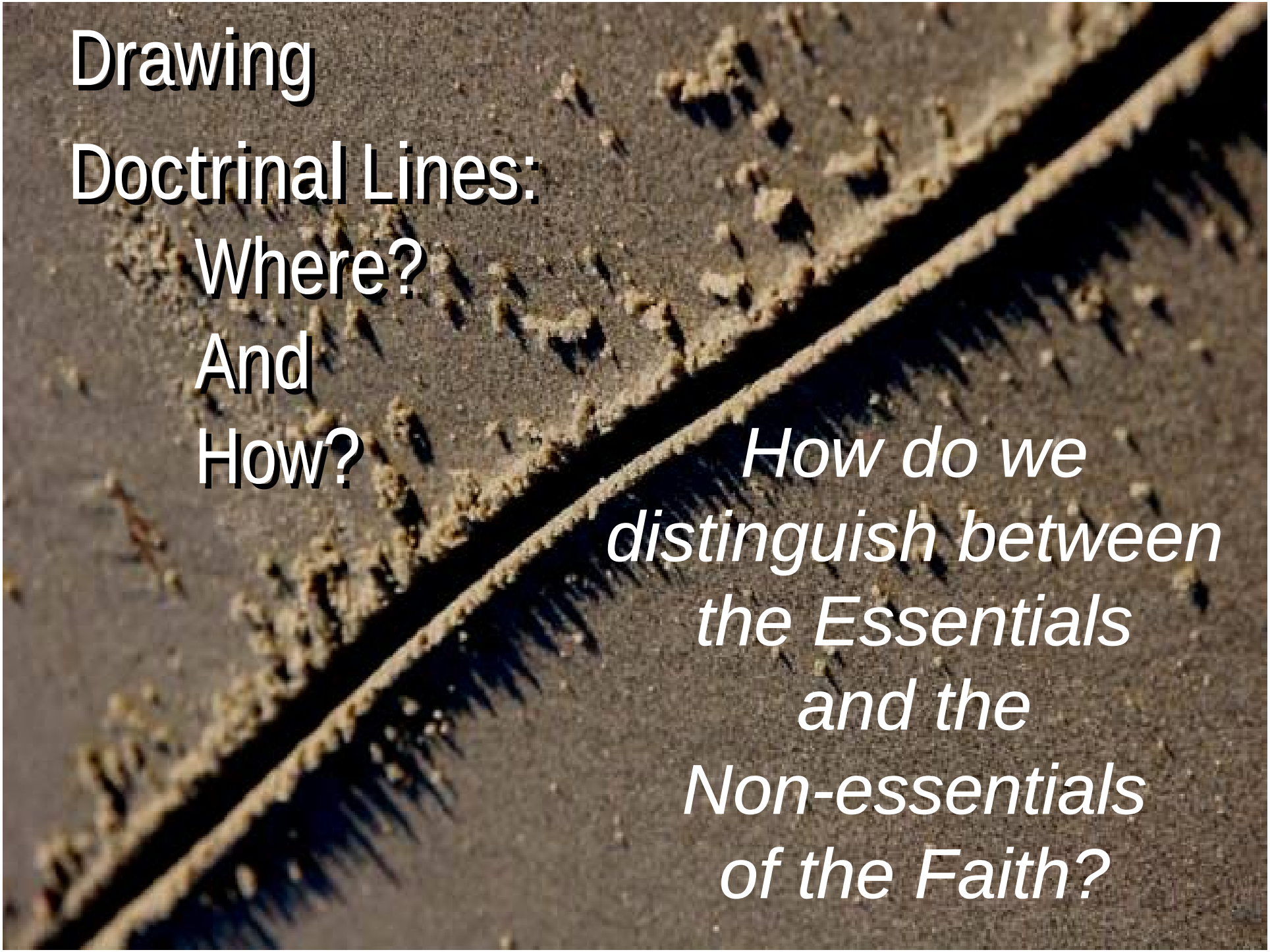
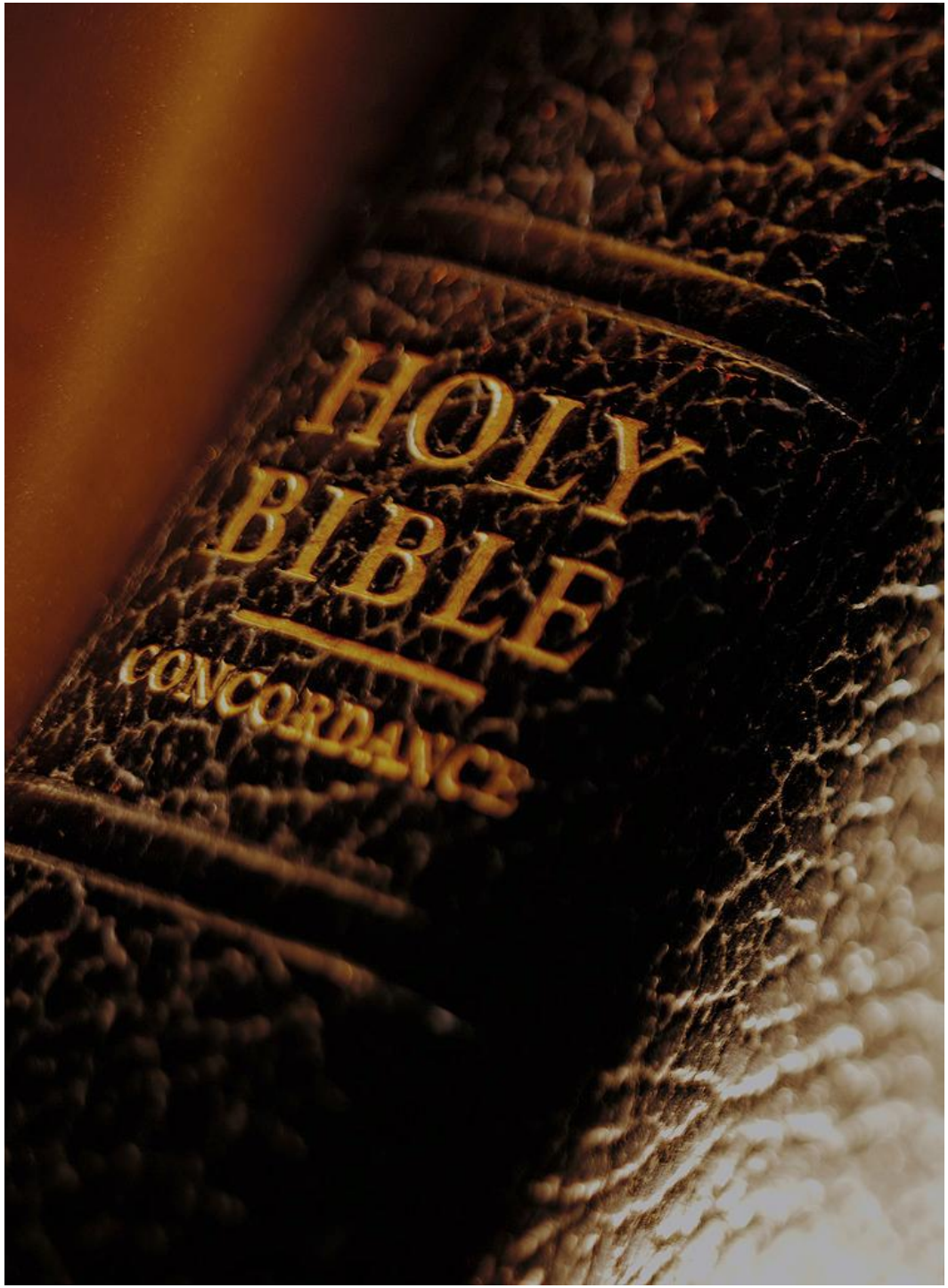

Drawing
Doctrinal Lines:
Where?
And
How?
How do we distinguish between the Essentials and the Non-essentials of the Faith?

