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Gospel and Doctrine in the Life of the Church

Jeremy R. Treat

Reality LA, 933 N La Brea Ave, Hollywood, CA 90038
jeremy.t@realityla.com

Biblical doctrine is rooted in the gospel and bears fruit in the church. Unfortunately, many in the church today have denigrated the role of doctrine and set it at odds with the message of the gospel. I believe this false dichotomy between gospel and doctrine is one of the most dangerous ideas in all of Christianity. The common perception that doctrine goes beyond the gospel into more advanced areas cultivates a church that too often exchanges doctrines for slogans, biblical literacy for cultural relevance, and sanctification for moralism.

As pietistic as this 'gospel rather than doctrine' sentiment may sound, it is actually a current within a broader academic stream of thought that has carved a not-so-grand canyon between the Christian gospel and Christian doctrine. Adolf von Harnack, the mouth of this stream, argued that the development of doctrine in the early church gradually corrupted the 'simple gospel' of Jesus.[1] Are Harnack and the current anti-doctrine age right to pit gospel against doctrine? Does doctrine corrupt or even distract from the gospel? Does Scripture reveal how the two should relate? This essay will demonstrate that rather than going beyond the gospel, the task of theology is to further understand the depths of the gospel. Doctrine, therefore, is the product of faith seeking understanding of the gospel and exists to promote the gospel by defending and defining it in order to help the church understand and respond to what God has done in Christ. In biblical terms, 'sound doctrine, in accordance with the gospel' (1 Tim. 1:10–11) leads to a 'manner of life . . . worthy of the gospel of Christ' (Phil. 1:27). Although the burden of this essay does not depend on an exact definition of 'the gospel', and Scripture itself uses the term in a variety of ways, I offer my own summary definition up front.

> The gospel is the good news of Jesus Christ – that through his life, death, and resurrection God, has reconciled sinners and established his kingdom.[2]

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[1] Adolf von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, trans. Neil Buchanan, vol. 1, 7 vols., 3rd ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1997).

[2] Most definitions of the gospel focus either on Jesus' preaching of the kingdom (Mark 1:15) or Paul's emphasis on the death and resurrection of Christ (1 Cor. 15:3–4). I believe both are necessary in their respective roles and are actually present in both Paul and Jesus. While the reign of God on earth is the

The unfortunate divide between gospel and doctrine has resulted in a two-fold problem: a gospel-less theology (usually in the academy) and a theology-less gospel (in the church). A concomitant aim of this essay, therefore, is that by providing a robustly theological gospel and gospel-centred theology, a right relationship will be encouraged between the church and the academy. The main argument, however, is that a way forward is dependent on a proper understanding of doctrine, namely that doctrine is rooted in the gospel and bears fruit in the church. I will discuss five ways in which the gospel and doctrine are inseparably related and then apply this practically to the life of the church.

DOCTRINE: THE PRODUCT OF FAITH SEEKING UNDERSTANDING OF THE GOSPEL

While the *task* of theology has reached consensus throughout church history as 'faith seeking understanding', the *object* of the theology has been greatly disputed. The key historical figure here is Anselm, who not only famously coined the phrase for the task of theology ('faith seeking understanding'),[3] but also infamously (in my opinion) determined the object of theology ('the supreme being'[4]). Assuming that Christian theology is bound by its canon of Scripture, it is questionable whether this generic concept of 'god' measures up to the LORD of the Bible who has revealed himself in the redemptive history of Israel and ultimately its promised messiah. Another common alternative for the object of theology emerged from the Enlightenment when Friedrich Schleiermacher, accept-

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eschatological goal of redemptive history, the atoning death of Christ is the glorious means and eternal foundation for that kingdom. This is consistent with John Calvin's understanding of the gospel, which claimed that the word 'gospel' has a 'broad sense' which encompasses all the promises of God in redemptive history and a 'higher sense' of God's grace in Christ for sinners. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. by John T. McNeill, trans. by Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols, The Library of Christian Classics (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2006), II.ix.2.

