

Arbor Foundations

1 – Introduction, Doctrinal Triage

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Suggested Reading

<https://albertmohler.com/2004/05/20/a-call-for-theological-triage-and-christian-maturity-2/>

Key Ideas

- Medical triage: recognizes that not every injury/illness is equally critical
- Doctrinal triage: recognizes that not every doctrine is equally clear or equally critical

- Example of why this is needed
 - Deity of Christ: Was Jesus fully God (yes or no)?
 - Clearly taught in many places in scripture
 - Which side we fall on the issue has HUGE implications
 - Melchizedek: Was he a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ, or just a type of Christ?
 - Not completely clear from scripture (case could be made either way)
 - Which side we fall on the issue has almost no implications

- Mohler's way of describing levels of doctrinal triage
 - **First order:** Doctrines most central and essential to the Christian faith
 - Examples: Trinity, full deity/humanity of Jesus, justification by faith
 - **Second order:** Believing Christians may disagree, but this disagreement will create significant boundaries between believers
 - Example: Believers' baptism vs. paedobaptism
 - **Third order:** Believing Christians may disagree but still remain in close fellowship
 - Examples: Eschatology, details of creation

- Caveats:
 - Not saying that two people with contradictory ideas can both be right
 - Not saying that third tier issues are not important, or that we shouldn't firmly hold to them
 - There are sometimes not crisp distinctions between various levels
 - Note: The concept of "doctrinal triage" is not explicitly Biblical (just like the idea of interpreting a Scriptural passage according to its context is also not explicitly Biblical).

So What?

We will run into various problems and imbalances if we treat every doctrine as completely equal in terms of clarity and importance.

Examples:

- If we say that all doctrines are second- or third-order issues: theological liberalism
- If we say that all doctrines are first-order issues: tendency of fundamentalism

What's wrong with considering everything that is found in the Bible a "first-order" issue?

- Will be imbalance in where we invest our time/mental energy, as we overly focus on relatively minor issues. (Note: not saying unimportant, just less important than other issues)
- Sometimes, focusing on lots of small things actually prevents us from dealing with the more weighty issues. (Example: Matthew 23:23)
- It will cause unnecessary division among believers
- We fail to recognize, with humility, that while the Bible is infallible, our own interpretations of the Bible are not infallible. Strongly asserting a more minor point in a way that demands that everyone else must agree is presuming that you are better able to discern scripture than others, who also have the Holy Spirit guiding them.