

THE LOSS OF ROBUST THEOLOGY

THE VITAL IMPORTANCE OF A ROBUST THEOLOGY

- A strong, robust, God-centered, Christ-focused, Scripture-saturated theology is vital for healthy churches and healthy Christians
- This has always been the case
 - Theology mattered for a 16th century monk named Martin Luther who launched the Protestant Reformation with a mallet and a list of grievances with the church of his day
 - Theology mattered for John Calvin who
 - Theology mattered significantly for all the Reformers
 - Theology mattered for the early Puritans who founded this nation
 - Theology mattered in the early struggles with liberalism that men engaged in during the early decades of the 20th century
- Theology matters....and it matters because it is that which enables us to live well unto God
- A healthy Christianity cannot survive without theology

This was once a given in evangelical thought and practice – theology mattered to every true worshipper of the Lord Jesus Christ. William Ames, in a time when theology profoundly mattered, was typical of his era when he contended that theology was for everyone. It was not simply the domain of a small group of academic experts. It was the personal concern of the most humble merchant or homemaker. That was because theology, by its very nature and function, was believed to speak not only to the intellect but also to the common *sensus*, to human feelings and emotions. So important is this last aspect of theology that John Owen, a Puritan who often is accused of being overly scholastic in the worst sense of the word, could write, “Let us proclaim it boldly – the man who is not inflamed with divine love is an outsider to all theology!”

Gary Johnson, “Does Theology Still Matter?” in *The Coming Evangelical Crisis*, 1996, 57-58.

- Theology and sound doctrine matter because how we think about ourselves and God determines how we live
- To think rightly is to live rightly...to think wrongly is to live wrongly

Proverbs 4:23 ~ Watch over your heart with all diligence, For from it *flow* the springs of life

Proverbs 23:7 ~ As a man thinks within himself, so he is

Romans 12:2 ~ And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect

Ephesians 4:23 ~ and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind

- A sound theology is vital to all areas of life and ministry

THE CONTEMPORARY DISDAIN FOR ROBUST THEOLOGY

- As a result of postmodernism, doctrinal discernment has fallen out of favor today in much of the church
- Today someone who takes a firm stand on biblical doctrine is criticized for being unloving
- There has been a move away from clarity, conviction, and doctrine in favor of love, tolerance, and unity

- As the culture becomes more and more relativistic and there is an abandonment of objective truth, the church begins to reflect such tendencies as well...tolerance is valued over truth

Popular evangelical faith has developed a bias against theology (not to mention the intellect), and what is more, it has elevated the bias to the level of a virtue, defending it as vigorously as democracy.

David Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 1993, 188.

- Doctrine is purposely avoided in many evangelical circles today

They focus on practical matters, such as family concerns and personal growth, not doctrine, sometimes mixing psychotherapeutic concepts with biblical teaching. They often emphasize religious experience. They seek to feel God's love, not understand church theology – a theme that plays well with the decreasing importance of denominational doctrine among baby boomers.

Richard Cimino and Don Lattin, *Shopping for Faith*, 1998, 57.

- While the Protestant Reformation was first and foremost a theological revolution...yet, today, the Reformation has been eclipsed in the evangelical church as is evidenced by the present-day attitude toward the place and importance of theology in the life of the church

The evangelical church today tends to be *non-theological*. In other words, so many churches and ministries want to emphasize the practical aspects of Christian living, but they neglect the doctrinal foundations of the faith. This is like attempting to build a solid house on shifting sand. I believe that churches and ministries must put first things first and lay the foundation before they would build upon it. This necessitates the teaching of sound doctrine and the general framework of systematic theology.

Steve Lawson

Lacking a sound, biblical, and well understood theology, evangelicals have fallen prey to the pragmatism and consumerism of our times. Instead of calling God's people to worship and serve God, and teaching them how to do it, we treat parishioners as buyers and market the gospel as a "product." A therapeutic world view has replaced classical categories such as sin and repentance, and many leaders have identified the gospel with such modern idols as a particular political philosophy, psychological views of man, and sociology. To the extent that the doctrines of the Bible no longer guide preaching, teaching, publishing, evangelism, worship, and the daily life of the people of God, to that extent evangelicalism has declined to become a movement that is shaped only by popular whim and sentimentality. To stand in awe of God once again, evangelicals must recognize these idols as idols and confess how much we have been taken captive by them.

James Boice, "Preface" in *Here We Stand*, 1996, 10.

It should not come as a big surprise that when theology is obviated, churches become preoccupied with other things. Entertainment in the form of drama and comedy skits replaces preaching, which, unless it is entertaining, is often described as boring. More and more stress is placed on music style that attempts to evoke an emotional response simply for its own sake.

Gary Johnson, "Does Theology Still Matter?" in *The Coming Evangelical Crisis*, 1996, 61.

