



Throughout its history, the Catholic Church has been a beacon of truth and a sure guide for millions of faithful. However, in today's era of relativism and doctrinal confusion, many people—even within the Church—struggle to understand the difference between what is unchangeable and what can evolve. How does the Church distinguish between dogma, doctrine, and discipline? What weight does each carry in our life of faith? And how can we, as Catholics, faithfully live according to the Church's teachings?

1. Dogma: The Unchangeable and Divinely Revealed Truth

Dogma is the highest level of Church teaching. It refers to divinely revealed truths that have been solemnly defined by the Magisterium, either by the Pope *ex cathedra* or by an Ecumenical Council. These truths cannot change because they come from God Himself and are essential to the Catholic faith.

Examples of Dogmas

Some of the most well-known dogmas include:

- The Holy Trinity: One God in three persons.
- The divinity of Jesus Christ: True God and true Man.
- The Immaculate Conception of Mary: Preserved from original sin from the moment of her conception.
- The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary: Taken body and soul into heaven.

Why Is Dogma Important?

Dogmas are not human inventions but divine revelations necessary for our salvation. Denying a dogma is heresy because it means rejecting a truth that God Himself has revealed. A Catholic cannot “choose” which dogmas to accept and which to ignore, because faith is not a buffet where one selects what is pleasing. Faith is a loving act of obedience to God, who reveals these truths for our good.

How to Apply This in Our Lives

- **Deepen our faith:** Read the Catechism and Church documents on dogmas.
- **Defend the truth:** In a world where many erroneous doctrines circulate, we must know and proclaim the truth with charity.



- **Live according to dogmas:** Faith is not just intellectual knowledge but a reality that should shape our lives and decisions.
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2. Doctrine: The Church's Teachings

Doctrine includes all the teachings of the Church on faith and morals. Unlike dogma, doctrine is not always directly revealed by God, but it is an authentic explanation or development of Revelation. Doctrine can develop and deepen over time but can never contradict dogmas.

Types of Doctrine

- **Infallible doctrine:** Definitive teachings, even if not formally defined as dogmas, such as the reservation of priestly ordination to men.
- **Non-definitive doctrine:** Teachings that can develop but must still be respected, such as certain interpretations of social justice or the death penalty.

Can Doctrine Change?

Doctrine does not change in its essence, but it can develop. For example, Saint John Paul II explained that the Church has deepened its understanding of human dignity, leading to a stricter stance against the death penalty. However, this does not mean that what was morally acceptable in the past is now immoral; rather, the Church has clarified its teaching more fully.

How to Apply This in Our Lives

- **Be docile to the Church's teaching:** Even when some doctrines are difficult to accept, humility leads us to trust in the Church's guidance.
 - **Avoid relativism:** We cannot individually decide which doctrines are valid. The Church, guided by the Holy Spirit, has the authority to teach.
 - **Study and deepen our knowledge:** It is not enough to know our faith superficially; we must learn in order to live it fully.
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3. Discipline: Norms That Can Change

Discipline refers to ecclesial practices that can be modified over time. These are not matters of faith, but norms that help the faithful live their Christian life more effectively.

Examples of Discipline

- **Priestly celibacy:** This is not a dogma but a disciplinary norm in the Latin Church (Catholic Eastern Churches allow married priests).
- **The Eucharistic fast:** Previously required 12 hours of fasting, now it is only one hour.
- **The Latin Mass:** While the Latin Mass remains valid and permitted, the discipline has allowed the Mass to be celebrated in vernacular languages.

Can Discipline Change?

Yes, because norms can be adapted according to the needs of the Church. However, not all disciplinary changes are necessarily positive. In recent times, some changes have weakened the spiritual life of the faithful rather than strengthened it.

How to Apply This in Our Lives

- **Obey the Church's norms:** Even if they are disciplinary, they reflect the Church's desire to help us in our spiritual journey.
- **Discern between what is essential and what is optional:** We should not cling more to a discipline than to a dogma. A Catholic cannot reject a dogma but can prefer certain traditional disciplines.
- **Be aware of harmful changes:** Not every disciplinary change is beneficial. The faithful have the right to express concerns when a discipline weakens the faith.

Conclusion: A Call to Fidelity and Holiness

Understanding the difference between dogma, doctrine, and discipline helps us live our faith more fully. Today, in a world where many question the Church's authority, we must remember that dogma is unchangeable, doctrine is the teaching that guides our lives, and discipline is the practical application that helps us on our journey of faith.

Catholics are called not only to know these truths but to live them with love and fidelity. The



Church does not impose its teachings arbitrarily; rather, it offers them as a lighthouse in the storm of relativism and confusion.

So let us ask ourselves:

- Am I willing to accept dogmas with humility, even if I do not fully understand them?
- Do I strive to learn and apply the Church's doctrine in my life?
- Do I obey disciplinary norms with a spirit of fidelity, without falling into extremes?

May the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church, help us live our faith with coherence, courage, and love, so that we may be faithful witnesses of Christ in the world. **Amen.**