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What Does Doctrine Have To Do With The Gospel?

I spoke with a friend not long ago who was bemoaning all the “doctrinal” controversies taking place in the churches. He felt that “doctrine” caused division and that the church simply needed to focus on the gospel. I appreciate my friend, but he was so very wrong. Doctrine is not just for the grand discussion halls of the seminaries, it is for the churches. If it is not for the church, why do we even bother teaching it in the seminaries? Furthermore, how can we truly be solid “gospel” churches without doctrine? So many churches today are doctrinally anemic, and that is one big reason they have ceased to be true forces for the gospel.

To further explain my point, I want to give to you an extensive quote from John Piper’s book, *God is the Gospel*. He writes: “The gospel is not only news. It is first news, and then it is doctrine. Doctrine means teaching, explaining, clarifying. Doctrine is part of the gospel because news can’t be just declared by the mouth of a herald – it has to be understood in the mind of a hearer. If the town crier says, ‘Amnesty is herewith published by the mercy of your Sovereign’, someone will ask, ‘What does “amnesty” mean?’ There will be many questions when the news is announced. ‘What is the price that has been paid?’ ‘How have we dishonored the King?’ When the gospel is proclaimed, it must be explained.

Gospel doctrine matters because the good News is so full and rich and wonderful that it must be opened like a treasure chest, and all its treasures brought out for the enjoyment of the world. Doctrine is a description of these treasures. Doctrine describes their true value and why they are so valuable. Doctrine guards the diamonds of the gospel from the pirates who don’t like the diamonds but who make their living trading them for other stones. Doctrine polishes the old gems buried at the bottom of the chest. It puts the jewels of gospel truth in order on the scarlet tapestry of history so each is seen in its most beautiful place.

“All the while, doctrine does this with its head bowed in wonder that it should be allowed to touch the things of God. It whispers praise and thanks as it deals with the diamonds of the King. Its fingers tremble at the cost of what it handles. Prayers ascend for help, lest any stone be minimized or misplaced. And on its knees gospel doctrine knows it serves the herald. The gospel is not mainly about being explained. Explanation is necessary, but it is not primary. A love letter must be intelligible, but grammar and logic are not the point. Love is the point. The gospel is good news. Doctrine serves that. It serves the one whose feet are bruised (and beautiful!) from walking to the unreached places with news: ‘Come, listen to the news of God! Listen to what God has done! Listen! Understand! Bow! Believe!’” (God Is the Gospel, pages 21-22).

Thus, good doctrine makes good gospel churches. Pray with me that God will guide us and nourish our souls as we seek to grow and understand all the marvelous truths of our redemption revealed in His Word!