

## **Doctrine in 100 Words**

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# Introduction

Understanding what we believe matters. The Salvation Army has eleven articles of belief. These are known as the doctrines. They are the foundation of Salvationist theology and provide the boundaries of Salvationist belief. Many resources are out there to help you learn about the doctrines. So why one more? Because this one is different. It's short, simple, and to the point.

This is the kind of introduction to Salvationist doctrine you can read in one sitting. They can help you learn about what the Army believes or be a little reminder of something you learned a while ago. You can give it to someone new to the Army to learn about our beliefs. Maybe you are new to the Army and trying to figure it out. This is a starting point, not a goal. There are many more places to go next, not least the amazing *Handbook of Doctrine*.

This is a place to start, a tool to help you get going. I will give you an introduction to the doctrines in one hundred words or fewer. Easy. Each chapter (a bit of liberty calling one hundred words a chapter!) is one of the doctrines. I have avoided using technical theological terms and put everything as plainly and simply as possible.

This introduction is twice as long as my doctrine chapters are. Not a bad start! I hope it's helpful for you and that you enjoy it.

# Doctrine One: The Bible

*We believe that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments were given by inspiration of God, and that they only constitute the Divine rule of Christian faith and practice.*

The Bible has special authority for Christians. The Old Testament and the New Testament are equal, both given by God. About 40 authors wrote the Bible over roughly 1500 years. God inspired those authors to write the Bible. God inspired the editors to put the Bible together. God now inspires us when we read the Bible. There are other sources on how to live a Christian life, but only the Bible has God's authority. Everything else in our life is measured against it. We work to understand it by faith, experience, and reason. It is the foundation for our faith.

## Doctrine Two: One God

*We believe that there is only one God, who is infinitely perfect, the Creator, Preserver, and Governor of all things, and who is the only proper object of religious worship.*

There is only one God. God is God for everybody, everywhere, every time. God created all things. Without God, nothing would exist. How God created the world is something we can disagree on. God keeps everything going. Without God, everything would cease to exist. God organises and sets the tone for how the universe works. God may not decide everything (people disagree about this), but God is the ultimate source of authority in the world. Only God deserves our worship. There are many things that pretend to deserve our love, but only God, who created everything, actually deserves it.

## Doctrine Three: Three Persons

*We believe that there are three persons in the Godhead – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, undivided in essence and co-equal in power and glory.*

There is only one God. Three persons make up the one God (it's ok; this is tricky to understand). The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are made of the same 'stuff' (essence). They are not different from each other in the same way that we are. They are all one God but are three persons. The three persons of the Trinity are not in a hierarchy. One is not more important than the others. They are equal in capacity and divinity. God is always in relationship with God's self. God wants to be in a relationship with us.

## Doctrine Four: Jesus

*We believe that in the person of Jesus Christ the Divine and human natures are united, so that he is truly and properly God and truly and properly man.*

There is no Christianity without Jesus. Jesus teaches us who God is and helps us learn about ourselves. God is three persons made up of one 'stuff'. Jesus has two natures (types of 'stuff') but is one person. Jesus has God stuff and human stuff. Not fifty/fifty, but 100% God and 100% human. Jesus is properly God. Not a demi-god. Not a superior spiritual being. Not the best in all creation. Properly God, uncreated and eternal. Equal to the Father and the Holy Spirit. Jesus is properly human in his birth, life, and death. Jesus is the image of God.

## Doctrine Five: The Fall

*We believe that our first parents were created in a state of innocency, but by their disobedience they lost their purity and happiness, and that in consequence of their fall all men have become sinners, totally depraved, and as such are justly exposed to the wrath of God.*

No one deserves God's love. We have all made mistakes. We all get things wrong. Humanity has fallen short of what God has made us for. This is not just something I have done; it is what it means to be human. When I sin, I contribute to the sins of humanity. No one is innocent. Even when we try to do good, we cannot help but get it wrong. Every part of who we are, body, mind, and soul, is sinful. We are utterly reliant on God to set us free from sin; we cannot free ourselves from sin.