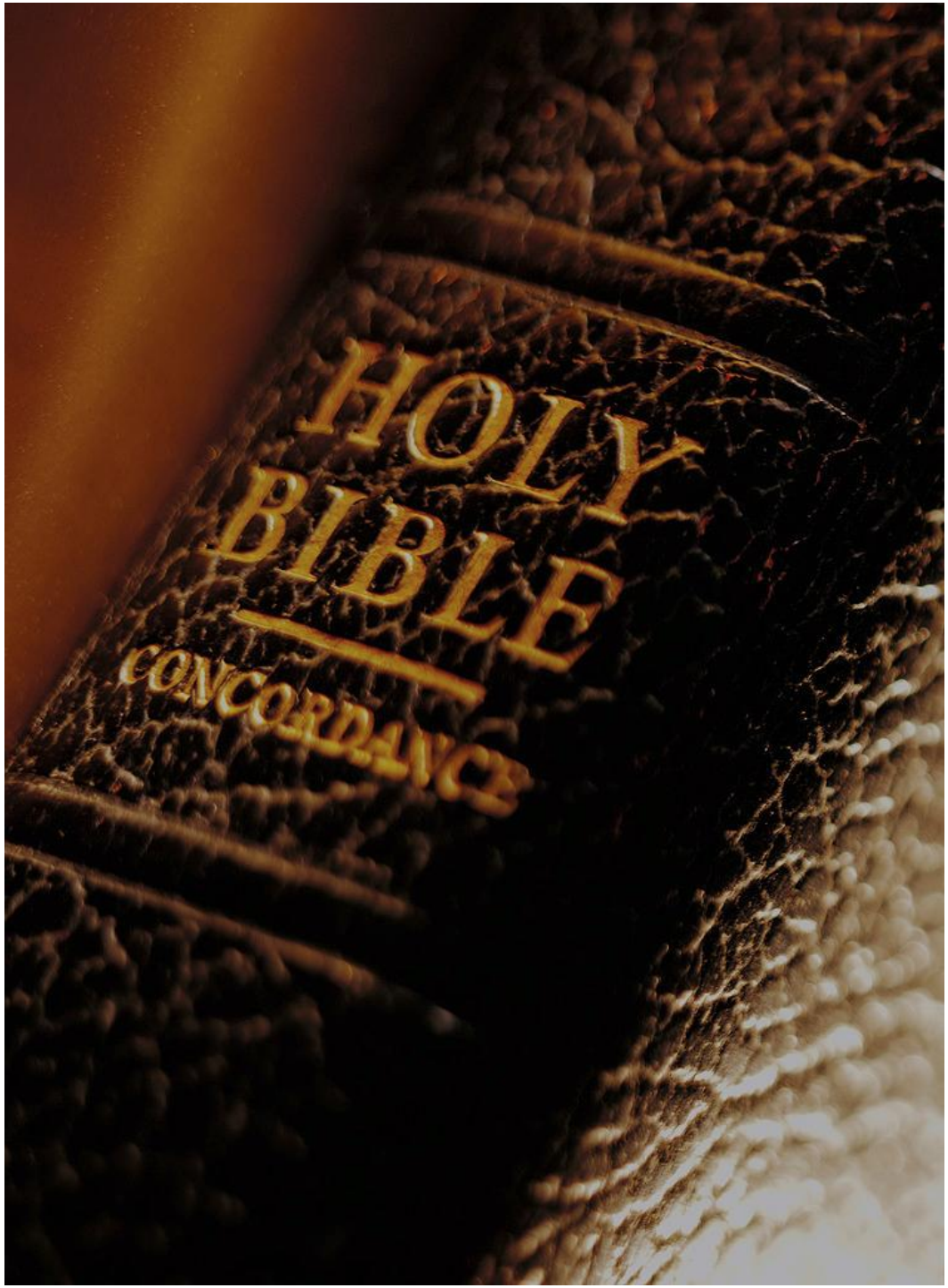
Drawing doctrinal lines–

- We must not draw them willy-nilly,
- We must not draw them based on church traditions,
- We must not draw them on some utilitarian grounds.
- Rather we need some sort of process to enable us to draw them
  rationally,
  logically,
  and biblically.



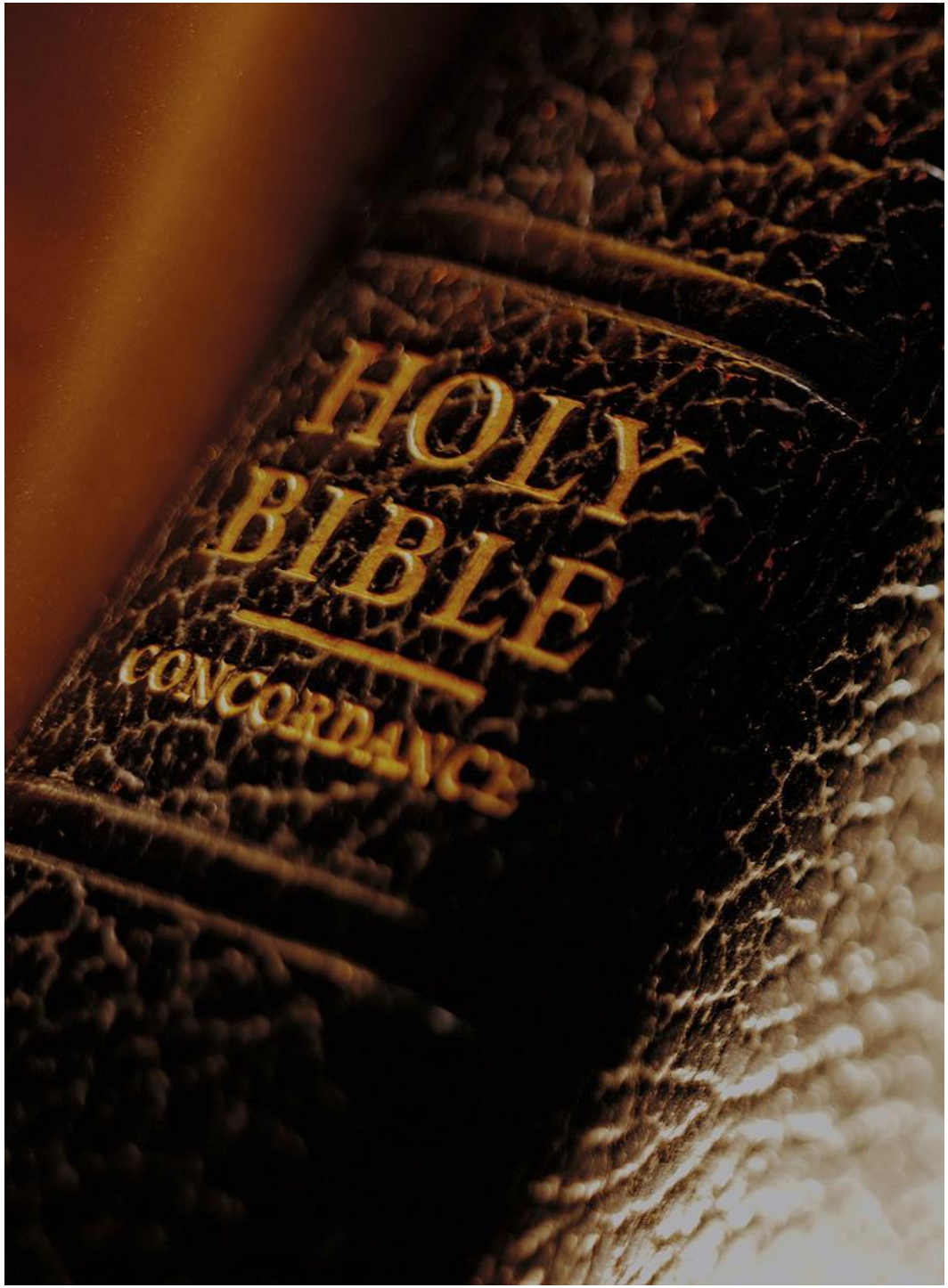
- Issues that have Impacted the EFCA:

