

Why Doctrine Matters

Series: These Things Never Change

Pastor Jarrett Stephens

I've got to tell you, I have not been this excited for a preaching series since the last one we did! Ha! Truly...every time we start a new series, I get so excited in my prep time and think to myself this is going to be the best series we've ever done! We're going to be talking about the core doctrines of our faith over the next eight weeks or so – what we believe and why it matters.

We'll have some guests with us as well here at our Champions Campus preaching for me as I will be making my way to preach on our Jersey Village and North Klein campuses during this series.

And so, here is what I want to do to kick this series off. I want to do an introductory message today. I'm calling the title of this sermon: **Why Doctrine Matters**

Now, let me say this right up front about this series...this is NOT going to be seminary type lectures. Nothing against seminary – I've been to a couple!

What I hope to do with this series though is to capture the motto of one of the seminaries I attended and that is that each week and certainly by the end of this series we would be a people that exude “knowledge on fire”.

We want to discover and know with confidence WHAT we believe, BUT we will also spend a lot of the time in these messages talking about WHY - WHAT we believe matters!

And so, as we get going here, let me explain very briefly why I think a series like this is important. Then, much like in our culture series we did last year we called *Chasing Sanity*, I'm going to set some expectations for what we can expect in this series. And then I'm going to give us five reasons as to why doctrine matters.

First, why is a series like this important? Why would we spend eight Sunday mornings on various doctrines that help define our faith?

Well, first is a personal reason. As I am in my third year as your pastor, I know there has been some change here in the church over the last few years – even before I got here there was change going on!

You had a previous pastor that had led you for nearly 15 years, and he decided to transition into another role – that's change! Then Covid hits! Talk about change – Recall having to shut down services and meet online. When you came back from Covid, there was change as it related to times you met, how you checked kids in, where you sat – change, change, and more change.

Then, you call a new pastor (me!). And he comes in and as typical with a new pastor there is a new vision and new direction and new focus. And I just want to express in this moment how

grateful I am to you for being so supportive of the mission and vision and direction that we believe the Lord is leading us in.

I still feel like me and you as a pastor and people are in our honeymoon phase, and I want to stay on it! Who wants to leave their honeymoon?! Let's keep this thing going! I realize though and am fully aware that as a church we have experienced A LOT of change recently.

We've brought on new staff...because of your generosity, we have updated and upgraded nearly our entire facility here at our Champions Campus. We still have some things to do, but you can just walk these halls (and if you've been here for a long time) you can visually see change.

And listen: change isn't bad...what's the saying? The last words of a dead church is "we've never done it that way before". To refuse to change and flex in programs and events and ministries, and the way we do church is often times a sign of decline and leads to a slow death in a congregation.

Change...whether it's inside or outside the church is a part of life. It's been said that it's the one constant in life – CHANGE.

BUT – in all this change, I wanted to bring a series of messages as your Pastor to assure to you that:

- While we will be light on our feet as it relates to programs and events and ministries.
- While we will constantly analyze and make sure that WHAT we are doing as a Church is MOST effective in accomplishing the mission of the Church.
- While we will change what we do and how we do things from time to time, this series of messages is going to be about what will NEVER change as a Church.

And what will NEVER change is what we believe as it relates to the core doctrines of the faith. If we cease believing the doctrine that we will be unpacking in this series, then we have ceased being a true Church. If there is ever a hint of teaching a different doctrine (OR adding to or taking away) from these fundamental truths we are talking about THEN it's time to find you a new pastor because that means I've lost my mind and I am no longer qualified to lead you.

So, for a very personal reason, I believe it's time for a series like this. I want you to take heart that in the midst of what will be constant change because change is a part of life, those things that are ultimately MOST IMPORTANT to our faith will NEVER EVER change!

A second reason I wanted to teach this series is because of the moral decline we are seeing in our culture today. I believe without a shadow of a doubt that there is a correlation – a STRONG correlation between the secular drift we find ourselves in as a culture in general and the increase in impotent liberal churches led by "pastors" that have stopped preaching the "whole counsel of God".

Now, look...lost people...people who do not have a personal relationship with God...people who don't believe in God – we can NOT expect them to act or live in a way where their life...their personal decisions are governed or made under the same authority as those of us who follow Jesus.

