

What in the World is the Big Deal with Doctrine?

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The Lord's Day Evening
November 26, 2006

Titus 1:1-2; II Timothy 1:13-14
Priorities: The Life of Our Church

If you have your Bibles, I'd invite you to turn with me first to II Timothy, even though it's listed second in the order of the Scriptures under the evening message. First, to II Timothy 1:13-14, and then we'll go back to Titus 1:1-2.

In this series on biblical priorities for the healthy local congregation of God's people, we have already said three things that characterize a healthy local church. First, we said that a healthy local church is marked by a congregation of believers who understand the times. They are biblically aware, and through biblical spectacles look at the culture and the world around them; and they're aware of some of the trends and things that are impacting them, impacting the work of the kingdom, characteristic of the spirit of the age. They're on guard; they're ready to address that culture and engage that culture with the gospel, but not to capitulate to that culture.

We've also said that a healthy local church is characterized by a love for biblical expository preaching. The believer loves the diet of God's truth fed to him/her weekly, Lord's Day morning and evening.

Then this morning we said that a healthy local church is characterized by a passion for biblical worship – worship that is biblical in form and content, both in all of life and when the people of God praise Him.

Tonight we're going to note that a healthy local church is committed to biblical truth, to biblical teaching, to biblical doctrine. Indeed, it's characterized by a delight in biblical truth, in biblical teaching, in biblical doctrine. So I want to take you to two passages in the Bible that illustrate the importance of doctrine to the Christian ministry and to the Christian church.

Now let me say truthfully that there are hundreds of passages that we could go to. I was thinking as we sang Isaac Watts' rendition of Psalm 19 just a few moments ago, that the Old Testament word for *doctrine* that most closely

approximates what we mean when we use that word *doctrine*, is probably the word *law* or *torah*.

Now, when we hear the word *law* the first thing we think of is a list of things that you can't do. But in the Bible, *law* or *torah*, means first and foremost *God's instruction*. It's God's household instruction about the way of life, about Himself, who He is, what He's like. And so the Old Testament, as you know from singing Psalm 19 or reading Psalm 19, is filled with exhortations to God's people to do – what? Bind God's torah around their neck; to learn it and live it in their rising up, in their sitting down, in their going out and their coming in; to teach it to their young children along the way; to internalize it in all of life. So we could go to literally hundreds of passages in the Old Testament that emphasize the importance of biblical doctrine or instruction, or teaching. And especially through that word *torah* or *law* we would find much of that emphasis there in the Old Testament.

Same thing in the Apostle Paul. Paul is forever giving some sort of exhortation about the importance of doctrine, about biblical truth, about theology; and the passage that we're going to read tonight are illustrations of that, so let's look first to II Timothy 1:13-14. Remember here he's giving some direct exhortations to young pastor Timothy about what he ought to be doing as he pastors the church in Ephesus, and here's what he says. Let's pray before we read.

Father, this is Your word, and so we ask again that by Your Holy Spirit our hearts would be opened up, our minds illumined to appreciate Your truth; that we would very quickly apply it to ourselves; that we would see the logs in our own eyes before we see specks in the eyes of our brothers and sisters; that we would attend to the application of the truth to our own hearts before we apply that truth to the lives of others; that we would joyfully receive Your truth; that we would relish it and savor it, and long for it; but also that we would grow in it; that we would live it out; that it would make us more Christ-like, more tender, more loving, more devoted to You. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

II Timothy 1:13-14; hear the word of God:

Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. Guard through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you.

Thus far the reading of God's word.

Just in passing, note that the Apostle Paul gives two direct exhortations to Timothy. First, that he would retain even the pattern of words with which

the apostle taught him the truth of the Christian life. Paul didn't even want Timothy to monkey with the words in the way that he told him the truth...that he was to retain the very pattern of speaking, the terminology, the words that the Apostle Paul gave him in teaching him the truth of the Christian life. "Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me..." so he's telling Timothy, 'Timothy, it's important that you retain not just the doctrine that I've taught you, but even the pattern of words that I used in teaching you that doctrine.'

