

## The Significance of Systematic Theology

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The two previous articles in this three part series on the subject of systematic theology [published in the *Conservative Theological Journal* – see footnotes] dealt with the definition of systematic theology<sup>1</sup> as well as the contribution that dispensational premillennialism makes to systematic theology.<sup>2</sup> This final article of the series gets to the most fundamental issue by answering the question, “Do we really need theology at all?” Although previous generations of believers would have never entertained such a question, this query is crying out for an answer today on account of the fact that more and more Christian leaders are beginning to view theology as something that is somewhat irrelevant to the health and life of the church.

### Evidence of Contemporary Doctrinal Decline

Lest the reader think that this analysis is an exaggeration, let us consider a few comments found in one of the most recent best selling books authored by a well-known advocate of the church growth movement. While many of the insights found in the book are appreciated, one is struck by how frequently the author goes out of his way to marginalize the significance of doctrinal study and exposition. Consider the following: “God won’t ask you about your religious background or doctrinal views.”<sup>3</sup> “Jesus said our love *for each other*—not our doctrinal beliefs—is our greatest witness to the world.”<sup>4</sup> “Today many assume that spiritual maturity is measured by the amount of biblical information and doctrine you know.”<sup>5</sup> “The Bible is far more than a doctrinal guidebook.”<sup>6</sup> “The last thing many believers need today is to go to another Bible study.

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<sup>1</sup> Mal Couch, “What Is Systematic Theology?,” *Conservative Theological Journal* 8, no. 23 (March 2004): 10-28.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Ray, “Systematic Theology and Premillennialism,” *Conservative Theological Journal* 8, no. 24 (August 2004): 165-91.

<sup>3</sup> Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 34.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

They already know far more than they are putting into practice.”<sup>7</sup> In another work, the same author seems to marginalize in depth teaching when he recommends that a sermon series should never go beyond eight weeks for fear that the congregation will begin to lose interest.<sup>8</sup> He then goes so far as to poke fun at in depth eschatological teaching by relaying the complaint of a woman who said, “My pastor has been in Daniel’s seventy weeks longer than Daniel was!”<sup>9</sup>

The slogans that believers use also betray doctrinal obfuscation within evangelicalism. One sometimes hears the following trite expressions. “Don’t give me doctrine, just give me Jesus.” “What really matters is Christ not creed.” “Devotion is important and not doctrine.” “What counts is our behavior, and not our beliefs.”<sup>10</sup>

Other signs abound that the modern church is down playing theological truth. Some of these signs come from my own personal experience. For example, I recently ran across an advertisement in a well-known Christian magazine from a church seeking a pastor. The advertisement read, “Seminary not required, MBA preferred.” On a similar front, one of my seminary professors used to ask each of his classes the following question at the beginning of each semester: “When was the last time that you heard a sermon on the Trinity?” According to this particular professor, it was rare to have even one or two hands go up in a classroom of about 50 students each time this question was asked. Furthermore, in an attempt to explain away the lack of doctrinal content in his ministry, I once had a pastor tell me that the “shelf life” of the average sermon is from the church building to the parking lot. He explained that people just do not remember what the Sunday sermon was about after they are reintegrated into daily life.

Much of the blame for the decline of doctrinal teaching in our churches can be laid at the feet of the seeker friendly movement. The name of the game in seeker-oriented churches is to attract the unsaved to church by coming up with sermon topics that appeal to the felt needs of the

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 186.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 231.

<sup>8</sup> Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 300.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Most of these slogans were originally accumulated in Henry Holloman, “Prolegomena, Bibliology, and Theology (Part 1)” (unpublished class notes in TTH511 Theology I, Talbot Theological Seminary, Spring 1998), 9.

unregenerate.<sup>11</sup> Those topics that run the risk of offending the un-churched such as sin, hell, the Second Coming, etc...are omitted from the church's Sunday morning diet. Thus, the problem with seeker-oriented approach lies not so much in what is communicated on Sunday morning but rather in what is omitted. Because of its emphasis upon the felt needs of man rather than on what God has disclosed, the seeker philosophy at its core is anthropocentric rather than theocentric. Consequently, MacArthur describes the seeker movement in terms of entertaining the goats at the expense of feeding the sheep.<sup>12</sup>