## Doctrine Six: Atonement

*We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ has by his suffering and death made an atonement for the whole world so that whosoever will may be saved.*

We are set free by Jesus. We can't do this on our own. Jesus does it for us. By his life, by his sufferings, and by his death, Jesus sets us free from sin. He dies for us, accepting the consequences of our sins so that we are set free. Everyone can be saved (dare we hope all will be saved?) because Jesus represented all of humanity, not only himself. Sin separates us from being able to recognise God and separates us from each other. Jesus dying for all of us means we can be with God and each other.

## Doctrine Seven: Salvation

*We believe that repentance towards God, faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and regeneration by the Holy Spirit, are necessary to Salvation*

Jesus has died for us. The gift has been given. We accept this gift when we realise that we need it. Knowing that we are sinful opens us to the reality of what Jesus has done for us. We accept Jesus's gift through faith. Faith is trusting in another person, in this case, Jesus. We trust in Jesus and can accept what Jesus has done to set us free. We are opened to God's love. Then the Holy Spirit can come into our lives and begin to heal us. God begins to heal our brokenness. We are set free indeed.

## Doctrine Eight: Justification

*We believe that we are justified by grace through faith  
in our Lord Jesus Christ and that he that believeth  
have the witness in himself*

We needed Jesus to take the first step towards us, which he did on the cross when he died for us. We recognise what Jesus has done for us and respond by trusting him. But we are still sinners. We have been forgiven but continue to get things wrong because we remain imperfect. But Jesus covers us with his own goodness like a blanket over an unmade bed. Even though we remain sinful, God still regards us as saints because our sin is hidden in Jesus's love for us. We are an example of what God can do for everyone.

## Doctrine Nine: Discipleship

*We believe that continuance in a state of salvation depends upon continued obedient faith in Christ*

We are set free from our sins so that we can follow Jesus. To keep on following Jesus means to keep on trusting him. You cannot follow someone you do not trust. Would you listen to directions from someone you don't think is telling you the truth? Definitely not! We must keep trusting Jesus, believing that he loves us, and continuing to rely on that love. We must never think we have set ourselves free from sin. Otherwise, we stop trusting God and start trusting ourselves. We must not stop knowing God's presence in our lives and listening to Jesus.

## Doctrine Ten: Holiness

*We believe that it is the privilege of all believers to be wholly sanctified, and that their whole spirit and soul and body may be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*

The work of the Holy Spirit takes place in every part of our life. Just as we were sinful in mind, body, and soul, now the Holy Spirit joins us to Jesus in mind, body, and soul. Where we were totally sinful, we are now totally joined to Jesus. Even though we are sinful, the Holy Spirit preserves us in our faith, holding us tight to Jesus. Our lives can be offered up to Jesus to help others come to know him and to help them with their needs. The Holy Spirit joins us to Jesus, and Jesus is love.

## Doctrine Eleven: Kingdom Come

*We believe in the immortality of the soul; in the resurrection of the body; in the general judgement at the end of the world; in the eternal happiness of the righteous; and in the endless punishment of the wicked*

We believe that we continue beyond death, not because of who we are but because of who God is. We don't believe in a spiritual home somewhere beyond the clouds forever, but that one day God will physically resurrect us to live in a new earth joined to a new heaven, which will be the same place. We believe that everyone is accountable for what they have done with their life. God tells us what is needed of us, and we must try to live up to that standard. Those whom God sets free from sin will be with God.

# Conclusion

The doctrines are like a fence around a field. There are limits to Salvationist faith. A belief that goes against these doctrines does not fit within the Salvationist faith. That does not mean it wouldn't be Christian, only that it would not be Salvationist. Some people's fields are very big, with lots of room to understand the doctrines. They think through what the doctrines mean and perhaps interpret them in ways that might not be straightforward. Others have quite a small field. They prefer the exact wording of the doctrines and accept them without interpreting them.

The doctrines do not encompass the entire Christian faith. The doctrines don't include things like the virgin birth, what the church is, or what an angel is. That is what positional statements are for. The doctrines were made as short and straightforward as possible to allow as many people as possible to agree with

them, even if they might disagree on the specifics. They are designed to foster unity: even if we disagree on how God created the universe, we can agree that God created it.

The doctrines give us a sense of shared commitment to a way of understanding God. They can bring us together, connect us to the history of the Christian church, and help us to know what makes us all Salvationists. Around the world, a million people share these same simple beliefs.

I hope you will now look more deeply into these beliefs. Where they come from, why we have them, and what they mean for how we live.