

Is “doctrine” divisive?

Have you ever been told that you were divisive or met someone who was markedly divisive? Many of us would answer in the affirmative to this question.

What exactly does it mean to be divisive? According to Merriam-Webster.com, divisive means, “creating disunity or dissension”. In light of this definition, it might seem obvious that we should strive earnestly to not be divisive. However, there is another aspect of “being divisive” that we need to consider.



I have personally heard Christians make the claim that “doctrine is divisive”. But what is “doctrine”? Doctrine is simply the term used to describe the key tenets of a belief system. For our purposes, we are solely focusing on the Christian faith. The following represents a few of the key doctrinal tenets of Christianity:

- The God-head (or Trinity)
- Salvation by Faith Alone
- Authority, Inspiration & Inerrancy of Scripture
- The Deity of Jesus Christ
- The Bodily Resurrection of Christ

Eastern Pantheistic Monism is a belief system or worldview that posits god is everything and everything is god. Is that correct? I’m guessing you would say, “No!” How do you know it isn’t? Mormonism posits that God used to be a man, we can eventually become god and more Divinely inspired scriptures exist than just the Bible. Is that correct? How would you know? How would you respond to these claims? Hinduism claims that you will be reincarnated in another life and your exact status is determined by the life you are leading now. Is this correct? How would you know? How should you respond?

I could go on and on with similar examples from other religions. The answers to my not-so-rhetorical questions lie within doctrines we find in the Bible. What Scripture says about these topics (God, the afterlife, etc.) is what we use to judge right from wrong. The importance of biblical doctrine is certainly imperative when dealing with false religions, but it is no less important when dealing with other Christians. There’s someone you are probably somewhat familiar with who was quite divisive. His name was Jesus! (More correctly, His name *IS* Jesus.) Much of what Jesus taught was considered divisive by those around Him. Truth by definition is “exclusive.” What does that mean? It simply means that if something is true anything contrary to it has to be false (i.e. it excludes the possibility of other contrary ideas being valid). When Jesus shared truth, He was excluding other beliefs, and it often caused division. This is absolutely necessary if we truly believe the tenets of the Christian faith. The Bible states that “preaching Jesus” is an offense to those who are perishing (1 Peter 2:7-8, 1 Corinthians 1:18). “Preaching Jesus” will often be perceived as being divisive.

However, many Christians believe that studying and discussing doctrine with other Christians is too likely to be divisive, so we shouldn't make a big deal about it. But, how do we determine right from wrong, if not by understanding doctrine? It's critically important!

In one sense, doctrine needs to be divisive, dividing truth from error. On the other hand, doctrine should only occasionally be divisive. What do I mean by that? Here's my point. We should certainly take a stand and have no close, intimate, regular fellowship with those who take patently unbiblical stances on major tenets of the Christian faith. However, we should not use our particular view of a more "minor" tenant to arrogantly judge other Christians and refuse to commune with them. No, I am not going to give you an exhaustive, authoritative list of what is "major" and what is "minor", but I will give you a few examples.

A couple of "minor" examples:

1) I have friends who have different views than I do when it comes to the doctrine of the rapture. I would never even consider not being in a Bible study with them, sharing prayer and deep fellowship. I have a fairly strong belief regarding the timing of this event, but if through whatever means I find out I'm wrong, I will shrug my shoulders and say, "Huh, I guess I was wrong." It would change virtually nothing else I do. This particular doctrinal issue would probably seem "relatively minor" to most Christians.

2) I feel the same way regarding the doctrine of creation, specifically, creation in six literal days, roughly 6,000 years ago. That may come as a great surprise to those of you who know me, given the fact that I've spent 31 years conducting research with great passion, emotion and scholarship related to this topic. Even though I think it is much more important and significant than many Christians realize, I still wouldn't break fellowship over it with someone, who in all other respects, is very sincere, loves the Lord, and is passionate about studying Scripture. Yes, I may have to work on not letting this affect my attitude towards those with a different belief, but that's my problem to work through.

One "major" example:

If I met someone who believed that salvation is by faith in Jesus Christ but that you also have to live in such a way as to deserve or earn salvation, I would not feel or respond in the same way as I would in the above "minor" examples. This particular "different" view, is not only different, it is aberrant and unbiblical. I could certainly never work with this person in sharing the Gospel with someone else, because we have strikingly different definitions of what the Gospel message actually is.

To summarize... being "divisive" in a caustic manner (especially over non-doctrinal issues) is never condoned and the Bible has clear warnings against that type of behavior (Romans 16:17-18, Titus 3:10). On the other hand, the Bible clearly teaches us to separate ourselves from those who are living in contradiction to what the Scripture teaches (Ephesians 5:7-9) and rebuke (in love) those who reject sound doctrine (Titus 1:9).

Question of the Month



In the meantime, if you have any questions about this or any other issue, please don't hesitate to [contact us!](#)