

Why Study Doctrine?

Text: 1 Timothy 4:6-8

By Pastor Trent Boedicker

The bell rings. Students file into the classroom and take their seats. The teacher begins the lesson: algebra... not everyone's favorite subject. One student in particular, sitting in the back row, expresses his lack of enthusiasm. The young man yawns and lays his head on the desk as if he is nodding off to sleep. Other students laugh, but the teacher is not amused.

"Is there a problem Mr. Lewis," she inquires.

"Yes, this is boring," he responds. "Why should I care about any of this? It's not like we're going to ever use math in the real world."

The teacher listens to his complaint and then asks a question of her own. "So what you're saying is that you don't see any practical value in what learning here?"

"Exactly!" the young man answers. "When will ever have to solve math problems after we graduate?"

"Hmmm, that's a good question," the teacher replies. "One day, when you move out of your parent's home, you'll get a job and you'll have your own place. You'll be earning a paycheck each week, but you'll also have bills that need to be paid. Somehow, you'll need to figure out if you have enough money to cover your expenses. You'll put together a budget, which shows you how much you have coming in and how much is going out, and what amount is left over to save or to spend. How do you plan to do that, without math?"

"Um, I don't know," he sheepishly answers.

The teacher tells her class, "We use math every day in the real world, without even realizing it. That's why we spend time studying in here, so that will be able to solve real problems out there." The teacher got the attention of her students that day, because they started to understand the subject made a difference in their lives.

Some people ask the same question about the subject of theology. "Why should do we need to study doctrine? It sounds kind of dry and academic to me. Isn't that something for scholars and theologians to debate? I'd rather spend time talking about practical issues that matter in my everyday life."

What that person fails to understand is that our doctrinal beliefs impact our everyday lives. Whether you realize it or not, you are doing theology every time you open the Bible and begin to read. In essence, you are saying "I believe that God is speaking to me and reveals himself through the pages of his Word." And you are doing theology every time you bow your head in prayer. In essence, you are saying, "I believe that God hears me when I call out to him, and he is working through the prayers of his people." You are doing theology when you make decisions

about right and wrong. In essence, you are saying, “I believe this is what it means to live a life that is pleasing to God.” There is nothing more relevant to our everyday lives than studying Scripture and what it teaches us about who God is, and who we are, and what it means to experience salvation in Jesus Christ.

Charles Ryrie says,

Theology is for everyone. Indeed, everyone needs to be a theologian... Theology simply means thinking about God and expressing those thoughts in some way... Even an atheist has a theology. He thinks about God, rejects His existence, and expresses that in [His] lifestyle. [But the believer bases his theology on Scripture.].¹

In our passage this morning (in 1 Timothy 4:6-8) the apostle Paul reminds a young pastor, named Timothy, of the things he had learned, and the message he had received during the years they spent together doing missionary work. Now Timothy was ministering to churches in Ephesus, and he would need to remain committed those doctrinal convictions, especially as critics arose to refute his message. It was essential that Timothy know what he believed and why he believed it. And it was important that he teach sound doctrine to God’s people, so they too would have a firm foundation on which to build their lives.

That’s just as important for us today. We live in an age of uncertainty, where people don’t really know what they believe. Some even question the very idea of truth. That’s not just happening outside the church, but within the church as well. Entire denominations are being swayed by the culture to change long held convictions. And so it’s essential for God’s people to understand where we stand. Do you know what you believe and why you believe it?

Believers should study theology because sound doctrine has an impact on our everyday lives.

What is Doctrine?

Before we dig into the question of why we should study doctrine we need to ask what is doctrine?

The word in our passage literally means “teaching” and it refers to the body of beliefs that define our faith. These are our core convictions. It is the message that has been passed down to us from the apostles, set forth in the Word of God.

One Bible Dictionary defines doctrine as: “Christian truth and teaching... Without such a framework, the church [would have] no coherent system of beliefs and no means of discerning between true and false [ideas]... The biblical focus is... upon living truths cherished and defended by all true Christians. The foundation, sourcebook, and authority for developing doctrine is the Bible.”ⁱⁱ

A simpler definition, tells us that “A doctrine is what the whole Bible teaches us today about some particular topic.”ⁱⁱⁱ

When you ask: “what does the Bible teach us about heaven?,” that is a doctrinal question, and we search the Scriptures, examining all the passages that speak to the issue to find the answer.

