

for preachers (and teachers). And pray that the Lord not send a famine of the Word among us.

Elders, please remember to speak to the young men regularly at family visitation, ministers in catechism, teachers in school, and parents at the dinner table.

The PRCA have 10 men aged 62 or older. This year, six of them will be 65 or older. We have only 2 graduates in view. That we are aware of, no other PRC students are ready for their first year in the seminary in

the Fall of 2018. We can wait until we have six vacant churches before we pray for students. Or we can plead now: “Haste to hear us, Lord of the harvest! Send ministers!” The members who have experienced a long vacancy know that to have *visiting* ministers is nice for a *little* while. But churches need pastors.

Please pray.

Pray that the Lord will provide ‘wood.’



Taking heed to the doctrine

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Why? (2)

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“And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord.”
Ephesians 2:20-21

John Calvin comments:

They are built on the foundation—they are founded on the doctrine, of the apostles and prophets. We are thus enabled to distinguish between a true and a false church. This is of the greatest importance; for the tendency to error is always strong, and the consequences of mistake are dangerous in the extreme. No churches boast more loudly of the name than those which bear a false and empty title; as may be seen in our own times. To guard us against mistake, the mark of a true church is pointed out. Foundation, in this passage, unquestionably means doctrine; for no mention is made of patriarchs or pious kings, but only of those who held the office of teachers, and whom God had appointed to superintend the edification of his church. It is laid down by Paul that the faith of the church ought to be founded on this doctrine. What opinion, then, must we form of those who rest entirely on the contrivances of men, and yet accuse us of revolt, because we embrace the pure doctrine of God?

We are answering the question: Why take heed to doctrine? Doctrine is a thematic summary in formulated propositions of what the Bible teaches on a certain

subject. Reformed doctrine is the system of the truths of divine revelation that are embodied in the Reformed standards and declared by Reformed churches to be the expression of their faith. Why hold on to and pay close attention to this doctrine? Our first two answers given were:

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

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

We continue with four additional answers derived from the reality that the foundation of the church is the pure doctrine of Christ as taught in Ephesians 2:20-21; therefore, the whole structure of the church in her faith and life is determined by her doctrinal foundation. Asking the question “Why take heed to doctrine?” then, is like asking the builder “Why take heed to the foundation?”

3. Worship: Because doctrine is the foundation for worship.

The goal of all things is the worship of God. The redeemed church exists for God’s glory. Unlike the reprobate wicked whom God uses to glorify Himself in spite of their hatred for Him, and unlike the brute creation that gives glory to God without conscious awareness of it, believers in the church have an intellectual understanding of God by faith and willingly,

consciously, and joyfully extol Him from the heart. But how can we arrive at an understanding of our covenant God apart from a careful study of His revelation to us in the doctrines (teachings) of the Bible? We must worship God in Spirit *and in truth* (John 4:24); therefore, doctrinal knowledge is a *sine qua non* for worship.

To put it differently, doctrine exists for the purpose of doxology and is necessary for doxology even as the foundation exists for the house and is necessary for the house. No doctrine means no doxology, and false doctrine tends to idolatry. We take heed to doctrine so that we might rightly know and then fittingly praise our God. The energetic worshiper producing spirited worship is an abomination to God if he is not baptized with the fire of the Holy Spirit kindled in the heart by sound intellectual knowledge of the doctrine of God in Christ. If the Spirit is generating fervor in a man's heart and doxologies from his lips, it is because his heart is being warmed at the fire of God's Word rightly interpreted.

Careful attention to doctrine in public worship—as opposed to whatever else it may be that man in his vanity craves, like the inspirational pep talks or gospel jams of “contemporary worship”—does not make worship dull and barren. When a congregation of believing sinners is brought to stand under the shadow of the cross and see the eternal, unchangeable, particular, saving love of God through a faithfully explained, sensibly applied, and dynamically delivered exposition of Scripture by a preacher who cries, “Behold your God!” hearts come alive in fruitful worship.

Who exclaims in doxology, “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!...for of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever, Amen”! (Rom. 11:33-36), but that blessed Jewish or Grecian soul that has sat spellbound at the feet of the holy apostle listening to him explain with careful doctrinal precision the righteousness of God that is revealed from faith to faith?

Who sings in doxology, “Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen”! (I Tim. 1:17), but that humble speck of dust who has first given himself to serious contemplation of the loaded doctrinal statement, “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am chief” (I Tim. 1:15), and made it his own?

Who cries in doxology, “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory!” (Is. 6:3) and cries so loudly that the posts of the doors move (Is. 6:4), but that creature, heavenly or other, who has stood in the immediate presence of the enthroned God?

