

Sound Doctrine

Messages in the "Sound Doctrine" Series:

Doctrine Is Practical

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Doctrine Is Practical

Occasionally I'm asked why we emphasize doctrine so much. Now and then someone tells me that my preaching needs to be less doctrinal and more practical.

The word doctrine simply means "teaching." The central imperative of the Great Commission is the command to teach. Matthew 28:18-20

Unfortunately, some are biased against doctrine. Many church folks have almost the same perspective. Because they view doctrine as heady and theoretical, they dismiss it as unimportant, divisive, threatening, or simply impractical.

Of course, practical application is important. I don't want to minimize that at all. But if there is a insufficiency in preaching today, it is that there's too much relational, pseudo-psychological, and thinly life-related content, and not enough emphasis on sound doctrine.

The distinction between doctrinal and practical truth is artificial; doctrine is practical! In fact, nothing is more practical than sound doctrine.

The pastor who turns away from preaching sound doctrine abandons the primary responsibility of his calling: Titus 1:9 "Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers." We teach truth, we teach error, or we teach nothing at all.

Layout of the Truth

The Bible is structured (laid out) in a manner so as to reveal truth God's Way, Will, & Work. Practical insights, gimmicks, and illustrations of men mean little if they're not attached to God's divine principles. There's no basis for godly behavior apart from the truth of God's Word.

Before the preacher asks anyone to perform a certain duty, he must first deal with doctrine. He must develop his message around theological themes and draw out the principles of the texts. Then the truth can be applied.

Romans provides a prime example. Paul doesn't give any practical exhortation until he has given eleven chapters of doctrinal theology.

Paul develops great truths of Scripture in Romans, culminating in Romans 11:33-36, where he says, “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen.”

Then in chapter 12, he turns immediately to the practical consequences of the doctrine of the first 11 chapters. No passage in Scripture captures the Christian’s responsibility in the face of truth more clearly than Romans 12:1-2.

Resting on eleven chapters of profound doctrine, Paul calls each believer to the highest act of spiritual worship—giving oneself as a living sacrifice. Doctrine gives rise to dedication to Christ, the greatest practical act. And the remainder of the book of

The book of Romans goes on to explain the many practical results of one’s dedication to Christ. Paul follows the same pattern in Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and 1 Thessalonians. The doctrinal message comes first. Upon that foundation he builds the practical application, making the logical connection with the word therefore (Romans 1:1; Galatians 5:1; Ephesians 4:1; Philippians 2:1) or then (Colossians 3:1; 1 Thessalonians 4:1).

Living of the Truth

We have placed an inaccurate meaning on the word doctrine. We’ve made it something abstract and threatening, unrelated to daily living. That has brought about the disastrous idea that preaching and teaching are unrelated to real

living.

The scriptural idea of doctrine includes the entire message of the gospel—its teaching about God, salvation, sin, and righteousness. Those concepts are so tightly bound to daily living that the first-century mind did not see them as something separate from practical truth.

The New Testament church was founded on a solid base of doctrine. First Timothy 3:16 contains what many expositors believe is an early church hymn: “God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory”. There, in capsule form, is the basis of all Christian teaching. Without that, no practical application matters.

Leaving of the Truth

The next few verses of 1 Timothy describe what happens when men depart from the basis of biblical truth: “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth.” (4:1-3).

Dishonesty, lying, hypocrisy, a dulled conscience, and false religious practices all have roots in wrong doctrine.

No ministry activity is more important than rightly understanding and clearly proclaiming sound doctrine. In 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus, Paul commissions two young men to the ministry. His central theme is the importance of adhering to sound doctrine.

Paul charged Timothy: “If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained.” (1 Timothy 4:6). Paul also goes on to say, “Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.” (v. 16).

Titus 2:10 says we “adorn [or honor] the doctrine of God” by how we live. When it comes to affirming sound

doctrine, what we do carries far more significance than what we say. That's why it's disastrous when a pastor, seminary professor, or any kind of Christian leader fails morally. The message he proclaims is that his doctrine becomes merely an intellectual exercise.

