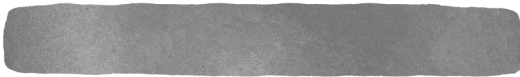


QUICK THEOLOGY

Determining Core Doctrine



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Introduction

As we discuss the topic of discernment and determining core doctrine, we will be following Albert Mohler's method of theological triage. Theological triage is a method for narrowing down the issue at hand and running it through analytical steps to discern what level of theological importance the issue is. As we triage, we must ask of each issue, "Does it align with Christian orthodoxy, or adherence to the accepted creeds? Is it a core doctrine? Or is it a secondary issue or practice?"

When discussing this topic, it is important to first have a strong understanding of Christian orthodoxy. G. K. Chesterton defined orthodoxy as the creeds—the Apostles and the Nicene—and the historic behavior of those who followed such a creed. Essentially this boils down to what we see outlined by the church as the fundamentals of Christian belief plus Christian practice in the early church. Looking at the New Testament

church we can ask, “What behaviors were followed? How did they live? What kind of practices in their communities showed their values?” These kinds of questions will help us to measure what we read against Christian orthodoxy, and to be discerning as we engage with others.



Biblical Literacy

As we dive in, we will start by looking at the foundation of biblical literacy. Literacy is the ability to read and communicate; biblically literacy is being able to read and communicate biblical truths in their proper context. It is the ability to understand, process, and apply the principles of the Bible to life and culture. It is essential that we do not take biblical truths out of their context or divorce them from what they meant to their original hearers. Once we understand the original meaning, we can then process and apply it to life and culture. Samuel Blair describes it this way: “It’s not just facts and the ability to recall them, but the ability to use them to create meaning about life, about God, about the world, and my place in all of it.”

All theology—all study of the nature of God—has to begin with biblical literacy. If we do not have biblical literacy and we are not accustomed to rightly dividing and applying the Word of truth, our theology will

inevitably be skewed. We will come up with theologies that are not actually a reflection of the principles taught in the Bible. This has happened so many times over the course of church history. We see it happen in the extremist sects of “Christianity” today, where they take small portions of the Bible and twist them to mean something they do not mean about God and about man. That is why biblical literacy is crucial for a sound theology.

DENOMINATIONS

Once we have a robust hold on biblical literacy, we can dive into deeper study on various aspects of Scripture and church life. It is important though, to understand the various viewpoints that writers come from in order to know what sources to look to. As we do this, we will encounter various aspects of denominational and theological bias.

Denominations play a huge role in our theological understanding. Most people have two or three trusted authors that they return to over and over again. This is fine and completely normal. It is difficult to know what to trust, who to trust, and who is teaching orthodoxy, so most people do not branch out and read outside their

tradition. But it is important to know the denominational bias of the authors you are reading. Maybe you only read Reformed scholars, such as R. C. Sproul, John Piper, Ligonier Ministries, and Kevin DeYoung, and you have never exposed yourself to Wesleyan, Methodist, and Arminian traditions. Or maybe you only consume materials from Arminian, Pentacostal, or charismatic traditions, and you have not opened up a book from a Reformed or Wesleyan standpoint. But to be well-informed Christians, we need to read widely and from multiple perspectives and denominations. This will offer us a robust and holistic understanding of our Christian faith.

Denomination literally means 'to name' or 'out of the name'. When we talk about denominations of Christianity, we are not saying these are all different versions of Christianity. Rather, they are sections with distinct names under the umbrella of Christianity, separated because there were differences, usually over *secondary issues*. When it was not over a secondary issue, denominations often arose because the conservative branch of the church could not in good conscience remain in fellowship with the liberal branch. Sometimes this was not the case. For instance, the Southern Baptist Church came into existence because of slaveholding and

