

Jason Upchurch - Doctrines to Die For, Divide Over, Debate About, Decide On

This morning and next Lord's Day morning we're going to slow down a little and look at the issue of doctrine. And specifically how do we think about the importance of doctrine in our lives?

As I mentioned last week, this chapter in 1 Corinthians is often called the "Resurrection chapter" of the Bible because it is the longest sustained treatment on the significance of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. In the first half of the chapter we see the significance of Jesus's resurrection, and in the second half we learn more about what our own resurrection will be like.

The resurrection of Jesus is central to the gospel message. Paul here says it is among those things which are of first importance in the gospel. It is essential to the gospel message.

To be really clear: if someone does not believe that Jesus rose from the dead they are not a Christian. You can't be. That's critical to the message of salvation.

And in this section Paul actually gives us a list of several things that are essential - that are of first importance in the gospel. I don't think it's exhaustive; I don't think his point is to be exhaustive. I think his point is to show the centrality of the resurrection to our faith along with some other beliefs as well.

What I want to do this morning is use this passage as a launching pad to talk about how we think about biblical doctrine in general. In **Vs. 3** Paul calls the resurrection of Jesus "first importance" - protos in the Greek. It is chief, it's primary. It's more important than your view of the the age of the earth or the role of women in ministry or a particular view of the Lord's Supper.

Which really should make us ask the question: How do we know which teachings in the Bible are protos - of first importance? Is there a scale of importance when it comes to doctrine? And the answer is "Yes."

Now, briefly, when I say doctrine, I mean "what the Bible teaches about something." That's all doctrine means. The doctrine of the Trinity is just what the Bible teaches about the Trinity - one God, three eternal persons. If you're 4 years old, your doctrine of the Trinity is probably "God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, all three in one." That's your doctrine. And that's good doctrine for a 4 year old.

The word doctrine and the word theology are often used interchangeably. Theology means knowledge about God. Theos = God, logos = knowledge or teaching. A theology of the Trinity and a doctrine of the Trinity are basically the same thing.

Side: Because I even heard it among pastors at the Shepherd's Conference: "I don't do like theology" isn't a thing. Everyone does theology. When someone asks you "What does the Bible say about angels?" You know what you're doing? Theology.

Others will say "I don't care about theology, I'm a biblicist - I just believe what the Bible says." Which sounds really nice until you ask them: "Well, what does the Bible say about speaking in tongues?" You know what they'll give you? Their doctrine of speaking tongues. They'll try to summarize what the Bible says about whatever the issue is. So saying you're a "biblicist" doesn't actually solve anything.

Everyone has theology. And what I want you to walk away with this morning is that not every doctrine is of first importance. We need to be able to categorize how important various teachings are.

And best I can tell there's basically 2 ends of the spectrum of people who are unable to categorize doctrine in a helpful way. These are like the 2 ditches on a highway and we're trying to keep it between the ditches.

So on the one side, there are people who make every doctrine equally important:

Age of the Earth | Resurrection | View of Prophecy | Trinity | Version of the Bible | Predestination | Calling it "Easter" or "Resurrection Day" (BTW you can call it whatever you want, I call it Easter) | Roles of Men and Women | Head coverings | Inerrancy of Scripture | Infant Baptism

Some people say all of those are of equal importance. Or really, really close in importance. This is very common in conservative, fundamentalist circles - like our circles. We love truth and truth is important and if you don't hold to the truth then you're a compromiser. And a denier and probably not even a Christian, and maybe even worse: a liberal.

Are those things important? Sure. But we have to understand they are not *equally* important.

The second problem, on the other end of the spectrum, the other ditch, is where people have this sort of minimalistic view of all doctrine and say "Well, if it doesn't relate directly to my salvation then it doesn't matter and I don't really care about it." You'll hear people say "I don't want to talk about doctrine and theology because those things are divisive; let's just talk about Jesus."

Which maybe sounds nice and godly. It sounds like someone who just wants to get along with everyone.

But what about when Jesus says: "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him?"

Or "If anyone comes after me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes even his own life he cannot be my disciple?"

Or when Jesus says "I lay down my life for the sheep." Did Jesus die for absolutely everybody, or just the elect - his sheep?

Or the whole discussion on the Mt of Olives where Jesus is talking about the destruction of Jerusalem. Is that when the temple was destroyed in 70AD? That's my view. Or is that the kickoff to the 7 year tribulation if you're a pretribber? Or secret option number 3 or 4?

