IS THERE ANY BIBLICAL WARRANT FOR
THE DOCTRINAL TRIAGE?

A THESIS
BY
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SUN VALLEY, CALIFORNIA
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Is There Any Biblical Warrant For The Doctrinal Triage?
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Master of Divinity

[Signature]

Adviser
ABSTRACT

Title: IS THERE ANY BIBLICAL WARRANT FOR THE DOCTRINAL TRIAGE? (DOES SCRIPTURE COMPARTMENTALIZE DOCTRINE INTO PRIMARY, SECONDARY AND TERTIARY LEVELS OF IMPORTANCE?)

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Date: December, 2016
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The following passages will be examined from the Word of God to evaluate if there is any biblical warrant for the doctrinal triage - Matthew 15:3, 6, 9; 22:34-40; 23:23-24; Acts 15:28; 1 Corinthians 3:9-15; 13:13; 15:3-4; Ephesians 4:1-16; and Jude 1:3.

Today, there are many leading voices in evangelicalism that postulate the doctrinal triage as a hermeneutical principle for Scripture. The “doctrinal triage” is the practice of prioritizing biblical doctrines according to their individual degree of importance, labeling them as of primary importance, secondary importance, or tertiary importance. However, is the “doctrinal triage” a self-attested hermeneutical principle from the Word of God or has man imposed the triage system upon the Word of God to allow for the reader to distinguish which biblical doctrines have more weight and importance than others?

Does the doctrinal triage compartmentalize the truth in a way that the Bible does not? What are the criteria for determining which doctrines are primary, secondary or tertiary? Is the doctrinal triage an emotional appeal to unity without explicit biblical support and therefore a pseudo-unity? Does the doctrinal triage allow for ecumenical unity or does it cultivate the unity that Christ commands his people to pursue? In other words, does the doctrinal triage promote doctrinal novelty and a pseudo-unity or sound doctrinal unity?

The purpose of the “doctrinal triage” in the endeavor of studying theology for the systematician, lay person, or those in pastoral ministry is to promote unity among denominational divides and theological differences. For example, core tenants of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus, like His cross work and bodily resurrection are triaged into the level of primary importance, whereas the theological controversy between cessationism and continuationism is considered a secondary matter of importance. Eschatology is often considered to be a tertiary matter of importance. Some have even suggested the doctrine of imputation a fifteenth tier doctrine of importance. However, in the doctrinal triage the ultimate criteria for triage is subjective to the reader of the Scripture, where the reader is the authority to distinguish the authorial intent of doctrinal importance making it subject to change and scientific consensus. This is the case because Scripture does not specify or catalogue doctrine as primary, secondary or tertiary in their levels of importance.
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<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BECNT</td>
<td>Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSBH</td>
<td>Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EBC</td>
<td>Expositor’s Bible Commentary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICBI</td>
<td>International Council on Biblical Inerrancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JETS</td>
<td><em>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MacNTC</td>
<td>MacArthur New Testament Commentary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NICNT</td>
<td>New International Commentary On the New Testament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TNTC</td>
<td>Tyndale New Testament Commentaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZECNT</td>
<td>Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
GLOSSARY

amalgamate. To blend and combine into an incorporated whole.

christocentric hermeneutic. An interpretational principle that seeks to show the significance of every text in the OT and NT is the work and Person of Christ.

divines. The titles used in the Reformation referring to those who held clerical offices.

hapax legomenon. (plural: hapax legomena) An item found only once in a body of literature.

inclusio. (envelope figure) A literary tactic that brackets a textual unit and typically marks that unit’s theme by means of repeated elements.

macroallocation. To plan the distribution of resources concerning public health policies at a large level.

microallocation. To select which individuals receive scarce or insufficient health care resources.

triage. To sort according to quality.
INTRODUCTION

DEFINITION OF DOCTRINAL TRIAGE

The library at The Master’s Seminary in Sun Valley, California allows access to more than 200,000 volumes. Among this vast array of works very few have been concentrated on an emerging topic in evangelicalism called the doctrinal triage (also known as theological triage – hereafter usually designated by “DT”), because, DT is a quite novel concept in evangelicalism. According to Mohler, President of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. In his article, Mohler defined the theological triage as a three-level system of doctrinal importance when he wrote:

Today’s Christian faces the daunting task of strategizing which Christian doctrines and theological issues are to be given highest priority in terms of our contemporary context... theological seriousness and maturity demand that we consider doctrinal issues in terms of their relative importance. First-level theological issues would include those doctrines most central and essential to the Christian faith. Included among these most crucial doctrines would be doctrines such as the Trinity, the full deity and humanity of Jesus Christ, justification by faith, and the authority of Scripture... The set of second-order doctrines is distinguished from the first-order set by the fact that believing Christians may disagree on the second-order issues, though this disagreement will create significant boundaries between believers. When Christians organize themselves into congregations and denominational forms, these boundaries become evident. Second-order issues would include the meaning and mode of baptism... Third-order issues are doctrines over which Christians may

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1 This writer will use the labels ‘doctrinal triage’ and ‘theological triage’ synonymously throughout this thesis (hereafter usually designated by “DT”).
disagree and remain in close fellowship, even within local congregations. I would put most of the debates over eschatology, for example, in this category.²

In other words, the theological triage is the practice of prioritizing biblical doctrines to their individual degree of importance, labeling them as of primary importance, secondary importance, or tertiary importance. Mohler’s thesis was that doctrines from the Word of God differ in their level of importance, and that these levels of importance dictate the levels at which fellowship is possible with others among the Christian consensus. Today, a little over a decade after his article, many have promoted DT as the solution in determining which issues two professing Christians can agree or disagree on and nevertheless be truly saved as primary issues as well as the ecumenical paradigm for cross-denominational relations to exist and conference together around a primary issue.

This thesis is interested in examining from the New Testament if there is any biblical warrant for the doctrinal triage. Accordingly, this writer will examine selected passages from the New Testament used by proponents of DT to argue for the validity of their system. The approach of this writer will be the self-affirmational rule from Scripture called the literal grammatical-historical approach to draw out from the Scripture the Author’s original intent and expound it. The literal grammatical-historical approach identifies “the laws of grammar and literary form, the facts of history, and the framework of context.”³

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³ John D. Grassmick, Principles and Practice of Greek Exegesis (Dallas: Dallas Theological Seminary, 1974), 11.
Has DT become a hermeneutical principle? Since the inception and reception of Mohler’s article “A Call for Theological Triage and Christian Maturity,” DT has gained serious momentum of popularity in evangelicalism. Be that as it may, the danger exists to postulate DT as a hermeneutical principle of the interpretational process for Scripture (e.g. the conception of the Christocentric Hermeneutic). However, is DT a self-attested hermeneutical principle from the Word of God or has man imposed the triage system upon the Word of God to allow for the reader to distinguish which biblical doctrines have more weight and importance than others?

In his manual for hermeneutics called The Hermeneutical Spiral, Grant R. Osborn set forth hermeneutical principles in determining which doctrines are essential to the core of biblical Christianity which he called ‘the cardinal doctrines’ and which doctrines are not clear in Scripture which he asserted as “never intended by God to serve as controlling beliefs in the church.” Osborn created a grid into which a doctrine is inserted for the purpose to determine if it is a cardinal doctrine, or a middle position called ‘denominational distinctives,’ or a non-cardinal/nonessential doctrine to which there can be tolerance and dialogue. He argued that a cardinal doctrine is a theological belief that is central to the Christian faith and clearly taught as such in Scripture (i.e. the return of Christ). A non-cardinal (or nonessential) doctrine is one that is not clear in Scripture or is not presented as a mandatory belief of the church (i.e. millennium or the tribulation positions). The middle ground position is a ‘denominational distinctive’ that can become

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5 Ibid.
a cardinal doctrine but should really be the object of tolerance and categorized as a non-cardinal doctrine. According to Osborne, one example of a denominational distinctive is the viability of women as pastors in the church. Osborne’s model is very similar to theological triage because it prioritizes the importance of doctrines relative to the politics of theological decision making in the church.

Mohler further developed his model of theological triage in his manual for preaching in a postmodern world called, *He is not Silent*, when he encouraged preachers to isolate what is most important in terms of theological gravity from which is less important. This is very similar to Osborne’s model. Mohler’s isolation of doctrines in terms of their importance were categorized as “first-order” doctrines that are fundamental and essential to the Christian faith; “second-order” doctrines that are essential to church life and order in the local church; and “third-order” doctrines that do not threaten the fellowship of a local church congregation or denomination. The transition of doctrines from the pages of Scripture to the application of these doctrines in the life of the church go through this first-stage evaluation. Therefore, the danger of DT is when it becomes a “principle” in interpreting and applying God’s Word.

Mohler argued that doctrines and theological issues are to be given highest priority in terms of our contemporary context. What is more, Mohler argued that theological seriousness and maturity demand that we consider doctrinal issues in terms of their relative importance. On the other hand, the Chicago Statement on Biblical

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6 Ibid., 402.


8 Ibid., 109-10.
Hermeneutics had a completely different take concerning the influence of the contemporary context on the relative importance of doctrine when the authors wrote, “WE DENY that the distinctions between the universal and particular mandates of Scripture can be determined by cultural and situational factors. We further deny that universal mandates may ever be treated as culturally or situationally relative.”

Hermeneutics is the discipline that deals with the principles of biblical interpretation. The goal of hermeneutics should be to determine the objective meaning from the Scripture. The only way to accomplish this is through the exegesis of the Scripture by using the literal grammatical-historical hermeneutic. The literal grammatical-historical hermeneutic is Scriptures’ self-attested rule for interpreting Scripture. For example, the Scripture upholds literal interpretation as its own self-attested principle because the Scripture confirms Authorial intent when it states, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16). What is more, the monolithic literal nature of biblical interpretation is affirmed in 2 Peter 1:20 when the Apostle Peter wrote, “But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation.” These verses referred to an entire corpus (quantity of content) and taught the literal principle of interpretation.

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11 Grassmick correctly defined the grammatical-historical-contextual method of interpretation when he wrote, “This approach seeks the meaning of a segment of Scripture as required by the laws of grammar and literary form, the facts of history, and the framework of context. It is the best approach because these features are the features the interpreter must share with the author in order to determine his meaning. Grassmick, Principles and Practice of Greek Exegesis, 11.
Scripture, namely the Authorial intent of God. Authorial intent is not subject to the reader in determining the Authorial intent in any way other than what the Author purposed to communicate. Also, utilizing the original languages that were used to compose the Scripture are an inseparable principle in drawing out the Author’s intended meaning. Even the NT writers referenced the grammatical nuances of word forms to correctly interpret the Scripture (e.g. Gal 3:16 “Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, ‘And to seeds,’ as referring to many, but rather to one, ‘And to your seed,’ that is, Christ;” see also Matt 5:18). Finally, Scripture upholds the historical principle of interpretation because the Word of God disclosed events that occurred in real history. To this effect, the Word of God presents the real facts of history with real geography and cultures and has interpreted these real events in history (cf. Rom 4; Heb 11). \[13\]


\[\text{\textsuperscript{13}}\] Grassmick explained the basic guideline of the historical principle from the literal grammatical-historical hermeneutic when he wrote, “The principle of grammatical interpretation is observing the known circumstances of history, geography, and culture.” Ibid., 12.
CHAPTER ONE

THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF TRIAGE

Origin in Secularism

The word “triage” is derived from the French word “tier,” which means to sort. It was originally used to describe the sorting of agricultural products, but today ‘triage’ is used almost exclusively in specific health care contexts. One dictionary defined triage as “the action of assorting according to quality . . . . The assignment of degrees of urgency to wounds or illnesses in order to decide the order or suitability of treatment.”

The history of triage in practice is a generally novel concept because the first implemented use in secular culture dates back only as early as the nineteenth century during the years of the French Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte (b. August 15, 1769 - d. May 5, 1821). The inception of triage arose from military medicine where the system was designed to distribute health care systematically among wounded and sick soldiers. Before this there is no documentation of triage care provided to injured soldiers in combat. The practice of triage began when Dominique Jean Larrey (b. July 8, 1766- d.

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16 Ibid, 277.
July 25, 1842), a French chief-surgeon in Napoleon’s military, invented the system of treating wounded soldiers in battle based on the degree of gravity concerning their injuries. In their article, “Triage in Medicine, Part I: Concept, History, and Types” Kenneth Iserson, MD, and John C. Moskop, PhD, described how Napoleon’s chief-surgeon invented triage:

Larrey recognized a need to evaluate and categorize wounded soldiers promptly during a battle. His system was to treat and evacuate those requiring the most urgent medical attention, rather than waiting hours or days for the battle to end before treating patients, as had been done in previous wars. Acting on this recognition, Larrey performed hundreds of amputations on the battlefield while the battle was still raging; he also designed light carriages, which he called ‘flying ambulances,’ to rapidly transport the wounded. In his memoirs on the Russian campaign (1812), Larrey articulated a clear rule for sorting patients for treatment: ‘Those who are dangerously wounded should receive the first attention, without regard to rank or distinction. They who are injured in a less degree may wait until their brethren in arms, who are badly mutilated, have been operated on and dressed, otherwise the latter would not survive many hours; rarely, until the succeeding day.’

After the Napoleonic wars, the triage was used somewhat in the Civil War in the United States, but it was not heavily implemented again in military emergency medicine until World War I & II. To summarize the origins of the history of the practice of triage, it began in military medical procedures only as early as the Napoleonic Wars and did not enter into secular emergency medicine or hospital emergency rooms until after World War II in the 1950’s.  

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17 Ibid.  
18 Ibid.  
19 Ibid.
There is a sense of pragmatism and utilitarianism with triage in emergency medicine. For instance, Iserson and Moskop described the purpose of triage in the emergency medicine context when they wrote:

When the needs or demands for medical treatment significantly outstrip the available resources, decisions must be made about how to distribute these resources, recognizing that not all needs will be satisfied immediately and some may not be satisfied at all. Decisions about distributing scarce health care resources can arise at all levels, from societal choices within a national health care system (macroallocation) to individuals allocating immediate emergency treatment and transport among the multiple severely injured survivors of a motor vehicle crash or industrial accident (microallocation). Several terms, including “triage,” “rationing,” and “allocation,” are used to refer to the distribution of scarce resources in different health care contexts. “Triage,” the term most commonly used to mean the sorting of patients for treatment priority in emergency departments (EDs) and in multicasualty incidents, disasters, and battlefield settings. Most discussions about triage address practical questions, such as when the process should occur and which techniques are most effective. Commentators rarely consider the essential characteristics of triage, the historical evolution of the practice, or the ethical justification for selecting those who will receive priority treatment—or any treatment—at a large group of acutely ill and injured patients.20

Therefore, the purpose of triage in emergency medical pragmatism is sorting and prioritizing patients to treat them based on the allocation of resources. The microallocation and macroallocation is contingent on the resources that are available. Specifically, it is dependent on which geographical area treatment is provided because resources can be scarce. But the Christian has the entire corpus of God’s Word. Therefore, the Christian does not have a shortage of doctrinal resources for the purpose of practicing microallocation and macroallocation. Triage has a place in emergency medical pragmatism. But does DT have a place in the church? Although emergency medical

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20 Ibid., 275.
departments rely on tax payer’s money to dispense emergency care – there is no lack of resources with God. God is infinite and He has unlimited resources.

What is more, the triage as a concept concerning ethical thought did not invade the overall western culture and implement itself into mainstream secular philosophies of education until the 1970’s. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the first time the word triage was used generally in mainstream western culture outside of the military in the media was on November 11, 1974 in Time. In another media outlet, namely, the Guardian on October 18, 1979 triage showed up in educational pragmatism in the following quote, “there is [sc. In New York] an unofficial ‘triage’ system in which teachers and school administrators concentrate their limited resources on helping those students who seem to be capable of succeeding.”

In conclusion, the inception of triage in western culture began in the nineteenth century and transitioned from military medical pragmatism to secular medical pragmatism as early as the middle of the twentieth century. The transition from secular medical pragmatism to educational pragmatism began as early as the last quarter of the twentieth century. All in all, with all things considered, triage is a relatively recent phenomena in the history of western pragmatism and philosophical thought.

