

**THE DISTINGUISHING
DOCTRINES OF
THE RELIGIOUS
SOCIETY OF FRIENDS**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649258406

The Distinguishing Doctrines of the Religious Society of Friends by James Wood

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Cover @ 2017

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The Distinguishing Doctrines

of the

Religious Society of Friends

**A Lecture delivered at Twelfth Street Meeting House
Philadelphia, 1 Mo. 24th, 1898**

by

James Wood

**Published by The Book Association of Friends
No. 20 South Twelfth Street
Philadelphia**

The Distinguishing Doctrines of Friends

As members of the Religious Society of Friends, we should approach the consideration of our distinguishing doctrines with sentiments of deep regard for all our brethren in Christ who belong to other denominations and whose doctrinal views vary from our own. Toward them we should ever entertain that feeling of Christian love which is kind, which "vaunteth not itself" and which "thinketh no evil." Indeed, the very name of our denomination should constantly remind of this, because it implies a recognition of other branches of the church that is unique, and is remarkable for the breadth of its liberality. The name "Friends" was chosen in recognition of the declaration of our Lord, "Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you;" and it

further recognizes the relations that should exist between those of the same household of faith. This word stands for the teaching of the two great commandments. The term "Society" was chosen because it was recognized that the word "church" stood for all true believers of every name who belong to Christ's Kingdom on the earth, and that no branch of that church has any right to assume for itself a name that implies, in any way, the exclusion, or the want of recognition of others. The founders of the Society of Friends in the selection of its name manifested a breadth of consideration, and a liberal regard for others, that stand without a precedent in the history of the church.

The
Protestant
Reformation.

Before speaking of our distinguishing doctrines it may be well to refer to the historic fact that there was a development of doctrine in the progress of the Protestant Reformation in England that was unlike anything that occurred in any of the continental countries. In the latter, there was a definite time when the old doctrines and practices were rejected and the new were embraced. There was no such time in England.

The passage by Parliament of the "Act of the Royal Supremacy" was merely a substitution of the authority of the king for that of the Pope. It in no wise touched the Catholic doctrines. Henry VIII. lived and died in the Roman faith. During the reign of Edward VI. considerable progress in the Reformed faith was made. This was checked and much of it lost during the reign of Mary, and was very cautiously revived and advanced under Elizabeth and James, but during all that period the advances were but different degrees of compromise with Rome. The true understanding of this requires some definite test as to what is the fundamental difference between Catholicism and Protestantism. The formula of Schleiermacher is generally accepted by both sides as a correct statement of this. "Catholicism makes the believer's relation to Christ depend upon his relation to the church; Protestantism makes the believer's relation to the church depend upon his relation to Christ." It follows from this that if the believer's relation to Christ is made, in any degree, dependent upon his observance of any ordinance or ceremony of the church, or upon any

exercise of sacerdotal authority by its priests or ministers, in so far, the fundamental principle of Protestantism is violated and the principle of Catholicism is maintained.

In the protracted discussions of the period in reference to the adoption and revision of the Prayer Book of the Church of England and its thirty-nine Articles, the vestments of the clergy and the administration of ordinances, these were the questions involved. Notwithstanding all this discussion, both in the Church of England and among the numerous bodies of dissenters that arose, some upon one point of doctrine or practice and some upon another, there was continually some recognition of the Catholic principle, and it was not until an hundred years had passed after the Reformation began that a body arose that clearly and unequivocally took the position that the believer's relation to Christ does not depend upon his relation to the church, and which brought the Reformation to its logical conclusion. That body was the Society of Friends.

Evangelical During this period of violent discussion there
Doctrines. was a substantial agreement upon the great fun-

damental doctrines of the church at large, as expressed in the two ancient creeds, known as the "Apostles' Creed" and the "Nicene Creed." In a general way the "Athanasian Creed" was accepted also. These great, general doctrines were not then called in question, and therefore but little was said upon them. These the founders of the Society of Friends accepted, as did the other bodies, and therefore, in their writings, which were mostly controversial in their character, particular stress was not laid upon them. It is a great injustice for anyone to claim that, because of this, Friends were in any way wanting in their allegiance to these fundamental doctrines of the Christian religion which stamp a true evangelical character upon those who hold them.

The Society of Friends was founded by **George Fox**. George Fox. He was born in 1624. While yet a very young man he was brought into great anxiety of mind in reference to his spiritual condition. His feelings were deeper and stronger than the most of us are capable of, because he was a very deep and strong man. In his distress of

mind he sought advice and help from those who professed to be able to give these. He went to ministers of the church of England and to those of the Dissenters, often traveling great distances to visit a minister of reputation. In answer to his inquiries they give him marvelous advice. The ignorance of the clergy of that time is strikingly displayed in what they said to him. Finding no help he was brought to the verge of despair. At length when he cried "There is none to help," he heard a voice that said to him, "There is one who can speak to thy condition, even Jesus Christ." He took his attention and his expectation away from men and turned them unreservedly to Him, who is "mighty to save and able to deliver all those who come unto God by Him." Then there was mercifully granted to him a precious sense of acceptance and of union with God. Then darkness and despair vanished and his soul was filled with light and life and joy. He became conscious that the light of life was shed in his soul by the Lord Jesus Christ who had come to abide there by the Holy Spirit. The longing of his soul was satisfied and in his own