We take heed to doctrine. Why? It is the foundation of our worship. The church must take heed to *sound*

doctrine, for only the foundation of *sound* doctrine—Christ Himself being the Chief Cornerstone—makes possible a fitly framed building of doxology to God. Orthodoxy! Orthodoxy not for the sake of orthodoxy; orthodoxy for the sake of *doxology*.

4. Salvation: Because doctrine is the foundation for the enjoyment of salvation.

While it is possible for an infant or a severely mentally handicapped child of believing parents to be saved and taken to glory apart from an intellectual apprehension of the doctrines revealed in Scripture, the rule is that God saves His people by an active, conscious faith in the Lord Jesus, whereby the elect, believing sinner smites his breast and urgently pleads, “I cry in deep need and Thy help I implore, make hast to the rescue I pray! My Savior Thou art, and my strength evermore, no longer Thy coming delay!” (Psalter, #188). Romans 10:13 states, “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” Those who call upon the Lord are those who have been given faith, and faith is worked to activity by God through the preaching of the holy gospel, so that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God (Rom. 10:14-17). God saves us by faith in the teachings (doctrines) of His Word—Christ being the Word incarnate. Therefore, doctrine is foundational for salvation—for the personal enjoyment of salvation's comfort and peace.

How can it be that an individual says he is a Christian who enjoys salvation in a personal relationship with Christ, but is ignorant of the teachings of the Bible or has an aversion to doctrine? How can any possess assurance of salvation when with conviction they believe in erroneous doctrine that makes salvation dependent upon their own worth, will, or works? Where you find a building of spiritually healthy saints enjoying communion with God, you find beneath a foundation of true doctrine.

That doctrine is the foundation of the enjoyment of salvation is what makes the pastoral ministry not only possible but a privilege. To be pitied is the poor pastor or congregation that disparages or is deprived of doctrine. What comfort is there apart from knowledge of the truth? The pastor visits the diseased, the lonely, the betrayed, the heartbroken, the grieving, the frustrated, the doubting, the dying, and the wayward and he comes with one thing—the doctrine of Christ in the Scripture. To a spiritually battered woman plagued by doubts and fears, to a grief-stricken family in a cold cemetery, or to a physically broken and discouraged young man suffering from the ravages of months of chemo treatments that did not knock his cancer numbers down one point,

the Reformed pastor, like the apostles and prophets before him, comes with the doctrine of God's Word, which the Comforter, through prayer, applies to the troubled heart. If all that one can offer suffering sinners are pills, drugs, massages, exercises, hugs, oft-repeated mantras, or psychological tricks to help them escape to their mind's happy place, even though some of those means actually are helps, their souls will never rise out of their mire. God's people need doctrine. God's people need right doctrine, or they will be buried in their sins. The Spirit gives comfort to the believing heart through the reading of Scripture and the explanation of such glorious doctrines as divine providence, the preservation of the saints, the attributes of God, and always the effectual redemption of the cross from which victory was announced, "It is finished."

To live and die happily we must *know* the doctrines of sin (how bad we all by nature really are), deliverance (how gracious, comprehensive, and precious our everlasting salvation in Christ really is), and gratitude (how liberating it really is to keep the law and pray from a grateful heart of praise).

We take heed to doctrine. Why? Right doctrine is the foundation for the enjoyment of salvation.

5. Life: Because doctrine is the foundation for the Christian life.

There must be an active, antithetical, fruitful Christian life of holiness. What good is the doctrinal foundation shaped by creeds, preaching, catechism, good books, and polemics if there is no holy temple sitting on that foundation? What good is maintaining doctrine if there is no serious devotional life, no hatred for evil, no humble witnessing of the gospel, no gracious tongue, no love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance, but a house of adulteries, unclean mouths, lasciviousness, hatred, bickering, strife, seditions, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revelings, laziness, and haughty self-righteousness doctrine-confessors? To the great shame of the church, sometimes this filth flows out her doors in the lives of those who profess to know God but deny Him in their works. But this is not the doctrine's fault! Nor is the command to take heed to the doctrine at fault. The sinner is at fault. Shame on you, sinner, for marring Christ's name and church and doctrine! Are you that sinner? Am I? Bow your head and plead for mercy right now if you are.

An active, antithetical, fruitful Christian life of holiness has only one foundation and it is the saving knowledge of and proper appreciation for the doctrine of God. Hosea 4:1 says there was "no truth, nor mercy,

nor knowledge of God in the land," and in verse 6 God declares, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." The evidence of Israel's lack of knowledge was obvious, and it was not merely their ignorance of God; it was their appalling wickedness of life described in verse 2 as swearing, lying, killing, stealing, committing adultery, and breaking out with blood touching blood.