So just saying "Let's just talk about things relating to salvation or what Jesus said" doesn't solve any problems.

As believers we should love all of Scripture *and* understand difference in importance in doctrines. **Look at Matt. 23** for a moment.

These are the seven woes of Jesus as he goes after the religious leaders of his day. And he actually touches on the reality that some things in the Bible are more important than others. **Read 23:23-24**

So the religious leaders tithed out of their spices - their produce. They were that meticulous. But what did they not do? Show justice, mercy and faithfulness. Jesus says those are the weightier matters of the Law. It's more important to be dedicated to justice, mercy and faithfulness. But does he say, "You don't need to tithe your spices anymore?" No. He says do them both. But major on the majors.

Jesus seems to be drawing from **Micah 6:8**: He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.

Again, these are more important than other issues.

So as we look back to **1 Cor. 15**, how do we think through this? I want to borrow a framework that I heard about years ago, This is not my own - but I've found it helpful as I think about doctrine. And it's basically this chart.

There are 4 categories of doctrine: things we'd die for, things we'd divide over, things we debate about in a friendly way, and things we simply decide on.

The things that we'd die for are the things that are very clear in Scripture and very significant. The things that we'd divide over are less clear and less significant...all the way down to things we simply decide on where it's not clear and the outcome doesn't matter too much.

1) Doctrines that we would die for.

These are the things that, like Paul said, are of first importance. These are beliefs that we'd be willing to die for. Someone points a gun to our head and says, "Deny that Jesus rose from the dead or you're dead." I'm not denying anything - I'm willing to die for that.

Someone says "Deny the Trinity" - I'm going to die for that one too. Why? Because salvation is on the line with these truths. These are essential to our faith and if someone rejects them they are not a Christian. I don't know how to make it any more clear.

And you say: Well, how do you know something is a "to die for" doctrine. The answer is that the Bible usually tells us. And it tells us in 2 ways. It'll either say "you have to believe this to be saved" or it'll say "if you deny this you are not saved."

So here, we see several things that Paul calls first importance. These are essential, critical to our salvation. Things we'd die for: **Read 3**

First, we see that Christ died for our sins. Substitutionary atonement is a doctrine of first importance; something we would die for. Our good works don't save us, only Jesus's death on the cross as means to appease the wrath of God. This is central to the gospel.

Second, we see the trustworthiness of the Scriptures. **Read 3-4**

Notice he mentions the Scripture over and over in this section. The Scriptures are essential. We don't understand the gospel or Jesus apart from the Scriptures - and here I think he primarily has in mind the OT Scriptures that foretold all these things about Jesus.

Obviously all Scripture is breathed out by God, the NT included. But defining and defending the Scriptures is a first level issue. Scripture is the foundation of everything else we believe so if we throw that out we're sunk. This is why usually in a church's doctrinal statement the first thing to be addressed is the church's view of Scripture.

Third, in line with the rest of the chapter is the resurrection of Jesus. **Read 4-5**

The resurrection of Jesus is central to the gospel. It's first importance stuff. But here's something else that's a first importance: the resurrection of all believers when Jesus comes again. **Read 12-19**

Did you catch that? If we deny our resurrection in the future, we are functionally denying that Jesus rose from the dead in the past; that's how tied together they are. And so if we deny a future resurrection, we're not saved.

Some people think eschatology is unimportant or boring. The reality is the coming of Jesus is what we are to set our hope fully on in this life and if we deny some things related to eschatology we're not believers. We're still in our sin. Our future resurrection is one of those essential issues.

What are some other "to die for issues?" **Look at 2 John 7-11**

In Roman times there were people who believed that everything physical was bad and everything that is spirit is good. That's not true, of course. When God created the world he finished by saying what? It is very good. God made physical matter; it's not intrinsically bad.

But this teaching that matter is bad crept into the church. And the idea was that since matter is bad, then Jesus can't be made of physical matter because then he would be tainted and bad. So some people said that Jesus wasn't really human. He just looked human. He was like a solid ghost. John says the problem with that is that it denies the humanity of Jesus. If you deny the true humanity of Jesus then you're not a believer. **Read 7-11**

Usually we talk about how Jesus is fully God - amen. He is. But we also have to believe that he's fully human as well. We affirm the two natures of Jesus - those are "to die for issues." If anyone rejects them they are not a believer.

