



## PART ONE: RELIGION ROUND A ROCK

*A Hill to Die On* is used to refer to an issue or belief held to be so important that it is worth fighting for at all costs. Most Christians are known for what they're against, not what they're for and they seem to fight about almost everything. To most Christians, they have hundreds—if not thousands—of hills they would die on. But if everything is important, then nothing is important.

**BIG IDEA:** [Whatever you put at the core of your beliefs—include love.](#)

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When you think about the core beliefs of Christianity, what doctrines come to mind?
2. What are beliefs that you have seen churches and Christians fight about?
3. Below are 22 theological statements. Each represents a position in a theological category. Your job is to evaluate each statement in terms of its centrality to the Christian faith by identifying, in your opinion, what's core and what's peripheral. Rate each statement on a scale of "1" to "5," with "1" indicating the statement is absolutely core to the Christian faith, a "2" indicating it's a little less important, and so on. A "5" indicates the statement deals with an area of theology that is clearly on the periphery. As you rate each statement, pay attention to why you rate it the way you do. Discuss it at group.

Just to be clear, our working definitions of core and peripheral are as follows:

- Core = those doctrines that are essential to the Christian faith and necessary for salvation.
- Peripheral = those doctrines that are not essential to the Christian faith and aren't necessary for salvation.

\_\_\_ There is one God who exists in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

\_\_\_ The church must observe two sacraments: baptism and communion.

\_\_\_ Christians should abstain from alcohol and smoking.

\_\_\_ God predestined some to salvation and others to damnation.

\_\_\_ Baptism must be done by full-body immersion.

\_\_\_ All humans are separated from God by sin and are in need of God's grace.

\_\_\_ Jonah was literally swallowed by a big fish and lived inside it for three days.

\_\_\_ Salvation is found no other name than Jesus.

\_\_\_ There is a literal heaven and a literal hell.

\_\_\_ Homosexual behavior is a sin.

\_\_\_ Abortion and the death penalty is a sin.

\_\_\_ The Holy Spirit dwells within all believers.

\_\_\_ The Bible is inerrant, which means without error.

\_\_\_ Jesus was literally and bodily resurrected from the dead.

\_\_\_ The creation accounts in Genesis are literal.

\_\_\_ The Holy Spirit gives all the spiritual gifts today that are described in the New Testament.

\_\_\_ Before Jesus returns to earth, all believers will be raptured to avoid the great tribulation.

\_\_\_ Satan is a fallen angel who opposes God's purposes in the world.

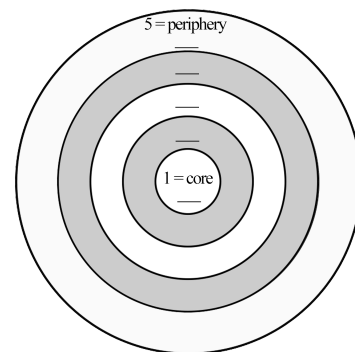
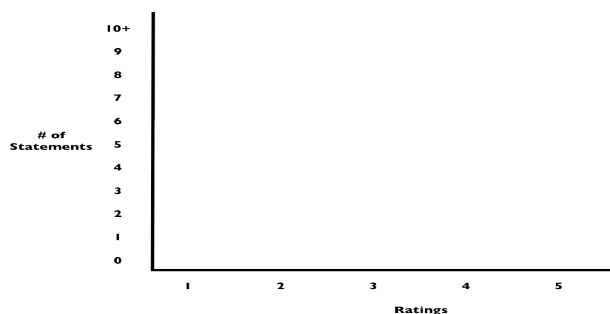
\_\_\_ Jesus was fully God and fully human.

\_\_\_ God will use the nation of Israel to fulfill end-time prophecies.

\_\_\_ Christians cannot lose their salvation.

\_\_\_ Biblical definition of marriage is between one man and one woman.

Now use the graph below to chart your results. Draw a bar to indicate the number of statements you rated “1,” and so on. For example, if you rated eleven statements as “1,” your bar over the “1” should reach the 10+ position on the scale on the left side of the graph.



The temptation is to put too much into the core. We do want to assign as much importance to our favorite theory about the second coming as we do the doctrine of salvation by grace. This is a mistake, as grace is core, but a particular stance on how the second coming will happen is not. If we try to put too much in the core, we end up minimizing the things that really do need to be there.

4. So which ones were your *Hills to Die On*? Which ones did you distinguish as core beliefs to Christianity? What are the essentials to the Bible and Christian faith? Which ones were peripheral?
5. *With your Bible or YouVersion, read Matthew 22:35-39.*

*One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied: “ ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’* *Matthew 22:35-39*

6. What do we know about the person who asked Jesus this question? How did others see him? What was his motive—to really learn about God, or to try to trap Jesus?
7. If you had to summarize doctrines and beliefs found in the Old Testament, which ones would you say are core?
8. How did Jesus define the core beliefs of the Old Testament? Jesus boiled the 39 books of the Old Testament—23,145 verses—down to 1 core principle—love—applied 2 different ways. Does that surprise you? In what way?
9. Whatever your core beliefs, the one thing you can’t leave out is love. Whatever you put at the core, love has to be included. However you disagree with someone who doesn’t have your beliefs? It’s just as important how you treat them then it is what you believe. If the church and denominations did that, how might the people view the church and Christians differently today?
10. What is essential to believe in order to come to faith in Jesus?
11. Chris said that, “Every atrocity in church history happened when the church confused fringe, sideline beliefs with core beliefs.” Do you agree or disagree? Why or why not?

## MOVING FORWARD

How has your definition of core Christian beliefs changed through this discussion?

## WHAT WILL YOU DO?

Most of the time we operate with a flawed understanding of what the core of Christianity is all about. Because of this, many churches spend more time fighting about beliefs than loving God and loving one another.



## CHANGING YOUR MIND

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