1. The destiny of the unevangelized



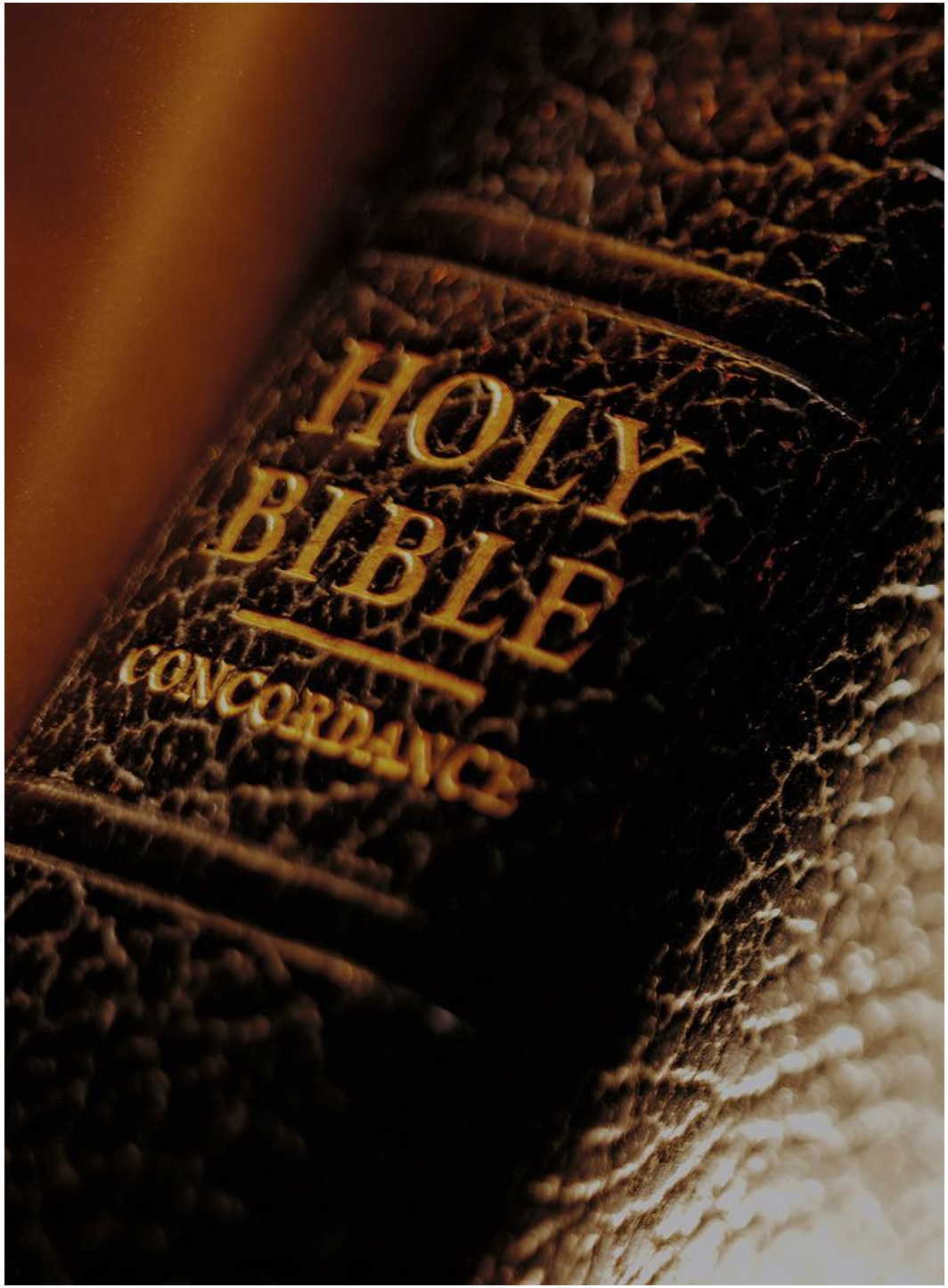
- Issues that have Impacted the EFCA:

1. The destiny of the unevangelized
2. The nature of the resurrection body

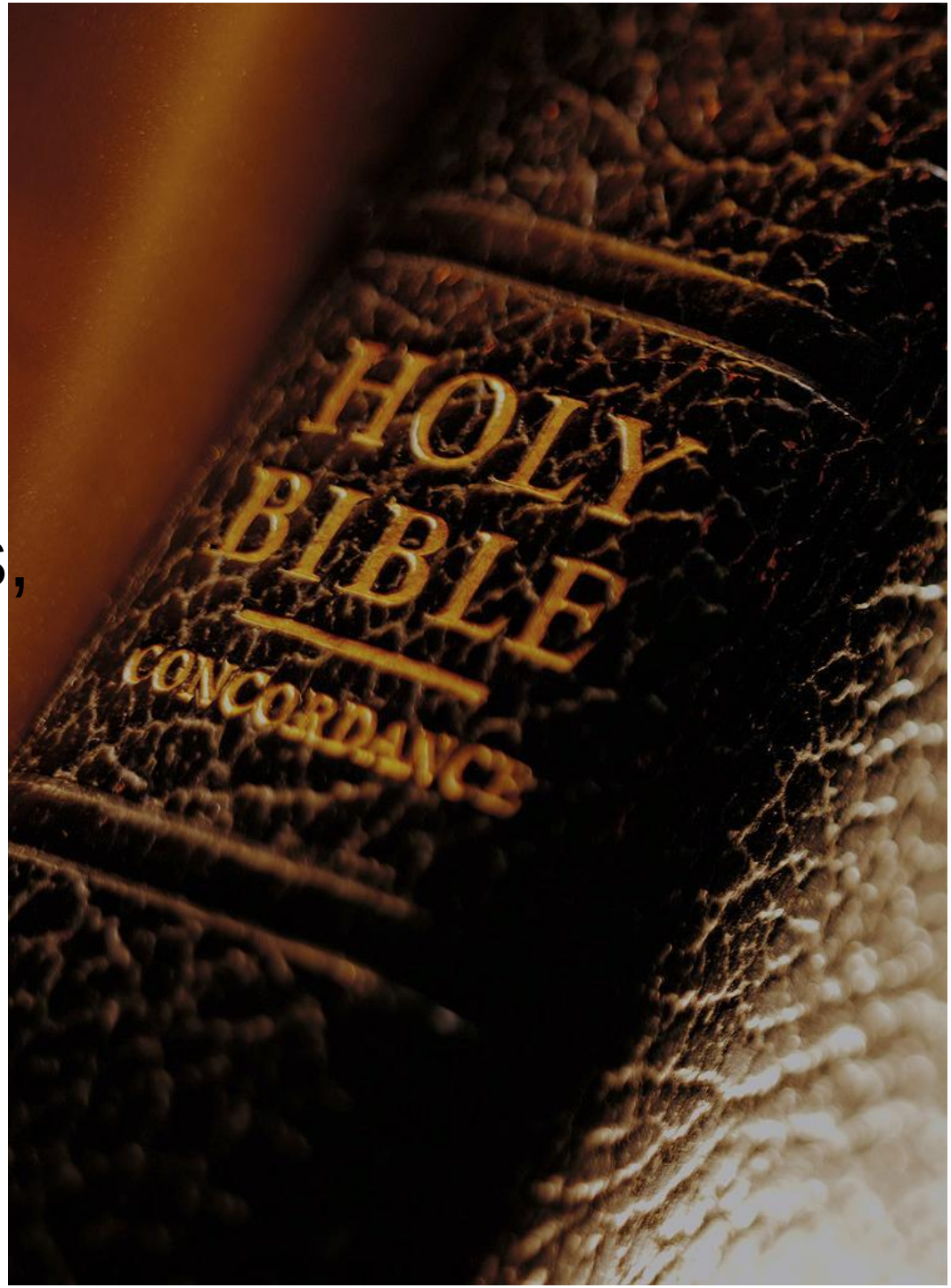


- Issues that have Impacted the EFCA:

1. The destiny of the unevangelized
2. The nature of the resurrection body
3. The time of the rapture



- In essentials, unity;
- In non-essentials, liberty;
- In all things, charity.



