



## Taking heed to the doctrine

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### Why?

Why take heed to doctrine? The title of this rubric is “Taking Heed to the Doctrine.” Writing for this rubric, I must take heed to doctrine. Reading this rubric, you take heed to doctrine. Before writing one article in explanation of the doctrine of the Reformed faith, an examination of the reason for the whole enterprise of theology and the importance of doctrine should be conducted. In any endeavor it is good to ask “why? Why do you do what you do?” And because young pastor Timothy, who was exhorted to take heed to the doctrine, was *first* exhorted to take heed to *himself* (I Tim. 4:16, “Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine...”), it will be good to examine the Scriptures and ask, “Why *should* I take heed to doctrine?” But with that, also to examine my (our) own heart and ask, “Why *do* I take heed to doctrine?”

The biblical term “doctrine” means “teaching.” To “take heed” means “to hold onto and pay close attention to.” Why hold tightly and pay close attention to the teachings of the Bible?

Jesus did. Upon the commencement of Jesus’ earthly ministry, a wave of astonishment rolled over Palestine because of his doctrine. Matthew concludes his inspired telling of Jesus’ great Sermon on the Mount with this notice repeated often by the gospel writers: “...the people were astonished at his doctrine,” (Matt. 7:28). Regardless of what the audiences did with Jesus’ doctrine, it is clear that Jesus took heed to the doctrine. Why?

Why should the officebearer like Paul or Timothy and even the individual believer in an unofficial capacity, especially amid all the busyness and responsibilities of life, eagerly study, diligently read, rigorously defend, carefully write, and enthusiastically teach and bear witness to doctrine?

Why should we continually pursue exactness of theological expression in the finer and broader points of the essentials truths of Scripture, both personally and ecclesiastically?

Why have, maintain, and use creeds of doctrinal statements and seek communion with other church-

es only on the basis of complete agreement with those statements?

Why should the preacher labor to bring the meat of sound, carefully explained and edifying doctrine into the pulpit each week? And why should the believer expect and seek such doctrine?

Of all the profitable things to teach children about themselves and their world, why teach them doctrine and require them to know terms like “imputation” or “propitiation” and memorize doctrinal formulations? And why teach them that, according to our Reformed confession, the first criterion for determining whether a church is a true church of Christ is if the pure doctrine of the gospel is preached therein? And why train them with a view to standing up in the assembly of the saints one day to promise, “I acknowledge the doctrine contained in the Old and New Testaments and in the Articles of the Christian faith and taught here in this Christian church to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation and I am resolved by the grace of God to adhere to this doctrine and reject all heresies repugnant thereto”?

Why charge some doctrines as being false, even heretical and wicked, declaring that not everything is true and not everyone is right? Why promise to do this as an officebearer?

When a friend or family member desires to separate from your congregation because of an alleged excessiveness in taking heed to doctrine, what do you say?

Taking heed to doctrine likely will not immediately benefit the physical condition and improve the felt needs of one human being. Giving a thirsty man a drink or a shivering woman a garment will immediately improve their condition. But spending an entire evening struggling through 25 pages of Luther’s *Bondage of the Will* or memorizing an answer from the Heidelberg Catechism will not immediately improve the felt condition of anyone; in fact, focusing intensely and intelligibly upon the sense of each sentence will probably give one a headache, making his felt condition worse.

Taking heed to doctrine may even bring a sword of division in homes and relationships.

Why take heed to doctrine?

In this article and the next I intend to present six answers to the question “why?”

### **1. Confession: Because doctrine is what we say about God and what we say about God is enormously important.**

Doctrine is a thematic summary of what the Bible teaches on a certain subject. Because the Bible is God’s revelation of Himself, the Bible’s teaching is a description in words of who God is, what God does, and what God commands. Jesus called His doctrine (teachings) “God’s words” (John 8:47) because those words were not only *from* God but *about* God. Doctrine is what we say *about* God.

With our tongues and from our hearts we must say something about God. The Bible calls this a confession (Rom. 10:9-10). God did not graciously reveal Himself in His Son our Lord Jesus Christ or even manifest Himself in the creation around us so that we keep silent before that revelation. Silence is wicked. Misspeaking is worse. Deliberate blasphemy is worst of all, for God will not hold him guiltless who profanes His revelation.

We must speak of God in confession of doctrine and what we say about God is enormously important, for God is *God*.

Even what we say about people is important. Misspell someone’s name, and they will spot it a mile away. Mispronounce someone’s first name, and they will hear it from the next town over. Unintentionally misspeak and misrepresent a politician’s educational credentials and career accomplishments while introducing him to an audience, and he will quietly grind in his soul. Maliciously slander another’s character or work, and you will draw his ire and provoke God to wrath. The Bible exhorts us to speak the truth in love, and an entire commandment—the ninth—is devoted to what we say about other people.

We are infinitesimally small specks of dust in the vast expanse of the universe. We are not infinitely glorious. We did not create heaven and earth. We did not redeem elect humanity unto everlasting life. And yet it is universally recognized—by believers, by heathens, and by professing Christians who have an aversion to doctrine and the zealous maintenance of it—that what we say about the identity, character, and work of our fellow human beings is very important.

What about God? God is God! God is the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity, the awesomely holy Creator of matchless glory, the God of redemption in Jesus Christ, whose mercy is as great as the heaven is high above the earth. Why take heed to doctrine? Be-

cause doctrine is what we say about *God*, and what we say about *God* is more important than anything else.