If we expect that we are setting ourselves up for A LOT of frustration and disappointment.

HOWEVER, we can expect...and SHOULD expect a group of people that define themselves as a “Church”...certainly those who carry the title “pastor” – we CAN and SHOULD EXPECT them if they say they represent God, to represent him faithfully.

What we are seeing today is what we have seen throughout history...it's certainly true in the Bible. You look where to lay the blame for the moral and spiritual decline of a people, it was typically laid at the feet of spiritual leaders who had neglected or had forsaken truth. They were shepherds who weren't feeding the sheep, but instead looking out for themselves (Ez. 34).

According to **1 Tim. 3:15** – “...the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.”

When a Church begins to redefine truth...or decide to live by their own truth rather than living by and “contending for the faith once delivered” (Jude 3) is it any surprise that we see a moral laxity and ever-increasing desire to live totally opposite from the way the Creator God designed us to?!

If the keeper of truth, the Church is no longer holding to the truth then of course there's going to be a sharp trajectory downward, and just watch the news, this is playing out right before our very eyes.

Illus. Methodist Church – Just look at what is taking place in the United Methodist Church right now. More than 2,000 churches have disaffiliated with the United Methodist Church denomination since 2019 because of the church's stance on ordaining LGBTQ clergy and the blessing of same sex marriage.

- When the Church moves away from the authority of scripture (we'll spend a week on the doctrine of the word of God) move away from it, then anything goes!
- When a church moves away from what scripture says about God (what is called Theology Proper) – this is the topic we'll tackle next week. Well, guess what? Move away from the scripture which declares God's holiness, you can ordain whoever you want because their lifestyle doesn't matter.
- When we move away from what the Bible says about sin and how man is created in the image of God (this is a core doctrine of man we're going to cover) – move away from what scripture says about these things and there is NO ISSUE at all with same-sex and LGBTQ lifestyles.

Where do you get a biblical worldview if you don't get it here at the Church?!

Once the Church untethers from the truth, anything goes! When the salt container goes bad, you can bet the salt will lose its taste and its influence is lost...it's impact minimal...and that's exactly what we are seeing play out in our culture today.

So, do we need a series like this?! YES! Because right doctrine leads to right living (at least it should!). What we believe matters because it always works itself out in action.

A third and final reason we are doing this series is because it is part of the Great Commission and Great Commandment.

The Great Commission – **Matt. 28:19-20a** – “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you...”

Part of making disciples (a focus priority for us!)– the very heart of the Great Commission is helping people properly know and worship God. “Teach them to observe all that I commanded you.”

In this doctrine series you will see that Jesus affirmed and helped build through his life and teaching the fundamentals of our faith.

That's the Great Commission, but we also need this series because of the Great Commandment.

Mark 12:30 – “(this is the first half of the Great Commandment) **And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.**”

To love the Lord is to grow in a knowledge of God. The word “theology” combines two words that mean the study of God – this is what theology is.

To use a definition given by the **ESV Study Bible** – “The study of theology is an effort to make definitive statements about God and his implications in an accurate, coherent, relevant way based on God's self-revelations. Doctrine equips people to fulfill their primary purpose, which is to glorify and delight in God through a deep personal knowledge of him. Meaningful relationship with God is dependent on correct knowledge of him.”

Well said! So, this series is VERY important because if God, the Creator of the world:

- can be known...
- has made himself known...
- desires to be known...and we'll talk more about this next week.

If this is true, then studying and growing in our knowledge of him (theology) is NOT just for preachers, and theologians and academics – it's for every person God has created!

How was that for an introduction on why a series like this is needed?! Now, very quickly I want to give you some expectations you can have from this series:

1. We will use the Bible as our truth source as it relates to God and every doctrine we study.

As mentioned, we will spend an entire week looking at the veracity of scripture. The Bible as God's Word is a doctrine in and of itself called "bibliology". We'll see why you can trust the Bible...why it's authoritative for life. We'll answer questions like where did this come from and ultimately see why we can stake our life upon it.

Illus. Podcast this week – this was the subject...why God to the Bible for hope – it was all rooted in the trustworthiness of scripture. If you can't trust it, don't go to it!