[3] The phrase (*fides quaerens intellectum*) was originally coined by Anselm. Anselm, '*Proslogion*', in *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, ed. by Brian Davies and G. R. Evans, Oxford World Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 83; The concept, however, was clearly present in Augustine: 'May God grant his aid, and give us to understand what we have first believed. The steps are laid down by the prophet who says: 'Unless ye believe ye shall not understand' (Isa. 7:9 LXX).' Augustine, 'On Free Will', in *Augustine: Earlier Works*, ed. by J. H. S. Burleigh, Library of Christian Classics (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), pp. 114–15.

[4] Anselm, '*Proslogion*', p. 89.

ing Immanuel Kant's premise that God himself cannot be apprehended because he is outside of the world of the senses, redefined the object of theology as the human feeling of absolute dependence.[5] In other words, when one 'does theology' he or she is not talking about God, but about the human experience of God.

As a third way between the two dominant strands of designating the object of theology—medieval scholasticism (God) and liberal Protestantism (us)—I believe the object of theology is the gospel (God for us).[6] Theology is not a search for the essence of God detached from the world, nor the inward reflection of something inexpressible, but the true-yet-not-exhaustive knowledge of the triune God who has revealed himself in the gospel. This appeal to the gospel as the object of theology must not be read as a contrast between God and the gospel, but is rather an assertion that the traditional understanding of the object of theology as a generic 'god' is not distinctly Christian.[7] Christian theology seeks to understand the 'God of the Gospel'[8] who makes himself known in the history of his deeds found within the Scriptures. This is truly an evangelical (gospel-centred) theology.

Perhaps the most obvious and disappointing example of the attempt to do theology apart from the gospel is found in accounts of the doctrine of God. In his essay 'The Triune God of the Gospel', Kevin Vanhoozer laments the longstanding tradition in the church that focuses solely on the divine 'what' rather than the divine 'who', especially considering that Scripture itself identifies God by his words and actions: 'I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt' (Exod. 20:2). According to Vanhoozer, 'The God of the gospel is not a generic deity but has spoken and acted in concrete ways, revealing his identity in history with Israel and ultimately in the history of Jesus Christ'.[9] In agreement

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[5]   Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999).

[6]   John Webster and Kevin J. Vanhoozer also speak of the gospel as the object of theology. John Webster, *Holiness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), p. 3; Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), p. 35.

[7]   I concur with Calvin: 'I subscribe to the common saying that God is the object of faith, yet it requires qualification...that apart from Christ the saving knowledge of God does not stand' (Calvin, *Institutes*, II.vi.4).

[8]   Karl Barth, *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), pp. 5–6.

[9]   Kevin J. Vanhoozer, 'The Triune God of the Gospel', in *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology*, ed. by Timothy Larsen and Daniel J. Treier

with Vanhoozer on the triune shape of the gospel, Fred Sanders argues that the Trinity is the essential yet tacit background to the gospel and therefore calls for a recovery of trinitarian theology by going deeper into the gospel. 'The deeper we dig into the gospel, the deeper we go into the mystery of the Trinity.'[10] To understand the gospel is to encounter the triune God of the gospel.

Furthermore, to speak of the gospel at all is to speak of the 'gospel of God' (Mark 1:14; Rom. 1:1; 15:16; 2 Cor. 11:7; 1 Thess. 2:8–9). The gospel is *good* news because it is *God* news. The greatest good of the gospel is not the many blessings given *by* God, but that in Christ God has given *himself*. In the words of Jonathan Edwards, 'The redeemed have all their objective good in God. God himself is the great good which they are brought to the possession and enjoyment of by redemption. He is the highest good, and the sum of all that good which Christ purchased.'[11] I elaborate this point to make clear that arguing for the gospel as the object of theology is not to displace God (although it does seek to displace the generic 'supreme being'), but is to further define this God and be explicit about the way in which we know who he is, namely through the gospel.

