

## DOES DOCTRINE MATTER?

The 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed an increasing revolt against doctrine. An out-right denial of specific formulations of classical Christian doctrine was seen in some quarters, while others were not sure where they stood. The same is true in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Doctrine has fallen on hard times even among those who call themselves Fundamental Baptists, or evangelicals. Some historians now argue that the defining principles of evangelicals (and this does not leave out the Fundamental Baptists) are not specifically theological – at least beyond the most general affirmations. If this be true, this is a disgrace to any people of God.

Fundamental Baptists and evangelicals have a proud doctrinal heritage and have given careful attention to confessions of faith and doctrinal issues.

Doctrine is, quite literally, the teaching of the church—what the church understands to be the substance of its faith. It is no substitute for personal experience. True Christianity has given clear witness to the necessity of personal faith in Jesus Christ, but that personal faith is based in some specific understanding of who Jesus Christ is and what He accomplished on the cross. After all, we do not call persons to profess faith in faith, but faith in Christ.

Remember, there is no Christianity in general. Faith in some experience devoid of theological or biblical content – no matter how powerful – is not New Testament Christianity. Those called to Christianity in general may believe nothing in particular; however, faith resides in particulars – particulars are all about teachings (doctrine).

It would appear, that some seem to think that doctrine is a concern for those of a certain intellectual bent, but unnecessary for most Christians – interest in doctrine amounts to something like an intellectual hobby. Others, however, steer clear of doctrine for fear of argument or division in the church. Both factors indicate a lack of respect for the Christian believer and the teaching function of the church.

I read a report which said, “Sociologists and historians observing the American church scene indicate that one of the first signs of denominational decline is a lessening of doctrinal attention. Many mainline Protestant denominations have followed this course, with a weakening concern for biblical doctrine followed by decline in membership and evangelistic outreach.” Brethren, doctrine is important, and we have a mandate by God to preach it!

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