

## Finding the Right Hill to Die On

A look at Gavin Ortlund's book on theological triage

### Chapter 4-Why Primary Doctrines are Worth Fighting For

Primary doctrines are those doctrines that are \_\_\_\_\_ to the Christian faith and message. They are those doctrines that, *"If they are lost, everything is lost."* In this chapter Ortlund provides two basic categories that primary doctrines fall into: Those that relate to the \_\_\_\_\_ of the gospel and those that relate the \_\_\_\_\_ of the gospel.

*"Some first-rank doctrines are needed to defend the gospel, and others to proclaim the gospel."*

**Ranking Different Doctrines**-The first issue that needs to be sorted out is understanding how to determine if a doctrine is a primary doctrine. A few different sets of criteria are examined but our author presents a simplified four-fold series of questions that will help us determine the rank of a doctrine:

1. How \_\_\_\_\_ is the Bible on this doctrine? (biblical)
2. What is this doctrine's importance to the \_\_\_\_\_? (theological)
3. What is the testimony of the \_\_\_\_\_ church concerning this doctrine? (historical)
4. What is this doctrine's effect upon the church \_\_\_\_\_? (practical)

Primary doctrines are those that are clearly taught in the Bible, are vital to a proper understanding of the gospel, have been historically defended and upheld in the church, and have a direct impact on the \_\_\_\_\_ of the church.

**Are First-Rank Doctrines Essential for Salvation?** -The second issue that needs to be addressed is our understanding of how these primary doctrines relate directly to a person's salvation. Can a person be wrong on some primary doctrines and still be a Christian? How orthodox is good enough to be saved?

Answers to these questions are not cut-and-dry. There are several factors that must be examined here.

1. **Some \_\_\_\_\_ circumstances do not allow a person to be taught all first-rank doctrines**

It is not as simple as saying that first-rank doctrines must be believed in order to be saved

*"In certain circumstances, people experience salvation with very limited information. The thief on the cross is a classic example. It is not clear that the thief personally affirmed the Trinity. It seems likely he did not possess this information in his circumstances. Supposing, for the sake of argument, that this is correct, this would not in itself exclude the Trinity from being a first-rank doctrine."*

2. **There is a difference between "what must be \_\_\_\_\_ and what must not be denied."**

Many Christians may not be able to masterfully explain all the first-rank doctrines but instead able only to appropriately not deny them.

*"Some Christians will lack the mental capacity, theological awareness, or communicative ability to express various first-rank doctrines."*

3. **Many first-rank doctrines are \_\_\_\_\_ over time and not immediately known at salvation**

*"We must distinguish between what must be affirmed when someone becomes a Christian and what must be affirmed as characteristic of growth in Christ over time."*

**4. There is a difference between denying a first-rank doctrine based upon \_\_\_\_\_ or confusion and a “knowing, willful denial.”**

We can say heretical things out of ignorance and confusion and not because we actually understand the doctrine and are \_\_\_\_\_ choosing to go against it.

*“We must distinguish between confused sheep and active wolves.”*

**5. We must remember that \_\_\_\_\_ judgment rests with the Lord**

We cannot know the heart of another person and therefore cannot pronounce with perfect certainty whether a person is a believer or not. But what we can and should do is to not accept those who reject first-rank doctrines into the \_\_\_\_\_ of the church.

*“Rather than insisting on a positive articulation of every first-rank doctrine for salvation, a more careful statement would be that if someone knowingly and persistently denies a first-rank tenet, we can have no confidence of that person’s salvation. It would probably be better to restrict our focus to whether we would allow such a person into the membership of our church than to speculate about the state of his or her soul.”*

Ortlund concludes by examining two primary doctrines: The Virgin Birth and Justification by Faith Alone

**1. The Virgin Birth**-this doctrine is biblically taught, central to the \_\_\_\_\_ and sinless personhood of Christ, has been historically defended by the church, and has huge ramifications for the practical worship of the church.

*“The virgin birth is not a matter of private judgment but is essential to the church’s worship, witness, and vitality.”*

*“The virgin birth protects us against various Christological heresies, enables us to uphold a full doctrine of the incarnation, and guards and illumines the nature of Jesus’s sinlessness.”*

*“First-rank doctrines often have such a close and intimate relationship to the gospel that if they are denied, the gospel itself is ruptured.”*

To reject the virgin birth, one must also reject the \_\_\_\_\_ of Scripture.

*“One reason first-rank doctrines are worth fighting for is that their denial weakens the authoritative, corrective role that God’s word is supposed to have over us.”*

**2. Justification by Faith Alone**-This doctrine is biblical taught, \_\_\_\_\_ to a proper understanding of the gospel, has been historically defended by the church, and again has major ramifications for the practical worship of the church.

*“We might say that justification is not, in itself, the whole gospel; but it nonetheless touches the whole gospel.”*

*“For the Apostle Paul, maintaining justification by faith alone is necessary in order to be faithful to Christ and uphold the gospel...The book of Galatians reminds us that there are some hills to die on and that justification by faith alone is one of those hills.”*

Christians should not \_\_\_\_\_ be fighting over doctrine but there are times when the faith needs to be fought for (Jude 3). *“Celebrating the gospel should be a matter of eagerness; contending for it, a matter of necessity. Regrettably, for some Christians it is the reverse.”*