Lastly, just as it is not enough to claim a generic 'god' as the object of theology, it is even insufficient to claim Jesus, since this could be (and is) used to speak of Christ's person apart from his works. 'Gospel' upholds the unity of Christ's person and work within a broader unity of Old Testament promise and New Testament fulfilment (Gen. 12:3; cf. Gal. 3:16; Isa. 52:7; cf. Mark 1:15). The mediatorial task of Jesus ('one mediator between God and men') is fulfilled not only in his person ('the man Christ Jesus'), but also in his work ('who gave himself as a ransom for all') (1 Tim. 2:5–6). As Graeme Goldsworthy says, 'The hermeneutic centre of the Bible is therefore Jesus in his being and in his saving acts—the Jesus of the gospel',[12] or as Calvin says, Jesus 'clothed with the gospel'.[13]

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[10]   (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 44.

Fred Sanders, *The Deep Things of God: How the Trinity Changes Everything* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), p. 13.

[11]   Jonathan Edwards, 'God Glorified in the Work of Redemption by the Greatness of Man's Dependence upon Him, in the Whole of it (1731)', in *The Sermons of Jonathan Edwards: A Reader*, ed. by Wilson H. Kimnach, Kenneth P. Minkema, and Douglas A. Sweeney (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 74.

[12]   Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics: Foundations and Principles of Evangelical Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), p. 63.

[13]   Calvin, *Institutes*, III.i.6.

To ask the question 'What is the object of theology?' is an esoteric way of asking 'What is the Bible all about?' The Bible is not merely about God in and of himself, but about God 'for us'. It is not a manual on *what* God is or even *that* God is, but a revelation of *who* God is in his reconciliation of the world to himself. In sum, if the object of theology is the gospel, then the task of theology is never able to go beyond the gospel, but ever-deeper into its riches.

DOCTRINE PROMOTES THE PRIMACY OF THE GOSPEL

Theology is not the good news, but it seeks to promote the news in a way that upholds its goodness. Since the gospel alone is 'of first importance' (1 Cor. 15:3), doctrine must be ministerial to, although inseparable from, the gospel. For Paul, 'sound doctrine'[14] must be 'in accordance with the gospel' (1 Tim. 10–11) because the gospel is the ultimate reality around which all Christian thought and life revolve. Though in this instance (1 Tim. 1:10–11) Paul is using the gospel as a standard for gauging doctrine, the broader context of the letter[15] and the Pauline corpus as a whole show that the very reason for doctrine's existence is to serve the gospel.[16] In other words, the gospel is normative for theology because it is both its generative source and its doxological aim. In the words of John Webster, theology operates in 'submission to the gospel'.[17]

Humanity is not created for the ultimate purpose of *understanding* God, but to know, love, and worship God—of which understanding is an essential component. Likewise, one is not justified by right belief in doctrines but rather through faith in the one to whom the doctrines point.

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[14]   *Hygiainouses didaskalias* translates literally as 'healthy teaching' and therefore should not anachronistically bring to mind thoughts of scholastic systematic theology. However, it is clear that by this point there was an established body of doctrine in the church and so the phrase does not always simply refer generically to teaching. Based on this, along with the fact that *hygiainouses didaskalias* always appears in the singular, Phillip Towner concludes that 'sound doctrine' is a 'technical term in these letters for the authoritative apostolic doctrine'. (*The Letters to Timothy and Titus* [The New International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006], p. 130).

[15]   Gordon Fee says Paul's concern for the gospel is the 'driving force' behind all of the Pastoral Epistles and 'absolutely dominates' Paul's first letter to Timothy. (*1 and 2 Timothy, Titus* [New International Biblical Commentary, 13; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988], p. 15).

[16]   'It is [the Gospel's] priority . . . to the sound teaching that explains its presence here as a normative source' (Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, p. 131).