Science has historically distinguished between:

- 1. Law - gravity
- 2. Principle
- 3. Theory - evolution
- 4. Hypothesis
- 5. Speculation - life on other planets

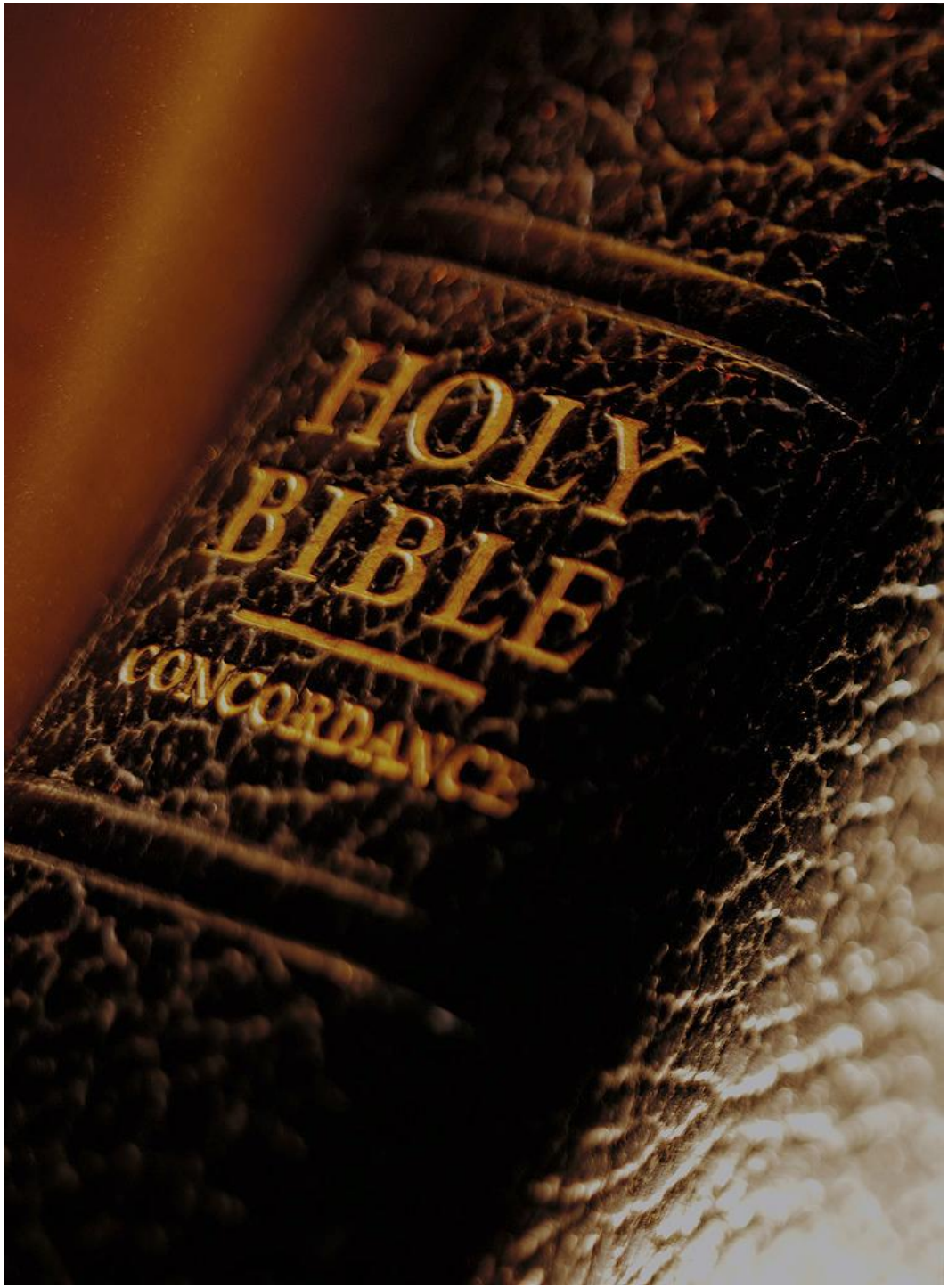
- Levels of theological thought:

1. Dogma
   (scientific law)

2. Doctrine
   (scientific principle)

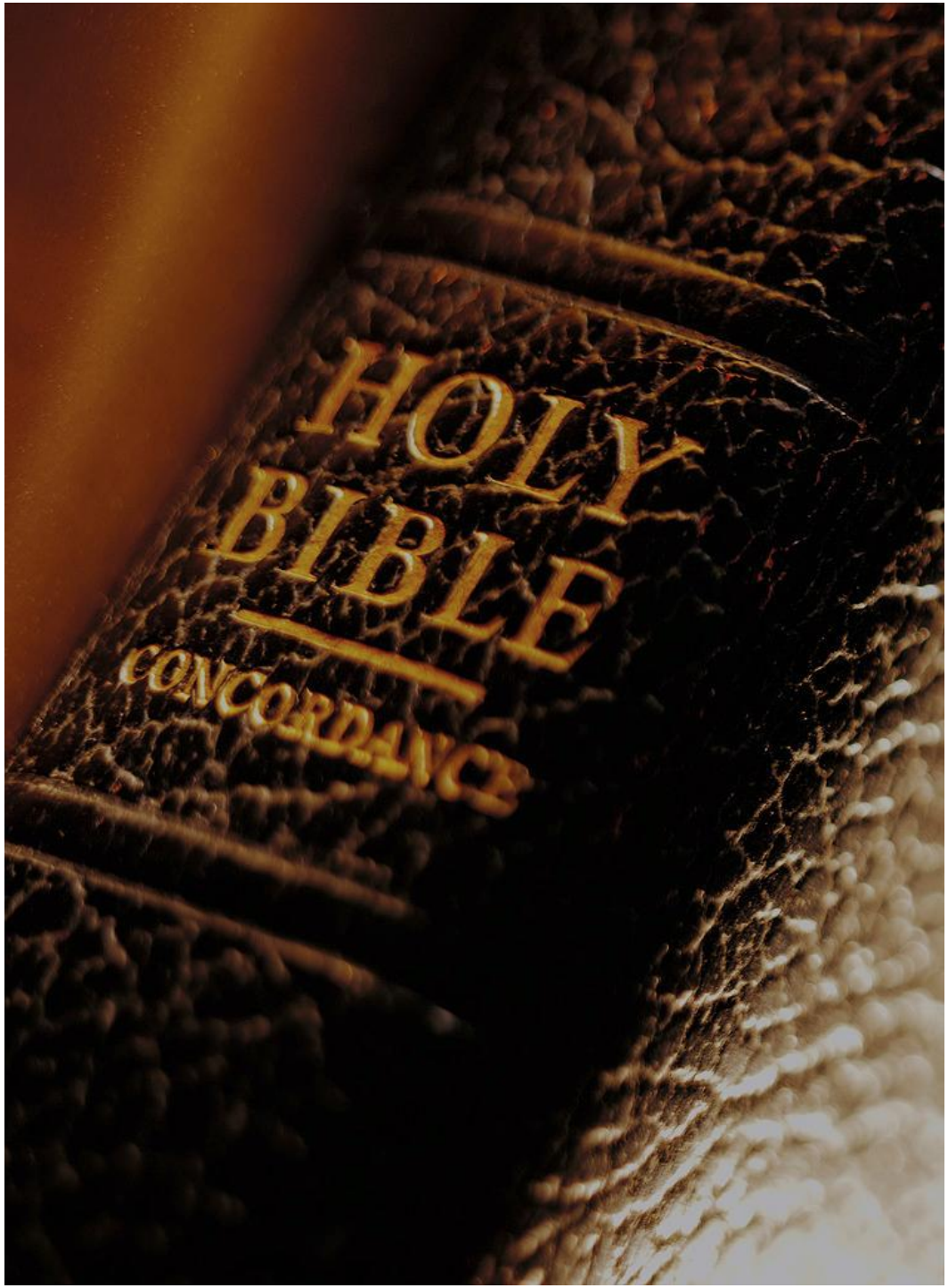
3. Theory (scientific theory or hypothesis)

