

# CHURCH HISTORY: THE DOCTRINES THAT DEFINE US

## WEEK 1: WHY IS DOCTRINE IMPORTANT?

### INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

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- Have you ever wondered why our church believes the various doctrines that we do? Have you thought about why another church, which seems to be a strong evangelical church, believes something completely different?
- Sometimes it is hard to take a position on doctrine when both beliefs seem to come from the same Bible.
- Is it possible for two churches, both desiring to honor God and walk with Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, to land on opposite sides of vital doctrine for the church? Is there a place for fellowship with those who hold to completely opposite views than we do?
- The goal of this series is to examine various doctrinal convictions in the context of the church today, looking at how and why churches differ in these areas. Using God's word, we will seek to develop and strengthen convictions in key doctrinal areas, while thinking through how to interact with those who differ in their convictions.
- Here is schedule for the upcoming lessons:
  - **July 21<sup>st</sup>: Introduction to the series/Why is doctrine important?**
  - July 28<sup>th</sup>: Why don't we play all styles of worship music?
  - August 4<sup>th</sup>: Why don't we believe all the spiritual gifts are for today?
  - August 11<sup>th</sup>: Why don't we hold to Covenant Theology?
  - August 18<sup>th</sup>: Why do we have only men as pastors and elders?
  - August 25<sup>th</sup>: Why do we practice believers' baptism?

### INTRODUCTION

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- Over the next five weeks, we are going to look through a variety of different topics, all pertaining to different practices within the church today.
- However, before we look at the topics themselves, it would be important to lay the groundwork for this study.

- Because, as we look to each of these topics, the common foundation for each of them is that they are all derived from doctrinal convictions through God’s word.
- Therefore, before examining these different practices, it is crucial for us to understand why doctrine is so important.
- Why should a “normal Christian” concern themselves in these things, rather than leaving it to scholars/theologians/pastors to understand and simply tell them what is right and wrong?
- How do we think through doctrine and how it affects our relationship with others who would profess Christ?

## WHY SHOULD CHRISTIANS STUDY DOCTRINE?

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- This is the question we must ask ourselves. Is doctrine really important? Should believers study doctrine?
- As we look to Scripture, the believer’s ultimate authority, we find clear instruction and motivation to pursue doctrinal conviction, as well as the practical safeguards and benefits of this pursuit.

### Believers’ Faith is Rooted in Doctrine

- Is it enough to "believe in Jesus" in some amorphous sense that divorces "faith" from any particular doctrine about Him, or is doctrine—and the content of our faith—really important after all?<sup>1</sup>
- To even say the sentence, “I believe in Jesus.”, there must be some level of conviction about doctrinal and theological truth.
  - What does it mean to believe?
  - Who is Jesus?
- To say that you can have faith with no concern for doctrine is to adhere to a religion of your own making!
  - **1 Timothy 4:6** - *In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following.*
  - In fact, in the context of this passage, Paul is warning Timothy of those who have apostatized, those who “fall away from the faith” (proving themselves to have never believed) because they were “paying attention to deceitful spirits and **doctrines of demons.**”
- This reminds us that our faith is rooted in sound doctrine and an understanding of truth!
  - **1 Timothy 6:3-4** - *If anyone advocates a different doctrine and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, he is conceited and understands nothing...*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gty.org/library/articles/A142/does-doctrine-really-matter>

## **Believers are Comanded to Pursue Understanding**

- Outside of the clear connection between faith and doctrine, there are expectations and commands for believers to be growing in their understanding of God's word and sound doctrine.
  - **Psalm 119:66** – *Teach me good discernment and knowledge, For I believe in Your commandments.*
- Believers are never called to stop growing in knowledge and discernment. In fact, the pursuit of understanding is a sign of true wisdom.
  - **Proverbs 1:5** – *A wise man will hear and increase in learning, And a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel...*
- Wisdom and understanding are to be sought out as treasure:
  - **Proverbs 2:2-6** – *Make your ear attentive to wisdom, Incline your heart to understanding; For if you cry for discernment, Lift your voice for understanding; If you seek her as silver And search for her as for hidden treasures; Then you will discern the fear of the LORD And discover the knowledge of God. For the LORD gives wisdom; From His mouth come knowledge and understanding.*
- Paul even prayed for believers to be filled with knowledge and true understanding:
  - **Colossians 1:9** – *For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding...*

## **Doctrine Provides Protection to Believers**

- We must realize that we do not live the Christian life in a bubble. We are not cut off from the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil when we come to faith in Christ.
  - In fact, the onslaught of temptation is going to be greater for those who seek to live for the Lord.
- Because of that, being grounded in sound doctrine is a way that we can be protected from the call to desert Christ to follow the world.
  - **Proverbs 2:6-8** – *For the LORD gives wisdom; From His mouth come knowledge and understanding. He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk in integrity, Guarding the paths of justice, And He preserves the way of His godly ones.*
- As we grow in sound doctrine, one blessed result is growth in spiritual discernment
  - **Ephesians 4:14-15** – *As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ...*