**Origin in Evangelicalism**

In his article “A Call for Theological Triage and Christian Maturity,” written on May 20, 2004 Mohler explained how he came up with the idea for theological triage. He

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21 “In the West, there is increasing talk of triage, a commonsense if callous concept that teaches that when resources are scarce, they must be used where they will do most good.” John A. Simpson, *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd. ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 496.

22 Ibid.
explained in his article that he borrowed the concept of triage from a trip to a local hospital emergency room. He invoked the memory this way when he wrote,

A trip to the local hospital Emergency Room some years ago alerted me to an intellectual tool that is most helpful in fulfilling our theological responsibility. In recent years, emergency medical personnel have practiced a discipline known as triage—a process that allows trained personnel to make a quick evaluation of relative medical urgency. Given the chaos of an Emergency Room reception area, someone must be armed with the medical expertise to make an immediate determination of medical priority. Which patients should be rushed into surgery? Which patients can wait for a less urgent examination? Medical personnel cannot flinch from asking these questions, and from taking responsibility to give the patients with the most critical needs top priority in terms of treatment. Thus, the triage officer in the medical context is the front-line agent for deciding which patients need the most urgent treatment. Without such a process, the scraped knee would receive the same urgency of consideration as a gunshot wound to the chest. The same discipline that brings order to the hectic arena of the Emergency Room can also offer great assistance to Christians defending truth in the present age.23

Since the inception of Mohler’s highly acclaimed article he has promoted DT in many different speaking venues and writing projects. One of his latest books, called *The Disappearance of God: Dangerous Beliefs in the New Spiritual Openness*, he dedicated the entire first chapter to his concept of theological triage.24 The first chapter of this book is almost a verbatim quotation from his seminal article on the topic. Nevertheless, Dr. Mohler unequivocally categorized the relative importance of particular doctrines into three levels—namely, (1) First-level theological issues (i.e. the Trinity, the full deity and humanity of Jesus Christ, justification by faith, and the authority of Scripture); (2) Second-level theological issues (i.e. the meaning and mode of baptism; fellowship within

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23 Mohler, “A Call for Theological Triage and Christian Maturity.”

the same congregation and denomination); (3) Third-level theological issues (i.e. Disagreements on Eschatology; close fellowship with the same congregation). The following chart below is a summary of Mohler’s three-tier structure:

**Chart 1: Summary of Albert Mohler’s Three-Tier Structure of Doctrine**

First-level (1st Tier)
Trinity; Christology; Soteriology; Bibliology

Second-Order (2nd Tier)
Ordinances; Ecclesiology

Third Order (3rd Tier)
Eschatology

Mohler gave the identical example as Osborne above that the issue concerning women serving as pastors is a second-order doctrine when he wrote,

> In recent years, the issue of women serving as pastors has emerged as another second-order issue. . . . Second-order issues resist easy settlement by those who would prefer an either/or approach. Many of the most heated disagreements among serious believers take place at the second-order level, for these issues frame our understanding of the church and its ordering by the Word of God.25

Mohler’s theological triage has gained commendation in the blogosphere and popular online video teaching programs. For instance, one blog writer identified Mohler’s

25 Ibid., 5.
original article on DT as seminal and praised the work as the solution to determine not only the relative importance of particular doctrines in the church but also the solution for triaging the distinctions between what he categorized as bad doctrine vs. heresy. On October 20, 2016, a popular and influential online teaching program dedicated an entire hour when a guest speaker and pastor argued that Mohler’s Theological Triage is the solution for maintaining the unity of the faith across the dividing line.

What is more, not only has DT made an impression on blogosphere and popular online video teaching programs, it has also influenced academic institutions beyond Mohler’s Alma Mater. For instance, a Master of Divinity thesis was written in 2007 by David Gundersen which was strongly influenced by Mohler’s original article. Consequently, Gundersen entitled his thesis “Biblical Principles for Determining the Relative Importance of Particular Doctrines.” Accordingly, Gundersen’s thesis purposed to develop biblical principles to examine a doctrine in order to distinguish its approximate scriptural weight. Nevertheless, the author confessed that Scripture does not teach DT as a biblical principle and demonstrated his frustration to create DT as such when he wrote, “Scripture does not provide a diagram or a list of all primary, secondary, and tertiary doctrines. . . It is impossible to create a flawless machine that can mass-


29 Ibid., iii.
produce doctrinal importance levels.” Still the author contended for DT as a precedent and argued that Scripture assigns differing levels of importance to different doctrines. For example, he argued that 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 taught “some sort of doctrinal hierarchy – things of most importance, things of much importance, and things of lesser importance.”

In summation, since the inception of Mohler’s highly acclaimed article on May 20, 2004 in which he introduced theological triage, DT has been received and promoted in a number of outlets and arenas in evangelicalism. Moreover, the influence of DT is undoubtedly increasing today as its emphasis is prioritized to be the solution to provide ecumenical relations among denominational divides who profess unanimity on “first-tier” doctrines – namely, doctrines referred to as “the essentials.”

**Essentials and Non-Essentials**

The debate on whether or not Doctrines from the Word of God can be categorized as essential or non-essential has existed throughout history. To this effect, a famous quote has been attributed to Augustine of Hippo (c. 354-480 AD) – namely, “in essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity.” However, there is no indication that this popular quote was ever said or written by Augustine. In fact, the origin of the quote is correctly attributed to a German Lutheran theologian named Rupertus Meldenius (c. 1582-1651). Historian Schaff chronicled the origin of the sentence when he wrote:

>This famous motto . . . is often falsely attributed to St. Augustine (whose creed would not allow it, though his heart might have approved of it), but is of much later origin. It appears for the first time in Germany, A.D. 1627

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30 Ibid.

31 Ibid., 25.
and 1628, among peaceful divines of the Lutheran and German Reformed
churches, and found a hearty welcome among moderate divines in
England. The authorship has recently been traced to Rupertus Meldenius .
. . author of a remarkable tract in which the sentence first occurs . . . . It
probably occurred in 1627 at Francfort-on-the-order . . the seat of
theological moderation. 32

The following chart is a summary of Meldenius’ distinctions between essential
doctrines and non-essential doctrines. 33

**Chart 2: Meldenius’ Distinction between Essential and Non-Essential Dogma**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Essentials (<em>necessaria</em>): Necessary Dogma</th>
<th>Non-Essentials (<em>non-necessaria</em>): Not Necessary Dogma</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) Articles of faith necessary to salvation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Articles derived from clear testimonies of the Bible</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Articles decided by the whole church in a synod or symbol</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Articles held by all orthodox divines as necessary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) Not contained in the Bible</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Not belonging to the common inheritance of the faith</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Not unanimously taught by theologians</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Left doubtful by grave divines</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) Not tending to piety, charity, and edification</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Even in Meldenius’ famous quote, the chart above shows that his ‘non-essentials’
were not biblical doctrines but matters of practice. However, today the three prepositional
phrases, “in essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity” has become
one of the most popular ‘sayings’ in evangelicalism to prioritize biblical doctrines. For
instance, the mantra has been embraced as the official motto of the Evangelical
Presbyterian Church denomination. 34 One influential author co-authored and organized

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33 Ibid., 651.

an entire book by using the sentence as a three-part outline – for instance, chapters 1-17 were organized under the heading “Part One: Essentials in Unity”, chapters 18-29 were organized under the heading “Part Two: In Non-Essential Liberty”, and the conclusion of the volume – that is, chapters 30-31 were organized under the heading “Part-Three: In All Things, Charity.”

However, there have been some who have adamantly spoken out against systems designed to argue that there are distinctions of essential and non-essential doctrines within God’s Word. For instance, before Meldenius’ systemization of the two-tier structure, some form of argumentation for essentials versus non-essentials existed because the magisterial reformer Martin Luther (1483-1546) expressed a colorful distaste of the two-tiered structure when he wrote:

> Just as in the days of the Apostles, so at this day we are forced to hear from certain denominations that we (by our obstinacy to adhere to the truth) do offend against love and unity in the churches, because we reject their doctrine. It would be better (they say) that we should let it pass, especially since the doctrine in dispute is what they call ‘non-essential.’ And, therefore, (they say) to stir up so great a discord and contention in the church over ‘one or two’ doctrines (and those not the most important ones) is ‘unfruitful’ and ‘unnecessary’. To this I reply: Cursed be that love and unity which cannot be preserved except at the peril of the word of God.

Likewise, Charles H. Spurgeon conveyed disapproval of the structure when he wrote:

> There is another inconvenience to which you will most surely be exposed, namely, *that you will be charged falsely*. Some will say, “You make too much of non-essentials.” That is a thing I frequently hear—*non-essentials!*

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36 The criteria for Meldenius’ second tier dogmas were those dogmas in the church not found in the Bible – see chart two above.

37 Martin Luther and Ewald M. Plass, *What Luther Says: A Practical In-Home Anthology for the Active Christian* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 2006), 1019.
There are certain things in Scripture they tell us that are non-essentials, and therefore they are not to be taken any notice of . . . And if I found that in Holy Scripture there were doctrines even of less value than the great points of our Christian religion, I should still think it would be my duty to bow my judgment, and to turn any intellect to the reception of God’s truth just as God sent it forth. That idea about non-essentials is wicked and rebellious. Cast it from you; go outside the camp. Be particular in every point. To the tiniest jot and tittle seek to obey your Master’s will, and seek his grace so that you may walk in the way of his commandments with a perfect heart.  

There is biblical support that all doctrines are essential. For example, 2 Timothy 3:16 reads, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.” Here the Apostle Paul prioritized “All Scripture.” He did not give a hierarchy of doctrines in a sequential order but rather appealed to an entire corpus (quantity of content), namely the Special Revelation of God - the Word of God - breathed out by God. In the OT, God commanded Joshua to observe all the given revelation that was available at that time (cf. Josh 1:8). Also, when Jesus commissioned the apostles in Matthew 28 He commanded them to make disciples of all nations and teach them to observe all that He had commanded them (vv. 19-20). As a final point, when Jude called for believers to contend earnestly for the apostolic faith considering the threat of false teaching and danger of apostasy he identified “the faith” as that “which was once for all handed down to the saints” (cf. Jude 3).  

In summary, the debate on the validity of doctrines from the Word of God to be categorized as essential or non-essential has been a point of contention certainly as early as the Reformation. For the purpose of this thesis, this author made mention of the

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39 Once for all implied an entire corpus of apostolic doctrine – that is, all of it being essential.
debate concerning essentials and non-essentials not to directly address it at great length (for that would take an entire volume in and of itself), but to show that DT has evolved from the essential/non-essential controversy – that is, DT is the evolution from a two-tiered structure into a three-tiered structure. To this effect, the harmony between the two systems is undoubtedly interdenominational relations.

**Purpose of Doctrinal Triage**

The Purpose of DT is undeniably ecumenical. Moreover, the purpose of DT in the endeavor of studying theology for the systematician, lay person, or those in pastoral ministry is to promote unity among denominational divides and theological differences. It is also constructed in order to bring differing theological views together to combat assaults against the church (e.g. conferences). For example, core tenants of the gospel of the Lord Jesus, like His cross work and bodily resurrection are triaged into the level of primary importance, whereas the theological controversy concerning the doctrine of pneumatology between cessationism and continuationism is considered a secondary matter of importance but divisive and therefore left undebated. Ecclesiastical matters like gender roles in the leadership of the church are ranked secondary matters. Eschatology is often considered to be a tertiary matter of importance and the most divisive among proponents of DT. However, does Scripture specify or catalogue doctrines as primary, secondary or tertiary in their levels of importance? Or is the ultimate criteria for DT subjective to the reader of the Scripture, where the reader is the authority to distinguish the authorial intent of doctrinal levels of importance that is subject to change by scientific consensus. Illustratively, if one catalogs a particular doctrine from the Word of God as primary and another catalogs the same doctrine as second tier, logic declares that one
interpretation could be right and the other interpretation wrong, both interpretations could be wrong, but both interpretations could not both be right. ⁴⁰

If it can be determined from the testimony of Scripture that there is no biblical warrant for DT, then DT is an extra-biblical standard that is applied to Scripture with an ecumenical purpose to have a shared experience of fellowship on only primary doctrines among interdenominational divides. All other doctrines from the Word of God that are not defined as primary become as of a secondary or tertiary matter of importance and are dismissed or ignored because they disrupt the unity of interdenominational relations. The next chapter of this thesis will examine from the Scripture if there is indeed any biblical warrant for DT.

⁴⁰ Concerning the self-attested monolithic nature of biblical interpretation, 2 Peter 1:20 propositionally argued for one interpretation of Scripture when Peter wrote, “But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation.” The Apostle Peter referred to an entire corpus (quantity of content) and taught the objectivity of Scripture which came from God and is not subject to the reader determining the authorial intent in any way other than what the Author purposed to communicate.
CHAPTER TWO

EXPOSITION FROM THE SCRIPTURE: IS THERE ANY BIBLICAL WARRANT FOR THE DOCTRINAL TRIAGE?

Now that a case has been made that DT’s inception was heavily influenced by military and medical pragmatism, is there a case for DT from Scripture? In other words, does the Word of God teach that doctrine can be assorted according to the quality of their degree of importance in triage – namely doctrines of first-level importance, second-level importance and third-level importance? DT proponents assert that Scripture teaches some doctrines are more important than others. They appeal to a number of biblical texts – mainly, Matthew 22:34-40; 23:23-24; Acts 15:28; 1 Corinthians 3:9-15; 13:13; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4; Ephesians 4:1-16; Jude 1:3. The purpose of this chapter is to examine these texts from the Word of God to evaluate if there is any biblical warrant for the doctrinal triage.

Matthean Texts

According to the standard of the Apostle Matthew, the Pharisees were not orthodox, that is they were not healthy or good (sound) in doctrine. On the other hand the Pharisees were heterodox, that is, pertaining to another or different doctrinal standard.

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41 From the Greek word ἐτερός which means “different, another” and διδασκαλία which means “doctrine, teaching” (cf. 1 Tim 1:3 e.g. ἐτεροδιδασκαλεῖν; 6:3 e.g. ἐτεροδιδασκαλεῖ).
which is contrasted with healthy/good doctrine from the Word of God. This was evident from Matthew’s account of Jesus’ rebuke of the Pharisees in 15:3, 6b, 9 when Jesus said, “Why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? . . . And by this you invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition. . . . But in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.” In the context, the Pharisees queried Jesus’ teaching and challenged Him for not stopping His disciples from breaking the traditions of the elders (cf. 15:1-2). The fact that some Pharisees and Scribes came to Jesus “from Jerusalem” (cf. v1) indicated that they were an official deputation from the headquarters of the religious epicenter in the land (cf. 3:5, 7).  

In other words, the Pharisees were company men – something corporate. The system of the Pharisees’ oral tradition of how to understand the OT Law was a manmade religious system which would later formulate their manual called the Talmud, a combination of the Mishnah (an early oral interpretation of the Old Testament Scriptures that was rigorously redacted [i.e. edited] ca. 200 A.D.) and Gemara (a rabbinic commentary on the Mishnah which was also rigorously redacted [edited] ca. 500 A.D.).

Jesus did not defend His teaching but instead directly condemned the Pharisees’ teaching. Jesus gave an example of how the Pharisees established and performed their error, the error which the sect undoubtedly later systematized as the Mishnah regulations concerning ceremonial washings – namely, Yadayim (cf. 15:3-6). James Montgomery Boice had some helpful remarks concerning Jesus’ rebuke of the Pharisees and their corruption:

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But it was not as if Jesus were merely saying, ‘If I am guilty, then you are guilty too.’ Rather, he shifted the issue from the matter of tradition to the revealed law of God. The Pharisees accused him of breaking the tradition of the elders, but he (rebuked) them (for) breaking God’s commands because of their traditions.\(^\text{43}\)

Then Jesus appealed to Isaiah 29:13 when He said, “But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men” (15:9). The Pharisees’ manmade religious worship was vain. Therefore, the Pharisees were not orthodox. Clearly without any ambiguity Matthew showed in chapter 15 how the Pharisees prioritized their manmade tradition above God’s Word (e.g. the commandment of God, cf. 15:3). Moreover, Matthew argued that their doctrines and teachings were man made (cf. 15:9). The Pharisees placed their tradition over Scripture. Spurgeon wisely pointed out the danger of appealing to human authority as the superlative standard of religious doctrine:

> Religion based on human authority is worthless; we must worship the true God in the way of his own appointing, or we do not worship him at all. Doctrines and ordinances are only to be accepted when the divine Word supports them, and they are to be accepted for that reason only. The most punctilious form of devotion is vain worship, if it is regulated by man’s ordinance apart from the Lord’s own command.\(^\text{44}\)

The conflict from the start between Jesus and the Pharisees was the arrogance of the Pharisees’ manmade system that lowered the standard of God’s Word as of lesser importance and raised their “teaching as doctrines the precepts of men” as of greater importance. They were prioritizing a tradition from men over a commandment from God. The implications were disastrous because they placed a higher regard on the authority of

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\(^\text{44}\) Spurgeon, *Matthew the Gospel of the Kingdom*, 121.
the elders than the authority of God. Jesus rebuked them because they “invalidated” or “nullified” the Word of God for the sake of their tradition (cf. 15:6). 45

Matthew 22:34-40 – “Which is the great commandment in the Law?”

