

Does Doctrine Matter?

Introduction. God intended different designs in preaching. Some preaching is to encourage us in what we already know and understand (Acts 14:21-22); some preaching is to offer comfort (1 Thessalonians 4:18); some preaching is to exhort (Hebrews 3:13; 10:25); some preaching is to reprove and rebuke (2 Timothy 4:2), but there is no more important purpose in preaching than to teach and instruct (1 Timothy 4:6; 2 Timothy 4:1-4). “Doctrine” simply is teaching or instruction. This is sometimes referred to as “doctrinal preaching.” It is preaching that imparts the word of God, increases the knowledge of those who hear, defends the faith, upholds the truth, refutes error and false teaching, and grounds people in the doctrine of Christ (Colossians 2:7).

Not all preaching must be doctrinal preaching. There are occasions where people need to be encouraged or comforted rather than instructed in the faith. But a steady diet of non-doctrinal preaching and teaching will result in weak, sickly congregations and individuals. It is the word of God that is spiritual nourishment for the Christian (1 Peter 2:2). The babe in Christ begins with milk and may be spoonfed, but as one grows he or she should be able to partake of meat (Hebrews 5:12-14). We should learn to hunger and thirst after righteousness (Matthew 5:6). Every eldership, and for that matter, every member, of a congregation should expect to be taught, enriched, and fed with the meat of the word (cp. 2 Peter 3:18). There are four exceptional reasons why doctrine matters.

I. Doctrine Is Important

- A. At the beginning of the church, the apostles taught and baptized (Acts 2:38-41). What should be done with those new converts who had been baptized for the remission of their sins? They were tutored in doctrine even from the start of their new life (v. 42). Should it be any different now? Many congregations have classes for new converts in which they are taught, trained, confirmed, established, and grounded in the faith (cp. Acts 11:22-23).
- B. Such training will pay rich dividends and will help people to understand the foundation of their faith. There have been too many cases in which people have never been schooled in the apostles’ doctrine even though they have been baptized, and they may ultimately either fall away or lack commitment to the cause of Christ. The doctrine of Christ should furthermore be emphasized continually from the pulpit. This usually is the only time the whole church is gathered together and influenced in one corporate setting.
- C. During the personal ministry of Christ, He delivered doctrine to the people with authority (Matthew 7:28-29). Not all doctrine is true, for not all doctrine is based on the authority of Christ (Matthew 15:9).
 1. Observe that the people were astonished at the “doctrine” delivered by Christ, but there were also “doctrines” based on the commandments of men. There is one true doctrine of Christ, but there are many doctrines taught by men. Some speakers talk about “basic Bible doctrines,” but it honestly would be better to say “basic Bible doctrine.”
 2. Jesus taught that worship is vain when people teach “for doctrines the commandments of men.” The Bible speaks of “vain worship” (Matthew 15:9; Mark 7:7), “will worship” (Colossians 2:20-23), and “true worship” (John

4:23-24). Both “vain worship” and “will worship” are associated with “the commandments and doctrines of men” (Matthew 15:9; Colossians 2:22). Vine defines “will worship” as “voluntarily adopted worship, whether unbidden or forbidden.” Men think it is permissible to adopt voluntary acts of worship which are “unbidden,” but Paul says it is “will worship.” Doctrine is important because it is the basis of acceptable worship before God.

II. Doctrine Is Healthy

- A. The word of God speaks of “sound” doctrine (2 Timothy 4:3; Titus 2:1). The word means “to be sound, to be well, to be in good health” (Thayer). Interestingly, the word *hugiaino* in the original language is the word from which we derive our English word hygiene which is defined as “the science that deal with the promotion and preservation of health.”
- B. “Sound doctrine,” therefore, is healthy doctrine because it promotes good spiritual health, making us “sound in the faith” (Titus 1:13; 2:2) or strong in the Lord (Ephesians 6:10). This results in the man of God being “perfect” or “complete” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).
- C. Why would anyone reject soundness and good health when “sound doctrine” is available in a faithful congregation?
 - 1. Perhaps we can think of it in this way. Many in our society refuse healthy meals of meat, vegetables, and fruit and choose fast food that is easy, tasty, but filled with fat and calories.
 - 2. Likewise, in religion it appears that many are attracted to “fast food” that provides satisfaction, but little healthy nourishment. It is more time-consuming to cook a healthy meal than to go to a drive-through window, so more and more people are selecting the easy way.
 - 3. Consequently, in spiritual matters some choose the convenient path provided by the doctrines and commandments of men rather than the study and diligence required to know and obey the truth. Churches need to stop offering the “drive-through” option and instead provide an alternative to the ways of the world with sound, healthy doctrine that will build us up and give us an inheritance among the sanctified (Acts 20:32).