Listening to the Truth

True doctrine transforms behavior as it is woven into the fabric of everyday life. But it must be understood if it is to have its impact. The real challenge of the ministry is to dispense the truth clearly and accurately. Practical application comes easily by comparison.

No believer can apply truth he doesn't know.

Those who don't know the Bible's principles for marriage, divorce, family, childrearing, discipline, money, debt, work, service to Christ, responsibilities to the poor, care of widows, response to governments, eternal rewards, and other teachings will not be able to apply them.

Those who don't know what the Bible teaches about salvation cannot be saved. Those who don't know what the Bible teaches about holiness are incapable of dealing with sin. Thus they are unable to live fully to God's glory and their own individual happiness.

THE DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

The doctrine of salvation, *soteriology*, must be the grandest theme in the Scriptures. It embraces all of time as well as eternity past and future. It relates in one way or another to all of mankind, without exception. It even has ramifications in the sphere of the angels. It is the theme of both the Old and New Testaments. It is personal, national, and cosmic. And it centers on the greatest Person, our Lord Jesus Christ.

From God's perspective salvation includes the total work of God in bringing people from condemnation to justification, from death to eternal life, from alienation to filiation. From the human perspective it incorporates all of the blessings that being in Christ brings both in this life and the life to come.

The inclusive sweep of salvation is underscored by observing the three tenses of salvation. (1) The moment one believed he was saved from the condemnation of sin (Eph. 2:8; Titus 3:5). (2) That believer is also being saved from the dominion of sin and is being sanctified and preserved (Heb. 7:25). (3) And he will be saved from the very presence of sin in heaven forever (Rom. 5:9-10).

Why should God want to save sinners? What could be His motivation? Why should He bear the pain of giving His only begotten Son to die for people who had rebelled against His goodness? What could it possibly mean to God to have a family of human beings?

The Bible indicates at least three reasons why God wanted to save sinners:

(1) This was the greatest and most concrete demonstration of the love of God.

His good gifts in nature and through His providential care (great as they are) do not hold a candle to the gift of His Son to be our Savior. John 3:16 reminds us that His love was shown in His gift, and Romans 5:8 says that God proved conclusively that He loved us by the death of Christ.

(2) Salvation also gives God a display of His grace throughout all eternity (Eph. 2:7).

Each saved person will be a special trophy of God's grace forever. Only redeemed human beings can provide

this display,

(3) God also wanted a people who would do good works in this life and thus give the world a glimpse, however imperfect, of God who is good (v. 10).

Without the salvation Christ provided these things would not be possible.

This salvation is tremendously important. In only two instances does the New Testament pronounce a curse on Christians for failure to do something. One is not loving the Lord (1 Cor. 16:22), and the other is not preaching the Gospel of grace (Gal. 1:6-9). Not comprehending clearly the doctrine of salvation can lead to proclaiming a false or perverted Gospel, and many statements of the Gospel one hears today may well come under this curse. Gratefully, the grace of God overpowers our unclear presentations, and people are saved in spite of, though not as a result of, an unclear or misstated Gospel.

Positively, this doctrine is crucial - simply because a Gospel witness is the responsibility of all believers. For the preacher it is even more important, for he is the link between God and the unregenerated person, and his message must be clear (Rom. 10:14-15). Lewis Sperry Chafer, whose ministry began in evangelism, still thought near the end of his life that "in a well-balanced ministry, Gospel preaching should account for no less than 75 percent of the pulpit testimony. The remainder may be for the edification of those who are saved"

This certainly highlights the importance of studying and understanding this great doctrine of salvation.

The Doctrine of Rewards:

The Judgment Seat (Bema) of Christ

One of the prominent doctrines of the New Testament is the Doctrine of Rewards and the Judgment Seat of Christ. It is a doctrine often ignored.

Though it is tremendously serious with eternal ramifications, the judgment seat of Christ is not a place and time when the Lord will mete out punishment for sins committed by the child of God. Rather, it is a place where rewards will be given or lost depending on how one has used his or her life for the Lord.

In 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20, the Apostle Paul drew courage and was motivated by the fact of rewards at the return of the Lord for the church which he mentions in every chapter in this epistle and becomes the primary subject of 2 Thessalonians. The Lord's return and what this means not only to the world but to us individually is a very prominent subject of the New Testament.