In the immediate context of Matthew 22:34-40 (i.e. “increasing controversy with the leaders in the temple 21:23-22:46”) 46 an additional divergence occurred between Jesus and the Pharisees. At this conflicting encounter one of them “a lawyer” put Jesus to the test when he asked Jesus, “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” (22:36). 47 Here one cannot argue from the text that there are primary, secondary, and tertiary levels of doctrinal importance for the following reasons. First, in the context the lawyer arrogantly tempted 48 Jesus for the purpose to entrap Him. Historically, rabbis considered all the commandments to be equal but still distinguished “light” from “heavy” though they contradicted themselves and would also argue which commandments were of secondary importance and which commandments were of primary importance. In fact, after this encounter with Jesus, the Pharisees structured a hierarchical tenet which prioritized the commandments from the Law when they distinguished the 613

45 “Nullify’ (ἀκυρώω) has a strong juridical force and here means to legally invalidate or revoke the very Word of God,” Grant R. Osborne, Matthew, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010) 587.


47 Osborn holds (μεγάλη) from Matt 22:36 to be superlative, “an example of the simple for the superlative” (superlative meaning of the highest quality or degree). “The rabbis considered all the commandments to be equal but still distinguished ‘light’ from ‘heavy.’” The goal of the lawyer was to tempt Jesus to see if he could catch Jesus in a contradiction to disqualify Him, because the Jewish leaders witnessed Jesus correct the Sadducees (cf. 22:23-35). Osborne, Matthew, 822.

48 It is better to translate this “tempting” instead of “testing” in Matthew 22:35 because the word Matthew used was πειράζω (peirazō) which was used in Matthew 4:1 – “Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil” (cf. Matt 4:3; 16:1; 19:3; 22:18; 22:35). In James 1:13 the same word is used when James wrote, “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God.’ For God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.”
commandments into two categories – that is, 248 of them positive and the remaining 365 of them negative.\(^49\) In the Babylonian Talmud there was a three-tier structure of importance in study – namely, the third importance was studying OT Scripture, the second importance was studying the *Mishnah*, and the highest importance was studying the *Gemara*.\(^50\) Some even debated that the commandments of the rabbis were more important than the commandments of the Law because the commandments of the Law contained little and great but all the commandments of the rabbis were all great.\(^51\) Today, one of the leading Rabbinic scholars on the Talmud has argued that the Talmud was more prominent than the Bible for Judaism when he wrote, “The Talmud was more influential than the Bible in forming the Jewish nature, religion, and way of life. The Talmud is the backbone of Judaism. Without it… you don’t have Judaism!”\(^52\)

The lawyer wanted to know what position Jesus held in the first-century debate – not because the lawyer wanted to understand the meaning of Torah but because he wanted to trap Jesus in a contradiction (cf. 22:15, 34). The Pharisees put their Pharisaic legal specialist into the ring to know how Jesus would answer for the purpose to control

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\(^{49}\) Rabbi Simlai, Talmud Makkot 23b. 3rd century A.D.

\(^{50}\) “Our rabbis have taught on Tannaite authority: Those who are occupied with study of Scripture – it is a meritorious quality that is not all that meritorious. . . with the Mishnah – it is a meritorious quality on account of which reward is gained. . . with the Gemara – you have no greater meritorious action than that.” The immediate next line on the same page contradicted the statements before it and argued that the Mishnah should be studied more avidly than the study of Gemara. Jacob Neusner, *Tractate Baba Mesi’a*, The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary, Vol. 14 Folios 21A-33B 2:11 II.6. A-E (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2005), 158–9.


Him and exercise authority over Him not because they wanted to learn from Him, worship Him or submit to Him.

The second reason one cannot argue from Matthew 22:34-40 that there are primary, secondary, and tertiary levels of doctrinal importance is because Jesus did not respond with a systematic formula for prioritizing doctrines into primary, secondary and tertiary levels of importance. Instead, Jesus referenced two commandments. First, He quoted from Deuteronomy 6:5, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Matt 22:37)– which He said is the great and first commandment (cf. Matt 22:38). Next, He said the second is like it and He quoted from Leviticus 19:18 – “you shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt 22:39). Then, He said, “On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets” (22:40). The word Matthew used for “depend” is the Greek word κρέμαται and had the sense of hanging – like a door hangs on its hinges. Therefore, the whole OT hangs on these two commandments.⁵³ The text does not indicate that the lawyer replied afterwards to Jesus. Instead, at the end of this encounter, after Jesus asked the Pharisees (plural) a question (cf. 22:45), Matthew recorded the following – “No one was able to answer Him a word, nor did anyone dare from that day on to ask Him another question” (22:46).

The lawyer’s initial question was: “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” Jesus did not only give him one commandment because He said concerning the first part of his response: “this is the great and foremost commandment,” and He continued to say “the second is like it,”⁵⁴ and He continued to say “on these two

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⁵⁴ The Greek word ὅμοιος (like) from Matthew 22:39 can mean similar (cf. Rev 4:3) but here in Matthew 22:39 it has the sense to mean equal in rank; equal in authority (see Gal 5:14; Jas 2:8-11).
commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.” If He would have stopped after labeling the first one as the great and foremost then the lawyer would have reason to challenge Him on not maintaining the equality of the Law. However, in Jesus’ answer there was absolutely no contradiction. But Jesus said the second is like it and on the two commandments hang the whole Law and the Prophets. Not just one or the other but both together – therefore the lawyer was owned.

The greatest commandment is twofold with all the commandments hanging on them. The Law is not tiered into three categories. Instead, all the other commandments are inseparably constrained to the twofold commandment. These two commandments are the summary of the Torah. They fulfill the Torah. They are the foundation of the Torah. Even the commandment to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind means that one is to love the LORD God completely with all of their being – namely, every part that is comprised to make up the whole of a person. But nowhere from the text is there a formula from Jesus for primary, secondary, and tertiary levels of doctrinal importance. In fact, the text is an argument against DT, because Jesus said, “. . . the whole Law and the Prophets” (22:40).


One must consider all viable contexts in Matthew concerning the conflict over authority between the Pharisees versus Jesus that contribute to Matthew 23:23-24. Concerning the Law versus human tradition, this writer specifically concentrated on how Matthew 15:1-9 and 22:34-40 are inseparably constrained to 23:23-24. In order to understand Matthew 23:23-24, one must understand the immediate context to which these two verses belong. For instance, as Jesus approached Jerusalem before his subsequent
crucifixion, resurrection, and commission (26:3- 28:20), opposition from the Pharisees toward Jesus came to an apex in Judea (19:3-26:2).

In Matthew 23 as a whole Jesus exposed the hypocrisy of the scribes and the Pharisees and their love of being noticed by men to receive praise from men (vv.1-12). Then Jesus launched into woes that condemned the Pharisees. The first woe exposed the scribes and the Pharisees as hypocrites because they claimed that they were the way to enter the kingdom of heaven but instead they “. . . shut off the kingdom of heaven from people; for you do not enter yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in” (v. 13). What is more, they conducted the ministry of pretense and took advantage of the helpless widows (vv. 13-14). The next woe was that they made their disciples worse than themselves (v. 15). The following woe was that they made ignorant rash oaths (vv. 15-22). Then Jesus gave them another woe because they trivialized and established a false hierarchical ethic which prioritized the commandments of God into what they judged was weighty vs what was light (vv. 23-24). Alongside that, two more woes were given to condemn the Pharisees for their hypocrisy. For instance, they looked pious on the outside but were full of robbery and self-indulgence. What is more, they marked themselves as holy by an external manmade holiness on the outside to appear righteous outwardly, but on the inside they were without God and dead in their sin (vv. 25-26). The final woe was that they rejected the prophets and God’s prophecy and the ultimate Prophet (vv. 29-36).

In Matthew 23:23-24, concerning one of the woes, Jesus condemned the scribes and the Pharisees for misinterpreting God’s Law in such a way that they lived as if tithing kitchen herbs was more important than justice, mercy and faithfulness (cf. Micah 6:8).
Therefore, it was the Pharisees who created the system that prioritized the Law into essentials and peripherals and they considered their human tithing regulations and tradition essential and the divine ordinances from God as peripheral. That was the issue and the reason Jesus rebuked them. It was the rabbinic tradition and system to distinguish between more important and less important matters of the Law that Jesus was criticizing.55 The requirements in the OT for tithing are found in Deut 12:15-19; 14:23; 14:22-29; Lev 27:30-33; Num 18:21-29. If the Pharisees wanted to tithe all of their spices that they use to flavor food, then congratulations to them, but they needed to practice justice, mercy and faith (cf. Lk 11:42). They pursued God by works not by faith. Concerning the requirements for tithing in the OT “mint, dill and cummin” went beyond the requirements of the OT Law which really referenced “the seed of the land”, “grain” and “the fruit of the trees.” Tithing garden herbs for flavoring food was furthering the call of duty. The Pharisees prided themselves for going above and beyond by a scrupulous tithe of even cumin, dill and mint. As a result, the Pharisees thought that they were more pious than the rest and prided their performance before God.

Of course, Jesus did not condemn tithing in and of itself (e.g. v. 23 “but these are things you should have done without neglecting the others” cf. Lk 11:42).56 Rather He condemned the Pharisees because they neglected the weightier provisions of the Law.


56 From Matthew 23:23, commentator Lenski pointed out the use of the effective aorist in Greek when he wrote: “Jesus safeguards against perversions when he adds: ‘These it was necessary to do (ποιῆσαι, effective: do completely) and those not to dismiss (ἀφεῖναι, also the effective aorist)’ . . . when ἔδει is retained, this is neither like the present nor the ordinary imperfect but denotes past necessity, merely that, although in fact the necessity may still continue to exist.” Richard Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961), 909.
The word used for weightier was βαρύτερα from βαρύς which means heavy, weighty, and burdensome. βαρύς was used no less than six times in the NT. It was used mockingly by Paul’s opponents to describe the authority of his epistles in contrast to his weak appearance (cf. 2 Cor 10:10). Also, βαρύς was used by the Apostle John when he wrote that Jesus’ commandments are not burdensome (i.e. βαρεῖα: cf. 1 John 5:3). MacArthur explained Jesus’ use of weightier when he wrote,

> Jesus borrowed the word weightier from the rabbinical tradition, which had divided the law into light and heavy categories. In their inverted priorities the scribes and Pharisees had reduced such matters as justice and mercy and faithfulness to the light category, and elevated the tithing of garden herbs to the weightier category... The Scribes and Pharisees... walked by sight rather than faith, trusting in their own works rather than God’s grace. Jesus did not denounce tithing of herbs, which would have been perfectly acceptable if done in sincerity and faith. And because tithing was at that time still a valid requirement under the Old Covenant, He certainly did not reprove tithing in general.\(^{57}\)

To argue that Matthew 23:23-24 taught that there are some matters of the Law that are more important than others – that there is proportionality in the law, and to induce from that argument that the same is therefore true in matters of doctrine is a false comparison. Jesus did not compare tiers of doctrine. Instead Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for their misapplication of the Law and an overemphasis on their man-centered extrabiblical rabbinical tradition – namely, misapplying the Torah for their oral tradition. The Pharisees did not uphold sound doctrine. Jesus’ point was that they were hypocrites and could not uphold any portion of the Law. The context is the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. If the Pharisees were sound then Jesus was not because He would have been condemning sound men whose only flaw was not being able to distinguish between primary,

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secondary, and tertiary levels of doctrinal importance. The fact that Jesus condemned them demonstrated that He did so from an objective unified corpus of sound doctrine.

In conclusion, concerning Matthew 15:1-9; 22:34-40; and 23:23-24 the doctrinal triage is a foreign idea that must be imported into the text. All indications of the doctrinal triage which are today asserted to be found in these passages must first be inserted. In other words, for one to affirm its presence in the book of Matthew one must have to put it there. The doctrinal triage is not in the text.

**Acts 15:28 – “Necessary Things”**

The book of Acts is the divinely inspired account of the origin of the church and early spread of Christianity as the apostles and early church testified to the crucifixion and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. The outline of Acts is found in 1:8 which reads, “but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.” Acts 1:8 outlined the book of Acts because chapters 1-7 revealed how the witness of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ was dispersed throughout Jerusalem; chapters 8-12 revealed how the gospel was dispersed through Judea and Samaria; and chapters 13 – 28 revealed the Apostle Paul’s missionary journeys and how the gospel was dispersed to the remotest part of the earth.

When Paul with Barnabas concluded their first missionary journey (cf. 13:1-14:28) they returned to the church that had originally sent them, that is the church at Antioch (cf. 13:1-3; 14:26-28). At that time, a controversy surfaced which occasioned the first Christian council. For instance, when Paul and Barnabas were in Antioch and had spent a long time with the disciples, the author recorded, “Some men came down from
Judea and began teaching the brethren, ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved’” (15:1). Paul and Barnabas had “great dissension and debate with them” (15:2), and rightly so because salvation is by God’s grace alone through faith alone in Christ Jesus alone not human merit. Therefore, Paul and Barnabas were sent to Jerusalem to set things straight on the ground that, “. . . the brethren determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue” (15:2). This would occasion the first Christian council in Jerusalem circa AD 49.

When Paul and Barnabas were in Antioch (14:26-28) the headquarters of the church still remained where it began, namely Jerusalem. Consequently, Paul and Barnabas had to journey approximately 300 miles from Antioch to Jerusalem, and as they journeyed the text reads, “. . . they were passing through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and were bringing great joy to all the brethren” (15:3). Therefore, while they were on their way to defend the gospel they were preaching the gospel and describing conversion in detail. For Paul and Barnabas there was no dichotomy in gospel ministry between preaching the gospel and defending the gospel. Moreover, for Paul and Barnabas it was part in parcel with gospel ministry that theological doctrines were to be defended and described in detail, namely conversion (cf. 15:3).

When Paul and Barnabas arrived at Jerusalem they were received by the church and the apostles and elders but they were not received by another group of opponents already in Jerusalem, namely “. . . some of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed” (15:5). These men were not the same heretical group as indicated from verse 1 but they
argued for the necessity of circumcision to be imposed on the Gentile believers because they said, “it is necessary to circumcise them and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses” (15:5). This sect argued for a standard of necessary requirements for the Gentiles that was not negotiable because of their contention of Gentile salvation by faith alone. The Apostle Peter argued that God had made no distinction between Jew and Gentile in regard to the promise of God the Holy Spirit and salvation by faith alone (cf. 15:6-9). This implied that some of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed had made a distinction that advocated a hierarchy where they were essential and the Gentiles were peripheral. In other words, they wanted to use circumcision and the Law of Moses to prioritize people. Once again men were imposing a standard on other men based on the wrong interpretation of Torah (cf. Matt 15:1-6). However, Peter argued that God cleanses a heart by faith and not by external works (cf. 15:9). What is more, the Apostle Peter indicted these men for tempting God because they imposed a standard on the Gentiles to which neither they (i.e. the sect of the Pharisees who had believed) nor their fathers were able to bear themselves (cf. Acts 15:10-11).

Peter silenced all the gathering with his rebuke and they listened to Paul and Barnabas (cf. 15:12). Then James made a judgment which was in accord with not putting

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58 The word used for necessary in Acts 15:5 is δεῖ present indicative active 3rd person singular. The same word δεῖ present indicative active 3rd person singular was used in Acts 1:21-22 which reads, “Therefore it is necessary that of the men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us—beginning with the baptism of John until the day that He was taken up from us—one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.” In the context of each text the parties involved indicated the standard of necessary requirements that were non-negotiable. In the case of the Jerusalem council it was the heterodox party that initiated a standard that prioritized the Law into essentials. They considered the custom of circumcision essential and salvation by faith alone peripheral because of their contention of Gentile salvation by faith alone (cf. 15:8-11).

59 It is better to translate τί πειράζετε τὸν Θεόν from Acts 15:10 “why are you tempting God?” instead of “why are you testing God?” because Luke used the word πειράζω (peirazó) the same word used in Matthew 4:1; 22:35; and James 1:13 (see footnote 48 on page 23). This gives a better sense of how bad and serious the nature of the offense was against God.
the standard on the Gentiles proposed by some of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed. Instead, James judged that the Gentiles “. . . abstain from things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood” (15:20). These four things that James instructed the Gentiles to abstain from were sins that were associated with the pagan practices of the unbelieving Gentiles.

The final ruling of the Jerusalem council was unanimously agreed upon by the apostles and the elders as they and the whole church chose two men to accompany Paul and Barnabas back to Antioch with a letter (cf. 15:22-23). In the letter, they ruled that those who initially began teaching the brethren that they could not be saved unless they were circumcised according to the custom of Moses were not given that teaching from the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. Moreover, they wrote that these opponents had disturbed the believers in Antioch with their words and unsettled their souls (cf. 15:24).

The letter concluded with requirements from the Jerusalem church, that is, “necessary things” for the Gentile believers to obey in order to maintain good standing and the unity of the faith with the Jewish believers:

For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials: that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication; if you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well. Farewell. (Acts 15:28-29)

The key word from Acts 15:28-29 in the NASB translation is “essentials” from the Greek adverb ἐπάναγκες which is better translated “necessary things.”60 It means

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60 The NASB translated the phrase “πλὴν τούτων τῶν ἐπάναγκες” from Acts 15:28 as “than these essentials.” The ESV translated the same phrase “than these requirements.” The HCSB and KJV translated this phrase “than these necessary things.” Finally, the NIV translated the same phrase, “the following requirements.”
pertaining to being necessary and indispensable to the occurrence of some event.\(^{61}\) This compound Greek word is found only once in the Word of God.\(^{62}\) Therefore, to structure an entire system from a *hapex legomina* (a term of which only one instance of use is recorded) and claim that it is Scripture’s self-attested hermeneutical principle for prioritizing all doctrines from the Word of God into primary, secondary, and tertiary levels of importance is a fragile argument. As indicated above, the word for “necessary things” in verse 28 is not the same Greek word that was used in verse 5 for “it is necessary.” Commentator Lenski explained the use of necessity here meant not doing things but keeping away from things that were dangerous to the believer’s profession when he wrote, “This type of necessity is something that is vastly different from all ancient or modern legalism. . . the necessity to keep away (ἀπέχεσθαι, to abstain, hold oneself away from) . . . from anything idolatrous, fornicatious, or otherwise contaminating; the necessity of considering our brethren.”\(^{63}\) Lenski correctly pointed out that the “necessary things” are those things to abstain from (cf. verse 29 emphasis added) not “necessary things” to perform or practice like circumcision as proposed by the sect of Pharisees who had believed (cf. verse 5 emphasis added). Nevertheless, the Gentiles


\(^{62}\) The Greek adverb ἀπάναγκαι “necessary things” is a *hapax legomenon*. That means from Acts 15:28 this is the sole occurrence of this term in this form in the NT (BAG, 282). Kaiser explained the difficulty of basing an entire system for interpreting Scripture on top of a *hapax legomenon* when he wrote: “The most difficult words of all to deal with are the *hapax legomena*, ‘words used [spoken] only once’ in the known texts at our disposal. Since dictionaries, lexicons, and related tools are based on collecting instances of usage from a number of contexts, they too, once in a while, let us down because of a lack of sufficient examples” Walter Kaiser, *Toward An Exegetical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 127.

under scrutiny by the Judaizers and the sect of Pharisees who had believed were already saved Gentiles (cf. 15:3; 7-11; referred to as “disciples” v. 10 emphasis added).

Therefore, is it then possible for one today to argue a doctrinal triage hierarchy (e.g. “what are the essentials that one must know in order to be saved”) from the context and occasion of the Jerusalem council when the text revealed that the Gentile believers under scrutiny were already saved? Paul and Barnabus were describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles because while Paul and Barnabus were preaching the gospel they were also defending sound doctrine (i.e. soteriology). This unequivocally revealed that there is no antithesis between preaching the gospel and defending sound doctrine. On the other hand, the Judaizers were guilty of syncretism of sound doctrine with unsound practice. Like the liberals of the Tübingen school the Judaizers were interested in reconciling thesis with antithesis into synthesis. The thesis of the Judaizers was circumcision for salvation, namely human merit to be saved from the wrath of God. In their minds, the antithesis was “salvation by faith alone in Christ alone to be saved from the wrath of God.” Therefore, the synthesis of Judaizers was “unless you are circumcised according to the Law of Moses you cannot be saved.”

The thesis of DT is trying to find a system to determine primary, secondary and tertiary levels of importance of what is deemed sufficient, essential, or necessary information for one to receive in order to be saved versus sound doctrine in the entire literary corpus. Those who taught “unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved,” made circumcision according to the Law the main thing. To them, the lesser quality would be to merely believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. The second group, namely the Pharisees who had believed, argued that the primary thing
would be to circumcise the Gentiles and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses (cf. 15:5). To them, these would be additional requirements to be saved and perhaps placing believing on Jesus in a lesser order of importance. In the context of Acts 15 – the occasion of the Jerusalem Council, the major point or goal of the heterodox groups was the emphasis of circumcision and the Law of Moses as primary importance and believing on Jesus as not sufficient enough to be saved from the wrath of God.

The Judaizers struck a dichotomy between the sound doctrine of *sola fide* in Christ alone versus the correct interpretation of Torah. In the place of the correct interpretation of Torah they amalgamated the sound doctrine of *sola fide* with “unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved” (15:1). This was in conflict with Paul, Barnabus, the brethren, Peter, James, the apostles and elders who corrected the Judaizers’ error and upheld the sound doctrine of *sola fide* in Christ alone perfectly united with the correct interpretation of Torah as well as the entire corpus of doctrine from the Word of God. There is no contradiction in the Word of God. The issue was resolved by the sound ruling of the Jerusalem council in the decree of the letter to Antioch which exhorted already saved Gentiles to live a lifestyle of abstaining from things that would disqualify a believer, supported by the entire corpus of Scripture.64

There is nowhere in the council’s ruling that there was or is a hierarchy of doctrines. The council ruled for unified doctrine and unified application (unified mind – “one mind” v.

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64 Barnhouse explained the issue of the pagan adultery and idolatry that the Gentiles needed to abstain from: “James is telling them that they were to have no part whatever in temple worship of pagans. . . Strabo tells us that in the temples of Aphrodite and Venus in Corinth, the priests owned 10,000 harlots. Ships passed through the seaport town, and it was the commercial center of the ancient world. All the men who came off the ships bought the use of the harlots from the priests, and the greatest income which the pagan temples had was from the price of the harlots. They also owned the butcher shops . . . the priests killed and sold the meat,” Donald Gray Barnhouse and Herbert Henry Ehrenstein, *Acts, an Expositional Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 138-9.
25 and unified with God and sound men – “For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us” (v. 28). They ruled on what was the correct doctrine and the correct way on how all must apply it – namely, what all the Gentiles must believe and how all the Gentiles must apply it.

**Pauline Texts**

The context of 1 Corinthians was Paul’s correction of the division in the church by means of addressing the problems reported to him from the house of Chloe (cf. 1:11). For instance, Paul exhorted the Corinthians believers to not be divided when he wrote, “Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Cor 1:10). Biblically, as demonstrated above concerning the Jerusalem council recorded in the book of Acts, conflict in the church is resolved when believers are of the same mind and of the same judgment regarding sound doctrine.\(^\text{65}\) Biblically the standard of a healthy church is sound doctrine across-the-board (cf. 2 Tim 1:13; 1 Tim 4:6, 16). The word “division” from 1 Cor 1:10 is the Greek word σχίσμα (schisma) which literally means “tear” and in its verb form – that is, σχιζώ (schizó) means “I tear apart.”\(^\text{66}\) The Apostle Paul was concerned for the Corinthians because they had created divisions with unsound doctrine. Therefore, Paul corrected them by systematically teaching the correct positions on many issues – for instance, the wisdom of God versus the disunity in the Church (1-4); church discipline and lawsuits.

\(^{65}\) The Greek verbal used in 1 Cor 1:10 for “made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment” was κατηρτισμένοι. It literally means “having been knit together” and is a perfect nominative masculine plural participle. It has the sense of the kind of action that is completed and the results continue.

\(^{66}\) “σχιζω,” BAG, 805.
Christian marriage (cf. 7:1-40); Christian liberty (cf. 8:1-11:1); the order of Christian worship, roles of men and women in the church, the Lord’s Supper, and spiritual gifts (cf. 11:2-14:40). What is more, it was so unsound in the church at Corinth that some were teaching that there is no resurrection of the dead (cf. 1 Cor 15:12). Therefore, Paul had to correct them with the sound doctrine of the resurrection (cf. 15:1-58). Below is a chart that shows the contextual theme that extended throughout the book of 1 Corinthians where the Apostle Paul addressed their heterodoxy which was causing division and exhorted them to be of one mind united on sound doctrine:

**Chart 3: Context of 1 Corinthians: Correction of the Division in the Church**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Passage</th>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Cor 1:10</td>
<td>“Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment.”</td>
<td>“divisions” σχίσματα (schismata). Noun nominative neuter plural.</td>
<td>Context and occasion of 1 Corinthians. Report from Chloe’s people of quarrels among them (cf. 1 Cor 1:10-11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Cor 1:13</td>
<td>“Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?”</td>
<td>“has been divided” μεμέρισται (memeristai) – Verb perfect indicative middle/passive third person singular; from μερίζω – “I separate into parts and divide one part from another.” (cf. 7:34).</td>
<td>“Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, ‘I am of Paul,’ and ‘I of Apollos,’ and ‘I of Cephas,’ and ‘I of Christ’” – 1 Cor 1:12.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Cor 11:18</td>
<td>For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that divisions exist among you; and in part I believe it.</td>
<td>“divisions” σχίσματα (schismata). Noun accusative neuter plural.</td>
<td>Abuse of the Lord’s Supper into factions. “For there must also be factions among you, so that those who are approved may become evident among you” – 1 Cor 11:19.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Cor 12:25</td>
<td>“So that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.”</td>
<td>“division” σχίσμα (schisma). Noun nominative neuter singular.</td>
<td>Abuse of spiritual gifts and prioritizing the importance of self edifying gifts over those gifts which edify others.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1 Corinthians 3:9-15 – “. . . Foundation . . . and Building on It”

The distinction between the foundation and the rest of the building in Paul’s analogy (i.e. 1 Cor 3:9-15) does not reveal that there is a formula for prioritizing doctrines into primary, secondary, and tertiary levels of importance. The passage belongs to the overall context of Paul’s argument that everything belongs to God including the church, its ministry, Paul and Apollos. Therefore, it is false to claim that one belongs to “Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas” because everyone belongs to God (cf. 1 Cor 1:10-17; 3:1-8).67 There is no triage of importance between Paul, Apollos and Cephas (cf. Matt 20:20-28; Lk 22:24-27). Moreover, the immediate passage is a warning for those in ministry to be careful how they build on the foundation – that is, Christ Jesus because God will judge each man’s work. Moreover, the passage is about God rewarding the “fellow workers” according to their labor (cf. 3:8; 12-15). The passage is not about God’s permission to be wrong on non-essential issues. The fact that the work of some men will be burnt up because they built with wood, hay and straw, but they themselves will be saved, yet so as through fire – does not mean that there is a difference between primary doctrine and secondary doctrine in levels of importance but rather that God was displeased with the building materials that some men used which God did not authorize. Intentionally using the foundation for one’s own purpose as an excuse to justify using those building materials that God has not authorized and presuming on God’s grace that one will be

67 Paraphrased from Fee. Commentator Fee argued that 1 Cor 3:9-15 continued Paul’s argument from 1 Cor 1:10-17, that is, the report from Cloe’s people of division in the Corinthian Church. Fee wrote: “Thus the argument continues to be a frontal attack against the division and those primarily responsible for it” Gordon D. Fee, The First Epistle to the Corinthians, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 134-6. If there is no division between God’s fellow workers – for instance, one plants and one waters but God’s causes the growth, is it not also true that there is no division between doctrines?
okay because the foundation is sound (which one did not even set) is lazy, putting God to the test and flirting with disaster. Such an attitude is audacious and comparable to that which Paul criticized in Romans 6:1-2a when he wrote, “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so grace may increase? May it never be!” What is more, the one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin (cf. Jas 4:17). God is jealous of His fellow workers, His field, and His building (cf. 1 Cor 3:9).68

It is one proposition to contend that the Atonement and the Person of Christ69 is the foundation of all biblical doctrines while maintaining that all biblical doctrines are equally important and essential. It is a completely different proposition to claim that the Atonement and the Person of Christ is the foundation of biblical doctrines and that all biblical doctrines are important and essential, and to amalgamate this, to the claim that all biblical doctrines have categorical distinctions of secondary and tertiary tier positions of importance. The Person of Jesus Christ, His cross work and resurrection is the foundation (cf. 1 Cor 3:11). Jesus Christ is God in human flesh the Second Person of the Trinity full of Grace and Truth (cf. Jn 1:14). Truth is a Person, namely Jesus Christ. Truth is realized through Jesus Christ (cf. Jn 1:17). The Third Person of the Trinity God the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth (cf. Jn 14:16-17), He was sent by God the Father in Jesus’ name (cf. Jn

68 In the Greek text, verse 9 had a chain of three genitives, “θεοῦ γὰρ ἐσμὲν συνεργοῖ, θεοῦ γεώργιον, θεοῦ οἰκοδομὴ ἔστε.” The genitive is the relationship between two nouns (substantives). The genitive is the case of description and is mostly used to show possession. The English words, “of” or “from” are used to translate genitive relationships in English. Wallace correctly pointed out that “God’s fellow workers” is not a genitive of association (i.e. that Paul, Apollos and God are in association with one another in the work of the ministry) but rather that Paul and Apollos belong to God: “However, it is better to see θεοῦ as a possessive gen. . . ‘we are fellow workers belonging to God’ Contextually, the argument in this section is very explicit: Paul and Apollos are nothing, but God is the one who brought about both salvation and sanctification (vv 5-7),” Daniel B. Wallace, Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 130.

69 “For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified” (1 Cor 2:2).
14:26), He was sent by Jesus (cf. Jn 16:7), and He inspired the biblical writers to write
the truth of God which is in perfect unity with the God man Jesus Christ (cf. Jn 16:12-
15). Therefore, the Christian has the very words of God – an entire corpus of sound
document – good and healthy teaching which contain the only ‘blueprints’ that God has
authorized for building His building.

For the purpose of analogy, in the building of a house the foundation holds up the
walls, the walls hold up the roof and the roof shelters the entire structure from all sorts of
issues in the environment like temperature, various degrees of precipitation and various
storms, etc. Therefore, the foundation, walls, and roof are all necessary and equally
important in the overall result of the building. To this effect, sound doctrine is the life
blood of the church. Without sound doctrine the church will not grow into who she
meant to be. However, God is jealous of His building and the church will be built up to
the fullness of Christ (cf. Eph 4:13).

The entire building of the church has been built on the foundation of the apostles
and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone (cf. Eph 2:20). The Apostle
Paul explicitly taught in Ephesians 2:19-20 that the foundation is inseparably constrained
to the whole building and the whole building is being fitted together in the Lord.70 Any
distinction between the foundation and the rest of the building in Paul’s analogy from 1
Corinthians 3:9-15 does not reveal that there is a difference of importance between
primary, secondary and tertiary levels of doctrines. At best the doctrinal triage is
scaffolding holding men who apply wood hay and straw to the building, but it is not “for

70 “Having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being
the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the
Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit” (Eph 2:20-22).
the equipping the saints for the work of the service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:12-13). Therefore, maturity in Christianity is based on unity in all of sound doctrine not only unity in some doctrines. The marks of maturity in the church evidence themselves by unity and growing in the truth in all aspects into Him who is the Head (cf. Eph 4:13-16). Christ holds the entire building together.