And then he says (look at verse 14), "Guard through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us the treasure which has been entrusted to you." And the "treasure" here probably refers to the gospel message itself, and of course that gospel message is full of doctrine. The minute that you say "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes on Him will not perish, but have everlasting life"—do you realize how many doctrines you have affirmed in saying that one verse, which you memorized when you were a four-year-old in Vacation Bible School? I mean, it is stunning to think through; and by the time you've gotten finished with that verse, you have affirmed a doctrine which an entire council of theologians spent over a year debating in the fourth century. When you affirm that Christ is the only begotten Son of the Father, you've affirmed the Trinity before you get out of that verse, because it's the Father giving His Son, who is Himself divine; you have affirmed the penal substitutionary atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ; you have affirmed the importance of faith in Christ...it would be really interesting to number the list of doctrines that are just contained in John 3:16. And so the Apostle Paul is saying to Timothy that he is to guard that gospel message which has been given to him.

Now, why? Why? Well, I think partly that why is answered when he turns to Titus 1:1-2. What's so important about doctrine? Well, here's what the Apostle Paul says, and this is just his introduction of the letter. He just says this in passing. He says (Titus 1:1-2):

Paul, a bond-servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the faith of those chosen of God and the knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness, in the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ago....

And I'll stop right in mid-sentence, because what I want you to see is contained there especially in verse 1. He tells Timothy here in verses 1 and 2 that as an apostle he is particularly concerned to encourage three things in the Christians that he has been called to minister to.

One, he is called to encourage them in their faith. Notice, he is an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of those chosen of God. So, he wants to see the saints built up in their trust in God, their belief on His promises, their faith in Christ.

Secondly, notice he says “...and ... [he’s] an apostle for the knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness....” Now he’s telling you why truth, why theology, why doctrine, why biblical instruction, why biblical teaching is so important: because the truth is unto – what? The truth is unto godliness. God’s truth is given to us in order to cultivate godliness so that we would be more like Christ, so that we would more consistently bear the image of God as we live and witness in this world.

And then he goes on to say “...in the hope of eternal life.” So he’s not only concerned to build you up in faith, he’s not only concerned to build you up in truth, but he’s also concerned to give you hope – real hope in this very dark fallen world in which we live. But in that very first verse he explains to us something of the importance of doctrine. And one mark of a healthy biblical church is that it is filled with members who love the truth, who know that it’s important, and who are being transformed in their discipleship by it, because the truth is unto godliness. And that’s what we aim for at First Presbyterian Church.

Now, as a way of introducing the importance of doctrine to you, I would like to ask your forgiveness and permission to read to you two rather long snippets from favorite books of mine which are introducing this very issue. I want to commend those books to you before we even begin. One, some of you have studied in small groups already, and if you haven’t studied this book, I’d encourage you to do so. It’s *Knowing God* by J.I. Packer.

Now, for some of you, *Knowing God* is a tough book to get through. Even though Packer wrote these as popular articles for a Christian magazine, when they were combined together in a book they became a best-seller. Over two million copies, I think, have been sold in the last 35 years or so since its publication. But more people buy this book than read it. They get about half way through it – and you really do need a small group to help you get through this book. For some folk, if you’re not used to reading Packer-esque theology, where he sort of packs it in, it can be a little intimidating. I think the first time I started reading this book, in maybe my late teenage years or my college years, I only got half way through it. And then when I came back to read it again during seminary, I got all the way through it, and then I immediately turned around and read it through two more times, marking it up and tearing it up, and I think I own about seven copies of it, not counting Ann’s. So it’s a wonderful book. But, look, even if you can’t get through the whole book, read his introduction (about two pages), and then read the first three pages of the first chapter, and I think it will actually hook you. So you only have to read about five pages and you’ll be hooked. And so I want to read to you just a few words from that.

And then, Mark Dever’s book, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, has a chapter called “Biblical Theology” where he’s saying that one mark of a healthy church is a biblical theology, and he explains why.

I want to read to you from those introductions tonight as a way of explaining why theology is important. Now this is Mark Dever talking. He's going to pick on Southern Baptists in this quote – remember, Mark is a Southern Baptist pastor, so this is not a Presbyterian taking cheap shots at Southern Baptists. This is a Southern Baptist picking at Southern Baptists. This is what he says:

I had made a statement in a doctoral seminar about God... [he went to a seminary that was liberal]. Bill responded politely but firmly that he liked to think of God rather differently. For several minutes Bill painted a picture for us of a friendly deity. He liked to think of God as being wise, but not meddling; compassionate, but not overpowering; ever so resourceful, but never interrupting. "This," said Bill in conclusion, "is how I like to think about God.

My reply was perhaps something sharper than it should have been. "Thank you, Bill, for telling us so much about yourself, but we're here to study God. We want to know what He's really like, and not simply about our own desires." The seminar was silent for a moment, as they took in this potential breach of politeness on my part, but they were taking in the point. I made some appreciative noises towards Bill, and we got on with our discussion about the nature and character of God as revealed in the Bible.