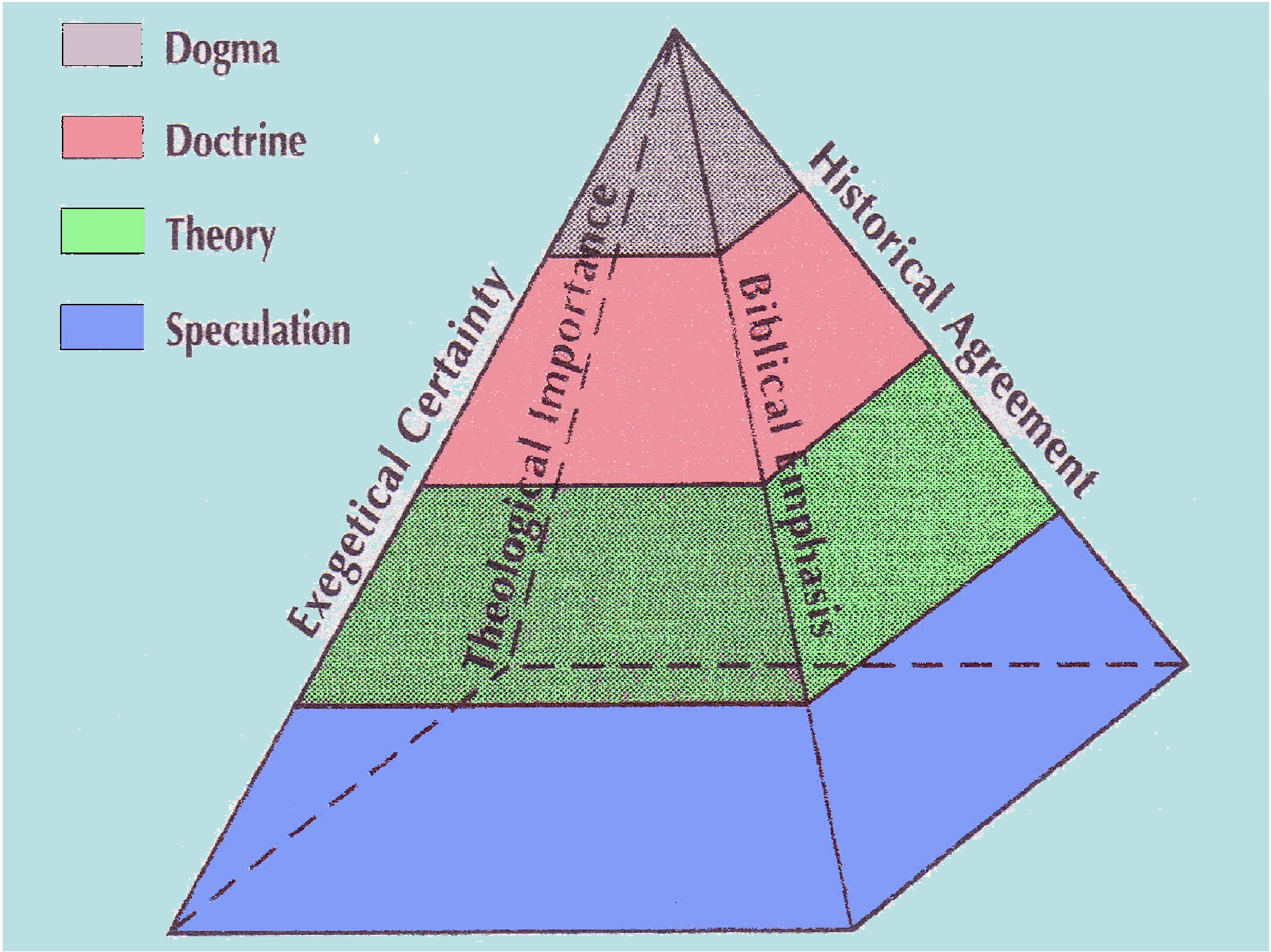
4. Speculation
   (scientific speculation)



- Four factors can help us determine how to categorize ideas properly:

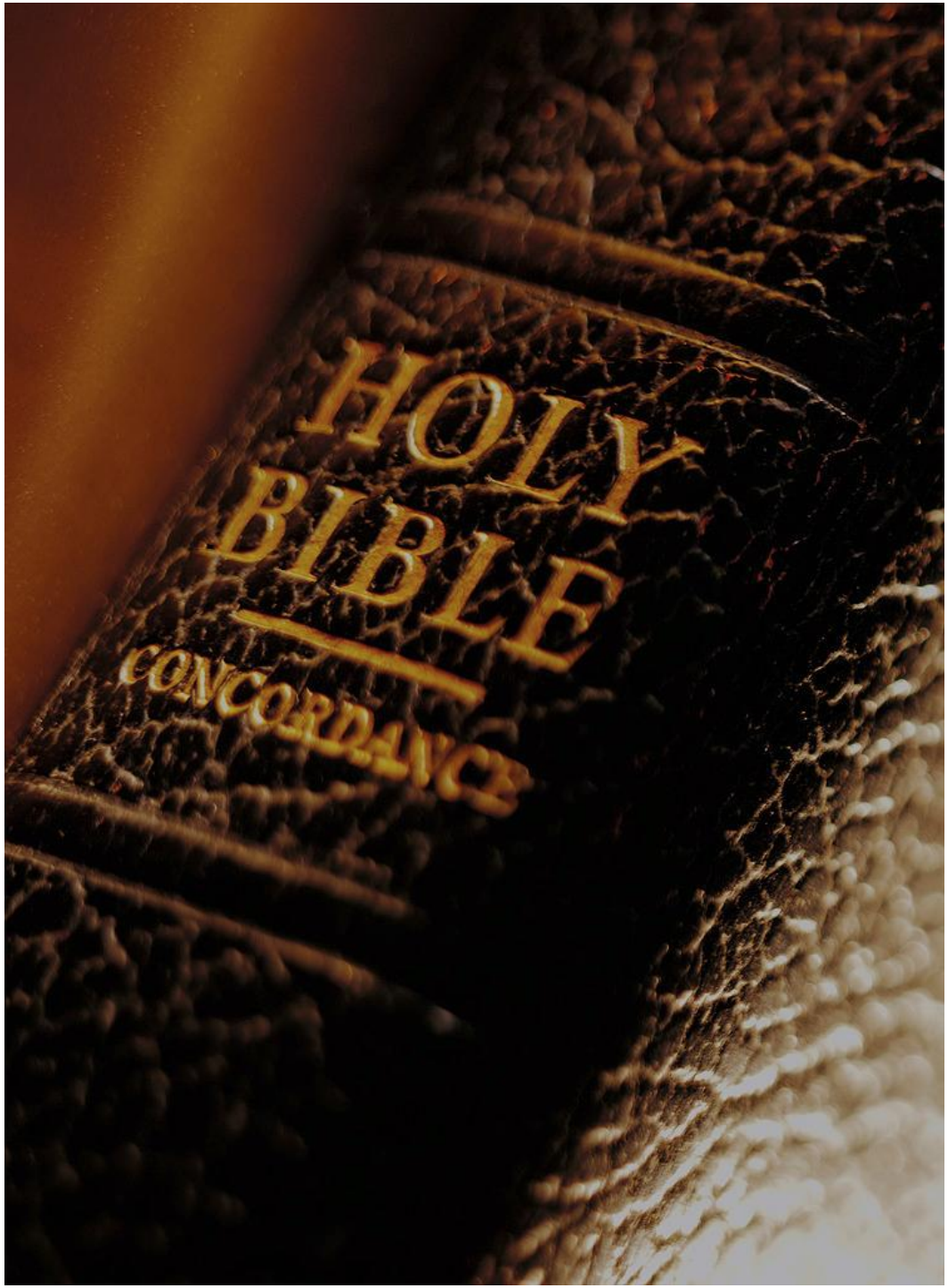
  - Exegetical certainty
  - Theological importance
  - Biblical emphasis
  - Historical agreement in the church