The conclusion of 1 Corinthians 3:9-15 is about the judgment of God upon the works of men in the ministry (cf. 3:13-15). Contrariwise, 1 Corinthians 3:9-15 is not about the difference between primary doctrine, secondary doctrine and tertiary doctrine. Such a three-tier level distinction must first be read into the text and forced into the text before one can affirm its presence there-in. What is more, 1 Corinthians 3:9-15 is not a justification that it is okay to be wrong on doctrines that are not specifically the Person of Christ, His cross work and resurrection. If such is the case, then why is the doctrinal triage even necessary? In the world of the doctrinal triage, would its proponents argue that the doctrinal triage itself is a secondary or tertiary doctrine of importance? Or would its proponents argue that the doctrinal triage itself is a primary issue of importance alongside the Person of Christ, His cross work and resurrection? Nevertheless, this passage has nothing to do with the doctrinal triage, instead it is about the day when God’s judgment will reveal each one’s works for what they are and that many will be consumed by fire.
1 Corinthians 13:13 “Abide These Three; but the Greatest of These”

The overall context of 1 Corinthians 13 was introduced by the last verse of the preceding chapter; “But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way” (12:31). The overall idea that Paul introduced in 1 Corinthians 12:31 to which 1 Corinthians 13 belonged contextually was not that Paul intended to compare love with gifts.\(^\text{71}\) For instance, Paul did not mean that love is more excellent than gifts but instead he meant that he now shows the Corinthian believers a superior way for seeking them.\(^\text{72}\) Here the gifts are not in contrast to love as in degree or tiers of importance.

Besides, in 1 Corinthians 14:1 Paul gave a present imperative active command for the Corinthian believers to pursue both love and spiritual gifts.\(^\text{73}\) All in all, spiritual gifts and love are from God the Holy Spirit and are according to the standard of God the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 12:8). Emphatically, love is that which is inseparably constrained to all

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\(^{71}\) The sense of 1 Cor 12:31 concerning ὑπερβολὴν ὁδὸν “more excellent way” depends on the context. Hodge argued that Paul is not ranking love above the gifts or creating a dichotomy between love and gifts but instead Paul showed the standard for exercising the gifts when he wrote, “The expression is not in itself comparative, ‘more excellent’; but simply a way according to excellence, i.e. ‘an excellent way’. Whether it is excellent compared to something else, or most excellent, depends on the context. Here no comparison is implied. . . The sense is, ‘Seek the better gifts, and moreover I show you an excellent way to do it.’” Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth, 1974), 264.

\(^{72}\) Lenski argued that Paul was not comparing the gifts to love as degrees of excellence when he wrote, “In excellence for its purpose. The sense is, however, not that this exceedingly excellent way is to be sought in place of the gifts, as a substitute for them. The idea expressed is not that ‘love’ is more excellent than gifts. This introduces a false contrast and would call for an adversative connective, namely ὅćε or ἄλλῳ in place of Paul’s καί and ἔτι. Nor does Paul elaborate the thesis that love is preferable to gifts. In 14:1 he urges us to seek both. Love is to be the all-dominating motive in seeking and in using spiritual gifts. R.C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s First and Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1963), 543.

\(^{73}\) In 1 Cor 14:1 Διώκετε “Pursue” and ζηλοῦτε “desire earnestly” are both present imperative active second person plural verbs and denote the kind of action that is continuous. In other words, pursue love and keep on pursuing love—desire earnestly and keep on desiring earnestly - “the present imperative commands the continuance of an action; the aorist deals with action as a single event,” H. Fred Nofer, *New Testament Greek Made Functional* (Colorado: Nofer, 2013), 10, 139.
aspects of Christianity because there is no dichotomy between love and any other Christian virtue or gift (cf. 13:4-7). To this effect, Hodge brilliantly explained the relationship love shares with other Christian virtues when he argued, “As to its superior excellence, it implies or secures all other excellence.” Pointedly, love must complete the gifts and actions of a person for these to be legitimate because none of these can exist without love (cf. 13:1-3). Love is the bond of perfect unity (cf. Col 3:14).

1 Corinthians 13 is bracketed as a textual unit which marked the unit’s theme by means of a repeated element. There is an inclusio. For example, 1 Cor 12:31 bracketed the start of the unit when it read, “But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way.” 1 Corinthians 14:1a-b bracketed the close of the unit (chapt. 13) when it read, “Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts. . .” The repeated element was clearly “earnestly desire the greater gifts” and “yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts.” Love is in the middle of these brackets, by way of introduction, and the focus of the entirety of chapter 13 (e.g. “And I show you a still more excellent way” 12:31b and “Pursue love” 14:1a). The authorial intent of the context of 1 Corinthians 12:31-1 Corinthians 14:1 in which 1 Corinthians 13 is found was that love is to be the all-dominating motive in seeking and in using spiritual gifts so that the church is built up. The overall context of 1 Corinthians 12-14 that occasioned Paul to teach the Corinthian believers was that they had overemphasized certain gifts (e.g. tongues) to the point that

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74 Hodge, A Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians, 265.

75 ζηλοῦτε – “be zealous” in 1 Cor 12:31a is the same word used in 14:1b, that is ζηλοῦτε – “be zealous.” The NASB translated ζηλοῦτε from 1 Cor 12:31a – “earnestly desire” and ζηλοῦτε from 1 Cor 14:1b – “desire earnestly.” Yet both uses of the word have the exact same form, namely present imperative active second person plural.
they “greatly over-estimated the gift at the expense of a very basic quality, love.”

Therefore, the Corinthians were corrected by Paul for rearranging the Holy Spirit’s standard of the gifts in such a way as to prioritize in levels of importance certain gifts for personal edification or self-promotion as most important and other gifts that are designed for the edification of others as of lesser importance (cf. 14:4, 12, 17). Certainly, the prioritization of the Corinthians was unloving and selfish. Not only did the Corinthian believers prioritize love as of lesser importance by their principles and actions but they also failed to manifest the fruit of the Holy Spirit which is love (cf. Gal 5:22). As a final point, a formula for theological triage cannot be drawn from the context of 1 Corinthians 12-14 due to the fact that the Apostle Paul argued for the necessity of every individual member of the body and gift and that they are given equally to contribute to the unity and singularity of the body of Christ (cf. 12:4-26). For instance, those who seem weaker are necessary! (cf. 12:22). Those members of the body which seem to be dishonorable are given more abundant honor! (cf. 12:23). Those members of the body that are less presentable become more presentable! (cf. 12:23). This has been designed by God so that there may be no division in the body and that all the members would have the exact same care for one another (cf. 12:24-25). The crux of Paul’s argument is to defeat any division in the body of Christ – the theme that there is no division between true believers which was initiated previously in 1:10; 3:1-23 (cf. 11:18; 12:25). This is explicitly the driving

76 Robert L. Thomas, *Exegetical Digest of First Corinthians 12-14* (Robert L. Thomas, 1988), 64.

77 As mentioned above Hodge argued that the sense of 1 Cor 12:31 concerning ἡ περιβολὴν ὁ ὅδον “more excellent way” depends on the context when he wrote, “The expression is not in itself comparative, ‘more excellent’ but simply a way according to excellence, i.e. an excellent way. Whether excellent compared to something else, or most excellent, depends on context. Here no comparison is implied.”
force of the context concerning 1 Corinthians 12-14. Theological triage offers unity for denominational divides for “first tier doctrines” yet allows for denominational divides to continue to exist on “secondary doctrines” and “tertiary doctrines”. Therefore, theological triage maintains division in the body. Theological triage is maintaining the unity of ecumenism but not maintaining the unity of the body as described in 1 Corinthians 12:1-26. Paul exhorted the Corinthian believers when he wrote, “Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1:10). In conclusion, in the context of 1 Corinthians 12-14 Paul did not advocate a tier structure of gifts, nor did Paul compare gifts to love. Instead, Paul taught the Corinthian believers the manner and means by which they must seek and exercise the gifts.

The love chapter – namely, 1 Corinthians 13 was perfectly outlined into three sections – that is, 1 Corinthians 13:1-3, 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, and 1 Corinthians 13:8-13. To start, in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 Paul used the personal pronoun “I” and created a strong hyperbolic scenario to emphasize what gifts are like without love – namely, nothing. Next, in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 Paul defined love by using a roster of Christian virtues in the definition because love has many aspects which define it mentioned in the text (e.g. patient cf. v. 4, kind cf. v. 4, rejoices with the truth cf. v.6, love hopes all things v. 7,

Thomas explained the force of the Greek word for “if” – that is, ἐὰν when he wrote, “The force of ἐὰν in this verse is simply ‘if,’ introducing a third class condition, a more probable future condition. It is a mere objective possibility in the future.” 1 Cor 13:1 does not introduce concessive idea, that “in spite of” or “although.” The pattern found from chapter 13:1-3 is an argument from actuality to hypothetical. Thomas, *Exegetical Digest of First Corinthians 12-14*, 64.
etc.).

Because the very definition of love is comprised of these Christian virtues, all of these qualities complement love. Love is inseparably constrained to the Christian virtues listed in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. Finally, 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 is about the perfect outcome of love (cf. Col 3:14).

One interesting component in Paul’s argument from 1 Corinthians 13 is the conclusion – namely, “But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.” Can an argument be made from this verse for a formula for theological triage by Paul’s use of “the greatest of these”? Does greatest one mean more important in such a way that the other two can be left out? Is love “first tier” of importance, while faith and hope are of “second or third tier” in importance? If Christians only agree on love and disagree on faith and hope can professing believers still be unified? No, these three words all together express a believer’s existence.

The sense of the passage means that the three go together as a triad each remaining for eternity. Lenski explained the equality of the triad appropriately when he wrote, “The sense of the verb (abide) is quite emphatic because of its position and refers to all three of the subjects equally. . . He ties a band about these three as if, after naming them, he asks us to stop a moment and contemplate these three which constitute one great unit.”

Then in what sense is love the greatest of these? It is the greatest in the sense that

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80 Love is the subject of this section e.g. ἀγάπη is in the nominative case three times in v. 4. In Greek the nominative case is the case that designates the subject.

81 Fee, The First Epistle to the Corinthians, 650.

82 The Greek verb μένει “abide” is present indicative active first person singular and individually refers to all three virtues collectively at once. They are a triplet.

83 Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Paul’s First and Second Epistle to the Corinthians, 571-3.
it completes them.\textsuperscript{84} This is clearly found in the context because Paul wrote that love, “believes all things” (i.e. faith in the things of God) and “hopes all things” (cf. 1 Cor 13:7). Love is the root and the outcome of true faith and hope. Faith is given by God to receive salvation. Hope looks forward to receive the outcome of faith. Love is the final product of a person who has truly been born again because love serves God and others (cf. 1 Jn 5:1).

1 Corinthians 15:3-4 – “Of First Importance”

1 Corinthians 15:3-4 is the primary text to which proponents of the theological triage appeal. Those who support theological triage assert that if Paul identified some doctrines as “of first importance” (e.g. the resurrection from the dead) then implicitly there must be doctrines of “secondary importance,” even though Paul never literally used the words, “of secondary importance.” Accordingly, they argue, that because Paul did not use ἐν πρῶτοις “of first importance” (NASB – but literally “in the first”) to introduce every doctrine in Scripture it must follow, then, that there is “some sort” of doctrinal hierarchy – things of most importance, things of much importance, and things of lesser importance.\textsuperscript{85} However, is there a case for a formula for theological triage from the text of 1 Corinthians 15:3-4?

The context of 1 Corinthians 15:1-58 concerned the fact that the Apostle Paul had to correct heterodoxy in the Corinthian church concerning the resurrection from the dead.

\textsuperscript{84} Completed is supported by the context cf. 1 Cor 13:8-12 e.g. “but when the perfect comes the partial will be done away with” (1 Cor 13:10) and “now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known” (1 Cor 13:12c-d).

\textsuperscript{85} David A. Gunderson, \textit{Biblical Principles for Determining the Relative Importance of Particular Doctrines}, 25.
For instance, Paul was astounded that some persons at this church were arguing that there was no resurrection from the dead: “Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?” (1 Cor 15:12). The theme of preaching Jesus Christ and Him crucified initiated from 1 Corinthians 2:2 was repeated in 15:3. What is more, Paul included the resurrection of Christ from the dead in 1 Corinthians 15:4.

Furthermore, in 1 Corinthians 15:3 Paul reinforced his argument that the cross is foundational for all Christian ministry (cf. 1 Cor 3:11). In fact, the cross is a major theme throughout 1 Corinthians; “the cross of Christ” (1:17), “the word of the cross” (1:18), “Christ crucified” (1:23), “Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption” (1:30), and “Jesus Christ, and Him crucified (2:2). When Paul spoke of “first” in 1 Corinthians 15:3 he spoke of the foundation he laid (cf. 1 Cor 3:10). “First” does not refer to a doctrinal triage but Christ and His cross work as the foundation.

The reinforcement of Paul’s argument that there is no division between God’s fellow workers in 1 Corinthians 1:10-13; 3:5-9 is explicitly found in 1 Corinthians 15:11 when he said, “Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.” Likewise, the overall context of the epistle (cf. 1 Cor 1:10-11) is reinforced in 1 Corinthians 15:12 because some were teaching that there was no resurrection from the dead (cf. 1 Cor 15:12). The error of teaching that there was no resurrection from the dead was bringing division to the church in Corinth. He had to preach again the foundation of the Person of Christ, His cross work and resurrection (cf. 1 Cor 15:1-11) because some were teaching heterodoxy (cf. 1 Cor 15:33-34). From having to lay the foundation again
(cf. 1 Cor 15:1-11) Paul then built upon the foundation with 1 Corinthians 15:12-58 concerning all the distinctions of the sound doctrine of the resurrection from the dead (i.e. the bodily resurrection) as a necessity to guard the church from the heresy that there is no resurrection from the dead (cf. 1 Cor 15:12). In fact, in the context of 1 Corinthians 15:1-58 the Apostle Paul discussed the doctrines of the atonement (1 Cor 15:3), the resurrection of Christ (1 Cor 15:4, 12, 20-23), faith (1 Cor 15:11), original sin and death cf. 15:21, 22, 54-56), the distinction between the first and second Adam (cf. 15:45-47), the second coming of Christ - eschatology (study of last things; the end times – cf. 15:23-28), and the resurrection of the body (15:29-58), etc. In other words, where does one draw the line to determine doctrinal hierarchy of things of most importance, things of much importance, and things of lesser importance from 1 Corinthians 15:1-58 when the Apostle Paul did not label the doctrines as such? Also, all the sound doctrines found from 1 Corinthians 15:1-58 assume the Person of Jesus Christ, His cross work, and His resurrection from the dead as their foundation. All sound doctrines found from 1 Corinthians 15:1-58 do not assume some sort of doctrinal hierarchy of things of most importance, things of much importance, and things of lesser importance.

The NASB rendered ἐν πρώτοις as “of first importance,” but the translators inserted a footnote for a literal translation of ἐν πρώτοις in the marginal reading and translated the prepositional phrase as “among the first.” Therefore, it is a dative of association according to the marginal reading of ἐν πρώτοις by the NASB translators. This was closer to the sense from the Greek because ἐν πρώτοις has the preposition ἐν with the adjective in the dative case – namely, πρώτοις. The prepositional phrase ἐν
πρώτος is not a genitive of source. If ἐν πρώτοις had the sense “of most importance” (HCSB) or “of first importance” (NASB) it would have been in the genitive without the preposition ἐν – “in.” What is more, if the adjective πρώτος (prótos) was a superlative for comparative it would have only had two things in mind not three (cf. Matt 21:28; Lk 2:2; Jn 20:4; Acts 1:1). So the context does not teach a doctrinal hierarchy of things of ‘most importance,’ things of ‘much importance,’ and things of ‘lesser importance.’ Nevertheless, the sense of πρώτος (prótos) was “former, prior” because Paul reminded the Corinthians what he previously delivered to them! The sense of this was compatible to the context of the passage (cf. 1 Cor 15:1-2, 12, 20). Another example of πρώτος (prótos) merely referring to “former, prior” was the accusative use, namely πρώτον found in Acts 1:1 when Luke wrote, “The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach.” Luke referred to the Gospel of Luke that he wrote first in chronology before Acts. In summation, the prepositional phrase ἐν πρώτοις “in first” from 1 Corinthians 15:3 has the sense of a temporal dative – that means, a point in time. Paul reminded the Corinthian believers the gospel that he first preached to them at the beginning. On the other hand, ἐν πρώτοις “in first” is not a genitive of source, namely “of

86 In many occurrences in scripture πρώτος simply means first chronologically (cf. 1 Tim 2:13; 3:10; 5:4, 12; 2 Tim 1:5; 2:6; 4:16). It can mean “most prominent” in rank but one of its most frequent uses is simply to denote chronology. In 1 Timothy 2:1 the construction πρώτον πάντων (first of all) was used and because it has the genitive adjective it ranks importance. Therefore, if Paul had in mind to rank importance in 1 Cor 15 why did he not use the genitive construction – namely, πρώτον πάντων (first of all)? Not only this, but many DT proponents rank the issue of women leadership in the church as a secondary matter of importance. However, the Apostle Paul included the issue of women leadership in the church under the overall context of πρώτον πάντων (first of all) cf. 1 Tim 2:1, 9-15. What is more, the overall context that governs 1 Timothy is how one should conduct themselves in the church (cf. 1 Tim 3:14-16).

