

In Nomine Iesu

First Sunday after the Epiphany of our Lord 2025 Just what the Doctor ordered – John 7:14-18

“About the middle of the feast Jesus went up into the temple and began teaching. The Jews therefore marveled, saying, ‘How is it that this man has learning, when he has never studied?’ So Jesus answered them, ‘My teaching is not Mine, but his who sent me. If anyone’s will is to do God’s will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on My own authority. The one who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory, but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and in him is no falsehood.’” (John 7:14-18)

Grace be to you and peace from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the doctor who is true. Dear friends, believers in the God of grace:

If, as an experiment, you would go from church to church on a Sunday morning, hearing a sermon here and a sermon there, and continue this for several weeks, you would hear many different things from different pulpits or, perhaps, stages. From some you would hear emotional personal testimonies and from others something sounding more like a lecture on politics and community activism. From still others, those churches thought of as “strict” or “Bible-believing,” you would have “fire and brimstone” heaped upon you and precious little of the comforting Gospel. From others you might hear sin and evil explained away as psychological or sociological problems that need treatment of one sort or another. Other preachers use professional drama and acting techniques, yet others tell funny stories or even crack jokes, and – now in the NFL play-off season – some preachers will even update their congregations on football play-off scores during the worship service.

If, during your experiment, you took notes on all the sermons you heard, there is one subject category that I suspect you would find very much neglected – that is, doctrine, Scriptural doctrine about the nature of God and man. Of all things you would find preached from the pulpits of churches today, Christian doctrine, biblical doctrine, certainly must be the most neglected. Why is that?

I

Before we try to answer the question we must know what we are talking about. What is doctrine anyway? The word is related to another common word that sounds very much like it: doctor. Originally, a doctor was one who knew a great deal about a particular subject or field of knowledge, and because of that taught others about it. Doctor, in other words, originally meant teacher. Doctrine was the content of what he taught. Doctrine is just another word for teaching.

Christian doctrine is the collection of truths that are found in the Bible. Since we just celebrated Christmas we can use the birth of Jesus as our example. The Bible plainly teaches in the Old Testament book of Isaiah and the gospel accounts of Matthew and Luke that Mary conceived and gave birth to Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, without agency of a human father. In other words, she was a virgin. Because of this plain teaching of God’s word, it is a doctrine of the Christian church that Christ was born of the virgin Mary. So important is this teaching or

doctrine that it became part of all three ecumenical creeds, the Apostles', Nicene and Athanasian, together with the doctrine that God created heaven and earth, that He exists in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit and yet remains One, that the second person of the Trinity, God the Son, assumed human flesh and then died in our place to redeem us from the guilt and penalty of our sins, that He rose bodily on Easter Sunday, that the Holy Spirit is the true Author of the Holy Scriptures, etc. All these together, and more, are Christian doctrine.

It is exactly those things that are noticeably missing in so much of the preaching to be found in today's churches. Instead preaching in churches today is very much geared toward making people feel better about themselves, either by advising them how to fix their own lives and live victoriously – whatever that means - or by telling them to go out into the world and change things so that the world will be a better place. But preaching in most churches today is not geared toward instructing people in Christian doctrine, the truths of the Scriptures, the truths about God and the Savior He sent into the world to redeem us from sin, death and hell.

When was the last time you were in a Christian bookstore and saw that the latest new books, the ones being promoted by the publisher and store owner, the ones really selling, were about any of the things we confess in the Apostles' or Nicene Creed? When was the last time you saw on television, either on a commercial or on a so-called Christian program, any kind of book or tape advertised, which dealt with the Trinitarian nature of God, the Scriptural doctrine of baptism or even the central teaching of Scripture, that a person is justified by grace through faith for Jesus' sake? When have you heard that?

When did you ever hear of a preacher who became renowned for the preaching of Christ crucified for sinners? Or of one who has so many hearers because he teaches the whole counsel of God, as the Apostle Paul exhorted the pastors of the church of Ephesus to do? (cf. Acts 20:27) In fact, whether it be on some Christian television program or at the nearest Wal-Mart sized community church, what is at the center of attention? Is it Christ the Savior, His life and His works, and the doctrines of the Bible or is it the dynamic preacher who tells people how to make their lives better?

II

People today, on both sides of the pulpit, are confused about who Jesus really is. Many people of Jesus' day were in doubt about Him also. Was He the promised Messiah? Or was He just a misguided, perhaps even dangerous charlatan? He fascinated and attracted many because His doctrine was profound and full of truth. Yet He repelled many because He claimed to be God in the flesh. He claimed to be Truth itself. We see this in our text: "How is it that this man has learning, when he has never studied?" (v. 15) Why, they fumed, He was a mere carpenter's son ... and from Nazareth of all places! He was just an ordinary, uneducated man. How could He claim that His teaching was truth? He answered them, "My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me." (v. 16) His word was profound and true because it came from God Himself. This is why He knew and understood the Scriptures, and could use them to shame and prove wrong the scribes and priests, the doctors, the professionals. And, so, many believed Him. When they heard His doctrine they said to themselves: Here is Truth in human flesh.

If anyone desired to do God's will, Jesus told the people, wanted to be a child of God, that person would know that He taught truth. And many believed Him to be not just a prophet sent by God, but the very Messiah Himself, the One of whom the Old Testament Scriptures spoke. A short time before the events of today's text He said to the scribes and Pharisees, "You search the Scriptures for in them you think you have eternal life, and these are they which testify of Me. And yet you refuse to come to Me that you may have life." (John 5:39-40)

If Christian doctrine, as we have seen, is simply those things revealed in the Bible put into plain and simple form for people to learn from, and if the Scriptures have as their central purpose to guide us to and teach us about Christ, as He Himself said, doesn't it follow that to teach Christian doctrine rightly is to teach Christ? If Christian doctrine, such as the catechism we learned, the creed we confess, the ancient liturgy we use, the hymns we sing – are clearly proclaimed and explained among us, are we not learning Christ? Is He not coming to us, standing among us and giving Himself to us? Is this not the reason for all that we do? Is it not the very substance of Jesus Christ's promise to us: "Wherever two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them"? (Matthew 18:20)

Let us remember, Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven ... Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me you who practice lawlessness!'" Dear friends, to simply invoke the name of Jesus in preaching and teaching proves nothing. Jesus said in our text, "He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory." (v. 18) If a preacher does not teach and preach the doctrine given by the Father from heaven, he does not proclaim the Christ who saves, does not give people **what the Doctor ordered.**

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Wherever Christ and the doctrines of the Bible are taught plainly and truly, there will be tension and, at times, even division. This is what happened in Jesus' own day **when He Himself did the teaching!** Some will accept His word as truth and desire to hear of Him and only Him. Others will hear and object, even reject. Do not let this be a discouragement to you. Just remember that as long as we have and hold on to Christ and His doctrine, we have everything, we have what the Doctor, the Teacher, God Himself, ordered for us sinners. We have forgiveness for our sins, not just quick fixes. We have salvation, not just seemingly improved life here and now. We have eternal life in heaven, and not just something that we lose when we die. If Christ and His doctrine are glorified in our preaching, our worship, and our heart, then rejoice with the angels of heaven! For Jesus said, "If you continue in My word, then you are My disciples indeed, and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (John 8:31-32). Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria