

Katy Fist Ward Spiritual Message #37

DOCTRINES, POLICIES, and PROCEDURES or PRACTICES

In the past I have often included the lessons I have taught, the principle of Doctrine vs. Policy to help members accept changes that that were made in the church. That concept has become even more important now as we see some members becoming disturbed by recent “POLICY CHANGES” in the church the past couple of years.

I used to use the example in my lessons that God having a body of flesh and bone is a DOCTRINE. Blacks not holding the priesthood was a POLICY. Starting Sacrament meeting at 9 a.m. is a PROCEDURE or PRACTICE. Church PROCEDURES and PRACTICES can and often are changed by local leaders. Church POLICIES can only be changed by the Prophet. Doctrines cannot and will not change. Sometimes it is hard to distinguish if something we do or believe in the church is a DOCTRINE that cannot be changed or just a POLICY that may at some point be changed. There is one sure way to know the difference. If the Prophet changes it, you then know for sure it was just a POLICY not a DOCTRINE.

I recently found that same concept taught by Elder Bednar. He said:

- **Doctrines** are fundamental truths of salvation that are eternal and do not change. Examples include “the nature of the Godhead, the plan of happiness, and the Atonement of Jesus Christ.” (pp. 151–152)
- **Principles** are “basic guidelines for behavior” that are “based upon and arise from doctrines,” and like doctrines, they “do not change.” They provide direction, but they are not specific behaviors or actions. Examples include faith in Christ, repentance of sins, obedience to God, and service to others. (pp. 154–155)
- **Applications** are “the actual behaviors, action steps, practices, or procedures by which gospel doctrines and principles are enacted in our lives.” They “can vary according to needs and circumstances.” Examples include not shopping on Sunday; praying morning, noon, and night; and always paying tithing first (p. 156)

Elder Bednar suggests that each of these answer a different question. Doctrines answer the question “Why?” Principles help us understand “What?” And applications tell us “How?”¹

[1] David A. Bednar, Increase in Learning: Spiritual Patterns for Obtaining Your Own Answers (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2011).