

## An Overview of Essential & Non-Essential Doctrine

### Why Does It Matter?

The Bible Commands Discernment:

- Ephesians 4:3: “Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”
- 1 Timothy 2:25: “In humility correcting those who are in opposition...”
- 1 Peter 2:1: “There will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies...”
- Matthew 7:15: “Beware of false prophets...”
- Matthew 24:4: “See to it that no one misleads you . . .”
- Romans 14: Commands to not separate between Christians over some teachings even if some people are incorrect.
- Romans 16:17: “brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them.”

### Implication for Salvation

- Although some doctrines are essential, it is not essential for people to know and understand them to be initially saved from their sins.
- However, if someone understands and then denies an essential doctrine, they fall outside of Christianity.
- For example, people can come to a saving faith having never heard of the New Testament teaching against working for salvation. But if someone denies salvation by faith and believes they can work to save themselves, their beliefs are outside of Christianity.
- No human can truly judge whether another person is truly saved.
- Although some doctrines are essential, we are saved by faith in Christ, not a knowledge of doctrine. It is not the knowledge of the doctrines that saves us. Rather, we are saved by God who has these doctrines.

### Essential Doctrine:

- Topics that affect who is God and how we are saved.
  - God exists
  - Humans cannot save ourselves from our sinfulness
  - God’s grace is necessary for our salvation
  - We must trust God (have faith) to be saved.
- The nature of God, such as:
  - Triune
  - One God (Monotheism)
  - Holiness and sinlessness
- That humans are sinful and separated from God
- Who is Jesus and what is His nature:
  - Virgin birth
  - Sinlessness

- Full deity & full humanity
- Christ's death atoning for sin
- Resurrection

### **Non-Essential**

The Bible may have a clear and true teaching about these, but Christians can agreeably disagree. Some examples include:

- Spiritual gifts
- How churches are governed
- The keeping of days and eating of foods (Romans 14)
- Calvinism / Arminianism
- What we name the church and what we name the leaders of the church.
- Views on God's covenants with Israel

### **Middle Area: Aberrant & More Difficult Teachings:**

Areas that can be very serious doctrines but may or may not be heresy:

- The nature of the Bible
- The nature & meaning of communion / the eucharist
- Bodily second coming
- Baptism for infants
- Requiring a Baptismal formula
- Requiring baptism for salvation as an act of obedience
- Degree of human depravity
- Whether Adam was the first human
- Age of the earth