Over the course of our study, in the coming year, we’re going to explore the major doctrines that make up our Christian beliefs:

- 1) Doctrine of God
- 2) Doctrine of Scripture
- 3) Doctrines of Christ and the Holy Spirit
- 4) Doctrine of Humanity and Sin
- 5) Doctrine of Salvation
- 6) Doctrine of the Church
- 7) Doctrine of the Future

We have a lot of ground to cover, and I am excited to jump in and explore all of these subjects which are so important to us as followers of Christ.

So why should we study doctrine?

We study doctrine to grow in our knowledge of God.

Look at verse 6 in our passage. The apostle Paul writes, “*In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following*” (1 Tim. 4:6)

Every living thing needs nourishment in order to grow. Maybe you are a plant person. Around your home you have vases of flowers or shrubs. In the winter it is poinsettias. In the spring it is lilies. Or all year round it might be a little cactus or aloe vera plant. You don’t want it to wither, but to thrive so you make sure to water it on a regular basis, and position it where it will get the appropriate amount of sunlight. That is the nourishment that it needs, and when you supply what it needs it continues to grow.

Anyone who has ever been around children knows that they need nourishment if they are going to grow healthy and strong. When the baby cries, you feed it a bottle. Before long, it begins putting on weight and stretching out in length. It feels like you blink and they are already crawling across the living room floor. You blink again and they are walking on their own two feet getting into all kinds of trouble. It’s no longer a bottle, but they are now devouring an entire plate of mashed potatoes or macaroni and cheese.

What kind of nourishment do we need in our Christian life? The passage tells us we need to be brought up in the words of the faith and sound doctrine if we are to grow and mature in our relationship with God. **1 Peter 2:2–3** (NASB95) says, “*...like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.*”

This was something Timothy had experienced in his own life. As a young person, he had a godly mother and grandmother who read the Scriptures to him. And then as he grew older the apostle Paul became a mentor to him, teaching him the essential beliefs of the Christian faith. As Timothy grew in his faith, he was able to share the gospel and help others develop into disciples of Jesus.

It's not just someone new to the faith that needs to be grounded in God's Word. This is a continuous process of learning and growing that takes place throughout our entire lives. Whether you are old or young, whether you have been a believer for a short time or for many years, we always have to room to grow. Our understanding of God deepens as we walk with him.

Growing in our knowledge of God is not just an intellectual pursuit. We come to know him in a personal way, discovering his character, marveling at his works, listening to his wisdom. As a result, we grow closer in our relationship with him.

The more we learn about God, the more we are inspired to worship him, the more our relationship deepens, the more we love him and appreciate all that he has done for us.

We study doctrine to guard against false teaching.

Back up in the passage, to 1 Timothy 4:1 (NASB95). *“But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons...”*

Paul had experienced a great deal of opposition during his missionary travels, and he knew that Timothy would also experience the same thing in the course of his ministry. False teachers would come, contradicting the truth of the gospel, trying to lead God's people astray. It will come in many forms. Some bring a message of legalism, telling people they have to earn God's favor through rituals and regulations. They diminish the work of Christ and obscure the need for God's grace. Others blend Christian ideas with other religions. It's like a spiritual buffet, they take a little of this and a little of that, insisting “we all worship the same god.” It might sound appealing, but the gospel is distorted in the process.

Over the centuries there have been many dangerous heresies and false gospels that have caused confusion and led people away from the Lord. But the passage tells us that it will only get worse, as we get closer to the end of the age.

The source of these false teachings is the devil. He is the great deceiver and the father of lies, and he tries to keep people from coming to a knowledge of the truth by sowing confusion. He wants people to be religious, because it makes them feel secure. He knows there is a longing in our hearts for god, and so he creates false gods for them to worship. The best lies are the ones that are closest to the truth. And in our sinful human nature, we would rather believe a lie that suits our desires than be confronted with the truth that calls for repentance.

