

LESSON 5

THE IMPORTANCE OF SOUND DOCTRINE

Instructions:

1. Read through the handout 3 times this week.
2. Write out the 3 things that stood out to you most. These may be things that were new to you or possibly things the study helped you better understand. The goal is to help you dig into the study and better understand the information. Be prepared to discuss these things next week in class.

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3. What do you think of the question, “Isn’t loving Jesus enough?” Do we really need doctrine?

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4. Is doctrine important to you? What things are you doing to assure you have sound doctrine?

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5. Review the eight things sound doctrine produces (section II B). Which are the most important to you? Why?

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## THE IMPORTANCE OF SOUND DOCTRINE

The Christian life is not meant to be an aimless wandering; it is not a journey without meaning. God intends for us to understand who He is, how we are to relate to Him, and how we are to understand our lives and the world in which we live. In short, we need God's take on reality. To this end, He has graciously given to us His Word, the Bible.

The Scriptures are God's revelation of Himself and His purposes. The Bible is, therefore, essential to our lives, our spiritual well-being, our knowledge of God, and our growth in godliness. In this lesson, we will examine this most critical component to the Christian life. How is God's truth to function in our lives? Is it really important to grow in our understanding of doctrine? Isn't simply "loving Jesus" enough? We must answer such questions before we will be prepared to truly "understand the journey" to which God has called us.

### **I. What is Doctrine?**

Around the church community, you will often hear talk of people's love for "doctrine" and the benefits of doctrine; you'll also hear of various books people are reading that are helping them in the Christian life—books about various aspects of doctrine. Before we look at the importance of doctrine, perhaps it will be helpful to understand what we mean by "doctrine." We will address this question in two ways.

- A. *The storyline of the Bible.* The Bible is not simply a mixed bag of books and ideas that bear no particular relationship to each other. The Bible tells a story: the story of God and his relationship to his creation in general, and to humanity in particular. We must understand this story in order to truly understand God, ourselves, history, and the future.

Some of the main facets of the Bible's "plotline" provide for us a general overview of God and his purposes in the world:

1. Creation. The Bible tells us that "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). This opening statement of the Bible implies some significant truths.
  - a. The world, and history itself, are purposeful. They came about by God's will and proceed in accordance with his will.

*Psalm 33:11: "The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of His heart to all generations."*

*Hebrews 1:3: "[Christ] is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature, and He upholds the universe by the word of His power."*
  - b. As Creator, God has prerogatives over His creation. He rules it according to His purposes, and all creation, including humanity, owes its existence and allegiance to Him.
2. The Fall. Though created to live in communion with and dependence upon God, mankind rejected God's loving and benevolent rule and sought to live independently from God, doubting His word and spurning his commands (Genesis 3).
  - a. This rebellion introduced sin into the world, and with it death (spiritual and physical), a break in fellowship with God, physical hardship and suffering, and turmoil in human relationships.

*Romans 5:12: "Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned"*

- b. The fall brought with it judgment. Because God is holy, He must distance Himself from and punish all sin.
3. The Plan of Redemption. God is not only holy, but loving and merciful. Despite mankind's alienation from Him and the necessity to punish evil, God sets out to redeem man from sin and to restore man to fellowship with Himself. The rest of the Bible, from Genesis 3 on, unfolds this history of God's redemptive purposes. Here are some of the "highlights" of this wonderful story:
    - a. God chooses Abraham, reveals Himself to him, and tells him that He will have a special relationship with Abraham and his descendants. In addition, all the nations of the earth will receive God's blessing through him (Genesis 12:1-3; 18:18).
    - b. The story of Israel traces the outworking of this plan, as God gathers from Abraham's descendants a people for Himself, who would know Him and who would make Him known in the world.
    - c. Israel's history reaches a climax when, from this chosen people comes a Savior—Jesus Christ—in whom all of God's promises of forgiveness, redemption, and restored communion with God are realized.
    - d. The New Testament tells the story of the accomplishment of God's saving purposes through Jesus' life and death, the realization through the church of God's plan to have a people for Himself, and the extension of God's saving plan throughout the earth through the preaching of the gospel. It also foretells the consummation of all things when Christ will return to gather his people, to judge the nations, and to restore all things back under the rule of God.
  4. Far from being a confusing batch of data, the Bible's storyline illuminates for us the very nature of God—sovereign, holy, and loving—and the nature of mankind as well—isolated from God, corrupted by sin, and subject to His righteous wrath. It also reveals the grace of God—acting to restore all things back to Himself through His Son—and how we can find forgiveness and be restored to a relationship with God—through repentance and faith in the finished work of Christ on the cross. Without this understanding, we can know neither God nor ourselves rightly.
- B. *Biblical doctrine*. In addition to the flow of Scripture's story, the Bible contains all that we need to know about God in order to know Him and live a life pleasing to Him. We refer to what the Bible teaches about various topics as "doctrine."
1. When we endeavor to understand what the Bible teaches about any subject, we are pursuing doctrine.
  2. The study of doctrine and study of the Bible are not opposed; Bible study should result in sound doctrine. When some react negatively to the idea of "sound doctrine," it would seem they are misunderstanding the concept; the only alternative is "unsound doctrine!"