- Paul warned about times like this:

2 Timothy 4:3-4 ~ For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths

2 Timothy 3:1-5 ~ But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, **holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power;** Avoid such men as these

THE DISASTROUS CONSEQUENCES OF LOSING A ROBUST THEOLOGY

1 Timothy 6:3-5 ~ If anyone advocates a different doctrine and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain.

- These false teachers “advocate a different doctrine” = 1 word (*heterodidaskaleo*)
 - 1) *hetero* = different
 - 2) *didaskaleo* = to teach
- Means “to teach that which is different from what should be taught....to teach a different doctrine....deviate from the truth...to teach errors”
- It describes any teaching that contradicts God’s revelation in Scripture...heterodoxy rather than orthodoxy
- These false teachers teach what ...vs. 3 ~ does not agree with sound words, those of the Lord Jesus Christ
- “sound” = *hugaino* = English word *hygiene* (i.e. that which clean, healthy)
- Their words and teaching are not sound....they are not clean or healthy
- These false teachers did not agree....vs. 3 ~ with the doctrine conforming to godliness
- Because their teaching is not healthy, their lives are not healthy...teaching not based on Scripture always results in an unholy life
- Notice some of the disastrous consequences of abandoning a robust theology

It Breeds Pride

1 Timothy 6:4 ~ he is conceited

- “conceited” carries the idea “to make proud, puff up with pride” and comes from the root word that means “smoke”
- This word actually literally means “to puff up like a cloud of smoke, to wrap up in smoke”
- Today we would say, “the person is blowing smoke” or “they are full of hot air”
- Refers to the person who just talks and talks but really doesn’t say anything
- Arrogance is the inevitable attitude that arises in the heart of someone who has weak doctrinal convictions
- They begin to think of themselves and their ideas more highly than God and His Word
- This is why the study of doctrine is so important: The study of doctrine keeps us humble!
 - You can’t study God’s attributes (holiness, sovereignty, omniscience, omnipresence) and come away thinking you’re something
 - You can’t study the person of Christ (virgin birth, fully God and fully man, fulfillment of OT prophecies and types, sacrifice on cross, resurrection, present ministry in heaven, return) and be prideful
 - You can’t study the work of the Holy Spirit (power in conversion, work in regeneration, sealing the believer, indwelling the believer, convicting of sin, teaching, power for gifts) and think highly of yourself
 - You can’t study the doctrine of salvation (God’s sovereignty, predestination, regeneration, conversion, adoption, the new nature, justification, sanctification, glorification) and be arrogant
- That’s why the Puritans said “soft preaching makes hard people, but hard preaching makes soft people”

It Reveals Ignorance

1 Timothy 6:4 ~ he understands nothing

- The person who has a disdain for doctrine or worse teaches wrong doctrine is ignorant of really knows nothing even though they think they are wise

It Causes Strife

1 Timothy 6:4-5~ but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth...

- Paul uses every possible word to refer to the strife that a lack of doctrinal clarity brings
- Constant wrangling over words, obsessing over terminology, etc. shows a contempt for the reliability and authority of Scripture
- The result is strife, disputes, factions, and every kind of dissension
- But sound doctrine has a way of unifying a body of believers: a deep understanding of the unfathomable riches of Christ...a robust understanding of God's sovereignty...a clear understanding of the forgiveness found in Christ at the cross promotes unity, guards against factions, and draws the body together in one heart, one mind

It Produces Ungodliness

1 Timothy 6:5 ~ who suppose that godliness is a means of gain

- Those who are not committed to sound doctrine often reveal their true motives: a love of money
- Instead of godliness, false teachers will be marked by sin
- But sound doctrine always promotes godliness...it produces right thinking which generally results in right and godly living

THE PRACTICAL BENEFITS OF A ROBUST THEOLOGY

It Guards Against Error

1 Timothy 1:3-5 ~ As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus so that you may instruct certain men not to teach **strange doctrines**, nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than furthering the administration of God which is by faith.

1 Timothy 4:1-6 ~ But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and **doctrines of demons**, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude; for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer. In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the **sound doctrine** which you have been following.

Titus 1:9 ~ holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in **sound doctrine** and to refute those who contradict.

It Prevents Felt Needs from Driving Ministry

2 Timothy 4:2-4 ~ preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure **sound doctrine**; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.

It Ensures Spiritual Growth and Stability

Ephesians 4:11-14 ~ And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by **every wind of doctrine**, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;

It Promotes a Healthy Church and Holy Living

Titus 2:1-2 ~ But as for you, speak the things which are fitting for **sound doctrine**. Older men are to be temperate, dignified, sensible, **sound in faith**, in love, in perseverance.

Titus 2:6-7 ~ Likewise urge the young men to be sensible; in all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds, **with purity in doctrine**, dignified

Titus 2:9-10 ~ Urge bondslaves to be subject to their own masters in everything, to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, not pilfering, but showing all good faith so that they will adorn the **doctrine** of God our Savior in every respect

SUMMARY

Love theology of course; but love theology for no other reason than this: Theology is the knowledge of God – and it is your meat and drink to know God, to know Him truly, and, as far as it is given to mortals, to know Him wholly... Convictions are the root on which the tree of vital Christianity grows. No convictions, no Christianity. Scanty convictions, hunger-bitten Christianity. Profound convictions, solid and substantial religion.

Gary Johnson, "Does Theology Still Matter?" in *The Coming Evangelical Crisis*, 1996, 67.

Theology really does matter! If we neglect theology, especially in the pulpit, we are committing a crime against Christ's little ones. The present state of the evangelical church... is plainly traceable to the absence of doctrinal teaching and preaching in our pulpits.

Gary Johnson, "Does Theology Still Matter?" in *The Coming Evangelical Crisis*, 1996, 68.