

Not All Doctrines Are at the Same Level:

The phrase "Not all doctrines are at the same level" refers to the theological concept of "doctrinal triage," which categorizes Christian beliefs by their relative importance. This practice is used to help Christians discern which issues are central to the faith and which are matters of legitimate disagreement.

The idea is that while all of scripture is authoritative, not every topic carries the same weight. Properly discerning between levels of doctrine prevents Christians from compromising essential truths or needlessly dividing over less critical issues.

Most versions of doctrinal triage distinguish between at least three tiers of doctrine:

First-tier doctrines (Essentials)

These are core, non-negotiable beliefs of the Christian faith. To reject them is to abandon Christianity altogether.

- **The Trinity:** The belief that one God exists in three co-eternal persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
- **The deity of Christ:** The belief that Jesus is fully God and fully man.
- **The Gospel:** The message that salvation comes through grace alone, by faith alone, in Christ alone.
- **Christ's bodily resurrection:** A fundamental doctrine that validates Jesus's divinity and the promise of eternal life.
- **The authority of Scripture:** The foundational belief that the Bible is the inerrant and authoritative Word of God.

Second-tier doctrines (Convictions)

These are important beliefs that significantly shape a church's practice and form boundaries between denominations, but they

do not affect a person's salvation. Christians may disagree on these points while still considering one another brothers and sisters in the faith.

- **The mode of baptism:** Disagreements over whether to baptize by immersion, sprinkling, or pouring, and who should be baptized (infants or believers), are a primary reason for denominational divides.
- **Church governance:** Different views on the structure of church leadership, such as episcopal (bishops), presbyterian (elders), or congregational rule.
- **Women in ministry:** Different convictions on the roles of women in pastoral and leadership positions within the church.
- **The Lord's Supper:** Disagreements over the frequency and meaning of communion.

Third-tier doctrines (Opinions or "disputable matters")

These are less-clear biblical issues on which Christians can disagree and still maintain close fellowship within a local church. These are not grounds for division.

- **Specific end-times views (eschatology):** Different interpretations of the timing and nature of Christ's return, such as premillennialism, amillennialism, or postmillennialism.
- **Age of the earth:** Differences over literal vs. figurative interpretations of the Genesis creation account.
- **Spiritual gifts:** Whether certain miraculous gifts, like speaking in tongues, are still active today.

How distinctions are determined

The importance of a doctrine can be determined using several criteria:

- **Biblical prominence:** How clearly and frequently a doctrine is taught in Scripture.
- **Connection to the Gospel:** How closely the doctrine relates to the core message of salvation.
- **Historical consensus:** The degree to which the church has historically agreed on the issue.
- **Effect on church life:** The impact the doctrine has on a local church's practice and unity.