Where true doctrine is faithfully taught there *might be* instances of wickedness for a variety of reasons; but where true doctrine is minimized, ignored, rejected, or corrupted there *will necessarily be* indifferent lives devoid of serious convictions and profane lives of wickedness. There is only one foundation for a building fitly framed together in holiness and that is the doctrinal foundation of Christ. Where there is no Christ, there is no life.

Some professing Christians have a serious misunderstanding of doctrine when they say that doctrine is a collection of irrelevant, abstract, heady propositions stifling a free and happy life of godliness. They claim they are doers while others are hearers and their church is practical while others are doctrinal. Doctrine is the truth concerning God and man and sin and the world and Christ and salvation and the church and the future of all things, and as such it is the only foundation for life.

What we believe determines how we live. If your doctrine is that a monthly trip to the chiropractor is the key to a wholesome life, and you really believe it and have even experienced the truth of it, then you will adapt your whole life, including finances and time, to live according to that doctrine. If you operate a burger chain and your doctrine or core business philosophy is "customer-friendly service at all costs," then you live accordingly and keep your restaurant clean, your food hot, and your workers cheery. If your doctrine is that there is no God, no final judgment, and no hell, then you live for the flesh. If your doctrine is that the whole or part of your righteousness with God is founded upon your good works, then you live your life arrogantly, trying to merit with God and, consequently, have a poor conscience that is continually vexed. If your doctrine is that doctrine is evil, then you, ironically, criticize people who maintain doctrine.

But if your doctrine is the doctrine of Christ that you hear preached, believe by faith, and confess in sincerity, then the Spirit will see to it that you live an active, antithetical, fruitful life. For example, sovereign, eternal election is a lofty subject. When you begin to grasp the truth of your own election by faith, then you do not believe you may safely perpetuate every species of the most atrocious crimes under the sun, but your heart is

overwhelmed, you adore the depths of God's mercies, cleanse yourself, and walk with a humble heart and willing hands.

We take heed to doctrine. Why? Right doctrine is the foundation for the Christian life.

6. Unity: Because doctrine is the foundation for unity.

It is commonly said that love unites and doctrine divides. Doctrine does not divide. Sin divides. Doctrinal deviance divides. Right doctrine unifies by giving a solid basis for true spiritual agreement.

Throughout the ages, Christians have always united on the basis of doctrinal truth and separated from those who do not agree in those doctrines. This is not strange. A gang of notoriously violent thugs in Mexico or worshippers in a Buddhist monastery in Asia or campaigners for an American political party are not held together by their dress or language or feelings, but by some objective, propositional truth-claims, written or unwritten, to which everyone in the group implicitly or explicitly agrees; otherwise they leave or are excluded. This is how groups form and stay united. Yet when a Reformed church pursues and seeks to express unity only on the basis of the essential truths of God's Word, she is regarded as proud, divisive, and narrow-minded.

Unity is especially the emphasis at the end of Ephesians 2. Former curious art-using, impious book-reading, fornicating, idolatrous Gentiles from afar off and Law-of-Moses-observing, bullock-sacrificing, Pass-over-keeping Jews could come together in Ephesus as one habitation of God builded together through the Spirit. For, in spite of all their differences, they were fitly framed together upon the foundation of "by grace in Jesus Christ are we saved through faith and that not of ourselves it is the gift of God, not of works lest any of us should boast."

We take heed to doctrine. Why? It is the foundation of our unity together.

In conclusion

The urgency in earnestly taking heed to doctrine is that Satan knows sound doctrine is the foundation of the church he detests and, therefore, he will fiendishly contend against it until his time is up.

The comfort in taking heed to doctrine is that God loves Himself and, therefore, loves right doctrine. No more than it is possible for God to be destroyed is the absolute and universal deprivation of His doctrine possible on earth. God will always preserve a remnant that steadfastly holds to true doctrine. By this doctrine the true church is known.



Believing and confessing

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Of the providence of God

Second Helvetic Confession, Chapter 6a

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Introduction

With chapter 6 of the Second Helvetic Confession, Heinrich Bullinger directs our attention to the providence of God. Along with the other Reformers, Bullinger subscribes to a robust doctrine of divine providence. God's providence includes all things; no one and nothing is outside of the scope of God's providence. Everything that takes place in time and in history is directed by the providence of God.

Interestingly enough, Bullinger treats the truth of providence *before* the truth of creation and the fall of man into sin. That is not the usual order. The usual or-

der among the Reformed is: creation, providence, and the Fall of man. That is the order found in the Belgic Confession of Faith and in the Westminster Confession of Faith. On the surface, that would appear to be the more reasonable order. Providence is treated after creation because providence presupposes a creation that is preserved and governed. And providence is treated before the Fall to demonstrate the Reformed conviction that the Fall into sin took place according to the appointment of God. The Fall did not take God by surprise, but was under God's providential rule.

The explanation for the treatment of providence be-