What do you think God is like? Not what do you like to think God is like, but how do you put together the God of Christmas with the God of the great Judgment of the final Day? What is your understanding of God and what He is like? To some of you, that whole discussion may sound nonsensical. Why expend any energy at all over what various people believe about an invisible being? I can understand that kind of skepticism over the importance of this topic. Regardless of our religious confession these days, who can dispute that in many ways religious beliefs seem irrelevant to our world. On television we see Roman Catholics fawning over the pope in his visit to St. Louis, while ignoring his teachings about contraception and abortion. Southern Baptists, who used to be known for decrying illicit sex, drugs, and rock and roll music (lest they lead to dancing, drinking, and playing cards) are now portrayed in a national magazine as antinomian Christians who have made peace with an anything goes morality.

This inattention to belief fits our culture's impatience with detail. In society today beliefs have been domesticated. We no longer fight about them. We don't really argue about them. We may not even care about them any more. After all, we think so many beliefs are merely passing fashions, or momentary expressions of individual wants or desires. Americans create designer religions and

smorgasbord faiths – “Oh, I’ll take a little of this from Hinduism, and a little of this from Christianity, and a little of this from my grandmother (I don’t remember what she was), and put it all together – as our own individual unique religion. Today people believe to be true simply what they desire to be true. Long held Christian beliefs about everything from the nature of God to morality have been reshaped, and have become unimportant to many people. They have been jettisoned in the name of making Christianity more relevant, more palatable, more acceptable to today’s hearers.

How relevant are your own beliefs to your daily life? When you last sat in church, how much did you examine the words of the prayers you heard? How much did you think about the words of the songs you sang? Or how about the words that you heard from Scripture? Does it really matter to you if what you said or sang in church was true? How much does it really matter anyway? If I attend church and I’m friendly, and I feel encouraged, and if I give my time to being there and even give my money, how much does it really matter if in my heart of hearts I really don’t believe all this stuff that people around me say? Or maybe even that I say? How important are religious beliefs?

He’s asking the question, how important is doctrine? How important is theology? How important is what we believe about God?

Now, J.I. Packer does the same thing at the beginning of *Knowing God*. At the beginning of the book...by the way, in his introduction, I love his first sentence. Anybody remember his first sentence? “As clowns yearn to play Hamlet, so I have longed to write a treatise about God.” And then his next words are, “This is not it.” But in the course of his first chapter, he tells this story:

On January 7, 1855, the minister of New Park Street Chapel in Southwark opened his morning sermon as follows:

It has been said by someone that the proper study of mankind is man. I will not oppose that idea, but I believe that it is equally true that the proper study of God’s people is God. The proper study of a Christian is the Godhead. The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy which can ever engage the attention of a child of God is the name, the nature, the person, the word, the doings, and the existence of the great God whom he calls his Father.

There is something exceedingly improving to the mind in a contemplation of the divinity. It is a subject so vast that our thoughts

are lost in its immensity, and so deep that our pride is drowned by our infinity. Other subjects we can compass and grapple with; in them we feel a kind of content. But no subject of contemplation will tend more to humble the mind than thoughts of God. But while the subject humbles the mind, it also expands the mind. He who often thinks of God will have a larger mind than the man who simply plods around the narrow globe. And while humbling and expanding the mind, the subject is immanently consolatory. Oh! There is in contemplating Christ a balm for every wound! In musing on the Father, there is a quietus for every grief, and in the influence of the Holy Ghost there is a balsam for every sore. Would you lose your sorrow? Would you drown your cares? Then go plunge yourself in the Godhead's deepest sea. Be lost in His immensity, and you shall come forth as from a couch of rest, refreshed and invigorated. I know nothing which can so comfort the soul, so calm the swelling billows of sorrow and grief, so speak peace to the winds of trial, than a devout musing upon the subject of the Godhead.

And then he goes on to preach a sermon on that subject. That young man who preached that message was 20 years old, had had no formal theological education. His name was Charles Haddon Spurgeon. Kind of makes you sick, doesn't it, that a 20 year old can speak so powerfully as that.

The point, of course, is that theology is in fact practical and crucial to the Christian life, and that's the one point that I want to press home tonight. The healthy Christian life is characterized by a balance of three things: doctrine; devotion; and, duty. (We could call them different things – truth, experience, and practice.) Doctrine – what we believe concerning God that He teaches in His word about Himself, His will and His ways; Devotion (or experience) – our experience of the grace of God at work in our lives, and our interpretation of God's providence for us in this world; Practice – our living out of the Christian life; Duty – our serving God to the fullness of our being, our loving our neighbors as ourselves, our supporting of the work and worship of the church. Those three components are a part of every healthy Christian life.