Imagine going to a large shopping mall, looking at the sign inside the doors to see where you are. The big map has an arrow pointing to a dot that says “You are here.” And the rest of the map shows how the mall is laid out: the stores, and restrooms, and food court, movie theater. But what you don’t know is that some practical joker has come along and changed all of the signs throughout the mall. Instead of pointing you to where you want to go, it points you in the opposite direction. After spending a half hour wandering the mall you find a map that is true, and compare it with the map that is false. Wait a minute, the arrow is pointing this way over here, but it’s pointing that way over there. Which is it? These signs cannot both be true! One is leading you in the right direction, the other is leading the wrong direction. You need to figure out which is which. Someone who has been there before, who has spent time walking those hallways, will not be led astray. They will be able to spot the false signs, and will ignore them. But if you aren’t familiar with the layout of the mall, it will be easy to get confused.

The same is true when it comes to spiritual things. All religious beliefs cannot possibly be true. They make contradictory statements, so some of the ideas out there are pointing us towards God and some of them are leading us away from God. A deceiver is out there trying to confuse us. So how can we tell the difference? The more we spend time in God’s Word, the more we learn about him, the more quickly we will be able to discern truth from error.

Ephesians 4:14–15 (NASB95) “As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; ¹⁵ but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ,”

We study doctrine to live godly lives.

Go back to our passage in 1 Timothy 4:7. The apostle writes, “*But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness.*”

Paul encouraged Timothy to spend time studying God’s Word, and also to be sure to make solid Bible teaching a priority in his ministry. This was not merely an academic exercise, so they would know lots of interesting things, and be able to win at Bible Trivia. The purpose of this study was that they might be molded and shaped into the people that God wanted them to be. The teaching and preaching of God’s Word is not just to inform, but to transform.

Paul talks about spiritual discipline. The word carries the idea of working out or exercising, like an athlete who trains for competition.

That’s what I need to work on in the coming year, to lose a few pounds and get into shape. I thought it was funny when I walked into Sam’s Club a couple of days after Christmas. All of the shelves that had cookies and chocolates and goodies the week before were now stocked with diet shakes and exercise equipment. The store managers know what they’re doing. They know we feel guilty for eating too much over the holidays and are making new year’s resolutions to get fit.

The passage tells us that physical discipline is a good thing. We want our body to be as healthy as possible. But spiritual discipline is even better because it not only affects our lives today but leaves impact for the life to come. The more we spend time with God in his word, in prayer, with his people, the more our lives are changed to become the people we're called to be. As we learn about the character of God, we realize that believers are called to be holy because God is holy. As we learn about the work of the Holy Spirit come to realize that Christian life is not something we can produce in our own strength, but comes from relying on the strength and power he supplies. As we learn about the salvation found in Christ, and what it cost him to redeem us from sin, it becomes unthinkable to remain in sin, but we want to please him in all that we do. That is the impact Scripture is supposed to have in our lives. If we're no different than when we started, we're doing something wrong.

One author writes,

“...the doctrines found in the Word of God are not just designed to increase information, but rather produce radical, organic transformation. God uses [his Word] as a means to turn angry people into peacemakers, greedy people into givers, demanding people into servants, lustful people into pure people, faithless people into believers, proud people into humble people, rebels into obedient people, and idolaters into worshipers of the one true God... [The doctrines of our faith] have real life implications. They're meant to turn you inside out and turn your world upside down. God's intention is that nothing in their path would ever be the same again.”^{iv}

Conclusion –

I'm a little nervous spending an entire year doing a study of Bible Doctrine. I hope you won't sit in your seat each week and yawn, thinking this is something dry or academic. What could be more thrilling than learning about the Almighty God? I encourage you to join me in diving into God's Word. As a result we will grow in our relationship with the Lord. Our hearts will be guarded from the false teaching swirling around us in the world. And the Lord will mold and shape us into the people that we're called to be, bringing glory to our Savior in all we do.

ⁱ Ryrie, C. C. (1999). *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* (pp. 12–13). Chicago, IL: Moody Press.

ⁱⁱ Mohler, R. A., Jr. (2003). Doctrine In C. Brand, C. Draper, A. England, S. Bond, E. R. Clendenen, & T. C. Butler (Eds.), *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (p. 436). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

ⁱⁱⁱ Grudem, Wayne, “*Systematic Theology*” Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House 1994 (p.25)

^{iv} Trip, Paul D. https://www.paultripp.com/articles/posts/the-importance-of-doctrine-article?gclid=CjwKCAiAjMHwBRAVEiwAzdLWGGWQN_0j91adYVldlf3lyOwZx22otjll-XSUmMTwtlDt8Sc6VGrxkRoCl7cQAvD_BwE