It is significant that among the final words of Revelation, the last book of the Bible, we find these words of the Lord:

Rev. 22:12, "And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be."

While salvation is a free gift, there are rewards given for faithfulness in the Christian life and loss of rewards for unfaithfulness. Rewards become one of the great motives of the Christian's life or should. But we need to understand the nature of these rewards to understand the nature of the motivation. Some people are troubled by the doctrine of rewards because this seems to suggest "merit" instead of "grace," and because, it is pointed out, we should only serve the Lord out of love and for God's glory.

Of course we should serve the Lord out of love and for God's glory, and understanding the nature of rewards will help us do that. But the fact still remains that the Bible promises us rewards. God gives us salvation. It is a gift through faith, but He rewards us for good works. God graciously supplies the means by which we may serve Him. Indeed, He works in us both to will and to do as we volitionally appropriate His grace (Phil. 2:12-

13), but the decision to serve, and the diligence employed in doing so, are our responsibility and our contribution and God sees this as rewardable. Compare the following passages:

1 Corinthians 15:10 “But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.”

Colossians 1:29 “Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily.”

Other Key Verses on Rewards: Rom. 14:10-11; 1 Cor. 3:11-15; 2 Cor. 5:9-10; 1 John 2:28; Rev. 3:11-12.

THINGS WHICH BECOME SOUND DOCTRINE

Titus 2:1 “But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine:”

There are three great fundamental truths that constitute the basis of our Christian faith:

I. WHAT THE BIBLE TEACHES ABOUT MAN

1. Man is a sinner by nature - Romans 5:12; Psalm 51:5
2. Man is a sinner by choice - Isaiah 53:6
3. Man cannot save himself from sin - Titus 3:3-7

II. WHAT THE BIBLE TEACHES ABOUT SIN

1. Sin is appealing to all men - Ephesians 2:1-3
2. Sin alienates man from God - Isaiah 59:2.
3. Sin produces spiritual death - Romans 6:23.

III. WHAT THE BIBLE TEACHES ABOUT GOD

1. God will eternally condemn the unrepentant sinner – Lk. 13:3
2. God desires the salvation of every man – 1 Tim. 2:4; II Peter 3:9
3. God completely forgives the repentant sinner - I John 1:9; Isaiah 43:25.

WHAT IS SOUND DOCTRINE?

We read in Titus 2:1, “But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine.” The word “speak” is a word that describes an ordinary conversation. It is in the present tense, thus speaks of one keeping on speaking. Paul is talking about things that are to be constantly and continually discussed, taught and preached.

What is it that is to be constantly talked about? It is “sound doctrine.” The word “sound” is found 5 times in Titus and is a word that means “being well” or “healthy.” We get our English word “hygiene” from this word. Paul is talking about doctrine that promotes and produces healthy Christian lives.

Ephesians 4:14 admonishes us “that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine...”

Colossians 2:7 urges us to be “rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.”

I. SOUND DOCTRINE IS BASED ON GOD'S WORD!

“And that from a child thou has known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.” II Timothy 3:15-16.

II. SOUND DOCTRINE MAGNIFIES GOD'S HOLINESS!

The seraphim hovering about the throne of God, cried out, saying:

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory.” Isaiah 6:3.

“The Lord is righteous in all His ways, and holy in all His works.” Psalm 145:17.

III. SOUND DOCTRINE DECLARES MAN'S DEPRAVITY!

Created originally in the image and likeness of God, sin entered the human race through the transgression of Adam: “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” Romans 5:12.

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?” Jeremiah 17:9.

“Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” Genesis 6:5.

IV. SOUND DOCTRINE TEACHES HEAVEN & HELL'S LITERALNESS!

Concerning Heaven:

“In My Father's house are many mansions, if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.” John 14:2. (I Cor. 2:9)

Concerning Hell:

“Then He will also say to those on the left hand: ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’ “And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” Matthew 25:41, 46.

V. SOUND DOCTRINE ASSERTS SALVATION'S GRACE!

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of your-selves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” Ephesians 2:8-9.