

The Importance of Doctrine

Due to the influence of the mass media, consumerism and the breakdown of institutional authority, more and more churchgoers are choosing their own private forms of faith. They go more by feelings than by knowledge. Doctrine is seen as outdated and irrelevant. When they hear the word "doctrine" they honestly think that it is dull, boring, ivory tower stuff. How many will respond to an adult course on doctrine? The study of doctrine seems to be at the bottom of the interest list. A common sentiment goes something like this: Doctrinal preaching and teaching were perhaps meaningful in the past; today we understand the importance of interpersonal relationships and practical instruction. Doctrine divides; action unites. Doctrine doesn't matter. The result? Even in evangelical churches, many ministries are now more concerned with emotional healing than with expounding Biblical doctrines. They are expected to meet the "felt needs" of the religious public. Research shows the lack of doctrinal knowledge of those who say that they are born again. According to pollster George Barns, a significant portion of these believers may have good feelings about Jesus and attend church but nearly 30 percent of them say that all good people will go to heaven, whether or not they have embraced Jesus Christ. Another 10 percent just "don't know." No wonder that so many Christians are carried away by every wind of doctrine not knowing what is Biblical truth. The sects and cults draw many of their recruits from ill-informed Christians. A *Christianity Today* editorial (June 21, 1993) comments, "Evangelical church numbers are growing in many places, but allowing a generation to grow soft doctrinally may spell disaster for the churches-and souls."

Doctrine may not seem important and relevant. Yet I am convinced that the strength of the church lies in its teaching of Biblical doctrine. Ideas have consequences. We act upon what we think. Correct doctrine leads to correct practice. First theory than practice. This truth the apostle Paul exhibits in his letter to the Romans, in which he spends the first eleven chapters expounding doctrine and the last five discussing practice. Charles R. Swindoll observes, "What roots are to a tree, the doctrines are to the Christian. From them we draw our emotional stability, our mental food for growth, as well as our spiritual energy and perspective on life itself. By returning to our roots, we determine precisely where we stand. We equip ourselves for living the life God designed for us."

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