If, for example, we say that regeneration is the Spirit’s sovereign and gracious work of pervading the inmost recesses of the spiritually dead, elect sinner and creating spiritual life in him, or if we say regeneration is the Spirit’s work of bestowing life upon a sinner in response to his request for it through his decision to devote his life to Jesus, we are making two radically different, mutually exclusive doctrinal statements. Both cannot be right. Does it even matter? Most definitely! What we say about a doctrine such as regeneration is what we say about God, for He is the Author of regeneration. God has revealed to us in Scripture this highly celebrated, supernatural, most delightful, astonishing, mysterious, and ineffable work that is not inferior in efficacy to creation or the resurrection from dead. We must say something about it! We must confess it! And every doctrinal statement we make of regeneration or any other work of God is enormously important because we are saying something about God Himself. In doctrinal controversies the church of Christ is not engaged in an inconsequential and trivial war over words, but is battling for the honor of the Most High who reveals Himself in the person of the incarnate Word Jesus Christ and through written words in Scripture.

### **2. Love: Because knowing doctrine is knowing the God whom we love.**

Doctrine describes our God. We come to know our God and all the greatness of His being and the wonders of His love through the teachings of the Bible. The doctrine of creation reveals the matchless power and wisdom of Jehovah in whom our help stands. The doctrine of the passion and death of Christ reveals the boundless love of the God who gave His Son to that inexpressible suffering on our behalf; it reveals the burning holiness of God who so hates sin and loves Himself as the highest good that He must punish sin with extreme, that is, everlasting punishment of body and soul; and it reveals the heavenly righteousness of God whose justice required such suffering for complete satisfaction. Biblical doctrine reveals our God as He really is—a consuming fire to His despisers and a compassionate Father to His adopted children and heirs.

To be saved by grace is to be incorporated into the everlasting fellowship of God’s covenant, so that we know Him savingly and cleave to Him in love. We eat and drink with Him. Like righteous Abraham, we are His friends. All those who truly love and walk with God take heed to doctrine because through their

knowledge of doctrine they grow in their knowledge of and love for their covenant Friend.

If a young man takes a young woman to a restaurant and loses himself in his phone or the football game on the wall behind her head, then his words “I love you” are empty. The proof is that he has no interest in knowing her. But if he really loved her, he would find such pleasure in getting to know everything about her, her background, her education, her family, her work, her interests, her spiritual convictions, and even such petty things as whether she prefers dark or milk chocolate. If it concerns *her*, he wants to *know* it because he *loves* her.

If the Christian takes the name of God and Jesus Christ upon his lips but loses himself in his earthly life, then his words “I love God” are empty. The proof is that he has no interest in knowing God. If we really love God—and, praise God, we do!—then we find pleasure in the reading, studying, hearing, and discussing of sound doctrine because through knowing that doctrine we come to know better and love deeper our God.

It is very discouraging for elders to hear a church member, or for parents to hear a child, or for companions to hear a friend say, “I don’t really care about doctrine,” or to demonstrate the same by their conduct because they are essentially saying, “I don’t care about and love God and His Son Jesus Christ.” How can you know and love God without knowing doctrine?

It is a gracious privilege almost too wonderful to be-

lieve that the triune God of transcendent glory and infinite perfections, who dwells in supremely blessed communion in His own eternal being, should take knowledge of us contemptible rebels, who are nothing of ourselves and even less than vanity, and by the precious blood of His beloved Son take us into His communion, transform us into His likeness, and give us true knowledge of Him by sharing His secrets with us so that we might know Him intimately in love. Why take heed to doctrine? Because knowing doctrine is knowing God whom we love.

Naboth the Jezreelite loved and therefore took heed to (held onto and paid close attention to) his inheritance as a parcel of land in Canaan—a type of his covenant salvation in Christ. For refusing to sell his heritage Naboth was murdered by the king and queen. God is our heritage. God’s people sing in Psalm 16:5, “The Lord is the portion of my inheritance...” and in Psalm 73:26, “My flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.” Inasmuch as the biblical doctrine of God is the revelation of our God—whom to know is life eternal—doctrine is our heritage. Every spiritual Naboth prizes his doctrinal heritage and is willing to die for it.

Why take heed to doctrine? Because we love God.

Next time we will consider the importance of doctrine in relation to worship, salvation, life, and unity with each other.



## Ministering to the saints

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# Psalter revision: Governing principles (6) music

Previous article in this series: November 15, 2017, p. 75.

In my last two articles I developed three reasons why the interdenominational committee is proposing changes to some of the music (tunes) of our Psalter: 1) the tunes must serve the lyrics well; 2) the tunes must serve the congregation by enabling her to sing the lyrics well; and 3) some Psalter numbers are rarely sung, raising the question whether a change of music would serve the congregations well. Although I developed these reasons, I did not invent them. One reason why some initially

explored the idea of Psalter revision was the recognition that “some tunes are difficult to sing due to their range or simply the nature of the tune.”<sup>1</sup> When the PRC Synod approved the PRC’s participation in the project, it did so recognizing that “not every tune is appropriate

<sup>1</sup> Minutes of the Joint Psalter Revision Exploratory Meeting, January 13, 2015, Art. 4, a, 3), as found in the PRC *Acts of Synod 2015*, 131, and the FRC *Acts of Synod 2015*, 137.