



By Charles C. Ryrie

IS DOCTRINE IMPORTANT?

Although relevance is the cry of our day, one of the most relevant aspects of the ministry is being pushed into the background. I refer to sound teaching or doctrine. Methods and mechanics, committees and commissions seem to figure more prominently in the thoughts and actions of Christians and Christian organizations than sound doctrine. Of course, all these things may be properly used, but never apart from teaching. After all, the purpose of God's giving us a revelation of Himself in the Bible is to teach us, so teaching or doctrine can never be irrelevant.

Particularly is this so as we come to the last days of the church. The apostle Paul warned that the time would come when people "will not endure sound doctrine, but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears" (2 Tim. 4:3). The forces that will oppose God's people and His work in the last days will promote their doctrinal system and it will include "doctrines of demons." We should learn a lesson from our opposition. They realize the importance of indoctrination; can we afford to do less?

Why is doctrine so important?

For one reason, it is the only accurate foundation for true Christian living which in turn is the motivation for all Christian activity. Years ago I had a Sunday school teacher who used to tell us that it wasn't important what we believed, just how we lived. But, of course, your living is a reflection of what you believe. Tragically, this teacher's illogical pronouncement has become a dogma in our day and promoted in high places. Doctrine, we are told, is not important — just living.

One of the reasons why this idea has become so popular is that those who believe the fundamentals of the faith do not always adorn their doctrine with godly living. Such irresponsible conduct can never be condoned, but the fault is not in the doctrine. The word *sound* means healthy, and healthy doctrine is always expected to result in holy living. Every attempt at godly living apart from sound doctrine will be defective in some point. When the apostle Paul prayed for the needs of churches he invariably prayed for an increase in knowledge since he realized that this would produce holy living. For the Philippians he asked for an increase in the discerning nature of their love in order that they might be filled with the fruits of righteousness (Phil. 1:10-11). For the Colossians he asked for the knowledge of God's will that they might walk worthy (Col. 1:9-10). Sound doctrine

issues in fruitful living, and holy living must be based on healthy doctrine.

Sound doctrine is also important as the bedrock for the indigenous church. The Central American Mission has been singularly blessed of God in its aim of establishing indigenous churches in the countries in which we work, so that today after 75 years of labor there are more than 700 congregations of believers in these lands. From the very first the teaching of believers has occupied a large place in the ministry of CAM missionaries. One of the pioneers of the work in Guatemala, A. E. Bishop, wrote of his procedure in these words: "My assistant and two other 'Teaching Elders' have charge of the night meetings. Sunday and Tuesday nights are given to Gospel preaching, Monday night to prayer meeting, Thursday night to doctrinal and dispensational teaching. Wednesday night one of the 'Teaching Elders' has a Bible class for beginners. Friday night cottage Gospel meetings; sometimes five or six are held on this evening. Saturday evening committee prayer meetings are held." Effort like this, giving Bible teaching its proper place, has been the strength of CAM work. Today the work of our five Bible institutes with their day and evening courses and of the very popular and successful short-term institutes for pastors and laymen carry on the work of establishing local personnel in sound doctrine. What we do today (or fail to do) in training others will be the strength (or weakness) of the church tomorrow.

Finally, teaching sound doctrine is important because without it the Great Commission cannot be fulfilled. The commission concerns not only evangelism but primarily the making of disciples. Disciples are made by evangelizing and by "teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:20). The unsaved must be won to Christ and the redeemed must be taught in order to fulfill completely the Great Commission. It is obvious, then, that doctrine must be a most relevant part of any ministry that seeks to follow the Lord's instructions for this day.

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