You can expect this - every week when you come in and we study these different doctrines, we're going to study them from the Bible. The presupposition we're coming into this series is God's word is alive and active (Heb. 4:12). It is true (Psalm 119:60), and so what it says about these subjects we discuss in this series, we can take to heart and believe. Bring your Bible!

2. We will only study what are considered major doctrines.

This series is only eight weeks long. We had to make some decisions as to which doctrines we would cover. And so, we decided we would cover the fundamentals. We are studying only the essential doctrines of our faith in this series.

The ESV has a great bulls-eye type target that I'll give you as visual to help you see where we are going (**SHOW IMAGE**). We are covering the absolutes...and here are the absolutes:

- The Doctrine of God (Theology Proper)
- The Trinity (Christ and the Holy Spirit)
- Man and Sin
- Salvation
- The Bible
- The Church
- Last Things

These are the absolutes...the essentials...the major doctrines. Listen to what **Wayne Grudem** writes about the major doctrines in his *Systematic Theology*:

“A major doctrine is one that has a significant impact on our thinking about other doctrines (this is sometimes called “first order doctrines”) or that has a significant impact on how we live the Christian life. A minor doctrine (second or third order doctrines) is one that has very little impact on how we think about other doctrines, and very little impact on how we live the Christian life.”

So, going back to our ESV bulls-eye (**SHOW IMAGE**). Here's how you could see this:

- An absolute is salvation – how we are saved – the doctrine of salvation. We'll see it is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone – that's essential – it's absolute.
- A conviction is that you are baptized after confessing Christ and for us it is baptism by immersion.
- An opinion would be that it must be done immediately following conversion...or some have an opinion that you need to go through a new believer's class to more fully know what you are doing and clarify what you are believing.
- A question would be how early can you baptize by immersion – can a child be baptized at four or five...six or seven? When should you baptize by immersion?

I'm not going to separate Christian fellowship over a conviction, opinion, or question. We will FIGHT over an absolute...over an essential! That's line in the sand type stuff. You don't believe what we teach about these major doctrines, you are NOT a Christian and NOT a part of His Church.

There's a saying that's been out there for a while. It's been attributed to a number of people: **“In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, and in all things charity.”**

And this is the mindset and heart we want to have. If you are a believer in Christ and embrace these absolutes whether you someone is Anglican, Catholic, Presbyterian, Lutheran or non-denominational – you embrace the essentials, we are family – brothers and sisters in Christ!

In the non-essentials we give liberty, and in the opinions and questions we give love to those that might differ from us on something specific we may embrace in scripture.

Another word for these essential doctrines is what we call “orthodoxy”.

Trevin Wax in his book, *The Thrill of Orthodoxy* – **“Orthodoxy refers to the foundational truths, consistent with the Scriptures, upon which Christians through the ages have demonstrated agreement. Orthodoxy is the historic Christian consensus on the essential elements of true faith and practice, what has been believed “everywhere, always, and by all.”**

3. We will recite creeds and confessions that will help inform our faith and anchor us to historic Christianity.

This will be a fun part of the series. At points during this series...in our services...maybe to open up the service one week...maybe to set the stage for the sermon one week...maybe as a part of the sermon, we are going to recite and read some of the historic creeds that are found in scripture and that the early church gave us.

Think of the Apostle's Creed that dates to the 2nd century...or the Nicene Creed that dates to the 4th century – 325 – these early creeds were recited by Christians as a clarified statement of faith. These creeds have been developed to keep people from heresy regarding the major doctrines...they faithfully summarize and help articulate the faith once delivered.

As Baptists, we are a confessional people...and we will look at what we believe as Baptist in the confession of our faith known as *The Baptist Faith and Message*. While we embrace the creeds and what they state, we also have certain confessions that make us who we are as Baptists, and we will look at some of these in this series.

So, we've covered why we're doing this series...we've covered what you can expect in this series – and please remember we only have about 35-40 min in a sermon – we can only do what we can do!

Now, to close the message out, I want to give you five reasons doctrine matters. This is the title of the message today: Why Doctrine matters.

1. It is commanded we teach doctrine

As a pastor/elder I've been commanded to teach the church doctrine, therefore it is commanded, it matters.

Titus 2:1 – “But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine.”