## II. Why Do We Need Doctrine?

Hopefully what we mean when we speak of “doctrine” is clear: what the Bible teaches. But this doesn’t answer the question of whether we need to know doctrine—“Isn’t loving God enough?” “Isn’t having Jesus enough?” Why do we as Christians need to give ourselves to the study of God’s Word?

### A. The necessity of doctrine

“The conviction that Christian doctrine matters for Christian living is one of the most important growth points of the Christian life.”—**Sinclair Ferguson**

#### 1. We cannot truly love God without loving biblical doctrine.

*Mark 12:28-30: “And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that He answered them well, asked him, “Which commandment is the most important of all?” Jesus answered, “The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’”*

- a. True love for God involves the whole person. There is an unmistakable inclusion—if not emphasis—on loving God with our minds—with what we think, our values, our opinions, our reasoning, with our view of God and ourselves and the world.
- b. We simply cannot love what we do not know.

#### 2. What we believe determines the way we live.

“However paradoxical it seems to our natural minds, it is one of the facts of spiritual reality that practical Christian living is based on understanding and knowledge.”—**Sinclair Ferguson**

- a. Every Christian is a theologian.
- b. The real question is not, “Do we need sound doctrine?,” but rather, “Is the doctrine I have sound?”

“No Christian can avoid theology. Every Christian has a theology. The issue, then, is not, do we want to have a theology? That’s a given. The real issue is, do we have a sound theology? Do we embrace true or false doctrine?”—**R.C. Sproul**

### B. The purpose of sound doctrine

#### 1. Sound doctrine provides a right understanding of God’s person and character.

- The only way for us to know God is for Him to reveal Himself to us. The only place He does this in such a way that we can have a relationship with Him is in His Word.

#### 2. Sound doctrine enables us to respond appropriately to God.

- Wrong ideas about God produce unacceptable worship of God: idolatry.

*Acts 17:23, 30-31: "...What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you...The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now He commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom He has appointed; and of this He has given assurance to all by raising Him from the dead."*

3. Sound doctrine produces true and vigorous affections for God.

- God's Word is designed to produce godly affections in our souls.

*Psalm 1:2: "His delight is in the law of the Lord."*

*Psalm 19:8: "The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart."*

*Psalm 119:16: "I will delight in your statutes; I shall not forget Your word."*

*Psalm 119:50: "This is my comfort in my affliction, that Your promise gives me life."*

*Jeremiah 15:16: "Your words were found and I ate them, and Your words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart;"*

*John 15:11: "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you and your joy may be full."*

*Romans 15:4: "For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."*

"True spiritual and gracious affections...come from the enlightening of the mind in order to understand the things that are taught of God and Christ...False affections arise from ignorance rather than instruction... But the Scriptures are able to give to the saints spiritual and supernatural understanding of divine things."—**Jonathan Edwards**

4. Sound doctrine produces stability in the Christian life.

*Ephesians 4:13-14: "...until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves..."*

5. Sound doctrine protects us against false doctrine.

*Ephesians 4:13-14: "...until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes."*

6. Sound doctrine generates true love for God and others.

*Philippians 1:9: "And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge..."*

7. Sound doctrine produces in us true discernment.

*Philippians 1:9-10: "And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent..."*

8. Sound doctrine strengthens the church.

*Ephesians 4:15-16: "Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into Him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love."*

### III. How Is A Commitment to Sound Doctrine Expressed in This Church?

We seek to express our commitment to sound doctrine in a variety of ways.

#### A. A commitment to the authority of God's Word

1. We accept the Bible, including the 39 books of the Old Testament and the 27 books of the New Testament, as the written Word of God; that they are the only infallible record of God's self-disclosure to mankind; that Scripture in the original manuscripts is fully inspired by God and free from error in all it teaches.
2. Because we believe the Scriptures are the Word of God, they are the final authority for all that we do as individuals and as a church.

#### B. A commitment to the preaching of God's Word

Preaching is the unique means by which God's Word is brought effectively to the assembled congregation.

*2 Timothy 4:1-2: "I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching."*

"We see how God, who could in a moment perfect His own, nevertheless desires them to grow up into manhood solely under the education of the Church. We see the way set for it: the preaching of the heavenly doctrine has been enjoined upon the pastors....Many are led either by pride, dislike or rivalry to the conviction that they can profit enough from private reading and meditation; hence they despise public assemblies and deem preaching superfluous. This is like blotting out the face of God which shines upon us in teaching."

—**John Calvin's Institutes, IV.1.5**

"For neither the light and heat of the sun, nor food and drink, are so necessary to nourish and sustain the present life, as the apostolic and pastoral office is necessary to preserve the Church on earth."

—**John Calvin's Institutes, IV.3.2**

#### C. A commitment to the singing of God's Word

*Ephesians 5:18-20: "...be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."*

#### D. A commitment to apply God's Word to every area of our lives.

#### E. A commitment to provide biblical resources for study and application.