

Doctrine Matters

Years ago I heard the following: “We should not preach doctrine. We should just preach Jesus Christ.” The person who said this went on to explain that we don’t need to spend precious preaching minutes presenting matters such as the lack of New Testament authority for instruments of music in worship, the scriptural role of women in the church, God’s laws regarding marriage, divorce and remarriage and even the New Testament’s teaching regarding the necessity of immersion for the forgiveness of sins. Apparently, these subjects are better left to each individual’s judgment. We should speak only of Jesus Christ and let the details of “doctrine” fall where they may.

Unfortunately, this attitude is more prevalent than we may think. A lot of people who call themselves Christians don’t want to talk about these matters. For some reason, there is a common concept that intimates that as long as we agree that Jesus is Christ, the rest of the New Testament is inconsequential. I have yet to find a verse of Scripture that prioritizes one passage above another. Jesus’ death was necessary for the establishment of the New Testament (Hebrews 9:15-17); that would be ALL of the New Testament, not just the verses that prove that He is the Christ.

“Doctrine” appears to be a frightening word to some folks. The word means nothing more than “that which is taught.” Since Christianity is a taught religion (Acts 8:26ff; Romans 10:14-17; et al.), then one cannot even become a Christian without having first been taught. Doctrine is central to Christianity. What’s more, in order for it to be called Christianity, that doctrine which is taught and followed must be that which is authorized by none other than Christ Himself.

It really is rather strange that one would advocate “preaching Christ and not doctrine.” In truth, the very name “Jesus Christ” is doctrinal in nature. What are we saying when we combine those two words? Are we not telling the world that Jesus is the Christ, the Savior of the world? If that’s not doctrine, I don’t know what is. In uttering that noble name, we are proclaiming that “there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12). We are clearly stating that salvation cannot be found in Judaism or Islam or Buddhism or any other group that rejects Jesus as the Christ. Yes, we preach doctrine when we state the name of Jesus Christ.

If we’re going to go so far in preaching doctrine that we will unequivocally declare that Jesus is the Christ, why would we stop and not continue to declare “all the counsel of God” (Acts 20:27)? Why would we shun the issues of what to do to become a Christian, how to worship acceptably in the eyes of God and how to live daily in a manner that honors Him? These are all doctrines taught in the New Testament. Why would we neglect them? To be sure, some neglect them for the sake of what they term “unity.” “Let’s not talk about these matters because we want to all join together, regardless of what each group believes.” How sad that anyone would erroneously feel that God would want people to be united in one doctrine (that Jesus is the Christ) but not care about the rest of the teachings He inspired the various writers of the New Testament to pen.

In short, doctrine matters. If it did not, then the Bible would say nothing about false doctrine. Every doctrine would be acceptable. Yet the Word of God speaks of “strange doctrines” (Hebrews 13:9) and “doctrines of devils” taught by those who claimed to be Christians, no less (I Timothy 4:1). From a positive perspective, the New Testament speaks of “sound doctrine” (I Timothy 1:10) and “good doctrine” (I Timothy 4:6). Paul exhorted that no other doctrine should be taught (I Timothy 1:3) and that doctrine, rather than being shunned in preaching, should in fact be the very basis of Gospel preaching (II Timothy 4:2).

A good place to conclude this article is with Paul’s succinct instruction in Titus 2:1. “But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine.” In a nutshell, that should be the hallmark of our preaching and teaching and our very lives. Sound doctrine is from God. May we preach, teach and live it, thus adorning “the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.” (Titus 2:10).

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