III. Doctrine Is Preventive

- A. Paul charged Timothy to preach the word because people would eventually turn away from sound doctrine (2 Timothy 4:1-4). Jude exhorted the disciples to contend for the faith because there were men who “crept in unawares” (Jude 3-4). To creep in “unawares” is to slip in secretly, literally, by the side door.
 - 1. False teachers generally do not announce their coming or give a blast on the trumpet to proclaim their presence.
 - 2. Like termites, they do their damage under cover. When they are discovered, the damage is usually already done.
- B. When people “learn” doctrine, it helps them to know false teachers and to avoid the disastrous consequences of their divisive behavior (Romans 16:17). One could not “mark” and “avoid” false teachers except for “the doctrine which ye have learned.” If they had been unwilling to learn the doctrine of Christ, they

could not have obeyed the instructions of Paul. Elders, in particular, have been admonished to hold fast the faithful word so they can stand against false teaching (Titus 1:9). This means they need to be studying themselves!

- C. The prevailing philosophy today is postmodernism. Postmodernism despises doctrine. One of the caveats of postmodernism is “doctrine divides, love unites.” The chief sin among postmodernists is to believe that one is right and others are wrong. In postmodernism a person can believe any doctrine he wishes, so long as he does not insist that his doctrine is right and others are wrong.
 - 1. Many people have been influenced by postmodernism who are unaware of it. They might not even know its meaning, but they manifest the effects brought on them through societal and cultural influences. We can sometimes see the effects of postmodernism in members of the church and even in the pulpit.
 - 2. There has been a noticeable decline for several years in doctrinal preaching. Postmodernism places an emphasis on deeds rather than beliefs. Be a good neighbor, be kind, be thoughtful of others, be generous, help others, be tolerant of what others believe, and impress others with your good deeds rather than your doctrinal beliefs.
 - 3. Doctrine is the foundation both for believing what is right and doing what is right. The proclamation of sound doctrine is not simply about baptism and the church, but it is the foundation for making right decisions concerning both conduct and belief (1 Timothy 1:9-11; 2 Timothy 3:10).
- D. In postmodernism, the part which is missing in this equation is belief. One would rarely hear a sermon about the right church, the plan of salvation, the danger of false doctrine, or the great scheme of redemption. The reason is that these are topics primarily about what we believe. They have a low priority among those influenced by postmodernism.
- E. The strongest antidote to all of this is the doctrine of Christ. If we drift with the prevailing winds, we will come to the point, as some have, of not wanting to tell anyone he is wrong about anything, and no one will change unless they know they are wrong (Acts 8:18-24; 13:6-12). If we contrast the doctrine of Christ with the doctrines of men, however, we can still do good deeds but without sacrificing the truth that we must both believe and practice.

IV. Doctrine Is Necessary

- A. The word of God connects doctrine to salvation. Doctrine is not just a hobby or a pastime. Doctrine is necessary because my obedience and salvation depends on it (Romans 6:17-18).
- B. Doctrine is also necessary because all of us are obligated to teach the truth so that men can be saved (2 Corinthians 5:11). Paul admonished Timothy that in taking heed to himself Timothy would be saved, but he also had to take heed to “the doctrine” that he might save those who heard him (1 Timothy 4:16).

Conclusion. It is dangerous to ignore or transgress the doctrine of Christ (2 John 9). Abide in the doctrine of Christ and enjoy the fellowship of both the Father and the Son. Doctrine matters!