The impetus of this philosophy emanates from psychologist Abraham Maslow who postulated that human behavior can be understood in terms of man engaging in various behaviors designed to satisfy his five basic areas of need (physiological, safety, social, esteem, and self development). Modern marketing approaches as well as managerial theories are predicated upon Maslow's view of human nature. The seeker approach also capitalizes on Maslow's theory by selecting sermon topics designed to appeal to man's various felt needs. It is argued that this approach will attract the unregenerate to church. Thus, the Bible is used selectively to preach a variety of pragmatic "how to" messages designed to appeal to the felt needs of the unsaved. Biblical subjects that do not nicely fit into one or more of the categories of Maslow's hierarchy are avoided. Such a selective approach creates "canon within the canon" teaching philosophy thus robbing the church of the spiritual knowledge necessary to reach maturity.

When seeker advocates are confronted with the lack of doctrinal and expositional teaching in their churches, their standard answer is that such teaching occurs at the midweek service or during small group ministry. However, as explained by T.A. McMahon, theory and practice are often two different things:

As we've noted, most seeker-friendly churches focus much of their time, energy, and resources on accommodating unchurched Harry and Mary. Consequently, week after week, the entire congregation is subjected to a diluted and leavened message. Then, on Wednesday evening, when a fellowship is reduced to a quarter or a third of its normal size, would it be reasonable to assume

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 294-95.

<sup>12</sup> John MacArthur, *Ashamed of the Gospel* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1993), 72.

that his remnant is served a nourishing meal featuring the meat of the word, expositional teaching, and an emphasis on sound doctrine and discipleship? Hardly. We've yet to find a seeker-friendly church where that takes place. The spiritual meals offered at midweek services are usually support group meetings and classes for discerning one's spiritual gifts or going through the latest psycho-babble-ized "Christian" bestseller...rather than the study of the Scriptures.<sup>13</sup>

Because doctrinal decline has become a discernible trend in modern evangelicalism, a fresh scriptural look into what God has revealed concerning the significance of doctrine is appropriate. The remainder of this article will survey various biblical reasons as to why doctrine should be returned to a place of preeminence within evangelicalism.

### **A Heaven or Hell Issue**

The most important reason as to why theology should not be neglected by Christian leaders is that what people believe about certain doctrinal matters can determine where they spend eternity. For example, the expression "do not give me doctrine, just give me Jesus" rings hollow upon considering that doctrine helps determine if someone has believed on the right or wrong Jesus. There are many false renditions of Jesus. The Jesus of the Jehovah's Witnesses represents the recycled Jesus from an ancient heresy known as Arianism, which teaches that Jesus is not an eternally existent being but rather is a created being. Thus, the Jesus of Arianism is a different Jesus than what is portrayed in Scripture. Believing on the Jesus of the Jehovah's Witnesses therefore entails believing on the wrong Jesus. This error, if not corrected, could have eternal ramifications. The only way to discern the biblical Jesus from the Arian Jesus is through the doctrine of Christology.

Numerous other examples of a false Jesus are found in other false religions, such as Mormonism and the New Age movement. Paul warned of such false gospels in Galatians 1:8-9 when he said, "But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed."<sup>14</sup> It is impossible to harmonize Paul's warning with modern statements such as "God

<sup>13</sup> T. A. McMahan, "The Seeker-Friendly Way of Doing Church," *The Berean Call*, March 2004, 2.

<sup>14</sup> All Scripture citations are taken from the

won't ask you about your religious background or doctrinal views" or "today many assume that spiritual maturity is measured by the amount of biblical information and doctrine you know." Doctrine is a central issue since it determines whether a person has believed in the right Christ, which in turn could determine whether they go to heaven or hell.

## Christian Living

Not only does the role of doctrine have the potential of determining someone's eternal destiny, but it also has a tremendous bearing on the standard of Christian living. As one of my seminary professors used to say, "a person cannot behave Christianly until he first learns to think Christianly." Perhaps the reason that the standard for Christian living has deteriorated in our day is because we have witnessed corresponding doctrinal erosion. A clear scriptural nexus exists between doctrine and daily living. Let us consider some examples.

