

## Finding the Right Hill to Die On

A look at Gavin Ortlund's book on theological triage

The Bible contains many different doctrines. All of these biblical doctrines are important. However, not all of these doctrines are of \_\_\_\_\_ importance. Some doctrines are more important than others.

*"Doctrines have different kinds of importance. Some hills are worth dying on. Others are not."*

The whole concept of triage is built around addressing those circumstances that are most urgent. So, theological triage is the process of ordering doctrines based upon their urgency. Some doctrines are absolutely crucial for a person to believe in order to be \_\_\_\_\_-they are very urgent. Other doctrines, while being important, are not crucial to one's salvation before God. Therefore, there must be a prioritization of doctrine.

As this book begins Ortlund, in the first two chapters, examines two reasons why theological triage is not properly done. He writes, *"Sometimes we flatten out all doctrine-either because we want to fight about everything or because we want to fight about nothing."* Chapter 1 is given to the first of these two errors.

### Chapter 1-The Danger of Doctrinal Sectarianism

Christianity requires \_\_\_\_\_. It is good to have convictions, even strong convictions. However, it is also good to be tender and kind. It is right to stand for truth. It is also right to be gentle and patient. \_\_\_\_\_ and wisdom are greatly needed to live the Christian life. We must learn when to stand and fight, when to thoughtfully consider the arguments of others, and when to lovingly disagree.

We must not be as spineless like a jellyfish. But we must also not be as hard and unbending as a diamond.

*"Martin Luther noted, 'Softness and hardness...are the two main faults from which all the mistakes of pastors come.'"*

**Are all doctrines created equal?** He answers this question by first examining another issue, the issue of sin. Are all sins equally bad before God? The answer to this is "Yes" & "No".

All sins make a person \_\_\_\_\_ before God. However, the Bible does distinguish some sins from others. Jesus talks about "weightier matters of the law" (Matthew 23:23). Moses distinguishes between "unintentional" verses "high-handed" sins. The apostle John declares that some sins "lead to death". Paul also places sexual immorality in a different realm at the end of 1 Cor. 6.

The reformers also agreed that some sins in the eyes of God are "more heinous" than others.

In a similar way, while all doctrines are \_\_\_\_\_, some are more important than others.

*"It might initially sound good to say 'all doctrines are equally important,' but it is a difficult statement to justify biblically. Paul, for instance, speaks of the gospel as a matter of 'first importance' (1 Cor. 15:3)."*

Understanding this is important for many reasons but one main reason is to help protect the \_\_\_\_\_ of the church.

*"Equating all doctrines leads to unnecessary division and undermines the unity of the church. Historically, theologians in the Reformed tradition have often drawn a distinction between essential and nonessential beliefs out of concern for the unity of the church."*

Similarly, doctrinal \_\_\_\_\_ differ in levels of severity.

*“There are different kinds of theological errors, with corresponding levels of severity.”*

Not every biblical doctrine is worthy of \_\_\_\_\_. Also, not every biblical error is worthy of the label “heresy”. Calvin discussed how if we divided over every nonessential matter, pretty soon there would be no churches left.

*“Calvin argued strenuously and at great length against the sin of schism, emphasizing that the church will always be mixed and imperfect until judgment day, and that much separatism comes from pride rather than holiness.”*

**The Unity of the Church is Essential to the Mission of the Church-**Christians should put much value on the unity of the church. Ortlund writes, *“If we value the cross, we should value the unity of the church.”*

The more divided the church is, the less \_\_\_\_\_ the church will be in the world. Jesus prays that His people *“may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.”*

*“Pursuing the unity of the church does not mean that we should stop caring about theology. But...if we love Jesus, we must love and embrace all those who belong to Him. To leave off loving the people of Christ, is to leave off loving Christ himself.”*

**Quarreling about Unimportant Doctrines Harms the Godliness of the Church-** *“We must go even further. Doctrinal sectarianism harms not only the unity of the church but also the holiness of the church.”*

When the saints cease to love another and instead only quarrel this is evidence of a spirit that is \_\_\_\_\_ to Christ. We can so deceive ourselves that we will actually “baptize” our anti-Christ spirit as being a love of righteousness.

*“An overly strict and fault-finding spirit is one of Satan’s principal means to discourage love among Christians.”* (quotes on page 41)

*“Theological zeal must be subjected to the test of love. Not all zeal is from God.”*

**Finding Our Identity in the Gospel-** *Unnecessary division is often a heart issue. It is easy for a spirit of self-justification to ride shotgun with our secondary distinctives. Much doctrinal separatism stems from finding our identity in theological distinctives when we should be finding it in the gospel.”*

Our \_\_\_\_\_ of and \_\_\_\_\_ with Christ should keep us from quickly and easily breaking fellowship with other saints.

*“When we notice the unhealthy symptoms of doctrinal sectarianism in our hearts, we need to return to our deepest level of emotional loyalty to Jesus himself. He is the one who died for us. He is the one to whom we will ultimately answer, and his business is what we are about in the first place. Jesus alone is worthy of our ultimate commitment, and all other doctrines find their proper place in relation to Him. As we return to Christ Himself for our deepest placement and identity, He will help us hold our convictions with both confidence and grace.”*