[17]   Webster, *Holiness*, p. 27.

Salvation is not by means of a proposition, but a person, Jesus Christ. Emil Brunner, known today mostly for his clash with Karl Barth on natural theology, offers great insight on the subsidiary role of doctrine. According to Brunner, because theology exists 'for the sake of the Christian message, not *vice versa*', it is called not to proclaim itself, but 'to create room for the Divine Word itself'.[18] The greatest danger of doctrine, therefore, is to forget that 'a servant is not greater than his master' (John 13:16) and to seek its own glory rather than that of 'the gospel of the glory of the blessed God' (1 Tim. 1:11). As Grünewald's *Crucifixion* painting served as a constant reminder to Karl Barth, theology is a finger pointing to the crucified Christ.

In sum, doctrine is not the be-all and end-all, but rather serves the understanding, proclaiming, and responding to the gospel. Ironically, by 'putting doctrine in its place', its importance is actually magnified rather than minimized. The higher one's view of the gospel, the greater their appreciation of doctrine. The more clearly one understands the gospel, the more he or she will praise the God of the gospel. Just as a microphone without amplification is useless, doctrine apart from the gospel has nothing to say. Theology, when done well, produces doctrine that promotes (and does not compete with) the gospel.

DOCTRINE DEFENDS THE GOSPEL

Doctrine's service of promoting the gospel entails the two-fold task of defending and defining. The defending of the gospel is particularly evident in Paul's commanding Timothy to 'charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine' (1 Tim. 1:3). Why, in one of Paul's most pastoral letters, would he begin with such a strong order about doctrine? As noted above, doctrine matters because the gospel matters. Timothy and his church have been entrusted with the gospel (1:11; cf. 2 Tim. 2:14) and therefore must defend it against every enemy and counterfeit. In 1 Timothy, as in the rest of the New Testament, sound doctrine is developed in the context of unsound doctrine. As made especially clear in the controversies of the church fathers, heresy forces orthodoxy to define itself. Theology is a never-ending task because the unchanging truth of the gospel must always be defended against new enemies and counterfeits. 'For the time is coming when people will not endure sound doctrine [*hygiainouses didaskalias*], but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves

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18 Emil Brunner, *The Mediator: A Study of the Central Doctrine of the Christian Faith* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1947), pp. 594–5.

teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths' (2 Tim. 4:3–4, my translation).

It is important to notice Paul's qualification of doctrine in 1 Timothy as either 'sound' (*hygiainouse*) or 'different' (*hetero*). Everyone is a theologian. Everyone has doctrine. The question is whether or not their doctrine is sound and whether it conforms to the gospel. Although it is accurate to speak of this contemporary time as an anti-doctrine age, Herman Bavinck perceived long ago that opposition to doctrine or dogma is always merely opposition to *certain* doctrines, for as Kant says, 'unbelief has at all times been most dogmatic'.[19] Why is 'different' (*hetero*) doctrine so dangerous to the gospel that has been entrusted to the church? Because *hetero* doctrine is 'in accordance with' a *hetero* gospel (Gal. 1:6; 2 Cor. 11:4). In other words, while sound doctrine exists to promote the gospel by defending and defining it for the glory of God, *hetero* doctrine exists to promote a *hetero* gospel by defending and defining it for the glory of a *hetero* god. Unsound doctrine is dangerous not because it provides the wrong answers on a test of orthodoxy, but because it promotes a different gospel and therefore a different god.