Let me show you an interesting passage. **Turn to 1 Tim. 4:1-5.** As you're turning, let me just say that if you look at our doctrinal statement you'll see that it's about 5 pages stating what we believe and it is organized by topics. It's all positive affirmations meaning it only says what we believe.

Some doctrinal statements have not only a section of affirmations, but a section of denials under each topic. This is sometimes a very helpful way to teaching not only what we believe, but what we reject for sure.

T4G: ARTICLE X. We affirm that salvation comes to those who truly believe and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

We deny that there is salvation in any other name, or that saving faith can take any form other than conscious belief in the Lord Jesus Christ and His saving acts.

So affirmations and denials are often a helpful tool to give greater clarity.

Here in **1 Timothy** we see something of a denial statement. Someone's view of food and marriage can affect their salvation. Take a look. **Read 1-5**

Isn't that interesting? If you say "believers have to be on this diet or you're not a Christian" - then **you're** actually not a Christian. Because what that is doing is adding to the gospel. You're saying faith in Jesus plus eating a certain diet - usually a Jewish kosher diet - is what is required for salvation. That's a false gospel. It's a gospel of demons and liars.

Same thing if someone said "You can follow Jesus, but you can't get married." That sinks the proverbial ship of salvation. The Catholic Church does this with their priests.

Paul says in Galatians that if someone says "Salvation is by faith in Jesus plus circumcision" they are not saved.

These "to die for" issues are issues that are just really clear in the Bible and that the Bible says are critical to believe in order to be saved. Usually the Bible makes these things explicit. But not always. We have to use some judgement.

Here's an example: the virgin birth - is that essential to believe for salvation? We don't talk about it much. But what happens if you deny it? Then God is a liar because Scripture promised a virgin would give birth to the Savior, it turns out Jesus is a sinner because he has a sin nature through Adam, the gospel writers are liars because they said Mary was a virgin, salvation is lost because one sinner can't save another sinner. The virgin birth is a "to die for" issue; it's a major doctrine because it affects the work of salvation.

2) Doctrines we'd divide over.

When I say divide over, what I mean is that there are issues that we can disagree on but still call each other brothers and sisters in Christ - these are not salvation level issues. But the issues are big enough that it probably makes sense to do church separately because of the weight of the issues and because they usually affect how we actually do church.

So I'm about to talk a lot about doctrinal statements and denominations and church issues because divide for issues are tied to that. We're not talking about whether someone is going to heaven or hell - usually. We're talking about whether or not it makes sense for us to worship together with another believer who has significant doctrinal differences with us?

So here are some examples.

Should we baptize babies like our Presbyterian friends? I would say no. I don't believe there's a biblical basis for paedobaptism. Every single instance of baptism we see in Scripture comes after someone gives a credible profession of faith.

Our Presbyterian friends would disagree and say that the children of believers are part of the covenant community and the way we recognize that is through the sign of baptism, much like the sign of circumcision in the OT. Whole households were baptized in the book of Acts and these promises we have in Christ are given to us and our children. So baptism to them is a sign of God's covenant faithfulness.

Why would we divide over this? First, let me say that some churches don't. Not everyone agrees what we should divide over.

I'll be honest, if Kevin DeYoung or RC Sproul - were he still alive - moved to Deer Park and wanted to be members of RBC would I really turn them away?

Interestingly, I talked to a Presbyterian guy a couple of weeks ago from the Bay Area and he said when CA shut down churches, the only church that was open was a Calvary Chapel. Very much not Presbyterian.

Presbyterians are cessationist, paedobaptist, covenant view of Scripture, sacramental, amillennial and postmillennial calvinists. The orthodox ones are, anyway.

Calvary Chapel is a charismatic, hold to believer's baptism, dispensational, memorial communion, pretrib, arminians. That's a spread.

And he attended Calvary Chapel for almost 2 years because he couldn't find a good Presbyterian Church in his area that was open. Calvary was the only place open and he knew he needed to go to church. I think his church has since reopened.

But I thought that was really neat, because even that is a prioritizing of doctrine: It's more important to meet together - Scripture clearly commands us to - than to have all our secondary doctrines aligned.

Why do we put this in as a divide for issue? Here's where I land: I'm a dedicated to believer's baptism. And because of that if a family asked me to baptize their baby it would violate my conscience to do so because I would be baptizing someone I know is not a believer. **And** it would probably violate their conscience to not have their child baptized, as that would deny them participation in the sign of covenant blessings their children would enjoy.