In John 13:17, Jesus says, "If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them." In this context, "these things" refers to Christ's example of servitude as recorded in the first sixteen verses of the chapter. Notice the relationship between knowing and doing in John 13:17. Knowing precedes doing. People cannot do what they do not know. Knowing is not an end in and of itself. It is just a first step toward the second step of doing. However, the second step cannot be taken unless the person has a cognitive grasp of doctrinal content. Our capacity to do the right thing is first predicated upon the doctrine that we know.<sup>15</sup>

Another example of how doctrine influences behavior is found in Acts 2:42-47. This familiar ecclesiological passage depicts the various items that the first church "devoted" itself to. These items included apostolic doctrine, fellowship, communion, prayer, worship, and giving. Although every item on this list is important, it is interesting to observe that the church's devotion to apostolic doctrine is mentioned first (Acts 2:42). Such prioritization is significant because doctrinal learning shows the believer why and how to perform the other items subsequently mentioned on the list. Doctrine gives insight into all of the following activities. If the church had not first given itself to doctrine of the apostles, it would not have known how or why to perform all the other behaviors. This explains why Luke conspicuously mentions doctrine as the first item

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<sup>15</sup> Henry Holloman, *The Forgotten Blessing*, Swindoll Leadership Library, ed. Charles R. Swindoll and Roy B. Zuck (Nashville: Word, 1999), 127.

the church devoted itself to.<sup>16</sup> Interestingly, many pastors complain that their churches do not give enough, worship enough, pray enough, fellowship enough, or value the Lord's Table enough. Perhaps the reason is that modern pastors do not allow doctrine to have preeminence in their ministries. If churches were more doctrinally literate, then the other previously described behaviors would naturally fall into place. Rather than "beating the sheep" for not living the right way, perhaps pastors should make doctrinal teaching more of a priority in their ministries.

Yet another example of how doctrine influences behavior is found in 2 Peter 3:11, which says, "Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness." Prior to this verse, Peter had unfolded numerous eschatological truths pertaining to the coming Day of the Lord and the destruction of the present order (2 Pet 3:3-10). Then, in verse 11, Peter explains that these truths have the effect of changing the behavior of God's people by giving them an incentive to live holy. Knowledge of great eschatological truths, such as the temporary nature of this world, naturally has the effect of revolutionizing a believer's priorities, value system, and the way he spends his time, talent, and treasure. Thus, this passage links knowledge of eschatology with behavior.

A similar link is found in 1 John 3:2-3, which says, "...We know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure." Thus, contemplating Christ's coming purifies the daily life of the believer. Unfortunately, many pastors avoid the subject of eschatology altogether for fear that it is too controversial or complicated. But here both Peter and John testify that the subject should be openly preached because of the impact that it has on the believer's daily life. The linkage between eschatology and behavior is found throughout the Bible. Dr. J. Dwight Pentecost, once commented that nearly every time the doctrine of the Second Advent is mentioned in the New Testament, it is linked to some sort of admonition about daily life. The impact that eschatology has on behavior probably explains why so much of God's Word is devoted to the subject of predictive prophecy. According J. Barton Payne's *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy*, 27%, or over one quarter of the Bible, pertains to the subject of predictive prophecy.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Holloman, "Prolegomena, Bibliology, and Theology (Part 1)," 8.

<sup>17</sup> J. Barton Payne, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy: The Complete Guide to Scriptural Predictions and Their Fulfillment* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973) 11-12.

## Practical Issues

Many attempt to marginalize the study of doctrine on the grounds that it is not practical. However, observing how frequently Paul introduces doctrine for the purpose of correcting practical problems within the local church rebuts this assertion. In fact, some of the greatest expositions of doctrinal principles comes about in Scripture as a result of Paul having to correct the daily behavior of Christians. In his writings, Paul does not elucidate doctrinal principles just for the purpose of passing on some random theological thoughts. Rather, some practical problem existed in the churches that he was writing to and he used doctrine to address the practical problem. It is for reasons such as these that biblical epistolary literature is sometimes referred to as “occasional literature.”