But doctrine is meant to help us in both the areas of devotion or experience, and duty or practice. Doctrine - biblical doctrine, rich, sound Bible truth - is meant to help us properly interpret our experience, because in this world it is a dangerous thing to attempt to interpret the Scripture by our experience. No, we're to interpret our experience by the Scripture, and doctrine is designed to help us do that. And in this world doctrine is designed to impel us to duty; to motivate us to practice, and so theology is important both for our having a healthy Christian experience and for our living out the Christian life in daily practice. That's what the Apostle Paul is saying when he says that the truth is unto godliness.

But as I look around at churches everywhere today, it seems to me that they are dogged in this issue of doctrine in at least four particular ways. In Jim Packer's book, *A Quest for Godliness*, he cites three different groups of people that have doctrine in different ways, and that's a helpful way to look at it as well. But I want to point out four particular problems that I see in relation to Christian doctrine dogging the church today.

The first one is *nominalism*, by which I simply mean an "in name only" Christianity. There is a claim to be a Christian, but there's no evidence in the heart, in the affections, in the life of any real vital Christianity in that person. So, nominalism.

Secondly, there is the area that I might call *doctrinal formalism*: people that are very concerned about biblical correctness but do not seem to have any evidences of the truth working in their own hearts to make them soft towards their own sins, to make them patient towards other believers who are struggling in their growth in grace, to make them winsome in their witness to the world. They seem to be very clear about getting doctrine exactly right and in all the boxes, but there's no working out of that so that they become sweeter Christians, more Christ-like believers, more faithful followers of the Lord Jesus.

Then, thirdly, there's what I might call a *non-doctrinal moralism*. These are people that are very concerned that we do what's right, but they're not very concerned about doctrine.

And then there's what I might call *doctrinal indifference*.

And I want to look at each of those four things just very briefly with you tonight.

I. Nominalism.

One problem, it seems to me, that dogs many Christian churches today with regard to doctrine is *nominalism...in-name-only Christianity*. It's the result of **easy-believeism**...going out and telling people that 'All you have to do is pray this one-sentence prayer, or sign this card, and you will be eternally saved, and I want to give you immediate assurance of that. That's all you have to do. Fill this card out, pray this prayer, you're in, you're saved, you're a Christian.' And what that has promoted – that easy believeism has promoted – is the burgeoning rolls of churches with people who have made that kind of an easy assent to Bible truth, who are marked by no reality of that in their hearts and their lives. And these people tend to be uncaring about doctrine, about devotion, or duty. In other words, none of those three things particularly interest them. They're not particularly concerned about the truth of Scripture, they're not particularly concerned about Christian experience, they're not particularly concerned about

Christian duty; and there are churches filled – or at least, church rolls that are filled – with such people in our own day. And so nominalism is a problem.

And what was the problem in the first place? The truth wasn't taken seriously. Truth demands a response that is much greater than simple assent. It demands embrace. It demands that we own the truth. When you're talking to your young people...and maybe you have a young person in your household who has committed a particular crime, and you are trying to impress upon that young person that what he or she has done is wrong. And you ask that young person to repent or to ask forgiveness...and you get "I'm sorry!" Are you or are you not a little suspicious about the sincerity of that confession when you get "I'm sorry!"? That is an example of assent that has not come from the heart. But truth must be embraced with the whole heart.

II. Doctrinal Formalism.

Secondly, there's the problem of *doctrinal formalism*. Sometimes we call it "dead orthodoxy." This kind of tendency cares a lot about doctrine, but it's insufficiently developed in devotion and duty. Oftentimes it comes in reaction to the doctrinal indifference and innovation that characterizes mainline liberal churches, and many well-meaning Christians fall into this trap. They've seen churches deviate from the truth, but then all they're concerned about are the formulas. They're very concerned about the formulas, but they're temperamentally doctrinaire and judgmental, and **they confuse spirituality with a rote knowledge** of theological textbooks. They've forgotten that the Lord did not give us theology as an end in itself, but to build one another up, to lead us to the truth, to make us more like Christ, to get us into communion with the living God.