## **Doctrine Affects How Believers Live Before God**

- Perhaps one of the greatest temptations to avoid studying and growing in an understanding of sound doctrine is that it seems so technical and academic.
  - Can't "normal Christians" leave the doctrinal debates to the scholars or theologians?
  - Like you may have said in school, "When will I ever use this in everyday life?"
- However, we forget that theology and doctrine is immensely practical!
  - Conviction of doctrine leads to commitment in the Christian life.
    - **Titus 2:1** – *But as for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine.*
    - **Ephesians 4:1** – *Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called...*
- Even as Paul warned Timothy about those whose lifestyle was ungodly, he understood that at the root of this was a rejection of sound doctrine and teaching:
  - **1 Timothy 1:9-10** – *...realizing the fact that law is not made for a righteous person, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers and immoral men and homosexuals and kidnappers and liars and perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching...*

## **Doctrine Defines Believers' Relationships**

- Now, as we look to our horizontal relationships with others, Scripture details how doctrine will affect those as well.
- In fact, you have, perhaps, heard the phrase, "doctrine divides".
  - We can hear something like that and struggle to find the balance between that and the call to pursue unity with one another.
    - **Ephesians 4:3** – *...being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*
  - However, as we look to Scripture's call to unity, we must understand the context of who we are to be seeking unity with, and who we are actually called to avoid.
- **Ephesians 4:13** – *...until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.*
  - Paul, in the same chapter that includes his call to seek unity, relates that unity to a true faith and knowledge of Christ.
  - True unity is found when it is built upon sound biblical doctrine!
- **Philemon 6** – *...and I pray that the fellowship of your faith may become effective through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Christ's sake.*

- **Titus 2:1** – *But as for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine.*
  - Titus 2:2-8 is one of the main passages discussed as we think through generational discipleship within the church.
    - Older men are called to pour into younger men and older women are called to pour into younger women.
  - However, v. 1 gives the context of what informs that instruction and discipleship. They are to be teaching and instructing in **sound doctrine!**
- **2 Timothy 3:1-5** – *But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; **Avoid such men as these.***
  - While we are united with believers through a true faith and knowledge of Christ, there are clear commands to separate from those who stand opposed to God.
  - Those who, as Paul warns, “**will not endure sound doctrine;** but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.”
- Scripture is clear that doctrine divides.

## THINKING THROUGH DOCTRINAL “TRIAGE”

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- Knowing that doctrine divides, we need to consider the degrees of separation that doctrinal differences will result in.
- This is likely what many of us wrestle with as we interact with others that have differences in doctrine.
  - Can I have fellowship with someone who differs in this area?
  - Can I still consider them a believer?
  - Could I attend their church in good conscience?
  - Does this make someone a false teacher? A heretic?
- Some helpful terms that have been used to think through and classify doctrines to help believers think through and discern interactions with others who profess Christ yet differ in areas of doctrine are “doctrinal triage”, or “doctrinal tiers”.
  - Just as a doctor would practice triage, considering which patients need the most urgent care (i.e. bullet wound vs. scraped knee), believers must think through doctrinal issues to consider the level of urgency.

- What do we need to hold to, doctrinally, to be considered a Christian?
- What do we need to agree on, doctrinally, to be able to “do church” together?
- What can believers disagree on and still worship corporately together?

