

Why God's Preachers Must Preach Doctrine

Laurence A. Justice

Recently some preachers were discussing what kind of programs we should have at the Baptist pastor's conference on Monday mornings. One preacher said, "Let's don't have any doctrinal sermons because doctrine is divisive." Another said he found it a good rule never to spend more than ten minutes preaching on a certain doctrine because it is so controversial.

Some people say they don't like doctrinal preaching because it is boring. Many are saying that we need preaching that applies to our everyday lives rather than abstract doctrinal preaching.

Doctrine simply means teaching or that which is taught. The doctrines of the Bible are simply the teachings of God's word. The word of God is a book of doctrine. Take doctrine out of God's word and you have nothing left!

What are some of the doctrines of God's word? All the major doctrines of God's word may be summed up systematically under seven headings.

First, there are the doctrines or teachings concerning the scriptures. The Bible teaches that the scriptures are verbally inspired by God. They are inerrant and infallible. They are clear enough for all to understand the gospel and be saved. They are all the revelation from God that man needs for salvation and godly living. They are the only rule of faith and practice for God's people.

Next, there are the doctrines concerning God himself. The Bible teaches that God is a Trinity. God is three Persons yet one God; God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. God is the Creator of all things. The Bible tells us many things about God's nature such as the fact that he is all powerful, all knowing, and everywhere present. God is holy and thus cannot tolerate any sin and will judge all sinners in eternal hell. God is sovereign. He rules over all things in this universe whether it be creation or redemption or providence.

Thirdly, there are the doctrines of God's word concerning man. Created perfect by God, Adam, the first man, sinned and since all men were in him when he sinned, all men fell in Adam. This sin brought ruin on the whole human race and even on the creation itself. Every part of man's being was corrupted until man has no ability even to come to Christ for salvation except as God graciously gives it. Death is the punishment for sin and this death includes physical, spiritual, and eternal death. Sin unrepented of sends people into the flames of eternal hell at last.

Fourth, there are the doctrines of God's word concerning Christ. The Bible tells us that Jesus Christ is God the Son and the Son of God who took flesh by being born of a virgin. He was both God and man in one person. He lived up to all the requirements of God's law and then suffered the penalty for breaking God's law which is death in all its aspects. After dying on the cross he was buried and rose again. He did all these things as the substitute for his people.

Fifth, there are the doctrines of God's word concerning salvation. There are many doctrines having to do with salvation revealed in God's word. A partial list of these would include election, calling or regeneration, faith, repentance from sin, justification, imputed righteousness, sanctification, perseverance in grace, assurance of salvation, and grace.

Next, there are the doctrines of God's word concerning the church; what it is, of whom it is made up, its three-fold task of making, baptizing, and teaching disciples, its ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper, and how it is to be governed.

Finally, there are the doctrines of God's word concerning the future or last things. God's word tells us that history is moving toward a climax when Jesus Christ will return literally and bodily to this earth to raise his people from their graves and glorify them, and to reign for a thousand years. There will be a final judgment at the great white throne where unrepentant sinner will be cast body and soul into the lake of fire. The earth will be burned up and there will then be a new heaven and a new earth.

It is obvious to those that will read it that the Bible is indeed a book of doctrine. The Bible does not lay out these doctrines systematically like I have done here today. The doctrines of God's word have to be searched out and studied to be properly understood.

The clearest expression of the doctrinal truth of the Bible that Baptists have ever made is the Philadelphia Confession of Faith of 1742. It is a systematic summary of Bible doctrine as Baptists understand them.

II Timothy 4:1-4 deals with the preaching of doctrine. "I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves, teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn sway their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables."

This passage of scripture is a charge made to God's preachers which every man of God is responsible for carrying out. This charge is made by the apostle Paul with the recognition that God and the Lord Jesus Christ see and know all things and that preachers will be judged by the Lord Jesus Christ when He comes in His kingdom for the way they keep this charge. This charge to preachers is to preach God's word and to do so instantly or diligently and to do so in season, out of season or when the word is received and when it is not, when it is popular and when it is not. This preaching of God's word is to involve reproof, rebuking, and exhorting the people and it is to be done patiently, with all longsuffering. Finally, the preaching of God's word is to involve doctrine Paul says in verse 2 and it is with this preaching of doctrine that we shall be concerned. The first reason God's preachers must preach doctrine is

Because God's Word Commands Them to Do So

Verse 2 of our text commands God's preachers to preach the word with all longsuffering and *doctrine*. Again and again God's word commands God's preachers to preach *doctrine*. Paul is

instructing the young preacher Timothy when he says in I Timothy 4:13, “Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to *doctrine*. Titus 1:9 says that God’s preachers must be able by sound *doctrine* both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers. I Timothy 5:17 tells churches to give double honor or literally double pay to their pastors who labor or work hard preaching doctrine. “Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the word and *doctrine*.”