DOCTRINE DEFINES THE GOSPEL

Contrary to the 'other doctrine' that must be defended against, Paul commends 'sound doctrine' that must be defined in accordance with the gospel (1 Tim. 1:3–11). The primary task is the proclamation of the gospel; the role of doctrine is to make sure the gospel is proclaimed rightly. Paul explains to Timothy that doctrine not only engages false teaching, but seeks primarily to discern the 'pattern of sound words' (2 Tim. 1:13), 'rightly handling the word of truth' (2 Tim. 2:15). Timothy is to be 'trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine' (1 Tim. 4:6). William Mounce explains the significance:

> Paul is differentiating between the basic gospel message ('the words of faith') and the doctrinal teaching that comes out of it ('the good teaching') . . . A reading of the gospel should always be accompanied by the correct interpretation or doctrinal understanding of the gospel. This emphasis on doctrine is similar to Paul's teaching elsewhere that Timothy must handle the gospel correctly.[20]

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[19] Quoted in Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. by John Bolt, trans. by John Vriend, 4 vols (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003-2009), 1, p. 33.

[20] William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles* (Word Biblical Commentary, 46; Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2000), p. 249.

The gospel is to be proclaimed, but it is to be done so in a way that is faithful to Scripture's witness to God's character and ways. If there is 'no other name' (Acts 4:12) by which one must be saved, then whether in prayer, praise, or preaching, it is imperative to get that name right.[21] The awareness and rise of the global church makes theology's task of promoting the gospel by defending and defining it in new contexts especially important for the future of the church.

DOCTRINE HELPS THE CHURCH UNDERSTAND AND RESPOND TO THE GOSPEL

Doctrine promotes the gospel *so that* the church might understand and respond to the gospel in a way that is faithful to Scripture. The gospel is good *news* about what God has done in Christ, not good *advice* about what needs to be done. The church, therefore, is not called to 'do' the gospel, but to believe (Mark 1:15), receive (2 Cor. 11:4), proclaim (Mark 16:15) and live in line with (Gal. 2:14) the gospel. One cannot 'do' the gospel because it is by definition something that God has done (in fact, what we have 'done' is the very reason for the necessity of the gospel). The gospel need not be repeated because it is 'once and for all' (Heb. 9:26). The gospel need not be completed because 'it is finished' (John 19:30). Doctrine, therefore, acts as an aid in the Christian's understanding and responding to the gospel for the glory of God and the edification of his church.

Inasmuch as theology is 'faith seeking understanding', the mind is crucial for its task. Just as God's people have always been called to love him with their minds (Deut. 6:4–5), it is imperative that they *think* about God in accordance with the gospel. The process of doing theology is too often thought of apart from the great work of redemption that it seeks to understand, as if the untouched mind were reflecting on God's restoration of an otherwise broken world. On the contrary, the mind understands the gospel because it is also being transformed by the gospel, meaning that sound doctrine is ultimately a result of the gospel's renewing effects on the fallen mind. John Webster rightly asserts that theology is an aspect of the sanctification of the mind.

> Christian theology is an aspect of reason's sanctification . . . Like all other aspects of human life, reason is a field of God's sanctifying work. Reason, too . . . must be reconciled to the holy God if it is to do its work well. And good

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21 Michael S. Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), p. 111.

> Christian theology can only happen if it is rooted in the reconciliation of reason by the sanctifying presence of God.[22]

> Christian theology is biblical reasoning. It is the redeemed intellect's reflective apprehension of God's gospel address through the embassy of Scripture, enabled and corrected by God's presence and having fellowship with him as its end.[23]

Although Luther was correct to call the fallen mind 'whore reason', one must also designate the redeemed mind as 'holy reason'. Like Gomer, reason has been reconciled by God's covenant love and restored to seeing God and his works through Christ, our true and better Hosea. As the Holy Spirit sanctifies the Christian, the gospel orders their thinking so that their thoughts about God and the world are consistent with the pattern of Scripture.