## **1<sup>st</sup> Tier Doctrine**

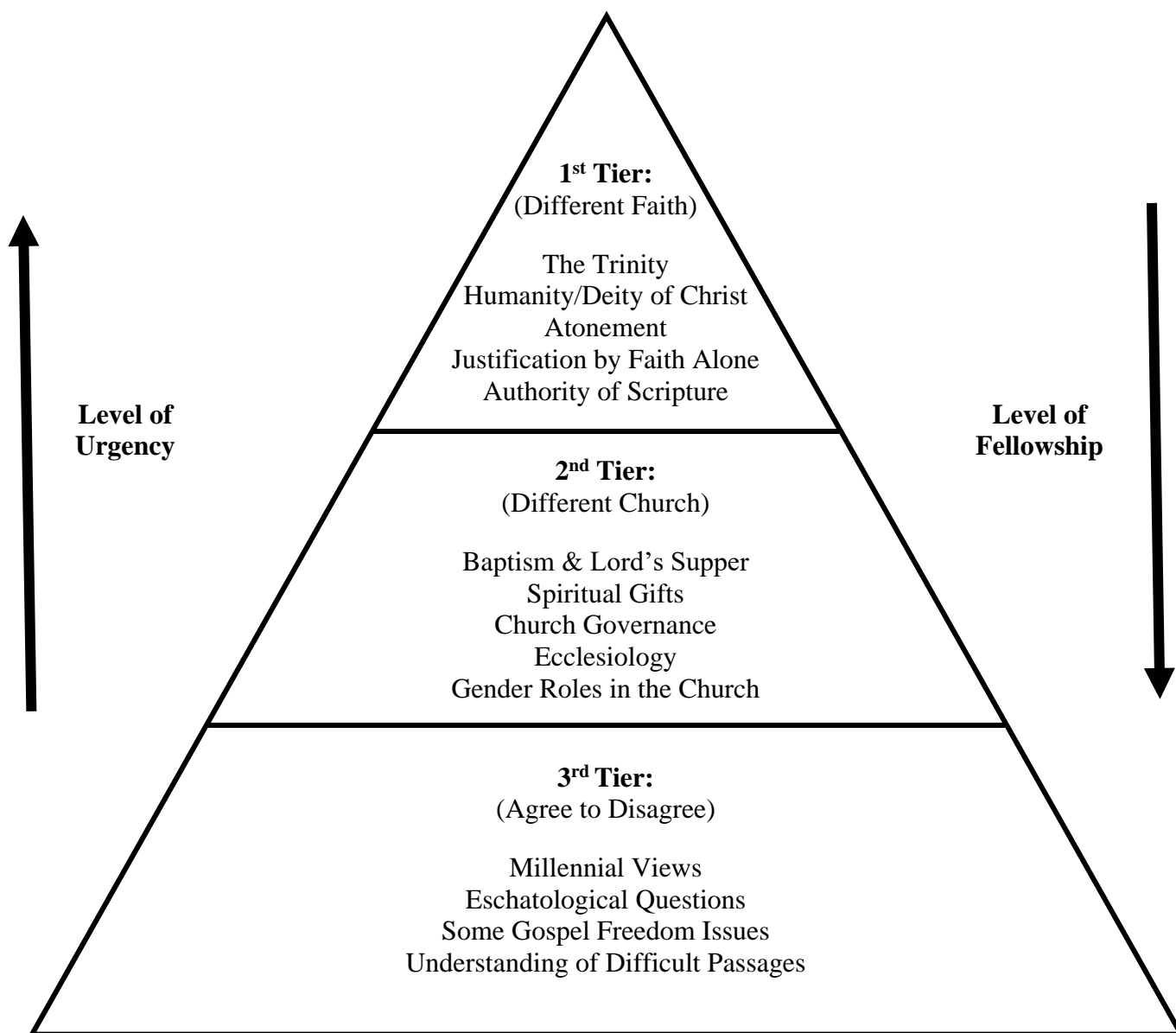
- 1<sup>st</sup> tier issues are those that are most central and essential to the Christian faith.
  - This includes the doctrines of the Trinity, atonement, the deity and humanity of Christ, justification by faith alone, and the authority of Scripture.
- Those who deny any of these doctrines are denying truths that are absolutely and fundamentally essential to the Christian faith.
- Denial of these key doctrines necessarily represents the abandonment of biblical Christianity.
  - **Galatians 1:8-9** - *But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!*

## **2<sup>nd</sup> Tier Doctrine**

- 2<sup>nd</sup> tier issues are doctrines that believers may disagree on but which still represent important issues and will form significant boundaries between Christians.
  - These are often the doctrines that have defined or divided denominations.
- Examples might include the mode and meaning of baptism or the continuation of the sign gifts in the church today.
- While Christians on either side of these doctrinal differences are brothers and sisters in Christ, this level of disagreement will likely prevent them from attending the same local church.

## **3<sup>rd</sup> Tier Doctrine**

- 3<sup>rd</sup> tier issues are those over which Christians may disagree even while maintaining close fellowship and remaining in the same local church.
  - These may include doctrines such as the end times, Gospel Freedom issues such as the consumption of alcohol, or other disagreements on hard to understand passages.



## Preference Issues

- One last noteworthy area is that of preference issues.
  - These are distinct from the doctrinal tiers, because, as the name suggests, they are not based on doctrinal conviction, but on personal preference.
- These should never be areas that put Christians at odds with one another or that should cause rifts in our fellowship.
  - We must never seek to make our own preferences into principles that we force upon others.
  - **Romans 14:1** - *Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions.* (c.f. Rom 14:1-23; 1 Cor 8:1-13)

## LOOKING AHEAD: WHY ARE WE DOING THESE TOPICS?

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- With all of this in mind, and looking ahead to the next five weeks, you may wonder why we are covering the issues that we are.
- Why not cover 1<sup>st</sup> Tier doctrinal issues? Why do the topics covered fall into 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> tier issues?
- We want to take time to understand how these differences in practice and understanding of doctrine happened within the church.
- Also, while those 1<sup>st</sup> tier issues are absolutely essential and comprise the foundations of our faith, this class is geared toward doctrinal issues that can cause confusion in the church and affect fellowship amongst believers.
  - Likely, as we look at “doctrinal triage”, most believers don’t struggle with how to handle differences with 1<sup>st</sup> tier issues.
- However, there may be people that you know (friends, family, co-workers, etc.) that attend churches that differ in some of these areas.
  - How do we interact with them?
  - Can we have fellowship? What does that look like?
- While this class will include history of doctrinal development, we want to focus on the applications and implications of these doctrines for all of you today.
- In the coming weeks, we will unpack topics that are especially prevalent areas in evangelicalism today that we must know and have convictions in.