The Lord Jesus was a doctrinal preacher. Matthew 7:28 says that “the people were astonished at his *doctrine*”. In John 6 when the Lord preached some heavy doctrines having to do with his grace in salvation, many of his disciples turned back and quit following him.

The apostles were doctrinal preachers. Acts 2:42 tells us that in the days of the early church “they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ *doctrine* and fellowship and in breaking of bread and in prayers.” Acts 5:28 tells how the high priest scolded Peter and the apostles saying “...ye have filled Jerusalem with your *doctrine*.”

Paul was a doctrinal preacher. He said to the young preacher Timothy in II Timothy 3:10, “Thou has fully known my doctrine...” Paul preached doctrine at Thessalonica. He preached there less than a month; three Sabbath days according to Acts 17:2. Yet when he wrote back to them his first letter and reviewed what he had preached to them he mentioned such doctrines as election, assurance, the Holy Spirit, repentance, the resurrection of Christ. Christ’s saving work of delivering his people from the wrath to come, and Christ’s return from heaven.

If God’s word commands preachers to preach doctrine then why don’t they do it? Why do so many preachers neglect and ignore doctrinal preaching? Let’s look at just three reasons here.

Number one must surely be laziness. It takes work, study, prayer, and reading to preach doctrinal messages. It’s much more difficult to preach a series of sermons on the doctrine of justification by faith for example, than it does to preach on being happy or on missions or on doing personal work. It requires a much greater knowledge of God’s word and a lot more reading of the great students of God’s word for one to preach doctrinal sermons. If a preacher preaches doctrine he is going to have to quit being lazy and start spending a lot more time in his study and a lot less time at the golf course and playing with the grandchildren.

Because of the flesh’s tendency to laziness, Paul exhorts preachers in I Timothy 4:13 to “Till I come give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.” And in II Timothy 2:15, Paul says for preachers to “Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”

A second reason preachers shy away from preaching doctrine is fear of controversy. The gospel ministry is certainly no place for those who are fearful of controversy. Can anyone name a single doctrine that has not been the subject of controversy at one time or another? The doctrines of God’s word are controversial because they go against the grain of the world. They humble the pride of man. They glorify God. They denounce the sinfulness and inability of man. They reveal the errors and heresies of men. Therefore they will of necessity be subject to controversy when preached.

So many preachers just don't want to be bothered with controversy so they seek to avoid it by shutting their mouths about the great doctrines of God's word. These men need a dose of the courage and boldness of Elijah and Nathan and Micaiah and John the Baptist and Paul.

A third reason preachers don't preach doctrine today is because Bible doctrine contradicts the easy believism they have been preaching. Brother, when a person begins to look into the great Bible doctrines of justification by faith and repentance from sin and persevering in the faith he has to stop this business of three easy steps to salvation and the "Come down to the front and make your decision for salvation." He has to acknowledge that salvation is not so simple after all and that only as the Holy Spirit moves and works through the preaching of the doctrines of God's word will lost sinners ever be saved. A second reason God's preachers must preach doctrine is

Because the Time Will Come When People Will No Longer Listen to the Preaching of Sound Doctrine

In verse 3 of I Timothy 4, Paul says, "For (or because) the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine." God's preachers must preach Bible doctrine because there will come a time when people won't listen to sound doctrine.

I submit to you that this time has already come. Many people today, many church members, will not listen to sound doctrine. They won't receive it. They won't tolerate it. They strike out against it in ridicule and contempt.

Instead of hearing and receiving the sound doctrine of God's word they turn away their ears from the truth and turn instead to the fables and nonsense of the TV preachers of the day. They find for themselves preachers who preach on exciting things, things that excite the flesh at least, preachers who preach only on love or on health, wealth, and prosperity, on self-improvement, or on caring and sharing.

The confused and shallow evangelism of the past two generations has filled our churches with people who know no biblical doctrine and have no concern to know it, and so they will not endure sound doctrine when God's man does preach it.

So many people come to church today, not to worship God or be instructed in biblical doctrine, but to be entertained. This is the entire concept they have of worshipping God. You can have a so-called Christian concert where entertainers come and sing and "give their testimonies" and crowds will flock to hear them. But announce that you are going to preach a sermon on the doctrine of regeneration or the doctrine of glorification and people will stay away in droves. Thirdly God's preachers must preach doctrine

Because to Believe Savingly in Christ People Must Believe the Right Things About Christ

Sometimes people who are opposed to doctrinal preaching will say, “Well, we need to just preach Christ and not concern ourselves with doctrine!” “We believe in Christ and that’s all that matters.” But what Christ do they believe in?

There are many Christs out there today. Jehovah’s Witnesses have a Christ who is a created being and not the second Person of the Divine Trinity, the eternal I AM of the Bible. The Mormons have a Christ who was a polygamist rather than the pure and sinless, unmarried Son of God presented in the Bible. The liberals have a Christ who was not born of a virgin and who did not rise bodily from the dead as did the Christ of the Bible.

To believe savingly in Christ, one must believe the right things about him. He must believe who he is and what he did and why he died and these things are involved in Bible doctrine. Christ cannot be preached if doctrine is not preached.

The central theme of all the word of God is Jesus Christ the Savior of sinners; “Christ crucified” as Paul puts it in another place. The doctrine of Christ crucified, the *doctrine* of the cross, should be prominent in every sermon. And every subject preached should be related to this doctrine of Christ crucified. When a man preaches on the holiness of God or the sovereignty or the goodness of God or the love of God or the demands of God’s law or the sinfulness of man or the certainty of eternal hell, he must always relate these things to the doctrine of the cross and man’s need of a Savior.

II John 9 says, “Whosoever... abideth not in the doctrine of Christ hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son.” To believe savingly in Christ, people must believe the right things about Christ. To believe the right things about Christ people must know the right things about him. And in order for people to know the right things about Christ, God’s preachers must preach the doctrine of Christ. Fourthly God’s preachers must preach doctrine

Because Bible Doctrine is the Essential Foundation of Christian Experience

It is absolutely necessary for a person to know Bible doctrine before he can live a Christian life. In God’s order of things doctrine comes before experience. Every one of Paul’s New Testament letters can be divided into two sections. Each has a doctrinal section followed by a practical section. In the book of Ephesians for example the doctrinal section includes chapters 1-3 and it deals with the doctrines of election, adoption, union with Christ, redemption, pardon from sin, regeneration, and the church. Then in the practical section in chapters 4-6, Paul tells how to walk worthy of our calling; Put away lying. Stop stealing, Walk in love. Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands. Husbands love your wives in the same way Christ loved the church and gave himself for it. And children, obey your parents.

Doctrine comes first because all right practice is based on sound doctrine. You cannot be a practicing Christian without knowing some Bible doctrine. Charles Bridges clearly saw this truth when he said that “Christian experience is the influence of doctrinal truth upon the affections.” Therefore if doctrine is not preached and known there can be no valid Christian experience.

Doctrine is to Christian experience what bones are to a body. Without bones a body would be a useless blob of tissue. And without biblical doctrine, Christian experience is meaningless and useless. The doctrines of the word of God shape our lives.

Let’s look at two important examples of the practical effects of doctrine in the lives of God’s people. First, let’s look at some practical effects of the doctrine of God upon our lives. When we know that God is holy and that he is a great, sovereign, infinite, majestic, all powerful Being who sees all things and knows all things and that we as creatures are totally dependent upon him, then we will bow down and worship him in all reverence and awe and will seek to glorify him. When we know the great God of the Bible, our worship of him will cease to include the circus-like atmosphere and the worldly and irreverent entertainment which characterizes so many church services today.

The other example of the practical effects of doctrine in the lives of God’s people is to be seen in the doctrine of the atoning death of Christ. As we study the Bible we find that there is a direct connection between the atoning death of Christ and the basic virtues of the Christian life.

Philippians 2:4-8 shows us how the doctrine of Christ’s atoning death leads us to unselfish concern for others. “Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” This doctrine has a very practical effect on our lives doesn’t it?

I Peter 2:21-24 shows how the doctrine of the atoning death of Christ serves as an example for us to follow in enduring suffering. “For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: whom when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.”

The doctrine of Christ’s atoning death and all the doctrines of Christ have Christ’s image stamped on them. The doctrine of Christ sanctifies people. It makes them holy.

Conclusion

Now let’s review the four reasons why God’s preachers must preach doctrine:

1. Because God’s word commands them to do so.

2. Because there will come a time when people will not listen to sound doctrine.
3. Because to believe savingly in Christ, people must believe the right things about Christ.
4. God's preachers must preach doctrine because Bible doctrine is the essential foundation of all valid Christian experience.

In Ephesians 4:14, Paul commands Christians to grow and mature in their knowledge of God's word so that they will no longer be "tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of *doctrine*." Hebrews 13:9 tells Christians to "be not carried about with divers and strange *doctrines*." Our people would not be swayed by the divers and strange doctrines preached by the TV preachers and prophecy mongers if they knew the doctrines of God's word.

Our eternal interests are involved in the doctrines of God's word. Our everlasting happiness depends on the doctrines of God's word. Let God's preachers begin to preach them once again and let God's people give careful and diligent attention and study to them once again!