Just as doctrine helps the Christian *think* in accordance with the gospel, it also helps the Christian *act* 'in step with the truth of the gospel' (Gal. 2:14).[24] The two, of course, are related inasmuch as belief informs behaviour.[25] Paul shows the interdependence of doctrine and living in his first letter to Timothy by saying that the opposite of sound doctrine is not only 'different doctrine', but also ungodly and sinful behaviour (1 Tim. 1:10–11). In fact, the broader context of the letter is striking in its implications for pastoral ministry. How does Paul oppose the sinful behaviour of this church in Ephesus? Not by focusing solely on the conduct itself, nor by implementing a discipleship program, but by explaining the practical importance of sound doctrine and the need to silence the teachers of different doctrine. If one's understanding of discipleship is detached from sound doctrine in accordance with the gospel, then sanctification will

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[22] Webster, *Holiness*, p. 10.

[23] John Webster, 'Biblical Reasoning', *Anglican Theological Review* 90 (2008), 747.

[24] Ellen Charry has demonstrated that historically this has been the church's understanding of doctrine, namely that it functions to shape one's character and life; *By the Renewing of Your Minds: The Pastoral Function of Christian Doctrine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

[25] This is not a denial of the corollary point that behaviour shapes belief. I am simply emphasizing that the 'renewal of your mind' plays a significant role in transformation (Rom. 12:2). Charry is very helpful in this regard, refusing a false dichotomy between the cognitivist and behaviourist positions, arguing that proper knowledge of God leads to obedience and that practices are 'a way not only of reinforcing the knowledge of God but also of shaping the mind so that knowledge of the love of God fits into a life prepared to interpret it properly'. (*By the Renewing of Your Minds*, p. 28).

dissolve into self-improvement. 'Without the creeds, the deeds surrender to vague moralism.'[26]

The divide between doctrine and living often operates under the guise of spirituality. For example, in *The Imitation of Christ*, Thomas à Kempis says, 'I would much rather feel profound sorrow for my sins than be able to define the theological term for it'.[27] Thomas is certainly right to argue that conviction of sin is more important than understanding the doctrine of sin, but there is potential here to set up a false dichotomy between the two, as if one had to choose between conviction and doctrine.[28] Though conviction of sin (and the repentance that follows) is paramount to the doctrine of sin, understanding the latter is certainly integral in practicing the former. The more one understands the nature and severity of sin, the greater one's appreciation for the saviour who provided the remedy. Fred Sanders offers a positive example of this with the Trinity, arguing that although *fellowship* with the triune God is primary, the *doctrine* of the Trinity is essential because it leads deeper into fellowship.[29]

In *The Drama of Doctrine*, Vanhoozer gives perhaps the most thorough and compelling treatment of the relationship between doctrine and life. Although Vanhoozer covers a vast amount of territory, one of the main burdens of the book is to show that 'Doctrine is direction for the fitting participation of individuals and communities in the drama of redemption'.[30] According to Vanhoozer, doctrine is not concerned merely with abstract theory, but with providing practical guidance for Christians as they walk in the way of Jesus Christ. In a more recent essay, Vanhoozer says,

> Theology is faith seeking theodramatic understanding, and understanding is best demonstrated not by those who can rightly parse Greek verbs (important as that may be) or by those who can defend past theological formulas but by those who can participate in the ongoing drama of redemption by speaking and doing the gospel truth in new cultural situations.[31]

26   Horton, *The Christian Faith*, p. 24.
27   Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, trans. William Creasy (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria, 2000), p. 30 (I.iii).
28   Ibid., pp. 33, 159.
29   Sanders, *The Deep Things of God*, p. 35.
30   Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, p. 102.
31   Kevin J. Vanhoozer, 'On the Very Idea of a Theological System: An Essay in Aid of Triangulating Scripture, Church and World', in *Always Reforming: Explorations in Systematic Theology*, ed. by A. T. B. McGowan (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), p. 181.

