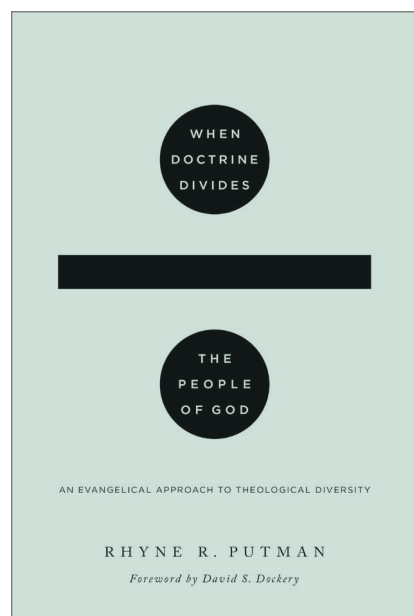


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When Doctrine Divides the People of God: An Evangelical Approach to Theological Diversity

By Rhyme R. Putman

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WHEN DOCTRINE DIVIDES THE PEOPLE OF GOD

Dr. Rhyme Putman's New Book Offers Biblical and Pastoral Wisdom for Navigating Issues that Divide Christians

WHEATON, Ill.—Daily newspapers and social media feeds are constantly filled with information on the latest controversy. From sports, to entertainment, to politics, no sphere is immune from heated disputes and debates—Christians included! In the context of Christian community, conflict can easily arise between faithful, Bible-reading believers who interpret the Bible differently from one another. Yes, doctrine is vitally important, but when is it important enough for Christians to diverge? And what are believers to do when disagreements stand between them and the biblical call for unity?

In his new book, *When Doctrine Divides the People of God: An Evangelical Approach to Theological Diversity* (Crossway, May 2020), Rhyme Putman acknowledges this challenge. “Even as society becomes increasingly antagonistic toward traditional Christian beliefs and practices, many followers of Jesus remain gridlocked over the doctrinal matters that separate them. Though we live in what is becoming a post-Christian culture, some segments of the church have never been more theologically engaged—or divided,” writes Putman. “Though we should be modeling civility for our deeply divided political and cultural climate, we who are the people of God have done very little to set ourselves apart from the broader culture. Instead of embodying the gospel of grace, we have just been part of the problem.”

Believers need to “think more clearly about how [they] disagree about doctrine and how [they] respond to [their] parochial skirmishes.” In the midst of these disagreements, Putman affirms the need for grace in disagreement and unity in diversity. To this end, *When Doctrine Divides the People of God* is a work in theological method that seeks to answer two foundational questions about theological diversity:

1. How do Christ-followers with similar convictions about Scripture and the gospel come to such drastically different points of view in matters of faith and practice?
2. What should otherwise like-minded Christians do about the doctrines that divide them?

In coming to his conclusions, Putman addresses the role that reason and human psychology plays in interpretive conflicts, as well as the power that bias and tradition have in people when disagreements arise. He also includes practical advice from philosophers to help Christians in the midst of theological debates, ending the book with a “constructive Christian ethic of doctrinal disagreement informed by Scripture, church history, and pastoral theology.”

Continued

“As lovers of the truth, we should not reduce our doctrinal disagreements to much ado about nothing. Healthy disagreements are an important part of sanctification and growth in ‘grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ’ (2 Pet. 3:18),” writes Putman. “The doctrinal distinctives of our traditions and denominations are important, giving shape to who we are. To force conformity of thought or the capitulation of beliefs would work against the grain of what it means to be a Protestant.”



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rhyné R. Putman (PhD, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary) is an associate professor of theology and culture at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, where he has served since 2010. He is the pastor of preaching and vision at First Baptist Church in Kenner, Louisiana, and has published multiple volumes and articles, such as *The Method of Christian Theology* and *In Defense of Doctrine*. Rhyné and his wife, Micah, currently reside in New Orleans together with their two children.

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