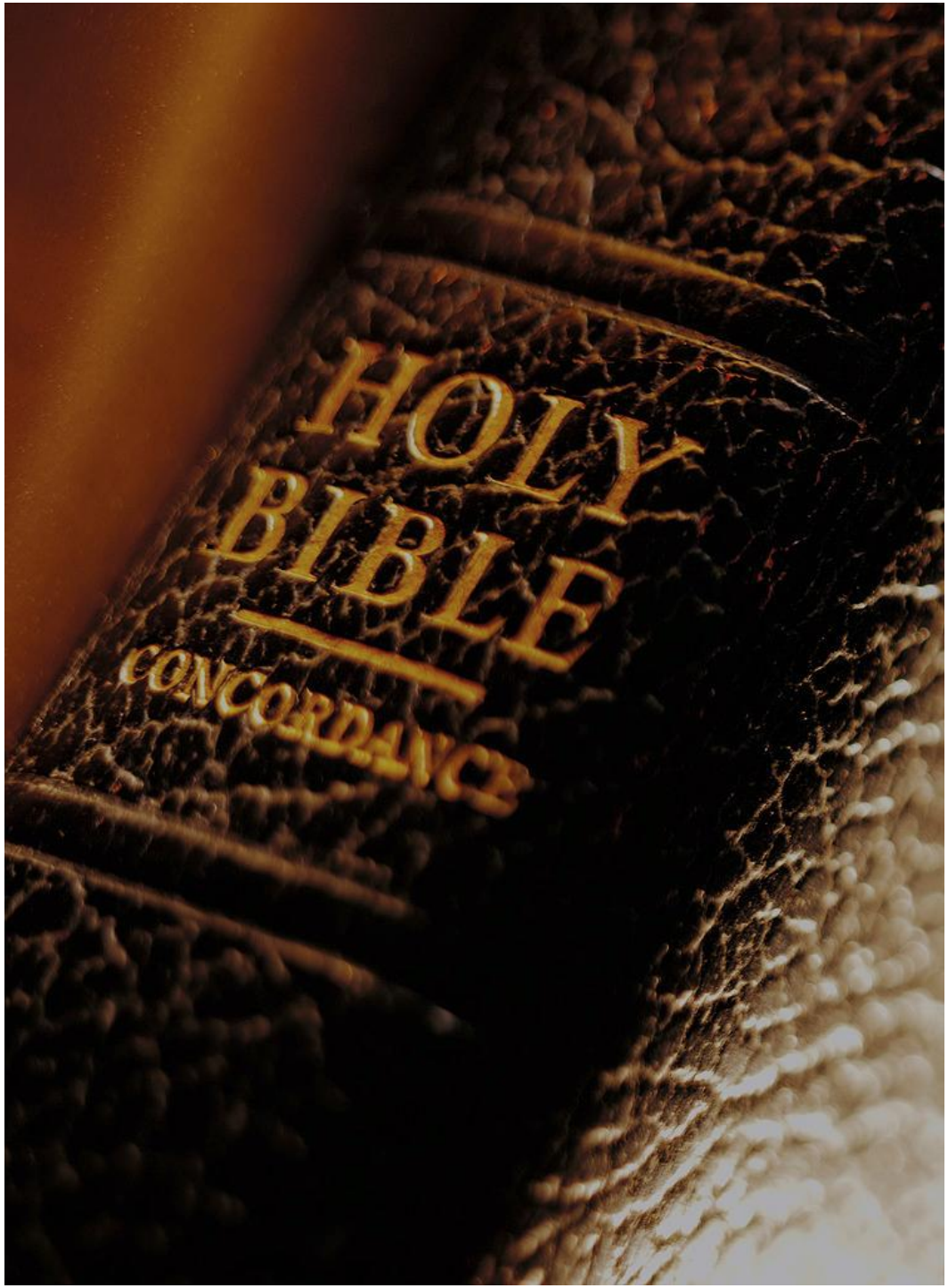

Dogma
Doctrine
Theory
Speculation
Exegetical Certainty
Theological Importance
Biblical Emphasis
Historical Agreement

- Try placing these issues on the pyramid:

- The inerrancy of Scripture
- The fact of the Rapture of the Church
- The time of the Rapture of the Church
- Dispensational or covenant theology
- The Trinity
- The deity of Christ
- The Virgin Birth
- Animal immortality
- Man as a tripartite being
- Eternal security

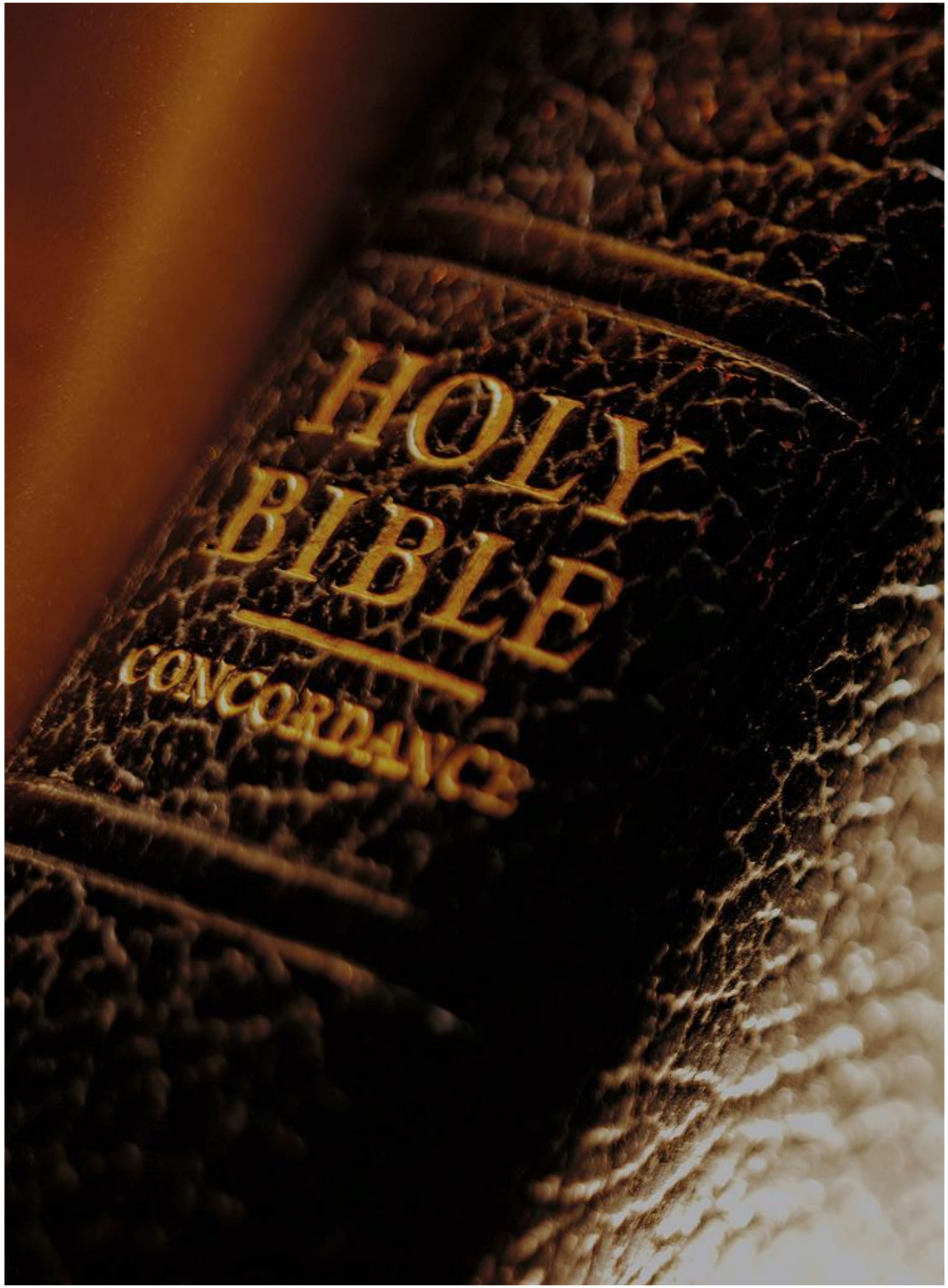


“What is the practical value of using a rational, biblical process for distinguishing between what is essential and non-essential?”

