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## FRIENDLY FIRE

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*“When all of the shootin' starts, first be sure all of the enemy is in front of you.” -  
-A wise old man.*

I am no theologian. I don't claim to be one. I haven't attended Bible College, studied in depth [eschatology](#) (1. The branch of theology that is concerned with the end of the world or of humankind. 2. A belief or a doctrine concerning the ultimate or final things, such as death, the destiny of humanity, the Second Coming, or the Last Judgment.), nor have I been trained in [exegesis](#) (1. Critical explanation or interpretation of a text or portion of a text, esp. of the Bible) and [hermeneutics](#) (1. The science of interpretation, esp. of the Scriptures. 2. The branch of theology that deals with the principles of Biblical exegesis.). But I can read, have studied the Bible, and spent a great deal of time in the school of the wilderness.

I was raised a Catholic, attended catechism, first communion, and confirmation. My wife and I were married in the Catholic Church. But in 1987 after 35 years of regular church attendance, I met Christ in an evangelical church. He radically changed me. I jokingly say to others that Jesus did for me what a phone booth did for Clark Kent... changed me into a brand new creature. The transformation was real. I have been following hard after Jesus ever since.

When I was about 14, I remember asking my Protestant mom, *“Are Catholics considered Christians?”* She reassured me that we were, at least to the depth that both of us understood that term.

Let me stop right here a moment. Please do not flood me with emails about how the Catholic Church is the *“whore of Babylon,”* that Catholics are not saved, etc. That is not what this article is about. Save your time. And also, Catholics please don't send me emails exhorting me to return to the *“Mother Church.”* I am not as

dumb or as blind on both issues as many readers like to assume I am. Can we please stay on topic? I believe that Catholics can be saved, just like some Baptist who think they are, aren't.

If I understand my theology correctly, there are [Essential doctrines](#) that all professing Christians must believe. Those beliefs consist of certain Christian doctrines that constitute the core of the faith. *Central doctrines include: [the Trinity](#), [the deity of Christ](#), [the bodily resurrection](#), [the atoning work of Christ on the cross](#), and [salvation by grace through faith](#). These doctrines so comprise the essence of the Christian faith that to remove any of them is to make the belief system non-Christian.* As far as I know, all Christian denominations believe that, or they are just pretending to be Christian.

With me so far?

[Denominations](#) are a *cluster of separate congregations, which have unified together due to their agreement on certain issues, and perhaps due to their disagreement with the viewpoints of other churches or denominations.* Christian denominations agree on the essential doctrines listed above, but disagree on non-essential, or “peripheral” issues. *Peripheral (i.e. Of minor relevance or importance.) doctrines include such issues as **the timing of the tribulation, the method of baptism, or the structure of church government.** For example, one can be wrong about the identity of "the spirits in prison" ([1 Peter 3:19](#)) or about the timing of the rapture and still go to heaven, but one cannot deny salvation by grace or the deity of Christ ([John 8:24](#)) and be saved.*

Man, I wish someone would have explained this to me years ago. It would have saved me a lot of headaches. As a “new Christian” I was naïve enough to assume that Christians agreed with each other. After years of dodging arrows from other “Christians” I now understand America’s problem.

When will we Christians figure out who the real enemy is?

Christians are a strange group. If you were to ask the average church-goer what religion he was, he would most likely respond “I’m a Methodist,” or “I am a Baptist.” He would self-identify his faith by his denomination. The correct answer would be “I am a Christian.” Unfortunately, most of our loyalties lie with our denomination. Remember, denominations are formed around “non-essential” issues.

What denomination are you? If you are a Methodist, can you explain to me what really separates you from a Lutheran, a Baptist, a Presbyterian, a Church of Christ, or the dreaded non-denominational? Most of us had our denomination chosen for us. I was Catholic because my dad was. I had no idea where an Episcopal differed from us. I’m not sure I know today.

Sadly, today, most churches major on the minors. Rather than working together across denominational lines, and standing together for the essentials of the Faith, most Christians spend their time fighting other denominational issues. We fight over

- Baptism--whether to submerge or sprinkle.
- The Rapture—pre-trip, mid-trip, post trip.
- Tongues—of the Lord or of the Devil, ceased or not ceased.
- Dress---jewelry good, jewelry bad. Long hair, short hair,
- Bible----literal translation, figurative translation. Legalism, apostasy.

Jesus said: *“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted **the weightier matters** of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. **Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel.**”* --Matthew 23:23-24

Straining at a gnat while America crumbles; that is the American church.

Mark 7: 7-9 *Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition.... **Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered:***

This came home to me a few years ago. I was invited by a local church to come and speak at a youth rally. The youth leader was all excited about the opportunity to bring together Christian kids in the community. He had contacted other churches, youth leaders, and pastors. He had mailed letters of invitation, produced fliers, and taken out radio ads. This energetic young man, on fire for Christ, had done all he could do to make the event a success. His energy on the phone the night before the event filled me with anticipation.

You know the result. The next evening 20 kids showed up, all but one from the hosting church. The youth leader was crushed. He knew the battle our young kids face. He knew the sense of isolation Christians felt in school. He understood that the eternal souls of children in that town were in danger, and that it was up to the Christians to do something.

When I got home I called a pastor friend of mine who lived in the same town. I shared the story I just told you. I asked him why no other churches encouraged their kids to go to the rally. I'll never forget his reply.

*“Coach, we appreciate his efforts, but the truth is we couldn't encourage our kids to go because we don't agree with their theology.”*

I felt the hair stand up on the back of my neck. *“Shame on you, Pastor, for not supporting their efforts, I told him as I bristled. “I notice you have no problem encouraging your kids to go to the public schools, and you certainly know the theology there. When we get to Heaven I think we will all be surprised at who is, and isn’t, there.”*

Teaching for commandments the doctrines of men.....

Get your head out of your church!

Have you looked around America lately? Are your eyes open to the frontal assault that the haters of God have launched against this nation? Don’t you know 4,000 babies are being murdered every day, the homosexual agenda is being forced down the throats of Christian children, that radical Islam is chomping at the bit for the opportunity to convert your child at the point of a sword, and that daily millions of souls are careening towards an eternity apart from God? All the while we fight our Christian brothers over man-interpreted rules.

*Mark 9:38-40. And John answered him, saying, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and he followeth not us: and we forbad him, because he followeth not us. But Jesus said, Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me. For he that is not against us is on our part.*

What was it Ben Franklin is reported to have said? We will all hang together, or we will all hang separately.

Hey Christians. Other Christians are not your enemy.

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