



AREOPAGUS PROCLAMATION

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Examples would include specific positions or opinions on the mode of baptism, the exact timing and sequence of end-time events, the age of the earth, types of church government, and

whether it's okay to mow your lawn on a Sunday! Non-essentials can be important, and they often arouse strong sentiment. But they are not a good test of orthodoxy.

So who decides what is essential and what is non-essential?

For the most part the Church as a whole has always agreed on this matter, as evidenced by the historic Christian creeds, the shared views of the reformers, and faith statements made by major Christian bodies even today, e.g. the National Association of Evangelicals.

But many Christians I know can't even agree on which translation of the Bible to use.

Well, why should they? There are a number of good translations of the Bible available today. And no one English translation of the Bible should be considered exclusively valid because there are many languages in the world. Languages change. Older reliable manuscripts are being discovered. The best Bible translations are those that formally and accurately reflect the best manuscripts. And there is more than one translation that does that today, e.g. ESV, NASB, KJV, NKJV, HCSB, NIV.

But didn't Jesus once pray that His followers would always be in agreement?

Jesus prayed for unity of spirit, not uniformity of opinion. The real focus of His prayer in John 17:22-23, and the major thrust of His command in John 13:34-35, was that unified conviction and visible love would mark His followers so clearly that others would know that they belonged to Him and that He was exactly who He claimed to be.

Why can't Christians just see things alike? Why so many different interpretations?

Because we're human. We have limited understanding. In this life "we see in a mirror dimly," the Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 13:12. Even after studying the Bible and serving Christ for a lifetime, great and faithful followers of Christ have disagreed on certain points.

Maybe God actually designed it that way in order to provide His followers with opportunities to demonstrate love, kindness, and unity against the backdrop of their differences.

This famous adage says it well: "In essentials, unity. In non-essentials, liberty. In all things, charity."

Well, that's not the way I've seen it work. I've been turned off on Christianity for a long time by all the squabbling and bickering and back-stabbing that I've seen.

I can understand your feelings. Sin and pride often become factors when differences arise. And that has sometimes led to behavior which is inexcusable.

But you're really not being fair to Christ, who is perfect, or even to yourself, when you judge Christianity by the imperfect followers of Christ. You don't denounce America just because all Americans don't agree with each other, or when some Americans act or think improperly. Why do so with Christianity?

If Christianity Is True, Why Do Christians Disagree with Each Other?

by Daryl E. Witmer

The following conversation is based on numerous exchanges that I've had with believers and skeptics on this subject over the years.

If all Christians believe in Jesus Christ, why don't they all agree with each other?

They do. All Christians *do* agree with each other on all essential matters of faith.

Really? Well then, why are there so many denominations?

Because Christians often *don't* agree on non-essential issues.

What are essential matters?

Essential matters include positions and truths which are considered absolute, basic, and non-negotiable — doctrines that literally define historic Christian faith, such as the inspiration of Scripture, the infinite-personal triune nature of God, the Deity of Christ, the reality of human sin, salvation by grace through faith — just to name a few.

What are non-essential issues?

Non-essentials are positions and convictions over which mature thoughtful sincere followers of Jesus Christ can honestly differ, yet still be considered Christian.