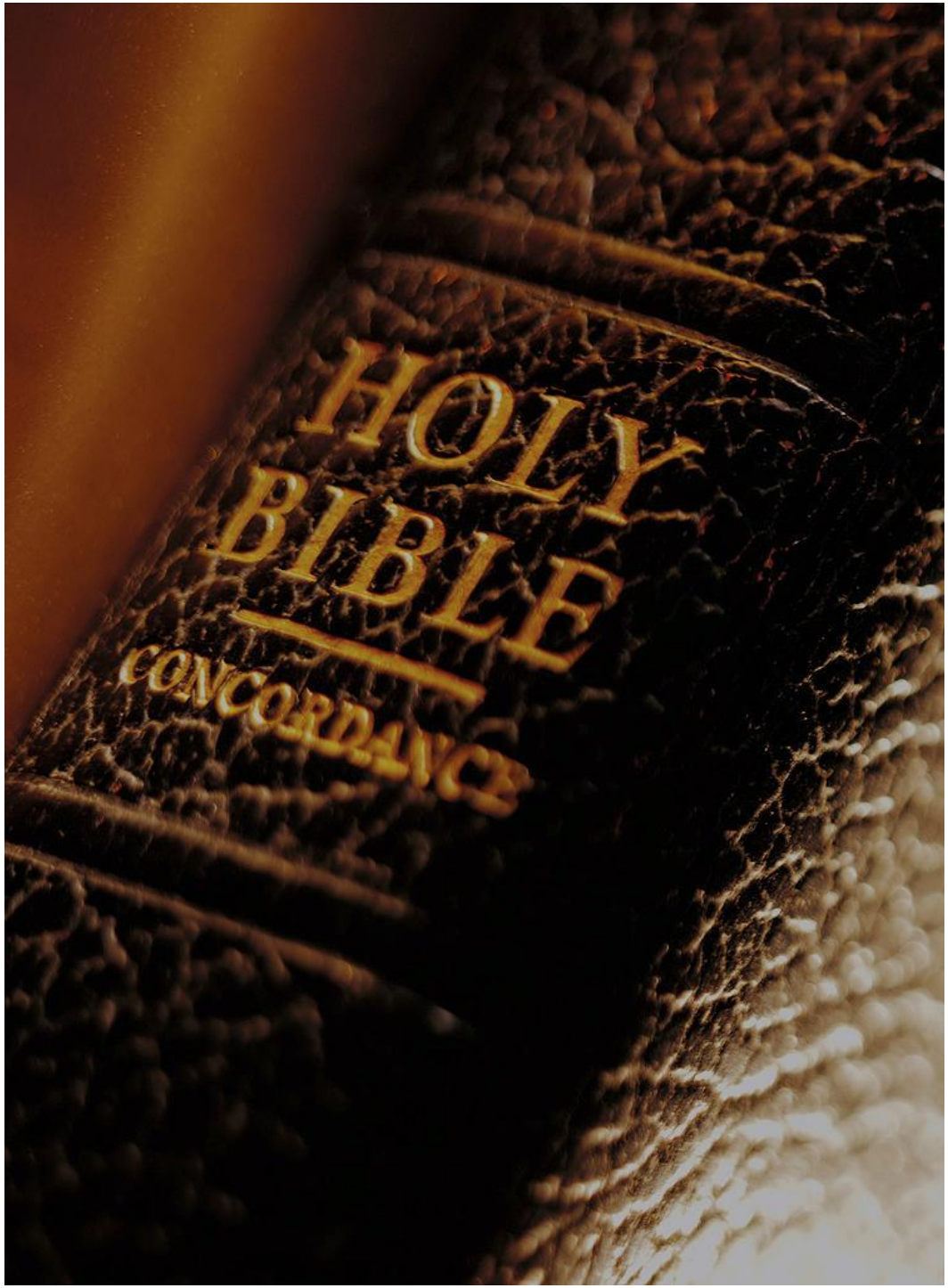


Daniel Clendenin, *Why I'm Not Orthodox*

…we must invoke the spirit of irenic disagreement in the formula: "In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, liberty; in all things, charity." The genius of this principle is that it allows us to disagree with other believers, even vehemently so, yet in an edifying fashion with a degree of theological modesty and a perspective that seeks a deeper con-sensus within the bounds of true faith.

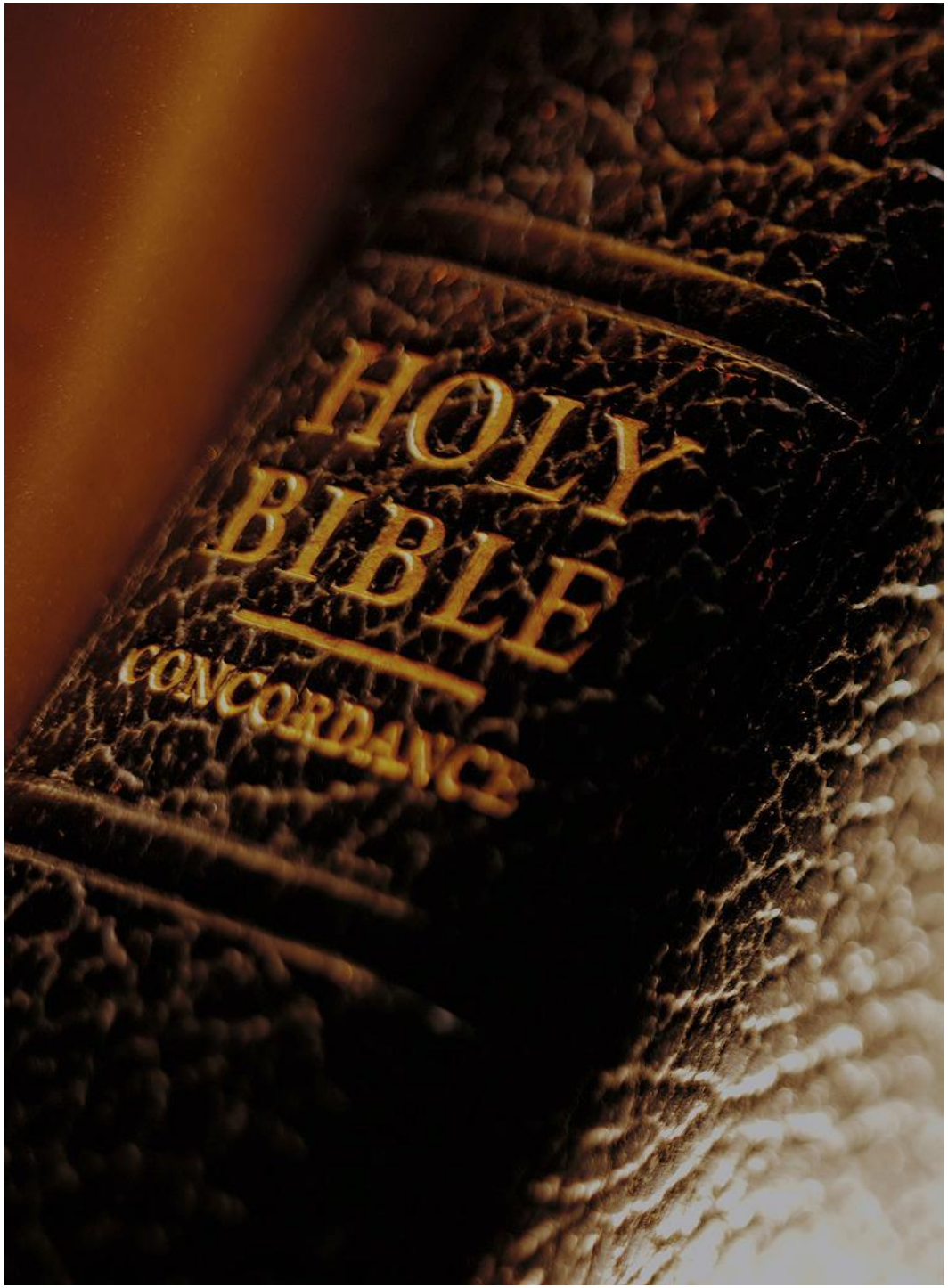


But this really begs another question: "Essential" for what? Do we mean essential for salvation? For church membership? For employment at a seminary? For taking Communion together? Essential for clergy to pray together, to talk, and to encourage one another in Christ? When we realize that every difference of opinion is not a difference of principle or a matter of conscience, then we are freed to engage fully people with whom we actually have profound differences without compromis-ing our own theological commitments.