Sound doctrine helps Christians understand and respond to the gospel so they can think and act in a manner fitting with its truth. Michael Horton helpfully puts several of these pieces together by describing the pattern of drama, doctrine, doxology, and discipleship. 'The narrative generates the doctrines and practices, evoking thanksgiving that then fuels discipleship.'[32]

GOSPEL DOCTRINE IN THE CHURCH

The last section of this essay will briefly discuss the primary location for gospel doctrine—the church—and then unfold several implications for its practice. By definition, gospel, doctrine, and church cannot be understood apart from one another. Webster provides a concise example of how the three are interwoven: 'dogmatics is that delightful activity in which the Church praises God by ordering its thinking towards the gospel of Christ'.[33] The church is the primary location for sound doctrine in accordance with the gospel because it is the church to which the gospel has been entrusted (1 Tim. 1:11). The task of theology (faith seeking understanding of the gospel) ultimately belongs to the church because only the church is bound to and under the authority of the gospel. Therefore, although academia can greatly serve the church in its understanding of the gospel, theological academic *disciplines* must find their place in the church's mission to make *disciples* (Matt. 28:18–20).

EMBEDDED AND DELIBERATIVE THEOLOGY

So how does this all apply practically to the church? A helpful distinction can be made between embedded and deliberative theology for both measuring and addressing the theological (im)maturity of a church.[34] *Embedded theology* is what people really believe, and it comes out in prayers, songs, conversations, and behaviour. The following are examples of embedded theology:

- The language of 'going to church' reveals the embedded belief that the church is a building, not the people of God (a lack of a biblical doctrine of the church).

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[32]   Horton, *The Christian Faith*, p. 203.

[33]   Webster, *Holiness*, p. 8.

[34]   This distinction is made by Howard W. Stone and James O. Duke, *How to Think Theologically*, 2nd edn (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), pp. 13–21.

- The common prayer 'God, be with _____' reveals the embedded belief that God might not always be with his people (a lack of a biblical doctrine of the Holy Spirit).

- A life of constant unrepentant sin reveals an embedded belief that God does not take sin seriously (a lack of a biblical doctrine of the holiness of God).

- A preacher talking about the gospel only when speaking to non-Christians reveals an embedded theology that Christians graduate from the gospel (an unbiblical doctrine of sanctification).

The sources of embedded theology can vary, but are usually one's upbringing, church tradition, culture, life experiences, and so forth. *Deliberative theology*, on the other hand, is the understanding of the Christian faith that emerges from intentional study of Scripture and critical assessment of one's own embedded beliefs. This task of deliberately conforming one's views to that of Scripture is not only for the pastor or the professor, but for all the ransomed of the Lord.

Acknowledging that everyone has embedded doctrines is the first step to diagnosing a church's theological maturity. An attuned pastor must listen for these assumptions so they can then correct them through sound doctrine both in embedded and deliberative ways. While most assume that the only way to teach theology is, well, to teach theology, sound doctrine can also be embedded in the practices of the church. Not only will a church learn sound doctrine through the deliberative theology in preaching, but also in the embedded theology of corporate worship, public prayers, and even announcements. The aim, then, is not to have people merely repeating theological formulas, but to have an embedded theology that is reflected in language, liturgy, and life that is consistent with Scripture and informed by the tradition of the church. Then, the theological language of deliberative theology will have the rich meaning with which it was developed. People will pray 'in Jesus' name' not merely as a formal closing to a prayer, but because they understand that it is only through the gracious mediation of the Son that they were able to come before the throne of grace in the first place.

GOSPEL DOCTRINE AND PRAYER

Doctrine is the grammar of the Christian faith, and what more important use of words than those directed to the Lord himself. According to one disciple's request, 'Lord, teach us to pray' (Luke 11:1), the ability to pray

well is not simply bestowed on all Christians but is a skill to be learned. The following examples demonstrate how doctrine is an essential element in learning to pray. Praising God for who he is and what he has done is dependent on the knowledge and understanding of these very truths. The confession of sin is motivated by the holiness and love of God. Asking for forgiveness of sins must be rooted in the knowledge of how that forgiveness is accomplished (Christ's atoning death) and applied (the Holy Spirit's uniting the Christian to the risen Christ). Doctrine matters for prayer because Christians are not only to call on the Lord, they are to 'call on him in truth' (Ps. 145:18). Prayer is a great example of how pastors can teach theology through practices that are embedded with sound doctrine. Take, for example, the following prayer:

> Father, I pray that your Spirit, who inspired the Scriptures long ago, would shed light on them today, that we may know Christ and be conformed to his image.

