

There is a Realistic Reason why we need to understand doctrine. Everyone has a systematic theology. If someone was to ask you “what do believe about God, or the cross, or heaven and hell”, we'd give an answer, and when we do that, we are doing systematic theology. So it's important we think it through and submit what we think to the Bible.

Doctrine is important for a Biblical Reason. The Bible itself assumes that it contains a system of doctrine, not just individual books. Paul in Acts 20 talks about “the whole will of God”. When he speaks to Timothy he calls him to keep to the “pattern of sound teaching”. In his letters he assumes that some truths are more foundational than others, some things (in 1 Corinthians 15) are of “first importance”. So it's important we know what they are.

There is also a Pastoral Reason for doctrine. Knowing what you believe and why you believe it will be invaluable for us in painful times. Understanding how and why you are a justified sinner is so important when are in despair over your sin. When you are on your death bed the doctrine of heaven will no longer seem so unimportant. When we are challenged by good intelligent arguments on creation and evolution or the Bible knowing what we believe and why will strengthen you. Knowing doctrine will help us when you read books or listen to preachers, so you are protected against false teaching because we know the truth so well.

There is an Evangelistic Reason to study doctrine. People love to caricature Christians as mindless folk who just have “faith” (without evidence). It's important that we are believers who can give a reason for the hope we have. Not un-lovingly, not to “win” arguments, but to gain respect, so we can give honest answers to honest questions.

There is also a Holistic Reason for systematic theology. To study a creed helps us see how what we believe fits together as a whole. We don't just believe lots of things about lots of different things. No – we trust one God who has revealed his truth to us. So all of his truth fits together. If we disbelieve or are in error about one thing, it will affect other things. For example, our view of sin affects our view of salvation and what we believe about God as Trinity affects what we believe about the Bible. It's why this is a serious business.