



3: Gospel and Doctrine

Whenever news is announced some explanation is often called for. News that is not understood is hardly news, let alone good news.

“If the town crier says, “Amnesty is herewith published by the mercy of your Sovereign,” someone will ask, “What does ‘amnesty’ mean?” There will be many questions when the news is announced. “What is the price that has been paid?” “How have we dishonoured the King?”

John Piper
God is the Gospel

Similarly, when the gospel is proclaimed, it must be explained.

We have learned that the essential heart of the gospel can be summed up in four points:

- There is a God and we are accountable to Him.
- We have sinned and we deserve God’s judgement.
- By God’s grace we can be saved by Jesus.
- Salvation is open to anyone who trusts Him.

But who is God? Why does He hold us accountable? What is sin? What penalty do we deserve? Will He judge us? When will He judge us? Will He judge everyone in the same way? Who is Jesus? How can He save us? What does it mean to trust Him? And those questions are just the start for when we pad out the gospel, as we did last week, the questions — the statements that call for explanation — multiply. Our God reigns. Jesus is King and Saviour. Jesus died for our sins. Jesus rose from the grave. The Holy Spirit has come. Salvation is for all who believe. Peace on earth, eternal life, blessing for all the nations. God abounds in grace. God is just. Those are just the headings from last weeks study.

Imagine you are hearing these things announced for the first time. What questions would you be asking? What would need to be explained?

So many questions, so much to be explained, and as those questions are answered and the explanations given, the answers and explanations become part of the good news. So many answers and explanations and if they were compiled would the result not look something like a text-book of systematic theology?

“The good news is so full and rich and wonderful that it must be opened like a treasure chest, and all its treasures brought out for the enjoyment of the world. Doctrine is the description of these treasures. Doctrine describes their true value and why they are so valuable. Doctrine guards the diamonds of the gospel from being discarded as mere crystals. Doctrine protects the treasures of the gospel from the pirates who don’t like the diamonds but who make their living trading them for other stones. Doctrine polishes the old gems buried at the bottom of the chest. It puts the jewels of gospel truth in order on the scarlet tapestry of history so each is seen in its most beautiful place.”

John Piper
God is the Gospel

“The gospel is not only news. It is first news, and then it is doctrine. Doctrine means teaching, explaining, clarifying. Doctrine is part of the gospel because news can’t be just declared by the mouth of a herald — it has to be understood in the mind of a hearer.”

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Why do some make a distinction between gospel and doctrine?

Do you think there is a distinction to be made?

Perhaps the reason the Bible does not give us a concise definition of the gospel is that it takes the whole of the Bible to lay out and explain the gospel.

Do you agree with that statement? What are some of its implications?

Is there a distinction to be made between a “gospel message” and a message that is not gospel? Is there such a thing as a “gospel service” as opposed to some other kind of service?

“Doctrine [explains the gospel] with its head bowed in wonder that it should be allowed to touch the things of God. It whispers praise and thanks as it deals with the diamonds of the King. Its fingers tremble at the cost of what it handles. Prayers ascend for help, lest any stone be minimised or misplaced. And on its knees gospel doctrine knows it serves the herald.”

John Piper
God is the Gospel

“The gospel is not mainly about being explained. Explanation is necessary, but it is not primary. A love letter must be intelligible, but grammar and logic are not the point. Love is the point. The gospel is good news. Doctrine serves that. It serves the one whose feet are bruised (and beautiful!) from walking to the unreached places with news: “Come, listen to the news of God! Listen to what God has done! Listen! Understand! Bow! Believe!”

John Piper
God is the Gospel