If a pastor prayed this prayer every week as he opened the Word to preach, he would embed in his congregation not only a sound doctrine of Scripture, but an implicit understanding of the Trinity as well; and all without ever saying, 'Today we're going to learn about doctrine'.

GOSPEL DOCTRINE AND PRAISE

Theology exists for doxology. In other words, understanding the depths of the gospel lifts the worshiper to the heights of the glory of God. This connection between doctrine and worship is rather simple: the more one understands who God is and what he has done in Christ, the more reason to worship him. 'Sound doctrine fuels worship'.[35] The structure of Romans 1–11 is telling: it begins with the gospel (1:1–17) and then unfolds one of the most theologically explicit sections in all of Scripture (1:18–11:36), culminating with an elaborate song of praise, declaring that 'from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever' (Rom. 11:36). Theology exists for and is secondary to doxology. As Bavinck says, 'The end of theology, as of all things, may be that the name of the Lord is glorified'.[36]

Nevertheless, doxology also needs theology. Stated positively, 'worship is ritualized theology'.[37] In negative terms, 'Without knowing the dramatic plot and its doctrinal significance, our doxology becomes unfo-

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[35] Horton, *The Christian Faith*, p. 23.
[36] Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1, p. 46.
[37] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, p. 411.

cused. Our praise lacks not only depth but even its rationale: For what are we praising God?'[38] The relationship between theology and worship is mutually edifying: 'Theology without worship is empty; worship without theology is blind.'[39]

GOSPEL DOCTRINE AND PREACHING

If worship is ritualized theology, then preaching is 'theology on fire'.[40] The above understanding of 'sound doctrine, in accordance with the gospel' is extremely significant for preaching, because it provides a third way between either challenging the faithful or making sense to the seekers. Since theology is understanding the depths of the gospel (as opposed to going beyond it), then preaching doctrine should never drift into theoretical speculation, nor should preaching the gospel slip into shallow aphorisms. The gospel is simple enough for a child to understand and deep enough for a life-long Christian to still be dumbfounded by it; preaching should reflect both the simplicity and depth of the gospel. Charles Haddon Spurgeon agrees: 'we cannot afford to utter pretty nothings',[41] but 'it will be a happy circumstance if you are so guided by the Holy Spirit as to give a clear testimony to all the doctrines which constitute or lie around the gospel'.[42] P. T. Forsyth saw the temptations in his day to soften theology in order to water down the message of the gospel, that it might be easily understood and less offensive. May his response be ours:

> The power of the gospel as a preached thing is shaped in a message which has had from the first a theological language of its own creation as its most adequate vehicle. To discard that language entirely is to maim the utterance of the Gospel.[43]

A preacher need not choose between preaching the gospel or theology. Rather, the theological gospel must be preached from the Scriptures.

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38 Horton, *The Christian Faith*, p. 23.
39 Kevin J. Vanhoozer, 'Worship at the Well: From Dogmatics to Doxology (and Back Again)', *Trinity Journal* 23 (2002), 11.
40 Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1972), p. 97.
41 C.H. Spurgeon, *Lectures To My Students* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1954), p. 70.
42 Ibid., p. 74.
43 P. T. Forsyth, *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind* (Blackwood, Australia: New Creation, 1993), p. 197.

CONCLUSION

In sum, this essay has argued that the task of theology is not to go beyond the gospel, but deeper into its riches. Doctrine, theology's product, promotes the gospel by defending and defining it, in order that the church may understand and respond to what God has done in Christ. Sound doctrine is rooted in the gospel, bears fruit in the church, and serves the ultimate purpose of bringing glory to God.