Nowhere does this become clearer than in Philippians 2. Most know this chapter as the *kenosis* chapter. It offers a graphic depiction of Christ’s incarnation. It describes how Christ voluntarily laid aside the independent exercise of His divine attributes, while still retaining His deity, for the purpose of serving humanity. But why did Paul insert this material into his letter to the Philippians? Was his goal to pass along a random theological thought? Hardly. The Philippian congregation was characterized by numerous self-serving attitudes such as selfishness and empty conceit (Phil 2:3), grumbling (Phil 2:14) and disputing (Phil 4:2). At one point, Paul makes mention of two women, Euodia and Syntyche, who were embroiled in a bitter interpersonal conflict. Paul’s remedy for ridding the church of such self-centeredness was an exposition of Christ’s incarnation (Phil 2) in hopes that his readers would imitate the selflessness of Christ. Evidently Paul thought that this doctrine was practical enough to change the behavior of believers.

Another example is Paul’s presentations of the doctrine of the Bema Seat Judgment in 1 Corinthians 3. This chapter represents one of the most graphic portrayals of this unique judgment found anywhere in Scripture (1 Cor 3:10-15). Was Paul’s intent to unfold this doctrine just for the sake of randomly developing another area of systematic theology? Not at all. Paul took the opportunity of revealing the Bema Seat Judgment because of practical problems taking place within the Corinthian assembly. Although the Corinthians were believers (1 Cor 1:2), they had made little progress in the area of practical sanctification. The church in Corinth was one of the most carnal churches of first century world of which we have record. In this church, there existed

Christians following men instead of Christ (1 Corinthians 1:10-17), worldly wisdom (1:18-2:16) divisions (chapter 3), sexual immorality (chapters 6), incest (chapter 5), lawsuits among believers (chapter 6), drunkenness at the Lord's table (chapter 11), misuse of spiritual gifts (chapters 12-14) and false doctrine that included a denial of the resurrection (chapter 15). Yet it is to this church that we find one of the greatest expositions of the Bema Seat Judgment because Paul believed that this doctrine would change the behavior of the people by communicating to them the reality of a coming judgment. This judgment, unlike the Great White Throne Judgment of Revelation 20:11-15, would not be a judgment to determine whether a person spends eternity in heaven or hell. That issue had already been settled because the Corinthians were already believers. Rather, this judgment would determine reward. The Corinthians would either gain or lose reward depending on how they progressed in the realm of practical sanctification. Paul understood that living with the knowledge of future accountability would change one's behavior in the present. Rather than seeing the eschatological truth of the Bema Seat Judgment as something unrelated to daily life, Paul saw it as integral to practical living.

Yet another example of Paul using doctrine to stimulate behavior is found in 2 Corinthians 8:9, where he offers the following profound Christological nugget: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich." However, there is a context in which Paul offers this Christological truth. Rather than offering an unrelated insertion on the generosity of Christ, Paul's goal in 2 Corinthians 8-9 was to get the Corinthians to give generously to the offering that he was collecting for the needy saints in Jerusalem. Paul discussed the selflessness of Christ in 2 Corinthians 8:9 in hopes that the Corinthians would imitate the generosity of Christ and give generously as well. Paul evidently thought that Christology was practical enough to insert into the extremely practical context of offering collections. Curiously, one of the common complaints among modern pastors is that their congregations do not give enough. Perhaps the problem lies in the people's lack of exposure to the doctrine of Christology.

Yet another example of Paul using doctrine for the sake of influencing behavior is found in the famous exposition of the rapture doctrine found in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17. This passage represents probably the clearest reference to the rapture found in all of the New Testament. Again, we ask the question, is Paul simply providing a random theological truth? On the contrary, this eschatological truth must be understood within the context in which it was written.

The Thessalonians were grieving over their deceased believing relatives and were wondering if they would ever see them again (1 Thess 4:13). Paul comforts the Thessalonians in the midst of their grief by informing them that not only would they see their relatives again in a reunion in the sky known as the rapture, but also God's eschatological resurrection program will in fact begin with these deceased love ones. In other words, Paul used this eschatological truth for the practical purpose of comforting Christians in the midst of emotional turmoil. This explains why Paul concludes this section with the admonition to "comfort one another with these words." Apparently, Paul saw a pragmatic connection between the eschatological truth of the rapture and alleviating emotional sorrow.

A final example where Paul relied upon doctrine to influence the behavior of his readers is found in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12, which furnishes a detailed outline of events that will transpire during the Tribulation. Items related to how the tribulation period begins are emphasized. But why is this information given? Apparently, the Thessalonians had become convinced that they were in the midst of the Tribulation. Such a misconception was probably due to several factors such as the reception of a false letter allegedly having come from Paul giving them incorrect information (2 Thess 2:2), an overreaction to the eschatological truths that Paul expounded in his first letter, and the present experience of persecution (1 Thess 3:3). Such bad theology was having a negative impact upon their lives by causing them to quit their jobs and neglect daily responsibilities (2 Thess 3:10). After all, why hold down a job if the Day of the Lord has begun and the Second Advent is right around the corner. Paul corrects the problem by furnishing the Thessalonians with an eschatological outline emphasizing key events that must first take place before the Tribulation can begin. Paul's point was that the Thessalonians were not in the midst of the Tribulation because the events signaling its arrival had not yet transpired. Thus, they could get on with their daily responsibilities such as holding down a job. Again we find Paul using doctrine for the purpose of remedying a practical problem.

James also follows the same practice. In James 3:9, he makes a significant contribution to Christian anthropology by explaining that man, even in his fallen condition, still bears the image of God. Man was originally fashioned in the image of his creator (Gen 1:26-27). Even after the fall, man continues to share in God's likeness (Gen 5:1; 9:6). Although this image has been defaced through the fall, it has not been erased. But why does James reiterate man's retention of the divine image even in his fallen state (Jas 3:9)? Interestingly, James inserts this

anthropological truth in the context of his admonitions to tame the tongue. In other words, if we view one another as deserving of dignity because we all share in God’s likeness, we will be less inclined to gossip about and slander one another. Thus, James connected a correct understanding of anthropology with the practicality of avoiding gossip and slander.

The preceding examples show how frequently biblical writers appealed to doctrine to alter the life choices of believers. Thus, they did not view doctrine as “pie in the sky” concepts that were available only for an ivory tower elite. They brought doctrine in at every opportunity for the purpose of changing the daily life of Christians. If they saw the practical import of doctrine and used it for pragmatic, tangible reasons, then the present generation of pastors should do no less.

### **The Pastoral Epistles**

The preeminence that God designed doctrine to have in the life of His church is amply illustrated by the doctrinal emphasis found in the Pastoral Epistles. The three pastoral letters of 1–2 Timothy and Titus represent the section of the New Testament that was specifically written for the purpose of providing instruction concerning “how to do church.” One cannot escape the emphasis that these books place upon the priority of doctrinal dissemination. Regarding the book of 2 Timothy, New Testament scholar Daniel Wallace makes the following observation: “By my count, there are twenty-seven explicit commands given in the body of this letter. In 27 words Paul tells pastors what to focus on. You have to be blind to miss the thrust of Paul’s instructions here, because *eighteen* of those commands--fully *two-thirds*--have to do with the ministry of the *Word*.”<sup>18</sup> These commands are especially significant given the fact that Paul wrote them with his impending death in mind (2 Tim 4:6). Therefore they represent his last will and testament. The focus of the elders of the early church upon doctrine can also be seen in their unwillingness to leave the ministry of the word in order to wait on tables (Acts 6:1-4).

We can also observe the priority that the pastoral epistles place upon the preeminence of doctrine in the pastoral letters by noting the criteria for the selection of elders as given in Titus 1. Verse 9 says that an elder must hold “fast to the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who

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<sup>18</sup> Daniel Wallace, “Crisis of the Word: A Message to Pastors or Would-be Pastors,” *Conservative Theological Journal* 1, no. 2 (August 1997): 108.

contradict.” How much should a person know about doctrine before he is selected as an elder of a local assembly? He obviously must understand the doctrinal content of his faith well enough in order to communicate it to others and exhort others in it. However, his breadth of knowledge does not end there. He has to also understand competing belief systems well enough in light of his own faith in order to refute theological opponents. Thus, Paul indicates that doctrinal knowledge was a key attribute that a candidate was to possess before he could occupy the office of elder. Sadly, many churches look for other qualities in an elder such as how “successful” they have been in the business world and consequently place doctrinal knowledge toward the bottom of the list. Unfortunately, the “MBA preferred, seminary not required” mentality is the norm in many places. Here, however, the importance of doctrinal knowledge can be seen in Paul’s criteria for the selection of church leaders.