87 “The genitive case is the case of description, and its function is to attribute some quality to the word modified. It is primarily used to show possession. Often, the English word “of” is used to help translate the genitive case, such as ‘of the box.’” Nofer, New Testament Greek Made Functional, 37.

88 Wallace, Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics, 303.
first importance” (NASB). The sense of the prepositional phrase ἐν πρώτοις “in first” from 1 Corinthians 15:3 is not quality or sorting according to quality.

One of the earliest expositors and commentators of the book of 1 Corinthians was Chrysostom (c. 347-407 AD), whose common dialect was Koine Greek, and he argued that the meaning of ἐν πρώτοις “in first” from 1 Corinthians 15:3 was a point in time when he wrote,

But what of this, ‘For I delivered unto you first of all?’ for that is his word. ‘In the beginning, not now.” And thus saying he brings the time for a witness, and that it were the greatest disgrace for those who had for such a long time been persuaded now to change their minds: and not this only, but also that the doctrine is necessary. Wherefore also it was ‘delivered’ among ‘the first,’ and from the beginning straightaway. And what didst thou so deliver? Tell me. But this he doth not say straightaway, but first, ‘I received.’ And what didst thou receive? ‘That Christ died for our sins.’ He said not immediately that there is a resurrection of our bodies, yet this very thing in truth he doth establish, but afar off and by other topics saying that ‘Christ died,’ and laying before a kind of strong base and irrefragable foundation of the doctrine concerning the resurrection.89

John Calvin did not argue for tiers of importance but for fundamentals as foundational which is compatible with the sense that Paul referred to the point in time he first preached, when he wrote, “He (Paul) now confirms what he had previously stated, by explaining that the resurrection had been preached by him, and that too as a fundamental doctrine of the gospel . . . as it is wont to be with a foundation in the erecting of a house.”90 Hodge argued that ἐν πρώτοις was not in ‘reference to time’ but rather only foundation when he wrote, “not in reference to time but ἐν πρώτοις means, among the

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first, or principle things. . . The death of Christ for our sins and his resurrection were therefore the great facts on which Paul insisted as the foundation of the gospel.”

Nevertheless, Hodge did not suggest tiers of importance. On the other hand, Lenski had a hybrid view that Paul went back to the time when he first preached to them as well as it being the most important in all his preaching and argued that ἐν πρώτοις is practically an adverb – that is, ‘firstly’ or ‘in the first place.’ But Lenski did not argue for three tiers of importance. Commentator Fee disagreed that the form and language meant, “priority in time” but none-the-less pointed out that a case for “priority in time” could be made when he wrote,

What is less certain is the meaning of the prepositional phrase translated ‘as of first importance.’ As the marginal reading indicates, this could also mean priority in time. Although a case can be made for the latter (he would be stressing that this is what he preached and they believed from the very beginning of their coming to Christ), both the form and language suggest that the former is Paul’s concern.

Nevertheless, as pointed out above, the sense of the prepositional phrase ἐν πρώτοις “in first” from 1 Corinthians 15:3 is not genitival quality or sorting according to quality.

In conclusion, the sense of ἐν πρώτοις “in first” from 1 Corinthians 15:3 was a point in time based on the context of 1 Corinthians as a whole as well as the context of 1 Corinthians 15 wedded to the exegesis of the passage. Although many commentators have disagreed throughout church history over the meaning of ἐν πρώτοις from 1 Corinthians 15:3, the early church Father Chrysostom was faithful to draw out the authorial intent of the passage. The argumentation for “of first importance” cannot be

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92 Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s First and Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 630.

93 Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 722.
supported from the overall context of the passage or the exegesis of ἐν πρώτοις because the prepositional phrase contains a dative not a genitive. Be that as it may, an explicit or implicit formula or principle for some sort of doctrinal hierarchy – that is, a three tier standard of things of most importance, things of much importance, and things of lesser importance cannot be drawn from the authorial intent of 1 Corinthians 15:3-4.

Ephesians 4:1-16 – “The Unity of the Faith”

Undoubtedly, one of the goals for DT is to accomplish ecumenical unity among denominational divides. Therefore, it is imperative to determine from the Scripture the Author’s definition and prescription for unity as the standard to measure whether the unity offered from DT is genuine or a pseudo-unity. To accomplish this task, a good place to start is Ephesians 4:1-16 which contained the only two occurrences in the NT of one of the Greek words for unity – that is, ἑνότης (cf. Eph 4:3, 13).94

The epistle to the Ephesians had a specific occasion – that was, the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles together only by the means of the reconciliation of those Jews and Gentiles to God through the Person, cross work-death and resurrection from the dead of the Lord Jesus Christ. For example, the internal evidence from Ephesians explicitly identified this occasion (cf. 2:11-19). The explicit context and means of the reconciliation to God through the Person and work of Christ was “and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity” (2:16). God redeemed individual persons through Christ alone from distinct ethnic groups of people (cf. 1:7; 2:13). Individually redeemed persons make up the one church in Christ (cf. 1:22;

94 “ἑνότης,” BAG, 267.
The church is the body of Christ (cf. 4:12), God’s household (cf. 2:19). Therefore, the occasion of the epistle to the Ephesians was that there was a dividing wall of hostility and enmity between Jews and Gentiles according to the flesh, but Christ had now broken down the dividing wall (i.e. ethnic discrimination and legalism) and God had established the headship of Christ over the church as both the church’s reconciliation to God and those in the church’s reconciliation to one another.

The distinct purpose of Ephesians was explicitly indicated in Ephesians 3:9-11. The reason this was the purpose of Ephesians was because the author used the word πρόθεσις – namely the word “purpose” (e.g. thesis statement) in Ephesians 3:11 which reads, “This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord” (cf.1:11). God eternally purposed to save some (cf. 1:9, 11) in Christ, establish Christ as head of the church (cf. 1:22) and to reveal to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places (cf. 3:10; 6:12) the manifold wisdom of God (i.e. the manifold wisdom is the grammatical subject of 3:10-11). The purpose was to crush the rulers and authorities under Christ’s feet (cf. 1:22) thus providing victory for the church in Christ and access to the armor of God to stand firm against the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. In Christ, the church has victory over the enmity in the heavenly places (cf. 1:3; 20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12) as well as victory over the ethnic enmity of discrimination between Jews and Gentiles on the earth (cf. 2:11-19). It is the logical sequence and quantity of the author’s emphasis in Ephesians that one is to draw from in order to accurately determine the purpose of the book. The issue of God versus satan is

95 “And to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Eph 3:9-11).
found in Ephesians 1:22—namely “and He put all things in subjection under His feet” (cf. Gen 3:15) and Ephesians 2:1-10—namely, God taking those He saved from walking “the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit now working in the sons of disobedience” and children of wrath as the rest (2:1-3) to a position of being raised up with Christ and seated in the heavenly places in Christ (cf. 2:6) thus, saved by God’s grace alone, through faith alone, in the Lord Jesus Christ alone, not works (cf. 2:8-10).

The Theme and Theology from Ephesians

The theme of the book of Ephesians is the position and purpose of the church in/with Christ as the head. The major theological theme from the book of Ephesians is the Christian’s position “in Christ.” Therefore, the epistle to the Ephesians is Christological. Concerning the Christian’s position of union in Christ there is the sound doctrine of election (cf. 1:3); the sound doctrine of predestination (cf. 1:5, 11), the sound doctrine of divine sonship (cf. 1:5, 14), the sound doctrine of the atonement (cf. 1:7; 2:13; 5:25, 29-32), and the sound doctrine of the eternal security of the saints (cf. 1:13-14). Therefore, the epistle to the Ephesians is soteriological. The word “will” (θέλμα) was used no less than seven times in Ephesians [the doctrine of the will of God (cf. Eph 1:1; 1:5; 1:9; 1:11; 5:17; 6:6) contrariwise to the will of the flesh (cf. 2:3)]. The word “mystery” (μυστήριον) was used no less than five times in Ephesians (cf. 1:9; 3:3, 4, 9; 5:32). The prepositional phrase “in the heavenly places” (ἐν τοῖς ἐπωρανίοις) was used no less than five times in Ephesians and as a prepositional phrase is only found in Ephesians. The “church” was used no less than nine times in Ephesians (cf. 1:22; 3:10, 21; 5:23, 24, 25, 27, 29, 32). The “body” was used no less than nine times in Ephesians
referring to the church (cf. 1:23; 2:16; 3:6; 4:4, 12, 16 x 2; 5:23, 30). “Saints” was used no less than nine times in Ephesians (cf. 1:1, 15, 18; 2:19; 3:8, 18; 4:12; 5:3; 6:18).

Concerning the structure of Ephesians it was divided into two major sections by the conjunction “therefore” (οὖν) (cf. 4:1). The first three chapters are doctrinal and presented the purpose of God in establishing the church. The second part of the book was practical. It dealt with the walk or conduct of those in the church (cf. 4:1-3). This showed that all the sound doctrine in the first three chapters (i.e. 1-3) was inseparably constrained to the instructions for sound living expected of the believer in the remaining three chapters (i.e. 4-6). Because the believer has the position of “in Christ” Paul imperatively told the Ephesian believers how they are expected to live. As a result, 4:4-16 introduced the practice all believers must follow so that they walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which they have been called (cf. 4:1). In other words, Paul applied all of the doctrine that he expounded in the first three chapters in the last three chapters. Therefore, the conduct of believers that Paul addressed in the last three chapters was based on the knowledge given in the first three chapters.96

Ephesians 4:1-16 was the prescription from the Apostle Paul on how to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.97 There is unity within the Trinity 4:4-6, unity

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97 The unity of the Spirit τὴν ἑνότητα τοῦ Πνεύματος is a genitive of production (author – originating cause) – that means, the Spirit produces the true biblical unity based on sound doctrine in which Paul exhorted the believers in Ephesus to be diligent to preserve (cf. Eph 4:3). Hoehner rightly corresponded to the sense of this preservation when he wrote, “The infinitive τηρεῖν from τηρέω essentially means ‘to keep, preserve’ what is already in existence. It is not the establishment of a new entity, but rather to keep and not lose or destroy ‘something already in our possession’” Ibid., 511. (cf. Rev 3:10 – for τηρέω’). In the context, this is the preservation of an entire corpus of sound doctrine from the apostles (cf. 2:20-22) which is already available to the believer antithetical to theological triage which maintains doctrinal divisions on “secondary” and “tertiary” levels of importance.
of the gifts 4:7-10, unity of the offices 4:11-12, and unity of doctrine 4:13-16. Like 1 Corinthians the Apostle Paul showed that true biblical unity exists in the church when believers in the Lord Jesus Christ are united on sound doctrine (cf. 1 Cor 1:10). This is the unity of the faith (cf. 4:13). The prepositional phrase, “in the bond of peace” is the adhesive that inseparably binds together.\(^{98}\) To start, the Apostle Paul appealed to the Godhead as the example of unity (cf. 4:4-6).\(^{99}\) He used the word ‘one’ seven times to emphasize unity. From Ephesians 4:4-6 the sense is singularity and unity – not priority.

The sound doctrine of the Trinity teaches the unity of the divine essence in three distinct Persons. The three distinct Persons of the Trinity are One in Being and essence and are unified in purpose. Therefore, it follows logically that although doctrines are distinct, they are unified in purpose because their source is unified. Commentator Hoehner pointed out that unity of sound doctrine is based on the unity that each Person of the Triune Godhead shares when he argued,

> The Trinity is an integral part of this treatise on unity. The one body of believers is vitalized by one Spirit, so all believers have one hope. That body is united to its one Lord (Christ) by each member’s one act of faith, and his or her identity with him is the one baptism. One God, the Father, is supreme over all, operative through all, and resides in all. All seven components are united in the Trinity. . . The Triune God is the center and model for unity.\(^{100}\)

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\(^{98}\) The word συνδέσμῳ is from σύνδεσμος which means ‘that which binds together’ (BAG, 793). Peace with the dative means the location where unity produced by the Spirit is held together – that is, when believers are like minded based on sound doctrine because they are in Christ, therefore, there is no disunity.

\(^{99}\) “There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all” (Eph 4:4-6).

\(^{100}\) Hoehner, Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary, 520-1.
There is no sense of a doctrinal hierarchy of most importance, much importance, or less importance from Ephesians 4:1-16. In fact, the very opposite is true from the text of Ephesians 4:1-16. Paul wrote of unified gifts that were given from the standard of the measure of Christ’s gift (cf. 4:7-8). Likewise, He gave apostles (i.e. an unique office in the apostolic age that has ceased), prophets (i.e. unique to the apostolic age that has ceased), evangelists, pastors and teachers (cf. 4:11). The purpose of these offices are “for equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ” (4:12). All the members of these offices were united in the fight against common enemies. Moreover, concerning the gifts, the harmony shared between 1 Cor 12-14 and Ephesians 4:1-16 is undeniable. In commenting on this passage James Montgomery Boice wisely exhorted believers to strive towards maturity based on the essential nature of all the gifts when he wrote,

Let us be done with our little kingdoms as well as with the spirit of complacency that does not care if the church is divided or immature. On the contrary, let us seek out our gifts and ask how we may use them to the building up of Christ’s body. Christ does not squander his gifts; each one is essential. He is not indifferent as to how his gifts are used; he has his own wise and lofty purpose in view.101

The reason Ephesians 4:1-16 does not support a doctrinal hierarchy tier structure of most importance, much importance, or less importance is because of the sense from verses 13-16 which focused on the unified corpus of sound doctrine as the final goal to attain maturity. Concerning the goal of building up the body of Christ in true Christian unity Paul wrote, “Until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness

of Christ” (4:13). How can dividing doctrines into levels of importance to ecumenically unite with others who are only likeminded on ‘primary’ doctrines and divided on ‘secondary’ and ‘tertiary’ doctrines lead to the unity of the faith described here from Ephesians 4:13-16, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ?

The direction or goal that the body of Christ must attain is to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God.102 Moreover, faith from Ephesians 4:13 referred to the content of faith – that is, the content of the faith believers are to be directed to as their ultimate goal.103 Theological triage opposes the goal identified in Ephesians 4:13. To this effect, it is not only ‘primary’ doctrines in mind as the goal of the unity of the faith because Paul wrote, “and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ” (4:13). The knowledge of the Son of God is the knowledge of Him by which the entire body of Christ is united. A mature man means one who is “fully grown” and “complete in all parts.”104 What is more, “man” is singular not plural. Therefore, Paul referred to not only individual believers being mature but the goal of maturity for the church as a whole. Likewise, “to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ” had the sense of

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102 Hoehner rightly showed that the Greek preposition εἰς, “to,” indicated direction or goal and expounded on the sense of Eph 4:13 when he wrote, “Hence, this aspect of the goal is the unity of the faith. The only other time the word ἑνότης (from ἑνότης), ‘unity,’ is used in biblical literature is in verse 3 where Paul exhorts believers to make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit. Here in verse 13 the goal refers to the effort made in order to preserve the unity. Hoehner, Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary, 553.

103 The genitive (τῆς πίστεως) is not a subjective genitive (i.e., the exercise of faith) but an objective genitive (i.e., the content of faith) indicating that believers are to reach the unity of the faith. Ibid.