III. Non-Doctrinal Moralism.

A third problem is what I might call *non-doctrinal moralism*. This tendency cares a lot about duty but less about devotion, and even less about doctrine. Now, if I were going to pick on and label some denominational tendencies to these things in their worst expressions, if you look at devolved Southern Baptist life, it often can be characterized by nominalism. If you look at devolved Presbyterian life, it can look like doctrinal formalism. If you look at devolved Methodist life, it can look like non-doctrinal moralism. Methodists are real into doing what's right; loving your neighbor - open hearts, open doors, open minds – all that stuff. But they're not in these days and age generally very interested in the importance of doctrine. And we see these tendencies in churches all around us that care about duty but less about devotion. But if we don't understand that our duty in the Christian life flows from the doctrines of

grace, we will end up teaching works righteousness, and we'll end up driving people into the ground with the demands of the Scriptures.

IV. Doctrinal Indifference.

And fourth, there's the problem of doctrinal indifference – people who very frankly do not care about doctrine. They may be far more interested in emotions or in experience, and particularly you see this in devolved charismatic life. Every church has its challenges, doesn't it? But doctrine is designed to change us and to help us in both the areas of experience and practice.

Let me give you just one example from another sermon that I want to commend to you. Phil Ryken's little booklet called *The Sovereignty of God's Mercy*, is actually just an address that he gave on Romans 9 to the Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology a couple of years ago. And by the way, the Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology is going to be right here in Jackson in March, in the room that you're sitting in, and I hope you'll take advantage of that. But here's what he says about the study of God's mercy. So...the theological subject of God's mercy:

We respond to God's mercy by becoming merciful ourselves. Sadly, some people who believe in election, in sovereign mercy, are not always known for their mercy. In fact, sometimes it seems like there's an ornery streak in Calvinism. But someone who understands the wonder of God's mercy must seek to become a living demonstration of it. Jesus said, 'Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.' But we could also reverse that statement and say, 'Blessed are those who have been shown mercy, for they will be merciful.'

One way to test our grasp of God's mercy is to ask how we treat other sinners. How do we respond when we encounter a homeless person? Or a gay prostitute? Or a drug addict? Or a drunk? Or whatever co-worker or family member or church member is most difficult for us to deal with? Usually our response is to get angry or to wonder why those people can't get their act together. But that's hardly a response of someone who knows God's mercy, who knows that the bondage of sin can only be broken through the mercy of the cross. Some Christians are Calvinists when they deal with their own sins, but they are Arminians when it comes to others. Sure, they've learned that their own solution for their own depravity is divine grace, but they still expect other people to save themselves. Certainly God holds sinners responsible for their sins, but He also reaches out to them in mercy; and if we really understand the doctrine of God's sovereign mercy in election, we

will neither be judgmental nor proud, but we will become messengers of God's mercy.

What does the Lord require of you? To act justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.

So how is it that we make sure that theology, that doctrine, that Bible truth doesn't go bad on us? Two things: First, we turn it into prayer. We make it a habit of studying theology and turning it back into prayer to God; and, secondly, we ask ourselves 'Has this truth so worked itself into my heart that I have become more Christ-like because of it?

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, thank You for the truth. The truth will make us free, Your Son our Savior has taught us. Free us, then, by this truth. Give us a love for the truth, change us by the truth, get glory for Yourself in us through the truth; make us to be a people who love Your truth. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Would you stand and receive God's blessing.

Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, through Jesus Christ our Lord, until the day break and the shadows flee away. Amen.

Biblical Priorities for a Healthy Church (4)

Titus 1:1-2 and 2 Timothy 1:13-14

What in the world is so important about doctrine?

Biblical Priorities for the Life of Our Church (4)

Biblical Doctrine

Introduction (review):

1. On October 22, we began a new series of topical-expository messages on Biblical Priorities for the Life of Our Church.
2. In our first message in this series, "Where in the world in the Church?," we considered the context in which we live and minister, and we agreed that the Bible teaches us that it is important for us to be aware of our contemporary context, to understand our times (see, e.g. 1 Timothy 3:1-7, 1 Chronicles 12:32 and Matthew 16:3/ Luke 12:56). We also argued that there at least three huge factors impacting the church in our day: *individualism, relativism, and*

consumerism. We also said that these cultural myths and assumptions have a massive influence on the church, and often unhelpfully impact the way we view what the church is, should be, does and believes, as well as the way we participate in the life of the church and the way we engage the culture.

3. So how do we compete with this? How do we resist the siren song of the culture? How do we keep from caving in and copying the world? The Bible's answer is primarily that we do so by having our hearts and minds captured by the word of God. And this has to work its way out primarily in the faithful exposition of God's word - biblical preaching. So that was the focus of our second message in this series.

