

“Doctrine: Why It Is Important”

Various passages

How many of you remember the old Rand McNally Road Atlas that used to be a staple of the yearly American vacation experience? As a kid, when our family went on trip somewhere, I'd love to sprawl out in the back of our brown Ford Aerostar van and flip through the detailed pages of the state maps. Now days, all one needs to do to get somewhere is merely tell Siri. Just punch in the address or coordinates of your desired destination, follow along the prescribed route, and you are there in a cinch.

Maps are a part of life. Whether it be in paper form or electronic these aren't the only kind of useful maps. All of us make mental maps that help us do the things we need to do—pick up groceries, run to the store, drop off library books, or do the things we love. We mentally map out our day or the work that we need to do.

Maps serve a very practical purpose in that they help us get where we want to go. With a good map and sense of direction, it is next to impossible to get lost. I may not know where I'm going, but I always know where I am!

I don't know if you realize this is or not, but God has given us a road map for living the Christian life, and it is called the map of sound doctrine, or biblical theology.

In an ultimate sense, the Bible itself is our map. The psalmist said that God's Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path. Sound doctrine simply sums up the teaching of the Bible. It synthesizes whatever the Bible has to say about any given topic, whether it is a topic that arises from Scripture or from life in the world.

Sound doctrine is extremely important for the believer!

I have often wondered why we spend so much time and energy in the things that ultimately do not matter in the grand scheme of eternity. One of the challenges of the Christian life is to live for God in a world that tells us life is every man for himself. At times in our lives, the things that do matter most are often relegated to the background.

Look at the social media trends, and you will discover what people are interested in. It does not matter what you think of some cultural icon, but it does matter what you think of Jesus.

What comes into our minds when we think of God is the most important thing about us! As believers, it is important that we know what we believe and why we believe it. We must be able to articulate doctrine well.

What is doctrine?

For some, doctrine is a stuffy word used only by seminary educated scholars who sit in ivory towers, but are totally disconnected from where the average person lives. It seems unrelated to the world where men and women live, work, raise families, and struggle with the realities of everyday life.

In reality, nothing could be further from the truth!

The Bible is written to real people living in a real world, facing real problems, and who need a real, practical word from God. That is one of the reasons why doctrine is so very important.

Definition — *Sound doctrine is a summary of the Bible's teaching that is both faithful to the Bible and useful for life.*

Doctrine is instruction for faith and practice. It is teaching for those who need wisdom. It is teaching from God about God that directs us to the glory of God, and its importance is emphasized all throughout Scripture.

2 Timothy 3:16 - “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.”

2 Timothy 1:13-14 - “Follow the pattern of sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.”

Doctrine does not consist of imposing our ideas on the Bible, but is simply a summary of what the Bible says on a topic.

Like a map, it serves the very useful and practical purpose of instruction in God’s Word for the purpose of living it out. It is a roadmap of our pilgrimage from this world to the world that is to come.

Doctors have to make complicated decisions on short notice, and quite often, a person’s life is in the balance. What enables a good doctor to make wise medical choices is his or her extensive knowledge of the human body. You can’t know if a kidney is failing unless you know what a kidney is and how it should work. That’s why doctors spend many years studying human anatomy and physiology so that they can make accurate diagnoses and prescribe appropriate medicines and treatments, sometimes with life-saving consequences!

The Christian life isn’t all that different.

All of us have to make complicated decisions in real time, and sometimes a lot is at stake. It may be a matter a life and death. There is no easy-peasy formula for

some of these decisions. For this reason, we need wisdom. Not the wisdom of the world, but true wisdom, the wisdom of God.

The foundation for all true wisdom lies in the knowledge and application of the things God has revealed to us in His Word.

In Scripture, God tells us about who He is, who we are, what is wrong in the world, and how God is remedying it in Christ.

If we are going to live lives that are pleasing to God, these are the things we need to know most.

Sound doctrine is among the things that matter most for the well-being of the Christian the church. This is not simply for the sake of prideful knowledge that puffs one up, but it promotes robust faith and sincere love.

We think of doctrine or theology as learning, organizing, and communicating the truths about God as revealed in His Word. Christian doctrine has a two-fold object:

- the primary object is God
- the secondary object is all things in relation to God

Doctrine teaches us to see God as the One from whom and through whom and to whom all things exist, and it directs us to live for the glory of God.

Why is doctrine important?

Scripture itself teaching us that sound doctrine is for life and spiritual health.

Belief impacts behavior! I want to show you three reasons why doctrine is so important:

Reason #1 – Every Christian is a theologian

As a pastor, I have often heard people make the statement, “Now, preacher, I am certainly no theologian!”

