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'Doctrines That Will Change Your Life' Series  
#1

## "The Practical Value of Good Doctrine"

Acts 15:22-16:4

### Introduction

Today we begin a new preaching series for the fall. The name of the series is *Doctrines That Will Change Your Life*. Some of you have probably just inwardly groaned. But before you get too discouraged, let me say that my goal for this series is not simply to lay out the ABC's of our theology. The emphasis on this series is going to be the *so what?* of doctrine.

Still you may be saying why do we have to do this? You've heard the saying *you are what you eat*. A better saying is *you are what you think*. We are going to spend a few weeks on this because what you believe determines who you are. Let me explain. Proverbs 23:7 says *As a man thinks within himself, so he is*. That doesn't mean if you think you are rich, you are therefore rich. Or if you think you're beautiful or the smartest man in the world that it makes it a reality. The Bible isn't promoting a power of positive thinking mentality. But it does mean that what you think and believe about yourself and God and others and life will be the determining factors in what you do. And what you do is a testimony to who you are.

So in this series we are going to have a high dose of *so what?*. I'll certainly take a little time and explain the various doctrines we examine. But then there are two questions we are going to consider

each week. *What are the implications of getting this doctrine wrong? What are the benefits of getting is right?*

So today, to get us started, we're going to consider the practical value of good doctrine. And it's here that we need to see that what you believe determines who you are. Without good doctrine you will be subject to the whims of your feelings and the persuasions of those most influential in your life.

### [Acts 15:22-16:4]

This passage gives us an illustration of the church grappling with doctrine. And once they had settled the issues before them, they *passed through the cities delivering the decrees which had been decided upon by the apostles and elders*. The word *decree* in verse 4 is the word *dogma*. Dogma or dogmatics is simply the gathering and expression of doctrines, systematically.

We actually use the word doctrine in various ways. Doctrines can be the loose teaching of an organization. If you start a new job you need to be indoctrinated with the ways of the office. The word is used politically to describe certain principles that have been established over time – like the 'doctrine of self-defense'. But for our purposes, when we talk about doctrines we are talking about the teachings of the Bible which we hold to be true.

Understand that doctrines and dogmas are our understanding of what the Bible teaches. The Bible is infallible and inerrant. The doctrines held by the church are always subject to the testing and light of Scripture.

My experience tells me that lots of Christians today don't like doctrine, which is mind boggling, when you consider that doctrine is an expression of

God's truth. But you have, no doubt, had the same conversations that I've had about how doctrine divides Christians, it's not that important, it deals with things that don't really make a difference in loving Jesus, etc. So we need to be able to answer that charge. So our question today is *Why is Doctrine Important?*

### I. God Cares About Doctrine.

John 14:6 – *I am the way and **the truth** and the life.*

John 1:17 – *The law was given through Moses, grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.*

We can't know Christ and not care about truth and doctrine.

What about this idea that doctrine is divisive and ultimately unknowable?

II Peter 1:19-21 - *So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.*

Notice:

- God says to pay attention
- Truth is established by God not by man. It is knowable and it doesn't shift from denomination to denomination.

II Timothy 3:16 - All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

- Notice the practical end of God's truth – to teach, reprove, correct and train us for good works.

So, God Cares About Doctrine.

## II. Bad Doctrine is Dangerous.

Most Christians don't believe this. Knives are dangerous; terrorists are dangerous; diseases are dangerous, but not theology and doctrine. Interesting. Debatable. But not dangerous. But bad doctrine is one of the most dangerous of all things because it has implications for this life and the life to come.

- Sometimes bad doctrine is fatal.

Absalom had a doctrine that said the one with the biggest army could rule. His doctrine and view of God led him to trust in his horses and chariots. That bad doctrine ignored the covenant God had made with David and in the end it was fatal. Absalom died hanging by his hair from a tree.

David surprisingly struggled with the same bad doctrine toward the end of his life. He counted the people in Israel because his pride led him to believe that bigger is better – a dangerous doctrine. In the end 70,000 men died by pestilence.

But more often than not, the danger of bad doctrine, though fatal, is not immediately seen. The Galatians, after coming to faith in Jesus Christ were dabbling in bad doctrine. They began to think that they had to contribute to their salvation by works.

Listen to the words of Paul. *I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed! . . . You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.*

There are some doctrines that are so critically important that if you get them wrong you are outside of salvation. The doctrine of justification, the Trinity, the inspiration of the Word; the nature of man. Missing on these is fatal to one's soul.

- Sometimes bad doctrine is troublesome if not fatal.

Within orthodoxy, Christians disagree about a number of issues like style of worship, issues surrounding baptisms and the Lord's Supper, the gifts of the Spirit, and church government. And while true believers can disagree over some of these areas, we are kidding ourselves if we think that:

- a. There are no practical implications to what we believe
- b. That two opposites can both be true.

And so we are driven to search the scriptures.

- God cares about doctrine
- Bad doctrine is dangerous

### III. Good Doctrine Brings Vitality

Acts 15 – The issue is in verses 1, 2.

- Critical in nature
- Emotionally explosive
- Worthy of great investment of time, resources, thought and prayer.

Three results of the doctrine that was hammered out.

1. Unity in the churches. Unity is build upon the foundation of truth. (see 22 & 23) Today, unity is sought by the de-emphasizing of truth.
2. Peace – Acts 15 begins with the church in dissention. It ends with them in peace. (33).

- a. There are great blessing of peace because we are a confessional church.
3. Freedom – Today many think that truth and the Word of God limits freedom, that it's burdensome and difficult. The opposite is true. When we know the truth the parameters are set for our work and ministry and life.
- a. It's fascinating that in chapter 16 while taking the letter explaining the doctrine of the church that circumcision is not required for salvation, vs. 3 tells us that Paul took Timothy and had him circumcised. Not a contradiction. He did it for sake of the ministry, not for the sake of Timothy's soul. Doctrine brought freedom. Without clear doctrine that would have been incredibly confusing and misleading.

So, as we embark on this study, let's ask God to teach us – not just facts and knowledge. Let's ask God to teach us life. You are what you think. May God build in us a zeal for Jesus. He is the truth.