

Doctrinal Differences

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For Discussion: Through a Glass Darkly

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<https://www.raptureready.com/2025/10/04/through-a-glass-darkly-by-pete-garcia/>

Is having so many Christian denominations a problem?

People have cited this as a reason why Christianity can't be true because Christians can't agree among themselves.

- Skeptics claim the Bible can't be true because it is subject to so many divergent interpretations.

Why are there so many Christian denominations?

Christians are drawn to different worship styles and have different convictions about the non-essentials, what the Apostle Paul called disputable matters (Romans 14).

What are the non-essentials?

They are convictions that have no bearing on a person's salvation. The non-essentials are beliefs that are not essential for salvation.

- Different views about Bible prophecy
- Infant versus believer baptism
- The type of music used during church services
- Differences on political issues

What unites all Christians?

The essentials that are fundamental to the Christian faith:

1. The deity of Christ includes: the virgin birth, sinless life, death, burial, and resurrection (Phil 2:6; 1 Tim 3:16).
2. The infallibility of Scripture: from Gen 1 to Rev 22, God's word can be trusted (2 Tim 3:16).
3. The Triune nature of God: The Godhood of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit- one Divine Being expressed in three distinct and co-equal Persons (Gen 1:26; Matt 28:19).
4. Man's helpless estate: All men are fallen and need a Savior (Rom 3:23).
5. Salvation by grace through faith, not of works: Just as good works do not save us, bad works cannot un-save us (Titus 3:5; Eph. 2:8-9).

Why are Christians so divided?

Despite having the presence of the Holy Spirit, Christians are still mortals limited by our earthly perspective.

1 Corinthians 13:12 – *For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.*

Paul says we know only 'in part,' but the part that we all agree on is the only part that really counts.

Why does God allow us to be so divided over non-essentials?

There is a principle here that is revealed in why He divided the people at the Tower of Babel.

- By scattering man 'among the nations' and removing the common bond of language and ethnicity, God ensured that no one man could ever again rule all men, as Nimrod did.
- It prevented any one culture or worldview from dominating all mankind.

What benefit was there to the church to have diverse views on non-essentials?

- That diversity is what allowed Christianity to flourish when it was introduced because it is a personal relationship with Christ rather than a commonly accepted cultural duty.
- Non-essential doctrinal differences prevent any one teacher from becoming the only accepted source of information on the things of God.

If everybody agreed on every point of doctrine, then the guy who articulates it the best becomes the Great Oracle of God. (And what if he was wrong?)

- So, we have diversity of understanding, but the same Scripture.
- And we have a diversity of teachings, but share the same salvation by grace through faith.

So, is it not important what Christians believe about non-essentials?

We will be judged by how we used the doctrine God delivered to us to lead others to salvation in Christ.

2 Timothy 2:15 – *Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*

Going deep in God's Word is an essential part of our relationship with Jesus... there will be rewards for getting to know Him better and applying what we learn to be more like Him.

How do we know God intended to have a diversity of doctrinal differences?

We are not all gifted the same, as 1 Corinthians 12 clearly points out. We are all given different callings and different understandings to draw us to different ministries making up the 'body of Christ.'

- The churches in Revelation 1-3 were not chastised for being different, they were either commended or chastised for what they did and didn't do with the gifts and callings God gave each of them uniquely.

What is it that causes us born-again believers to divide ourselves so easily these days?

Christians seem to divide over the 'mysteries of God' that are revealed primarily through the Apostle Paul who revealed the deeper things of God.

2 Peter 3:15-16 – *Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand*

The deeper things of God that Paul wrote about does not lend themselves to a superficial understanding, they require diligent study.

What are the mysteries of God?

A mystery (*mysterion*-Greek) is something that has not yet been previously revealed to man. It does not mean it didn't exist prior, but only that God revealed it at a later point...

1. The mystery of Israel's blindness (Rom 11:25-27).
2. The mystery of Christ in you (Eph 3:3-5).
3. The mystery of the Church (Eph 5:32).
4. The mystery of Godliness (1 Tim 3:16).
5. The mystery of the Rapture (1 Cor 15:51-56).
6. The mystery of Lawlessness (2 Thess 2:7).

What is the division caused by these mysteries?

Israel's blindness – If we fail to see that God's dealings with Israel are not yet complete, Christians will seem to think that God has replaced Israel.

Christ in us – If we fail to see that it is Christ in us, who not only cleanses us, but imparts His righteousness to us, then we think that our salvation is somehow dependent upon our own behavior.

The Church – If we fail to understand the mystery of the Church, we fail to understand our role and our royal standing in God's economy as 'the Bride.'

Godliness – If we fail to understand the mystery of Godliness, then we fail to see how it is God's righteousness that demands perfection; also, God's love provided a way for man to attain that righteousness through Jesus Christ.

Rapture – If we fail to understand the mystery of the Rapture, we then assume the Second Coming, which misplaces our hope in God's plan for the church, or worse, denying the 'wrath that is to come.'

Lawlessness – If we fail to understand the mystery of lawlessness, we will fail to recognize the season of Christ's soon return.

Why does the Bible have some very clear passages and more that are so subject to interpretation?

The essentials are very clear... passages such as John 3:16, John 14:6, and Romans 3:23 that leave zero room for deviation.

- God's Word was designed with the believer in mind and it takes the Holy Spirit to reveal its truth to us (John 14:15-18, 15:26-27, 16:12-15).

Why couldn't the Bible have been written to have zero wiggle room for different interpretations?

Pete Garcia cites two reasons:

1. Differences promote discussion.
2. Differences keep us separated (by design).

If we all agreed on everything, discussions would dwindle.

- This also provides God a way to reward us differently based on how we approach a subject.

How do doctrinal differences emphasize what is really important?

These differences help us to unite on the fundamentals of our faith while recognizing the 'secondary' issues as those that have largely divided us.

- It also keeps the true church from not falling under the sway of any one denomination or sect.

How have we seen the problem when the church unites on non-essentials?

God knows man's heart, and from the days of the Tower of Babel going forward, that if mankind remained united in belief and purpose, it could be corrupted by Satan.

- Even when people unite under the pretenses of a good cause, that too would become corrupted by Satan just as he did with the monolithic Roman Catholic System.

How did the consolidation of beliefs in the Roman Catholic Church result in corruption?

As the old maxim goes, absolute power corrupts absolutely: Before long, corrupted clergy introduces paganism into the church, selling indulgences, leading suicidal and murderous crusades, and the bloodthirsty Inquisitions to purge those who expose your corruption.

- God wants us united on the fundamentals, but divided on everything else

What are the prophetic implications of religious unity?

What God has divided, let not man reunite. Yet that artificial "unification" is exactly what Satan has been working on since the days of Babel.

- Convincing people to make compromises for the sake of ecumenical unity and encouraging apostasy.
- During the Tribulation, the church's diversity of understanding is replaced by a universal religion imposed by the false prophet and directed toward the worship of the Antichrist.

What applications do we see from this discussion?

- Doctrinal differences over secondary, non-essentials are by design.
- The church is united over what is important, the essentials for salvation which must be emphasized.
- The church divides over the mysteries of God which encourages us to go deeper in getting to know Him.
- We will be judged over what we have done with God's revelation to be more like Christ.