Bruce Milne - *“It usually implies that serious thinking about Christian beliefs and the attempt to express them in an ordered form are altogether distinct from real Christianity, which is about practical concerns: our personal walk with the Lord, sharing the gospel, and so on. While the theologians may have their place, the serious study of doctrine is seen as something which need not bother ordinary Christians, and indeed may even hinder their Christian life if they go into it too deeply. This prevalent anti-doctrine spirit is a major departure from the Christian instincts of earlier ages and its roots go deep into contemporary Western culture. In face of the tremendous challenges and opportunities facing the church today this dismissal of doctrine is, in my judgment, nothing short of a recipe for disaster.”*

Just this week, I read a tweet by a pastor that said, “I’ve never been more certain that a church focused on ‘insiders’ (those already there) cannot reach its full redemptive potential.”

That statement, while I appreciate the intended concern, reflects the attitude that typifies so much of what’s wrong with the modern church. The church growth movement says that attendance is the number one criteria for health and success. This has led to a downplay on the importance of doctrine in the local church and its value in the Christian’s life. In reality, there is such a thing as a healthy ‘inward’ focus as it applies to teaching people. The biblical model for the local church is healthy Christians. Better Christians lead to more Christians!

When we understand the importance of doctrine, it becomes apparent that every Christian is a theologian.

Theology is for all of those who desire to love and obey Christ.

Paul told Timothy this much when he wrote:

1 Timothy 1:3-5 - “As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith. The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.”

We are to devote ourselves to sound doctrine in the church so that lives are impacted for Christ. Sound doctrine leads to sound faith, sound hearts, and sound consciences. The more I come to know about God, the more I love Him and recognize my need for Christ. Maturity leads to multiplication!

So, properly understood, theology and doctrine is not for a few religious eggheads who want to live with their head in the clouds but is everybody's business, for those who want to make impact.

Once we grasp this, our duty is to become the best theologians we can be for the glory of God, as our understanding of God and His ways is deepened through studying His Word.

Reason #2—Right doctrine is key to right living

Right belief is to lead to right behavior. Faith manifests itself in righteous works for the glory of God.

Sound doctrine is God's road map for living faithfully in the world and tells us not just where we are, but who we are, and who God is, and how He has saved us from sin and enabled us to live lives that are pleasing to Him. Sound doctrine is essential for navigating the winding road of life.

Titus 2:1-10 - "But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine. Older men are to be sober minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness. Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the Word of God may not be reviled. Likewise, urge the younger men to be self-controlled. Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us. Bondservants are to be submissive to their own masters in everything; they are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, not pilfering, but showing all good faith, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior."

In these verses, practical living is bookended by an emphasis on doctrine. What I believe is to impact how I behave.

We live in the day of 'soundbite theology.' Whatever sounds right, feels right, looks right, that is what we embrace. Perhaps we should be mindful of the words that came from the pen of the wisest man who ever lived:

Proverbs 14:12 - "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death."

Not everything that feels right or sounds right **IS** right! The wisdom of the world follows its own heart, not God's. To follow whatever sounds right at the time is sure to lead to disaster.

John 7:16-17 - "My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me. If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know the doctrine."

Matthew 7:24-27 - "Everyone then who hears these words of Mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it."

The careful study of sound doctrine is crucial for right living in a world gone wrong. This holds true for every single area of the Christian life such as worship, witness, discipleship, and our relationships. We need its application in our homes and marriages. We need it to be better employees for our boss.

Bruce Milne - *"At every point right living begins with right thinking. The NT writers exemplify this principle. Faced with practical problems in the churches, they always sought first to clarify the theological issues underlying the problem, then to apply the practical remedy. In this profound sense doctrine is the key to life as the Holy Spirit uses God's truth to work in and through us."*

We need sound doctrine so that we can live fully mature lives to the glory of God and spread of the gospel.

Reason #3—We are to love God with our minds

On one occasion when a certain lawyer asked what the greatest commandment in the law is, Jesus quoted from Deuteronomy 6 and said:

Matthew 22:36-40 - “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law? And He said to him, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

Have you ever thought through what it means to love the Lord your God with your mind? It means that we are to glorify God by thinking thoughts that are worthy of Him.

Your mind is a battlefield, and you better be dressed for battle!

2 Corinthians 10:4-5 - “For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.”

Pursuit of truth is as God-honoring as practice of truth.

Reason #4—We cannot separate Christ from His Word

There is no other Christ than the Christ who is known through the truths and doctrines of the whole Bible. He comes to us ‘clothed in His gospel.’

Loyalty to His person involves commitment to His truth. Jesus said that we have no right to call Him Lord without believing and obeying what He says. This is huge!

Carelessness toward doctrine reveals contempt of Christ and is a form of disloyalty to His name. It shows unconcern for the gospel of grace by which we are saved.

Doctrine matters! That is why we are going to spend time this year looking at it in a systematic way, beginning next week with the doctrine of Scripture:

- what is the Bible?
- how did we get it?
- what is meant by certain terms? (authority, inspiration, etc.)