104 “τέλειος,” BAG, 816-7.
maturation because of the context, namely, “to the fullness of Christ.” The Greek word for fullness has the sense of completion. 105 Likewise, Paul pointed out that the body of Christ is to grow up in all aspects of Christ when he wrote, “but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ” (4:15).

The goals that Paul identified in Ephesians 4:13 are purposed to protect the church from immaturity – that is, an immaturity which Paul identified in the next verse when he wrote, “As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming” (4:14). Therefore, the signs of immaturity or worse are a lack of discernment in doctrine (e.g. Paul labeled “every wind of doctrine”) and a lack of discernment in detecting whether or not someone is purposed to deceive the church (cf. 4:14 “by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming”). Being tossed here and there by waves and carried about is a reference to an unstable person without understanding. John Calvin was accurate in his comments on the one who is “tossed here and there by waves and carried about” when he wrote, “the distressing hesitation of those who do not place absolute reliance on the word of the Lord . . . . It is their just punishment for looking, not to God, but to men.” 106 This is the exact opposite of the goal of sound doctrine in the church. False doctrines (every wind of doctrine) inside and outside the church are unified in their attempt to destroy the unity of sound doctrine in the church. As a result, false doctrines are unified in their purpose to destroy the true unity of the church.

105 “πλήρωμα,” BAG, 678.

The contrast is unmistakably clear between a man versus children in the area of maturity based on sound doctrine. The objective evidence that the church is mature is that the church is sound in doctrine, using its offices and gifts to serve one another to the building up of the body of Christ. How can dividing doctrines into levels of importance to ecumenically unite with others who are only likeminded on ‘primary’ doctrines and divided on ‘secondary’ and ‘tertiary’ doctrines lead to the maturity that Paul has identified in Ephesians 4:13-14? Albert Mohler asserted that it is the sort of doctrinal hierarchy in which theological triage provides which will achieve maturity when he argued,

Today’s Christian faces the daunting task of strategizing which Christian doctrines and theological issues are to be given highest priority in terms of our contemporary context. This applies both to the public defense of Christianity in face of the secular challenge and the internal responsibility of dealing with doctrinal disagreements. Neither is an easy task, but theological seriousness and maturity demand that we consider doctrinal issues in terms of their relative importance. God’s truth is to be defended at every point and in every detail, but responsible Christians must determine which issues deserve first-rank attention in a time of theological crisis.  

However, the contemporary context does not determine the relative importance of doctrine. Maturity is not based on relative importance of doctrines in light of the contemporary context. Instead, maturity is based on an entire unified corpus of sound doctrine from the Word of God that transcends space and time. In Christianity, maturity is the goal of sound doctrine across-the-board. What is more, maturity protects the church from “every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming” (Eph 4:14). Theological triage proponents not only make distinctions of importance

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107 Mohler, “A Call for Theological Triage and Christian Maturity.”
between the doctrines that the Bible teaches based on the relative importance of doctrine determined by a contemporary context, but also they make distinctions of importance between bad doctrine and heresy.108 However, according to Paul bad doctrine is heresy (cf. 1 Tim 6:3-4a).109 Even so, the context of the unity of the faith from Ephesians 4:13-14 demands an entire corpus of sound doctrine. There is no evidence from the text that Paul has prescribed a doctrinal hierarchy of most importance, much importance, and less importance to “... attain the unity of the faith, of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to Christ” (4:13).

Contrariwise, Paul prescribed how to grow in unity when he wrote, “but speaking the truth in love” (4:15). Speaking the truth referred to both belief and behavior, conduct and content.110 The bond of truth and love from Ephesians 4:15 is in harmony with the definition of love from 1 Corinthians 13:6 – that is, love “does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth.” Paul continued his thought on how to grow in unity when he wrote, “we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ” (4:15). To grow up in all aspects certainly means an entire corpus of truth. The Lord Jesus Christ is the living Word of God (cf. Jn 1:1-18). Therefore, being sound in

108 One proponent of theological triage wrote, “Similarly, in the theological world, Christians must understand the difference between (a) “first-order” doctrines—where to hold an errant position actually precludes one from being a true brother in Christ—and (b) “second-” and “third-order” doctrines—issues on which two genuine Christians can disagree and nevertheless be truly saved. In other words, we need to be able to discern the difference between bad doctrine and heresy” Mike Riccardi, “Bad Doctrine vs. Heresy: An Exercise in Theological Triage,” www.thecripplegate.com, 15 November 2015, http://thecripplegate.com/bad-doctrine-vs-heresy-an-exercise-in-theological-triage (accessed 27 November 2016).

109 “If anyone advocates a different doctrine and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, he is conceited and understands nothing” (1 Tim 6:3-4a). The Apostle Paul used the Greek word ἔτεροδιδασκαλέω (heterodidaskaleó) for “a different doctrine” to which the words heterodoxy and heresy are derived.

110 Hoehner, Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary, 565.
doctrine concerning the written Word of God across-the-board is part of what it means to
grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head.\textsuperscript{111}

Finally, Paul concluded Ephesians 4:1-16 with these words, “from whom the
whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the
proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up
of itself in love” (4:16). Undeniably this verse showed that all of the various parts of the
body are supplied from the head and are interrelated, integrated and necessary.\textsuperscript{112}
Furthermore, it is the standard of the proper working of each individual part of the body
that causes the growth of the body.\textsuperscript{113}

In conclusion, the reason it is so critical to understand that Ephesians 4:1-16
teaches directly against a doctrinal hierarchy is because to suggest that other Pauline texts
teach a doctrinal hierarchy while Ephesians 4:1-16 does not would suggest that there
exists an antithesis amidst Pauline literary corpus. However, as demonstrated above such
an antithesis does not exist among Pauline literary corpus. The Apostle Paul never
contradicted himself in the divinely inspired epistles that bear his human authorship.
What is more, theological triage proponents argue that the path to unity, maturity and
protection from error is through the grid of prioritizing doctrines into levels of most
importance, much importance, and less importance. However, Paul had something
completely different in mind in Ephesians 4:1-16 when it came to true unity, maturity,

\textsuperscript{111} τὸ πάντα “all things” is an accusative of general reference. This means that the church should
aim to grow up in every area of Christianity, especially in sound doctrine.


\textsuperscript{113} ποιεῖται – “causes” has the causative idea. Wallace, \textit{Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics}, 412.
and protection from heresy – namely, “being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (4:3).

**Jude 3**

Mohler began his original article on his thesis for theological triage with a quotation from Jude 3 when he wrote,

In every generation, the church is commanded to ‘contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints.’ That is no easy task, and it is complicated by the multiple attacks upon Christian truth that mark our contemporary age. . . . Today’s Christian faces the daunting task of strategizing which Christian doctrines and theological issues are to be given highest priority in terms of our contemporary context. . . . Neither is an easy task, but theological seriousness and maturity demand that we consider doctrinal issues in terms of their relative importance. 114

However, does Jude 3 teach that to contend earnestly for the faith means we consider doctrinal issues in terms of their relative importance – that is, which doctrines have the highest priority in terms of our contemporary context? Or does Jude 3 teach the priority to guard and defend all of the Scripture (i.e. all doctrines from the Word of God) because all of Scripture is relevant to the believer in spite of the contemporary context in which the believer lives? (cf. Matthew 28:20 “teaching them to observe all that I commanded you” – Jesus gave His apostles this command prior to the close of the canon). Now that the Canon of Scripture is closed, now that the canon of Scripture is complete, that is, Genesis- Revelation – all and every doctrine from the Word of God is essential.

Jude was one of the half-brothers of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jude wrote his epistle with the purpose to remind Christians of the threat of false teachers and appeal to Christians to earnestly contend for the apostolic faith (cf. 3-5). There had been false

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114 Mohler, “A Call for Theological Triage and Christian Maturity.”
teachers who had crept in unnoticed into the fellowship of Christianity (cf. 4). Jude then described the false teachers and their subsequent destruction at great length (cf. 5-16). Jude described these false teachers so that true believers would recognize them and guard against them.

The key verse for Jude is verse 3 which reads, “Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.”¹¹⁵ The adverb “once for all” ἅπαξ (hapax) modified the participle “handed down” παραδόθηση (paradotheisē) meaning that “the faith” was a onetime completed object.¹¹⁶ “Handed down” had the sense that stressed the cessation of an act or state.¹¹⁷ Commentator Green argued that ‘the faith’ meant apostolic teaching and preaching which was the regulative principle upon the church when he wrote:

Jude is therefore saying that the Christian apostolic tradition is normative for the people of God. Apostolic teaching, not whatever be the current theological fashion, is the hallmark of authentic Christianity. The once-for-allness of the apostolic ‘faith’ is inescapably bound up with the particularity of the incarnation, in which God spoke to men through Jesus once and for all.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ MacArthur argued from Jude 3 that “once for all” further defined ‘the faith’ as an entire literary corpus of both the OT and NT when he wrote: Jude further defines the faith in succinct, specific terms as that which was once for all handed down to the saints . . . . Through the Holy Spirit, God revealed the Christian faith to the apostles and their associates in the first century. Their New Testament writings, in conjunction with the Old Testament Scriptures, make up the ‘true knowledge’ of Jesus Christ, and are all that believers need for life and godliness . . . . God with finality and certainty, delivered His complete body of revelation in Scripture. John MacArthur, 2 Peter and Jude, MacNTC (Chicago: Moody, 2005), 156.

¹¹⁶ The Greek participle παραδόθηση (paradotheisē) is an aorist passive participle singular feminine dative which matches in case and number with πίστει (πίστει) “faith.” Commentator Lenski is correct when he identified the aorist participle as an effective aorist. Lenski, The Interpretation of I and II Epistles of Peter, the three Epistles of John, and the Epistle of Jude (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1963), 611.

¹¹⁷ Wallace, Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics, 559.

Jude repeated the adverb “once for all” ἅπαξ (hapax) with the adjective πάντα (panta) “all things” in verse 5 which modified the participle εἰδότας (eidotas) “having known,” a perfect participle that has the sense of a completed action in which the results continue. This concerned the OT history and verdict against false teachers.

Like Jude, 2 Peter taught of the danger of false teachers that would threaten the church throughout all of church history and their subsequent judgment and destruction. The Apostle Peter prioritized the equal importance of both the propositional truth for one interpretation of Scripture (cf. 2 Peter 1:20) as well as the warning of mockers in the last day with their mocking – that is, false teachers who would deviate away from the correct interpretation concerning the day of the Lord (cf. 3:3-10). The reason the Apostle Peter prioritized the equal importance of both of these doctrines was because of his repeated use of τοῦτο πρῶτον γινώσκοντες “this first knowing” (cf. 1:20; 3:3). This is an example from the Word of God where eschatological details, contending for the faith against false teachers and details concerning the doctrine of bibliology are equally important.

In conclusion, the Word of God is an entire corpus of truth. Christians throughout all of church history have been called to earnestly contend for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints. The contemporary context does not determine which doctrines have the highest priority in terms of their relative importance. Instead, the Christian is to equally guard and defend all of the Scripture against all error for all time. All Scripture is relevant to the Christian irrespective of the contemporary context.119

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119 The premise behind DT is that because we live in the 21st century we have an entirely new problem. However, the heresies from false teachers today are repackaged heresies from false teachers of all times throughout church history. There is nothing new under the sun.
CHAPTER THREE
THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS: THE NATURE AND UNITY OF GOD

There is a logic in DT that appeals to man to sort doctrines according to their relative importance determined by the contemporary context. Be that as it may, even if there is a logical supposition it is not justifiable to argue that the Scriptures teach DT unless it has been intended by God from His Word. God is the One who determined the meaning of His Word. DT is reasoning from a man-made paradigm based on human reasoning in its post-fall natural state. Therefore, DT is anthropocentric – that is, theology with its origin in human reasoning. On the other hand, when it comes to God’s Word believers are to reason from God’s perfections and from a spirit that is submissive to the indwelling of the Person of God the Holy Spirit who dwells in the believer. This is theocentric – that is, theology with its origin from God. Reasoning from God’s perspective, namely thinking His thoughts after Him, is possible because of regeneration. The believer can understand God’s Word clearly because God has clearly revealed His Word and the believer is a recipient of the ministry of the illumination of God the Holy Spirit (cf. Eph 1:18).

All doctrines from the completed canon of Scripture are relevant to the believer and are equally true. This is because all doctrine from the Word of God comes from its Author – namely, God.
One of the attributes that defines God is His Self-Existence, and because He is Self-Existent all His attributes work at maximum capacity forever. All God’s attributes are Supreme because He is the One and only Supreme Being whom eternally exists in three distinct Persons, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit (i.e. God is One in Three distinct Persons, each Person is fully God and there is one God – cf. 2 Tim 2:5). Each Person of the Triune God is one in being, essence/substance, co-equal and God is three distinct Persons (cf. Jn 10:30; 1 Cor 8:6). This is the unity of the divine essence in three Persons and in this One essence are Three persons, yet so that neither is there a triple God, nor is the one essence of God divided. The sound doctrine of the Trinity teaches the truth that God the Father, Son, and Spirit, are one God, and yet the Son is not the Father, the Holy Spirit is not the Son and the Father is not the Holy Spirit. When Jesus said in John 10:30 “I and the Father are one” He taught that He is one in essence, one in nature, one in being yet distinct in Person. Therefore, in John 10:30 Jesus made a declaration of His absolute deity. So, there are three distinct Persons in one essence, not three qualities in one and the same person. One God in Trinity and Trinity in unity, neither confounding the Persons, nor separating the substance.

To restate, God is Self-Existent and all His attributes work at maximum capacity forever. It is important to state that God is not a robot or a machine that can be taken apart and isolated in sections. Rather, God is a unity not a unit. The unity of God refers to His Being, One and Only, inseparably constrained to all His attributes. Because of God’s attribute of unity there is no dichotomy in God between His attributes. Therefore, there is unity in God between all His attributes. The unity of God means that there is one God and that the divine nature is complete, unbroken, undivided and indivisible.
In 1445 BC, an angel of the LORD appeared to a man named Moses in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush, on a mountain, in the wilderness of Mount Sinai (cf. Exod 3; Acts 7:30-36). God spoke to the man Moses from the midst of the bush. At this miraculous event, Moses inquired of God’s name. God personally revealed His name to Moses when He said, “I AM WHO I AM . . . . This is My name forever, and this is My memorial-name to all generations” (Exod 3:14b; 15b). “I AM WHO I AM” not only reveals God’s name but also who God is, namely that God is Self-Existent and therefore eternal. Because YHWH is God’s name forever and His memorial-name to all generations, Exodus 3 teaches that God is perpetual and that God attributes to Himself alone divine glory, because He is Self-Existent and therefore eternal; and thus gives being and existence to every creature. In order for one to be Self-Existent means that one has always existed without beginning and ending. In other words, to be Self-Existent means that there was never a point in which one came into existence and there will never be a point in which one will go out of existence, that is, cease to exist. This is why the historical narrative of the burning bush on Mount Horeb is one of the most memorable historical events recorded in the Word of God because it is where God revealed to man His name and the attribute that describes who He is – namely, Self-Existence.

The reason why God’s name “I AM WHO I AM” has the meaning of Self-Existence is because in the context of Exodus 3:14-15 God said, “This is My name forever.” The word “forever” in Hebrew שָׁלֵם and means permanent, forever and ever, everlasting, all successive, eternity. Eternity is not a measurement of time. Eternity is forever. On the other hand, time is a measurement because it has a beginning point and a point of cessation. On the other hand, God’s existence is immeasurable.
The Apostle John recorded in John 14:9 how the Self-Existent infinite God is knowable when he recorded Jesus’ conversation with Philip; “Jesus said to him, ‘Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?'” What is more, in the Gospel of John the Lord Jesus Christ made specific claims to deity, identifying His divine nature with the “I AM” of Ex 3:14-15. For example, the “I AM” statements in John are as follows, namely, “I am the bread of life” (6:35), “I am the Light of the world” (8:12), “I am the door of the sheep” (10:7, cf. v 9), “I am the good shepherd” (10:11; cf. v 14), “I am the resurrection and the life” (11:25), “I am the way, and the truth, and the life” (14:6), and “I am the true vine” (15:1 a).  

