly-ordered loves, and a commitment to the authority of Scripture in our reflection on doctrine and practice will practically entail a concern for holiness. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. F. Leroy Forlines, *Biblical Ethics: Ethics for Happier Living* (Nashville: Randall House, 1973). [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. *Biblical Ethics*, 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Ibid., 43. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. James K.A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009). I will also draw upon a lecture Smith gave for the Center for Faith and Work at Redeemer Presbyterian Church on May 22, 2011, entitled “Culture as Liturgy.” [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. It is important to note at this point that Smith is quite clear that he is not offering a totally original proposal. Instead, he is taking most of his seminal reflections from St. Augustine of Hippo (4th cen. A.D.) and constructing an approach to worship, worldview, and cultural formation upon that Augustinian foundation. From the outset, I would also add that Smith’s account, while compelling and a helpful corrective to many of the overly idealist approaches to anthropology, goes a bit too far at points in his argument. Nevertheless, his proposal is a very useful one. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Interestingly, sociologist Christian Smith’s includes love in his account of what a person is in his *What is a Person? Rethinking Humanity, Social Life, and the Moral Good from the Person Up* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010). [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. This is true both of good and bad desires. For instance, consider the emphasis on “lusts,” especially in the New Testament. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Amy Plantinga Pouw, “Attending to the Gaps Between Beliefs and Practices,” in *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, eds. Miroslav Volf, Dorothy Bass (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002). [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. “Culture as Liturgy.” [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2008). Crouch adopts a similar take on culture. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Smith, 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Smith, 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. This vocabulary is my own. However, it practically shows how cultural artifacts address questions of action, desire, *and* belief. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Inevitably, beliefs arise from this framework. Our desires, regardless of what practice has formed them, are directed toward some kingdom that we *believe* it to be real. We have a particular mental picture of what the good life is, even if we cannot immediately put it into words. Sometimes it is more instinctual, but it is present. This also illuminates Jesus’ call to “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.” [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. I would also add that Smith’s anthropology is overstated at places in his argument. That is, desires function in a symbiotic relationship with doctrine and practice as well. Therefore, making affections or desires primary doesn’t solve the problem. Nevertheless, emphasizing and understanding desires helps move the doctrine-practice discussion forward in a crucial way. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Smith, 90-91. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Craig Dykstra and Dorothy Bass, “A Theological Understanding of Christian Practices,” in *Practicing Theology*, 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. It is important to distinguish between “final practices” and “formative practices.” According to Smith’s proposal, it is a series of practices that habituate our loves which ultimately lead to a change in direction. But in some sense, it may sound as if we’re saying “practices lead to more practices.” In a way, this is true. Yet it is a constellation of these smaller practices that lead up to a “final practice.” I would describe it this way: Right Beliefs 🡪 Right Practices. This model is too simplistic because it neglects our desires. So then a more accurate model might be…Beliefs---Desires---Practices---Beliefs---Desires---Practices (in no particular order). [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. *Biblical Ethics*, 41-43. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. *Morals and Orthodoxy*, 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Vanhoozer, 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Geoffrey Wainwright, *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine and Life: A Systematic Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), preface. Protestants ecclesia semper reformanda (252) [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. The three headings that follow are among the five components of Christian worship given by Mark Dever, *The Deliberate Church: Building Your Ministry on the Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005), 81-86. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. There have been two essays on the Helwys Society Forum in the last several months which better enhance my brief presentation on worship, particularly singing: Matt Bracey’s “Christian Worship: Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs,” and Phillip Morgan’s “Musical Thought in the Early Church.” [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. See Timothy Quill, “Liturgical Worship,” in *Perspectives on Christian Worship: Five Views*, ed. J. Matthew Pinson (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009). While Quill differs from a more Reformed evangelical outlook on worship, much of his explanation about how worship forms a worshipper is valid here. See especially pp. 27-42. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Timothy Ward, *Words of Life: Scripture as the Living and Active Word of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. *Treatise of the Faith and Practices of the National Association of Free Will Baptists, Inc.* (Nashville: The Executive Office, 2010), Chapter XVIII, Section 3, p. 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Miroslav Volf, “Theology for a Way of Life,” in *Practicing Theology*, 256. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)