Could we do church? Probably. We'd have to think through some things. But overall it seems to make more sense, as RC Sproul once said, to live in separate houses but have low fences. We're in different buildings, but we love each other and are good friends with each other.

Another issue churches might divide over is the role of spiritual gifts in the church. Say, someone believes strongly that speaking in tongues is no longer functionally in operation, it's going to be hard to fellowship in a congregation where speaking in tongues is happening regularly. Especially if the tongues are not known languages or not interpreted.

Conversely, if someone believes they have the gift of tongues but the church they go to does not believe the gift even exists, it might be hard for them to stay to stay in good conscience. At RBC we don't draw a line on this issue, but many charismatic churches do, and many committed cessationist churches do as well.

Another reason we might divide is the role of women in leadership. **Turn to 1 Tim. 2:8-15.** I think this is a more critical issue than the other two. Can women be pastors and elders? Can women preach in church or exercise authority over men in the congregation? The Bible is clear that the answer is no. **Read**

So women are not to be blingy - but modest in every way. Men are to be prayerful peaceable. But Paul makes it clear that women are not to teach men or exercise authority over men. And the reason Paul gives is because

of the way God designed their role from the beginning. I'm going to strategically avoid what it means to "be saved through child-bearing." It's not saying women are saved by having kids.

But the point Paul makes clearly is that women cannot teach or exercise authority. In the very next chapter those are precisely 2 of the qualification for men who desire to be elders in the church.

Some churches would say this is just cultural. It only applied to Paul's day, but now we can have women pastors. I think that's a clear violation of what Paul teaches.

But there are some churches that say women in leadership is okay. Many Methodist churches, charismatic churches, liberal Presbyterian churches, even non-denominational churches allow for women in various roles of leadership and even pastoral ministry. I would divide for because it is intrinsic to the nature of the church.

I think women in ministry is a larger issue than paedobaptism or spiritual gifts because the Bible expressly forbids this in every way and grounds that prohibition in the creation order. So I think this issue becomes an issue obedience and sinfulness.

There are other issues that people choose to divide over. Church government, views on end times, the millennium, the age of the earth. I'm not saying we should divide on those issues, but some do.

Now, on the chart, I've got a line between divide and debate. And next to that line is the word doctrinal statement. Most churches or ministries will include both "die for" and "divide for" issues in their doctrinal statement. The point of a doctrinal statement is not just "what is the bare minimum to believe to be saved." It should include that, but it will almost always include these divide over issues as well.

That's what defines a church as a church. Are they going to baptize babies? Are they going to allow for speaking in tongues? Are they congregational or elder rule or Presbyterian in their government? And where they draw the line will be reflected in the doctrinal statement.

And, if a doctrinal statement is really small or doesn't address any "divide for issues" I think that's actually a red flag. It probably means they're doctrinally weak and has very few convictions. **Or** it means that there is a divide list they're just not telling you what's on it.

Sometimes you can tell what a church is by just asking "What kind of church do you go to?" The answer to that question is usually the "divide for" level.

I'd say RBC is a reformed baptist church that is complementarian, expositional. Reformed in that we are not Arminian, but see that the Lord has to work to regenerate a sinner. We're baptist, in that we hold to believers baptism. We're complimentarian in that men and women are equal, but have different roles. Expositional - except for the next two weeks - in that we expositional Scripture for the Sunday morning sermons.

Okay, divide for issues are primarily issues that relate to the church. Let's forget about churches and doctrinal statements for a minute. Let's talk about how do we relate believers to these we might not go to church with.

If you're at camp or a retreat or a bump into someone in the store and make a new friend who is a believer, you might find out they hold some very different views than you do. How do you deal with that?

First, I think the thing we rejoice in is that we have have the same Lord. There's one faith, one God, one baptism, one Lord. Rejoice that they are brothers in Christ.

Second, don't shy away from talking with people about these issues if they're willing to discuss them peaceably. Sometimes we view people with different secondary beliefs as weird or whatever. "We're not going to talk about **that**." And I'm telling you, unless you know for sure it's heresy, go talk about that. "Hey, I know you go to a church where they do infant baptism/speak in tongues/so on, why do you guys do that?" And just listen with an open Bible.

Next week we'll look at debate and decide issues. How do we disagree with each other in our own congregation to the glory of God?

Pray