

The distinction we make between various doctrines.

Theology is a part of our life every day. How we understand God, how we understand ourselves, how we understand the world is doing theology. It is imperative that we put our understanding of particular doctrines in their proper place - not all doctrine is created equal.

The Bible tells us much about many things, but the Bible does not tell us about all things equally. There are things the Bible majors on; there are other things the Bible minors on. We need to focus on what the Bible majors on as well as being committed to focus on the minor details.

First, there are doctrines or beliefs for which we would die. These are truths we hold with great fervor—non-negotiables. If someone doesn't hold to these, they aren't a true follower of Christ. One example would be the deity of Christ. You cannot be a Christ follower and not believe that Jesus Christ is God. Because if He's not God, then how did He rise from the dead? If He's not God, then how can He be seated at the right hand of the Father in glory and majesty? If He is not God, then we have bought into a story of a martyr and not the King of Kings.

But when it comes to the issues of end times, what doctrine we would die for? The very truth that Jesus Christ is coming back. Why? Because if Jesus Christ isn't coming back, then He told a lie to His disciples in John 14 when He said, "I'm going to prepare a place for you. And if I'm going to prepare a place for you, then I will come back and bring you to be with Me." Well, if He's not coming back, He just told a bald-faced lie to His closest associates. If He's not coming back, then He lied in the second to the last verse in the Bible, Revelation 22:20, when He said, "*Surely I am coming soon...*" If He's not coming back, then Jesus just lies and at numerous times says, "I'm coming back." He's a liar and the truth is not in Him. As I said, all branches of Christianity say Jesus Christ is coming back. They differ on the details, but on that one truth they agree.

Second, there are doctrines we debate. These are issues that don't reach the same level as the doctrines for which we would die. These are doctrines the Scripture seems to be clear on, but you can take more than one path in understanding them. One issue that is hotly debated—not just in this church, but in all churches—is the process of salvation. Who plays the major part in salvation? Is it God, or is it man? We hear words like predestination and free will, and we can debate that. There are verses on free will and verses on predestination, and we can have an argument trying to sync them together. That's what Bible students in Bible colleges all over the place do at night instead of playing video games! They debate these things.

At the end of the day, these debatable issues are ways we set apart churches. They make their way into doctrinal statements. They find themselves patterning how we do ministry. They're important things. But if someone disagrees with you on a debatable issue, this doesn't consign them to being unbelievers.

So, what do we debate about regarding the doctrine of end times? One of the things we debate is the nature of the millennium. In Revelation 20, John says there will be a thousand-year reign of Christ. He will come and reign on earth for a thousand years when He comes the second time. Some believe that to be a symbolic thousand-year reign. Some believe it to be simply a symbol of a reign that's already taking place in our hearts. Others believe that in fact is a literal thousand-year reign that will happen here on earth. Nobody really knows, right? We haven't lived there yet. So we can debate these things—and churches do.

Third, there are doctrines we discuss. These are stated in Scripture, but there's no clear consensus on how to understand them. People have strong opinions about them, but at the end of the day—if we're really honest—we can never be 100% sure on our position.

When it comes to the end times, we discuss the timing of a rapture, or the nature of the tribulation, or other events. At times our discussion can become debate because it's fun to do. It's interesting to speculate, but we can't be quite sure. We don't know what to make of it.

Fourth, there are doctrines we dump. These are things that were never meant to be made into beliefs or doctrines. Paul says in Titus 3:9, "*But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless.*" These things only cause quarreling and fighting. When it comes to end times doctrine, we need to dump any discussion that seeks to pinpoint the date of the coming of our Lord. Why? Because Jesus specifically said no one will know the hour or the day. If Jesus says that, why would we invest time and energy trying to pinpoint or predict the time? If our Lord and Savior said, "Hey, only the Father in heaven knows these things," we need to dump that idea, helping people understand that it's not doing good eschatology—the study of last things.