4. As we studied 2 Timothy 4:1-4 and noted Paul's emphasis on the importance of preaching, we also suggested five ways that we as hearers of the word can better profit from the message preached. 1. Listen as if your life depended on it (Matthew 4:4). 2. Recognize the seriousness of your life situation (Ephesians 6:12). 3. Realize that it is God's word you need in such a circumstance (Psalm 119:105). 4. Understand that it is God's help that you need (Psalm 40:17). 5. Appreciate that communion with God is your goal (Psalm 27:4; 42:1)

5. This last observation on how to benefit from the preaching of God's word led us, naturally, to focus on the subject of worship. Having communion with God as our goal is closely connected with valuing God above all else as our end (and not simply viewing him as a means to an end). Thus, true believers all have a passion for worship.

6. We learned that *worship takes place in two arenas, all-of-life and the gathered congregation, and flows from a heart that has received God's grace and desires God.*

7. We see a good, brief, biblical definition of worship in Psalm 29:2 - "giving to the Lord the glory due his name." We see an emphasis on *all-of-life worship* in the OT and NT in Jonah 1:9 and Romans 12:1-2. We see the emphasis on *gathered or congregational praise* in the OT and NT in Psalm 100:2 and Hebrews 10:25.

8. We said that: *a healthy church is filled with believers who by God's grace have a passion for biblical worship.* They live to glorify God in all of life and they love to gather with the saints to meet with him. And we argued that this passion will manifest itself in at least four ways:

- I. Glorifying God** (Worship in all of life);
- II. Desiring God** (God as the object of our worship);
- III. Following the Bible (God-directed worship, in form and content);**
- and**
- IV. Loving the Lord's Day** (God-centered view of Sunday).

9. Tonight, we move to a fourth priority of a healthy, biblical church: **a delight in biblical truth, teaching and doctrine.**

10. The study of theology (call it what you will: doctrine, biblical teaching, biblical truth, etc.) is in fact that most practical study that a person could ever undertake, because God's truth is intended by God to serve the interests of his glory and the well-being of his people.

11. *One mark of a healthy biblical church is that it will be filled with members who love the truth, know that it is important, and are being transformed in their discipleship by it.*

12. So, those who just do not care about doctrine, are missing out on a blessing. They may consider doctrine extraneous to authentic Christian experience, irrelevant to their daily practice, and entirely too cold and speculative for their tastes, but every day of our lives, our choices, our attitudes, our words, our motives are based on our theology! We can't escape it. What we believe affects how we live. Bad theology leads to bad practice. Good doctrine aids us in our duty and helps us interpret our experience, and bad doctrine distracts us from our duty and confuses us about our experience. That's why every Christian needs to be thoroughly grounded in Christian doctrine. We need to know biblical truth (doctrine) in order to live the Christian life (discipleship). God's truth is for people! It is good for us and makes our lives better.

13. Paul explains to both Titus and Timothy the importance of doctrine in the Christian life when he says:

Titus 1:1-2 1 Paul, a bond-servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the faith of those chosen of God and *the knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness*, 2 in the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago, . . .

2 Timothy 1:13-14 13 *Retain the standard of sound words* which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. 14 *Guard*, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, *the treasure which has been entrusted to you.*

The well-formed Christian life consists of **three parts: doctrine, devotion, duty** (or you could call the three parts: theology, experience and practice - corresponding to the three functions of the soul, thinking/believing, desiring, willing).

Five problems in relation to these three components of the Christian life dog the church today: (1) nominalism, (2) doctrinal formalism, (3) doctrinal deviation, (4) non-doctrinal moralism, (5) doctrinal indifference.

PROBLEM ONE: *Nominalism* – "in name only" Christianity

PROBLEM TWO: *Doctrinal formalism* – "dead orthodoxy"

PROBLEM THREE: *Doctrinal deviation* -- "denying, undermining, perverting the truth"

PROBLEM FOUR: *Non-doctrinal moralism* – "duty disconnected from grace and the Gospel"

PROBLEM FIVE: *Doctrinal indifference* – "often rootless, individualistic experientialism"

How do we help make sure doctrine doesn't "go bad on us"? By turning our study of doctrine into prayer (of adoration, confession, thanksgiving and petition) and by engaging in self-examination in connection with all our doctrinal study (asking ourselves if we are growing in the graces that the truth we are studying is designed to promote).

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