The infinite God of Scripture is comprehensible and immanent. What is more, the infinite God is transcendent, that is, He is beyond everyone and everything – so, in that sense He cannot be fully grasped yet He is a personal being who is knowable and in whom all other beings depend on Him for their existence. God is independent and self-sufficient – He depends on no other being. He is the Creator of all and He owns everything (cf. Gen 1:1; Ps 24:1; Neh 9:6). Isaiah 40:28 reads, “Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable,” and shows how all these

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120 Concerning Jesus Christ’s Self-Existence, commentator Lenski claimed that the grammar of John 8:58 indicated Jesus’ aseity when he wrote, “As the aorist sets a point of beginning for the existence of Abraham, so the present tense ‘I am’ predicates absolute existence for the person of Jesus, with no point of beginning at all. That is why Jesus does not use the imperfect ἦμι, ‘I was’; for this would say only that the existence of the person of Jesus antedates the time of Abraham and would leave open the question whether the person of Jesus also has a beginning like that of Abraham (only earlier) or not. What Jesus declares is that, although his earthly life covers less than fifty years, his existence as a person (ἐγώ) is constant and independent of any beginning in time as was that of Abraham…. Thus with the simplest words Jesus testifies to the divine, eternal pre-existence of his person” Richard Lenski, The Interpretation of St. John’s Gospel (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961), 670-1.
attributes of God (Self–Existence, Creator, eternity, omnipresence [all present at all places – there is no place where God is not], omnipotence [all powerful], omniscience [all knowing – there is nothing that God does not know]) are inseparably constrained to one another – specifically God’s Self-Existence and Him as Creator. This is why God is unique because only God can be Self-Existent and infinite, and only God can be the Creator. Only God can be the Creator because if He were to create another god – that created god by definition would be a creature. Isaiah 40:28 emphasized God’s incommunicable attributes – that is, those attributes that belong to God alone. This is important because God’s eternity and God as the Creator are emphasized together in Isaiah 40:28. Isaiah did not compartmentalize God by isolating one of His attributes independently from His other attributes. Instead, God’s attribute of Creator was exercised in harmony with all of His other attributes.

Likewise, the book of Isaiah emphasized God’s eternity and God’s attribute of holiness together in Isaiah 57:15, “For thus says the high and exalted One Who lives forever, whose name is Holy, ‘I dwell on a high and holy place, and also with the contrite and lowly of spirit in order to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.’”

The main point this writer is making is this – to only focus on one of the attributes of God to the neglect of the others concerning God is not rendering an accurate portrayal of the being of God, the glory of God, the work of God, and the Word of God – there is no dichotomy in God between His being, attributes, work, and Word. All of God’s attributes are eternally invested with each other – that is, the attributes of God are unified, interconnected, integrated, interrelated, and interdependent – namely, His Self-Existence,
self-sufficiency, independence (aseity), omni-benevolence, omnipotence, omnipresence, omniscience, graciousness and goodness, holiness, justice, righteousness, wrath (anger), transcendence, immanence, immutability, impassibility, impeccability, incorporeality, incomprehensibility, infinity, jealousy, love, mercy, mystery, unity, providence, simplicity, sovereignty, veracity.

A person has right thoughts about God when that person’s thoughts of God agree with what the Word of God teaches about Him – that is, when we think of His Being and attributes as the Word of God teaches, thus thinking God’s thoughts after Him. Thinking about God rightly is to think about all of who God is concerning the unity and summation of all of God’s perfections. Therefore, all doctrines from the Word of God are eternally invested with one another and are equally true and important (cf. Ps 89:2; 119:89, 160; Is 40:8; Matt 24:35; 1 Pet 1:25).
CONCLUSION

To end, this writer will be greatly disappointed if a clear and concise conclusion was not made from the exegesis and exposition of the Word of God to answer the question, “Is there any biblical warrant for the doctrinal triage?” After a close and careful examination of all the texts above from the Word of God the answer to the question at hand is a resounding no. Therefore, it stands to bear that the doctrinal triage is a foreign idea that must be imported into the text. All indications of the doctrinal triage which are today asserted to be found in these passages must first be inserted.

The need of the hour is the need that has been the need of every hour – that is, sound doctrine from the Word of God. The church is both the pillar and support of the truth (cf. 1 Tim 3:15), therefore the people of God must uphold the truth of God. Truth be told, truth is a full corpus (quantity of content). For example, Jesus prayed to the Father in John 17:17, “Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.” The Word of God is a full corpus of truth. There is no rank or novelty that can be inserted into the Bible as if man stood in judgment of the Word of God. We must not try to suppress any part of the truth in any way as if to say, “you can only come this far and cannot come any further.” Whether it be Christology, pneumatology, cosmology, eschatology, ecclesiology, hamartiology, anthropology, baptism, the Lord’s Supper, it is all essential and equally important. True unity is based on truth, namely doctrinal purity.
In health care, there is a place for the micro and macro allocation of emergency medical resources for mass casualty units or in a busy emergency room at an inner-city hospital. However, that sort of triage is not analogous when one is engaged in contending “earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints” (Jude 1:3 emphasis added on “once for all”). God has spoken and His infinite Word will accomplish everything that it has been predetermined to accomplish (cf. Isa 55:11).

The doctrinal triage is an appeal to ecumenical unity amalgamated with emergency medical pragmatism - not biblical unity. The doctrinal triage compartmentalizes the truth in a way that the Bible does not. What we need today is not ecumenical unity amalgamated with emergency medical pragmatism, which the doctrinal triage allows for, but rather sound doctrinal unity. The DT will be the waterloo of evangelicalism if it continues to gain influence as churches across the globe use it as a principle of sorting biblical doctrines into first, second and third tier categories of importance. However, the church needs sound doctrinal unity not doctrinal novelty. True unity in Christianity is based on the Truth of God. This is a charge for those who are called by the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to unite on sound doctrine across-the-board and preach the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the true mission of the church. This is the true need of the hour. May the Lord Jesus Christ be accurately represented, honored, and glorified in His church. May the church truly take heed to some of the final divinely inspired words that the Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy – namely, “retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you” (2 Tim 1:13-14).
APPENDIX A

IMPLICATIONS FOR ECCLESIOLOGY: PHILOSOPHY OF MINISTRY

Although DT proponents argue that ecclesiology is a second-tiered doctrine, when DT is applied to doctrinal matters in the church it becomes a first-tiered doctrine in application. For instance, in DT the authority over prioritizing doctrines becomes the role of the elders (or whatever ecclesiastical leadership structure) in a particular congregation. The local church assumes the authority to determine which doctrines their particular congregation prioritizes and practices.

One example of this is from an influential church leader Mark Dever. In his book, *The Gospel Made Visible*, Dever explained his understanding of the authority the local churches can exercise concerning the particular importance of relative doctrines:

First, some things are not essential for an individual’s salvation, yet agreement on them is essential in order for a church to function. One thinks of questions surrounding church government, qualifications for membership, or women serving as pastors and elders. Such issues of polity and practice may be declared ‘matters indifferent,’ and freedom may be allowed among different congregations for determining their own answers to these questions. But finally each congregation must do one thing and not the other. A congregation either recognizes women as elders or it does not, an outside bishop as an authority or not, and infants as viable subjects of baptism or not.\(^{121}\)

What is more, Dever argued that every congregation has the responsibility for deciding what membership standards are appropriate for its own church.\(^{122}\) However, it is the Word of God that determines membership standards that are appropriate for the church,


\(^{122}\) Ibid., 153.
not a group of people. It is very dangerous to assert that membership standards are
determined by congregations because congregations are not the source of objective
absolute truth. What if a congregation has deviated from the Word of God? What if a
congregation has redefined God’s Word? What if a congregation has added to or taken
away from God’s Word? Authority in Christianity is not intrinsic to the office of elder or
a congregation in and of themselves. Instead, authority in Christianity is rooted in sound
doctrine from the Word of God. For example, from Titus 2 the Apostle Paul commanded
Titus to “speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine” (2:2b). At the end of the
same context Paul wrote, “these things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority.
Let no one disregard you” (2:15). Therefore, the authority is from sound doctrine, not
Titus.

One extreme example of taking DT to its logical conclusion was when Dever
argued from his sermon on Revelation 20 that leading a congregation in a particular
millennial view was a sin:

I think that millennial views need not be among those doctrines that divide
us. . . . I am suggesting that what you believe about the millennium—how
you interpret these thousand years—is not something that it is necessary
for us to agree upon in order to have a congregation together. . . .
Therefore for us to conclude that we must agree upon . . . a certain view of
the millennium in order to have fellowship together is, I think, not only
unnecessary for the body of Christ, but it is therefore both unwarranted
and therefore condemned by scripture. So if you’re a pastor and you’re
listening to me, you understand me correctly if you think I’m saying you
are in sin if you lead your congregation to have a statement of faith that
requires a particular millennial view.123

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123 Mark Dever, “The End of Death” (audio of sermon, Capital Hill Baptist Church, Washington,
D.C., July 12, 2009), accessed November 27, 2016, http://www.capitolhillbaptist.org/sermon/the-end-of-
death/.
Eschatology is given the rank of third-tier among DT proponents. Therefore, it would make sense that particulars in eschatology like the correct position on the millennial kingdom are also given the rank of third-tier importance. However, the Word of God nowhere presents eschatology as a third-tier doctrine in terms of its importance. In response to Dever this writer boldly affirms that it is not sin for an overseer to lead their congregation in a particular view of the millennium if it is the correct view.

Eschatology is a major theme in the NT. For instance, next to the subject of faith, the theme of Christ’s second coming is the most prominent in the NT. Concerning the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ there are inseparable eschatological issues that are part in parcel to defining the gospel. For example, the doctrines of final judgment, Hell, and Heaven must be part of any gospel presentation. When one presents the gospel one must explain what the Person, perfect life, cross work and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ has saved one from - namely the eternal wrath of God. Furthermore, the second coming is what the believer is hoping for and how the believer is comforted (cf. 1 Thess 4:13-18).

In the millennial kingdom Jesus will sit on David’s throne. Paul identified this as part of the gospel when he wrote, “remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descendant of David, according to my gospel” (2 Tim 2:8). Jesus is the rightful heir of the throne of David which He will occupy in his coming literal thousand-year reign on earth as described in Revelation 20:1-6.

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APPENDIX B

The alternative to DT presented in this thesis is not doctrinal regeneration. Doctrinal regeneration is not a prerequisite to regeneration – that is, the assertion that one must be able to articulate every nuance of doctrines in order to be regenerated.

Regeneration is the new birth (cf. Jn 1:12-13; 3:3-8; Eph 2:4-10; Tit 3:5). It is this writer’s conviction, because of the testimony of Scripture, that regeneration precedes faith and is a monergistic work of God – that is, regeneration is solely the work of God alone – who alone has the ability to cause spiritual birth (cf. Acts 16:4; 1 Cor 2:10-14; Eph 2:4-10). To this effect, regeneration is a spiritual and heavenly birth from God above. Men and women in their natural state are born naturally and come into this world dead in sin – that is, original sin and total depravity. In a state of total depravity, men and women cannot see God and cannot enter into spiritual life unless there is a supernatural miracle of regeneration for a person by God the Holy Spirit. The source of regeneration is God. The cause of regeneration is God. Those who have been born again; who have repented unto salvation and believed the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ; whose lives have been changed by the power of God – evidence signs of spiritual life and the assurance of salvation which is the consequence of regeneration.

The description of the results of regeneration from the Word of God include the following: (1) The Scriptures teach that a person who has been born again loves God and others who have also been born again – namely, fellow Christians – “Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him” (1 Jn 5:1); (2) The Scriptures teach that the person who has been born again
lives a life characteristic of not practicing sin – “No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God” (1 Jn 3:9). This does not teach sinless perfection this side of the grave but it does teach that the believer lives a habitual life of not practicing sin. The participle γεγεννημένος (having been born) is a perfect participle passive nominative masculine singular – that means, “having been born of God” has the kind of action that is completed and the results continue. Pointedly, the following three words in 1 John 3:9 – namely, ἁμαρτίαν οὐ ποιεῖ “sin not practicing” has the kind of action that is defined by the present aspect and indicated an ongoing habitual lifestyle of not practicing sin! The Apostle John wrote of the cause of this, namely, “because His seed abides in him” – which indicated the seed that is placed into a person at regeneration that in other places is referred to as the Word of God (cf. Lk 8:11; 1 Pet 1:23). What is more, καὶ οὐ ἁμαρτάνειν δύναται “and he is not able to sin” also has the present aspect and indicated an ongoing habitual lifestyle of not being able to practice sin. And the Apostle John wrote of the cause of this – that is, “because he has been born of God”; γεγένηται (he has been born) a perfect indicative passive verb which indicated the kind of action that is completed and the results continue. Practicing sin means living in sin as a lifestyle which does not characterize the born again person.

What is more, there are other objective evidences from the epistle of 1 John for a person to determine that they are in fact regenerate – which include, confession of sin, repentance and walking in the light (1 Jn 1:5-10); a life characteristic of obedience by keeping Christ’s commandments (1 Jn 2:3-4); not being a liar (1 Jn 2:4); love for other Christians (1 Jn 2:9-11; 5:1); hating the world system (1 Jn 2:15-17); perseverance in
sound doctrine (1 Jn 2:24-25); a life characteristic of righteousness (1 Jn 3:10); God the Holy Spirit’s testimony (1 Jn 4:13; cf. Rom 8:16). What is more, the book of Hebrews taught that a person who is disciplined by God is a child of God (cf. Heb 12:5-8).

Therefore, according to the standard in Scripture, doctrinal regeneration is not a prerequisite to regeneration – that is, the assertion that one must be able to articulate every nuance of doctrines in order to be regenerated. It is a fallacy for proponents of DT to justify their system through the proposition that the arguments herein in this thesis against DT are an appeal to doctrinal regeneration. This writer has boldly affirmed that regeneration is monergistic and precedes faith. The fallacy called poisoning the well is a fallacy where adverse information about a target is preemptively presented to an audience, with the intention of discrediting or ridiculing everything that the target person is arguing. Proponents of DT are poisoning the well if they submit that the arguments here in this thesis against DT are in any quality, from the macro to the minutia, inductively or deductively, in the sphere of doctrinal regeneration.

This writer boldly affirms that when a person is regenerated they are then given faith as a gift and as a result the ability to believe in Christ for eternal life to be saved from the wrath of God. The recipient of salvation, now being spiritually alive, has believed the truth concerning Jesus, knows the truth, and has been set free (cf. Jn 8:31-32; Eph 4:21). The person who has been born again has the Spirit of God, namely the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Triune God, residing in them salvifically. It is the ministry of God the Holy Spirit to illuminate the Word of God to the believer and teach them the truth (Eph 1:18; 1 Jn 2:20-21, 24, 27). There is a development of growth that the believer goes through illustrated in the Word of God as a newborn baby to a mature adult nurtured
on milk to solid food (cf. Eph 4:13-15; Heb 5:11-6:2; 1 Pet 2:2-3). This does not presuppose DT, but instead the believer grows in his or her understanding of the Word of God in all areas of doctrine. There are elements of ecclesiology and eschatology inseparably constrained to the correct gospel presentation that are identified as milk and foundational together with soteriology, to be specific, “instructions about washings and laying on of hands” (i.e. ecclesiology) and “the resurrection from the dead and eternal judgment” (i.e. eschatology; cf. Heb 5:13-6:2). The writer to the Hebrews exhorted the readers to press on to maturity – that is, moving forward in growth concerning all areas of sound doctrine from the Word of God. DT stunts the growth that the NT promotes.

Arguing against DT is not leading the mind astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ because Christians are to press on to maturity rooted on the foundation of the Lord Jesus Christ and His cross work. All Scripture is theopneustos, that is, God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness (cf. 2 Tim 3:16). Therefore, there is nothing that is theopneustos that can lead the mind astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.

In conclusion, this thesis does not promote doctrinal regeneration, namely, the assertion that one must be able to articulate every nuance of doctrines as the prerequisite or condition to be regenerated. On the other hand, DT is reductionistic in nature and a formula that censors the Word of God. As such, DT is a minimalist approach to water down the Word of God for the purpose of ecumenism which can create a community of false conversions at a large scale. Many sympathetic to DT often ask, “Which doctrines must a person absolutely agree with in order to be saved?” To which this writer responds, “How is that question not an appeal to doctrinal regeneration?”
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