One of my main roles and responsibilities is to teach sound doctrine. I am not teach my opinion...not to preach worldly wisdom or just give good advice. I am commanded to teach sound doctrine that comes from the Word of God.

2. Doctrine can lead to salvation

1 Tim. 4:16 – “Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.”

In a very real sense, eternity is at stake. This is why I will always request when God brings me and the pastors of this church to your mind, please pray for us...this is a weight. We know as teachers, we will be held to a more strict judgment from God (James 3:1).

How I teach and what I teach matters before God and there could be someone here that is lost that needs to hear:

- the doctrine of man and sin...
- the doctrine of salvation...
- the doctrine of God, the Father...
- the doctrine of the Holy Spirit drawing...

There is someone here that may be drifting – will talk more about that in just a moment! What they need is not me being clever...telling funny jokes (and I've got some good jokes!)...they don't need my take on what's happening in the world today!

What they need sound teaching...what they need is doctrine that according to Paul can save their soul...and for believers that are backsliding it's doctrine rightly divided that can turn them back to God!

3. Doctrine builds up believers

Titus 1:9 – “He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.”

You grow in your faith by knowing sound doctrine. “Give instruction” in NIV is – “encourages others in sound doctrine...”

Come on...the reason that many of us have such a weak faith is that we grew up in weak churches that never gave us meat to eat!

It was topical, not textual...it was feel good...it was entertainment, and we never went deep into doctrine that gives life!

Illus. Good Friday example

Heb. 5:12-6:1a – “For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, ¹³ for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. ¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil. Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity...”

Let's dive deep into doctrine NOT for knowledge sake! The danger here...the warning here is in the scriptures doctrine and lifestyle ALWAYS go together! We can't divorce these two. If we grow in knowledge, but it's not effecting the way we live something is wrong!

Think about it...the harshest words Jesus had for people in the New Testament were for those who had all the knowledge of God (the Pharisees) but they didn't know God! There's a real danger here that we must take to heart.

Listen to this warning from **J.I Packer** and his book, *Knowing God* – I'm sure I will quote from him often in this series. He offers up this admonition as it relates to gathering up mere knowledge of God:

“If we pursue theological knowledge for its own sake, it is bound to go bad on us. It will make us proud and conceited (This is 1 Cor. 8 – knowledge puffs up!). The very greatness of the subject matter will intoxicate us, and we shall come to think of ourselves as a cut above other Christians because of our interest in it and grasp of it.”

We are NOT taking a deep dive into the foundational truths that make up our faith just grow smarter! Instead, we believe (doctrine) SHOULD affect the way we behave (what we do). If we're not working what we are learning out in action then we're missing out!

Illus. OBU theology classes (Head grows big and heart grows cold!)

And so, the warning is if what we believe is not burning within our hearts, we can be in real trouble! True doctrinal teaching and acceptance of the teaching should lead to life change! It builds believers up!

4. Sound doctrine refutes heresy

Heresy is the opposite of orthodoxy. Taking in sound doctrine...healthy doctrine will keep us from listening to, believing in, and endorsing false teaching and false doctrine.

Illus. Counterfeit bill – they study the real! If you want to refute false doctrine, you need to become very familiar with true doctrine.

1 Tim. 1:3-11 – “As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine,⁴ nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith.⁵ The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion,⁷ desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions. Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers,¹⁰ the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine,¹¹ in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted.”

5. Doctrine helps prevent people from drifting spiritually

1 Tim. 6:20-21 – “O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you. Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called “knowledge,”²¹ for by professing it some have swerved from the faith.”

2 Tim. 4:1-4 – “I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom:² preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.³ For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having

itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions,⁴ and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.”

Here is what is interesting about those that wander...those that drift...It just happens! Think back to our illustration regarding the Methodist Church – it didn’t just happen one day – it happened over time...a slow drift!

Illus. College floating the river

If you don’t want to drift, you have to be anchored to something. And spiritually what can keep you from drifting is anchoring yourself to the faith once delivered – it’s the doctrine that endures.

So, I want you to come hungry to these services – bring your bible and notebook and be ready to take notes and engage with what we are talking about here. Come humbly to these services. We bend our knee...our hearts...our will to the whole counsel of God that is taught in the scripture where we find a TRUTH that will NEVER change. Let’s pray.

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