The doctrinal emphasis of the pastoral letters can also be seen in Paul’s command to Timothy to preach the word (2 Tim 4:2). A few verses earlier Paul explained to Timothy why the word must be preached. According to 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Scripture is “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequately equipped, for every good work.” Thus, if the faithful proclamation of Scripture is substituted for something else, the ministries of teaching, reproof, correction, training, and equipping within a local assembly disappear since these ministries are inextricably linked to the faithful proclamation of Scripture.

The notion of equipping in 2 Timothy 3:17 conjures up memories regarding what Paul had told the Ephesian church a few years earlier regarding the function of a pastor. In his earlier letter to the Ephesians, he explained that the gift of pastor-teacher was necessary to bring the church to maturity (Eph 4:11-12). But how does this happen? Paul explains this in writing a few years later to the same Ephesian church when he says that Scripture is capable of equipping the man of God for every good work (2 Timothy 3:17). Putting Ephesians 4:11-12 together with 2 Timothy 3:17, we learn that the pastor matures the church through the systematic exposition of Scripture. Thus, the primary function of a pastor is that of an equipper. An equipped, matured and gifted body is then capable of carrying on the work of the ministry (1 Cor 12; Eph 4:12). An awareness of a pastor’s primary role is needed in our day when so much confusion abounds concerning what the role of a pastor actually is. Many see the function of a pastor as that of a CEO, marketer, motivational speaker, or resident psychologist. However, the Pauline definition of a pastor is that

of an equipper. Perhaps the reason why so much immaturity exists in the body of Christ is that modern pastors have strayed away from their primary task of being an equipper who leads the church into maturity through the faithful exposition of Scripture.

The emphasis upon “all Scripture” (2 Tim 3:16) conveys the idea that pastoral responsibility entails communicating the totality of divine revelation rather than just portions of it. Paul emphasizes all Scripture in 2 Timothy 3:16 and then emphasizes preaching the word in 2 Timothy 4:2. Putting these verses together, we can see Paul’s emphasis upon communicating the totality of Scripture rather than using it selectively.

Paul’s emphasis upon “all Scripture” (2 Tim 3:16) also brings to mind what he had told the Ephesian elders about ten years earlier on the Island of Miletus toward the end of his third missionary journey. There, he gave the Ephesian elders his farewell address in which he declared that he was innocent of the blood of all men because he had declared to them the full counsel of the will of God (Acts 20:26-27). This statement may be a direct allusion to God’s admonition to the sixth-century prophet Ezekiel. On two occasions, God told the prophet that if he warns the wicked man who dies in his sin, then the prophet was not responsible for the wicked man’s blood. However, if the prophet does not warn the wicked who does die in his sin, then God would hold the prophet accountable for the wicked man’s blood (Ezek 3:17-19; 33:7-9). In alluding to God’s admonitions to Ezekiel, Paul was modeling for the Ephesians elders that their primary function as spiritual leaders was to disclose the totality of divine revelation. To the extent that they did not, God would hold them accountable (Jas 3:1). To the extent that they did, they had exonerated themselves. This emphasis upon the totality of biblical truth stands in stark contrast to the previously mentioned seeker movement, which selectively uses the biblical text for the purpose of appealing to man’s felt needs. In sum, any honest reading of the pastoral letters demonstrates the great influence that God expects doctrine to have within the local church.

## **Conclusion**

Sadly, we live in a day when the relevance of doctrine to the vitality of the church and the individual believer is being questioned as never before. However, a fresh scriptural look into God’s design for doctrine argues convincingly for its restoration to a place of preeminence. Most significantly, bad doctrine has the potential of damning the soul. Moreover, the influence of doctrine is linked to proper Christian living. The relevance of doctrine can also be seen in the

way Paul did not shy away from using it for the purpose of addressing pragmatic concerns within the churches that he was ministering to. In addition, the pastoral letters place an inordinate emphasis upon doctrine. As servants of the Lord, let us not follow contemporary trends but rather work to restore doctrine to its rightful place of preeminence within modern evangelicalism.