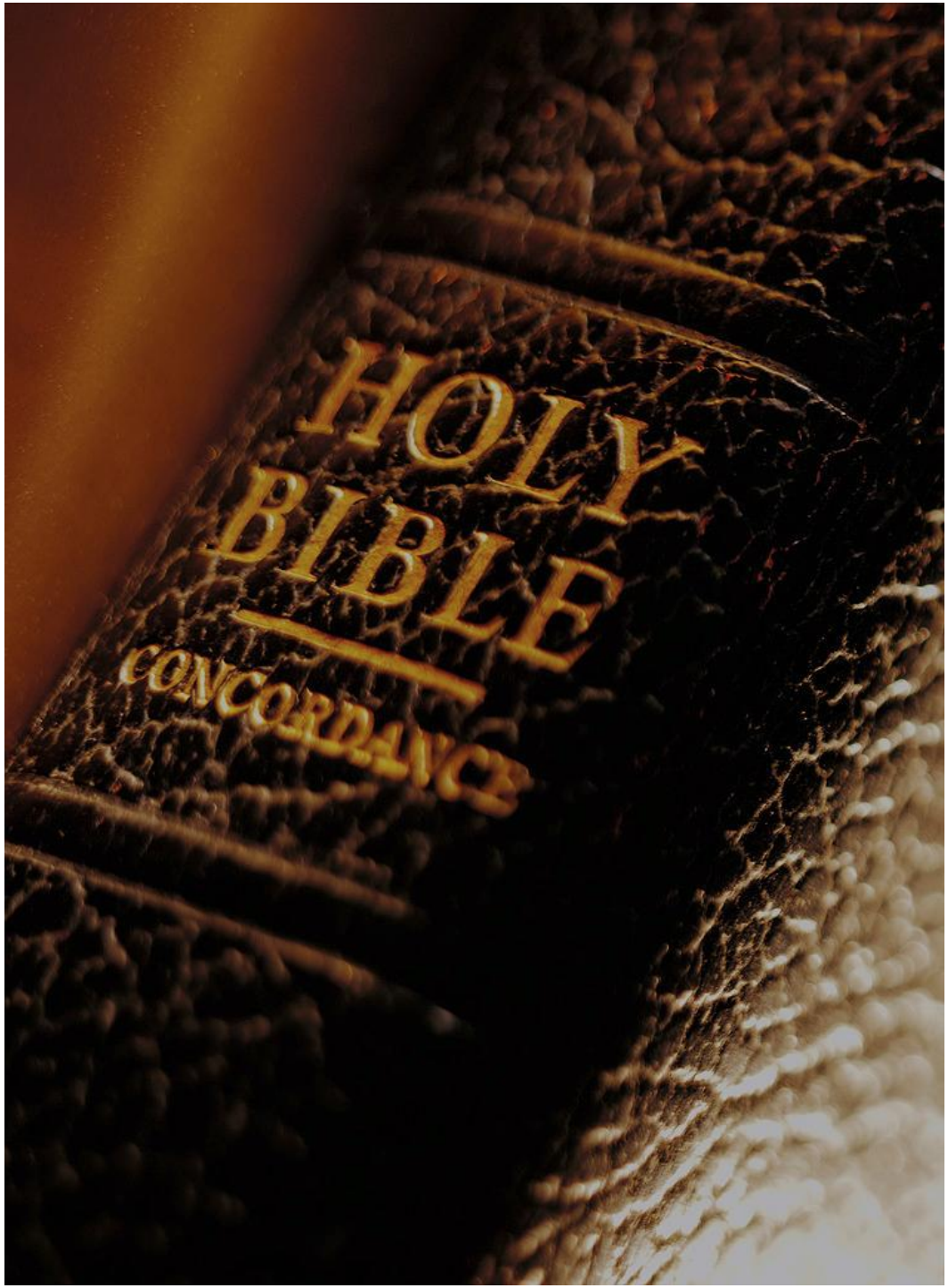
- “What is the practical value of using a rational, biblical process for distinguishing between what is essential and non-essential?”

1. It helps us to make informed decisions about appropriate levels of fellowship.



- “What is the practical value of using a rational, biblical process for distinguishing between what is essential and non-essential?”

- 1. It helps us to make informed decisions about appropriate levels of fellowship.
- 2. It can aid us with leadership decisions in the local church.



- “What is the practical value of using a rational, biblical process for distinguishing between what is essential and non-essential?”

- 1. It helps us to make informed decisions about appropriate levels of fellowship.
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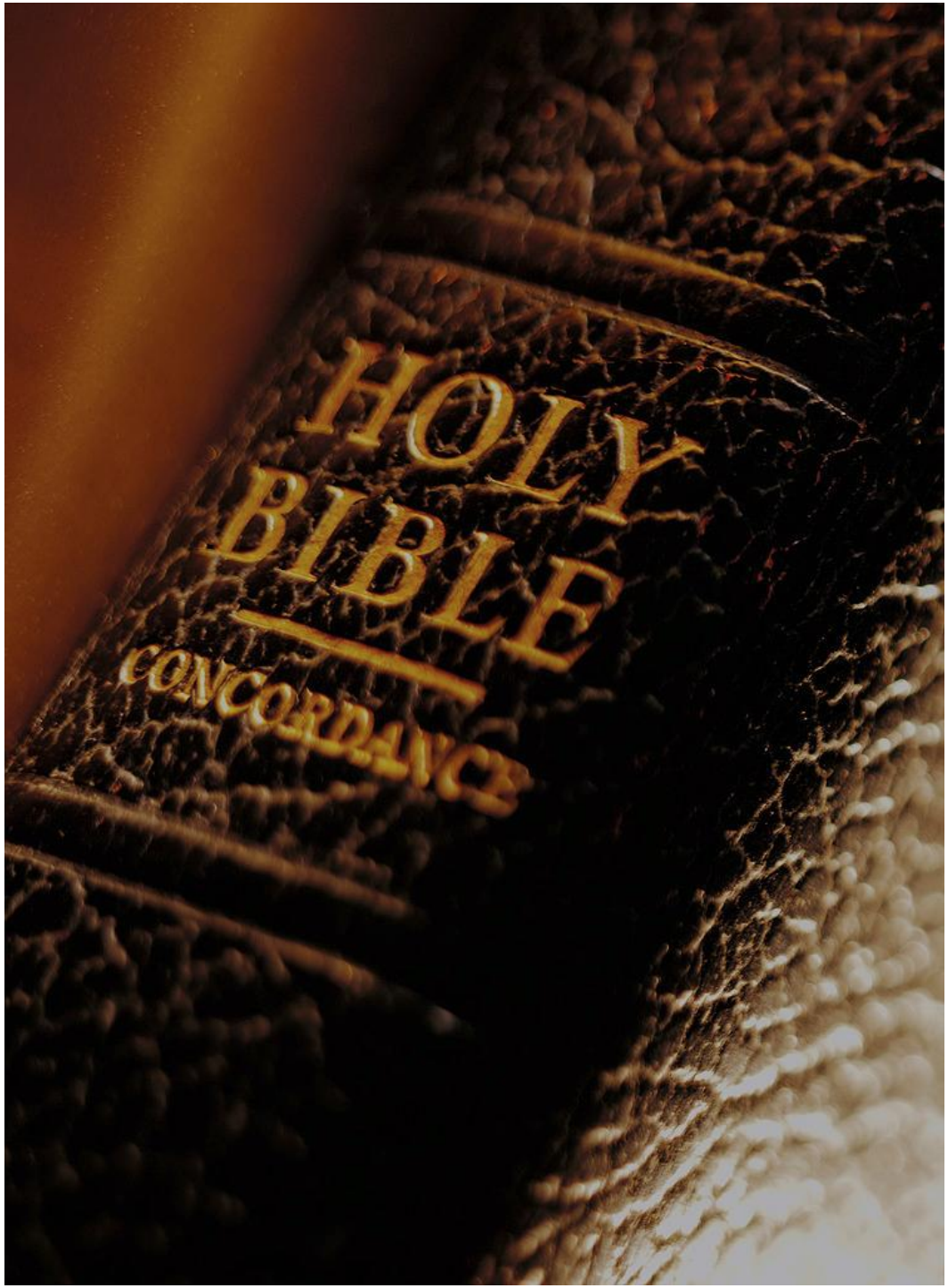
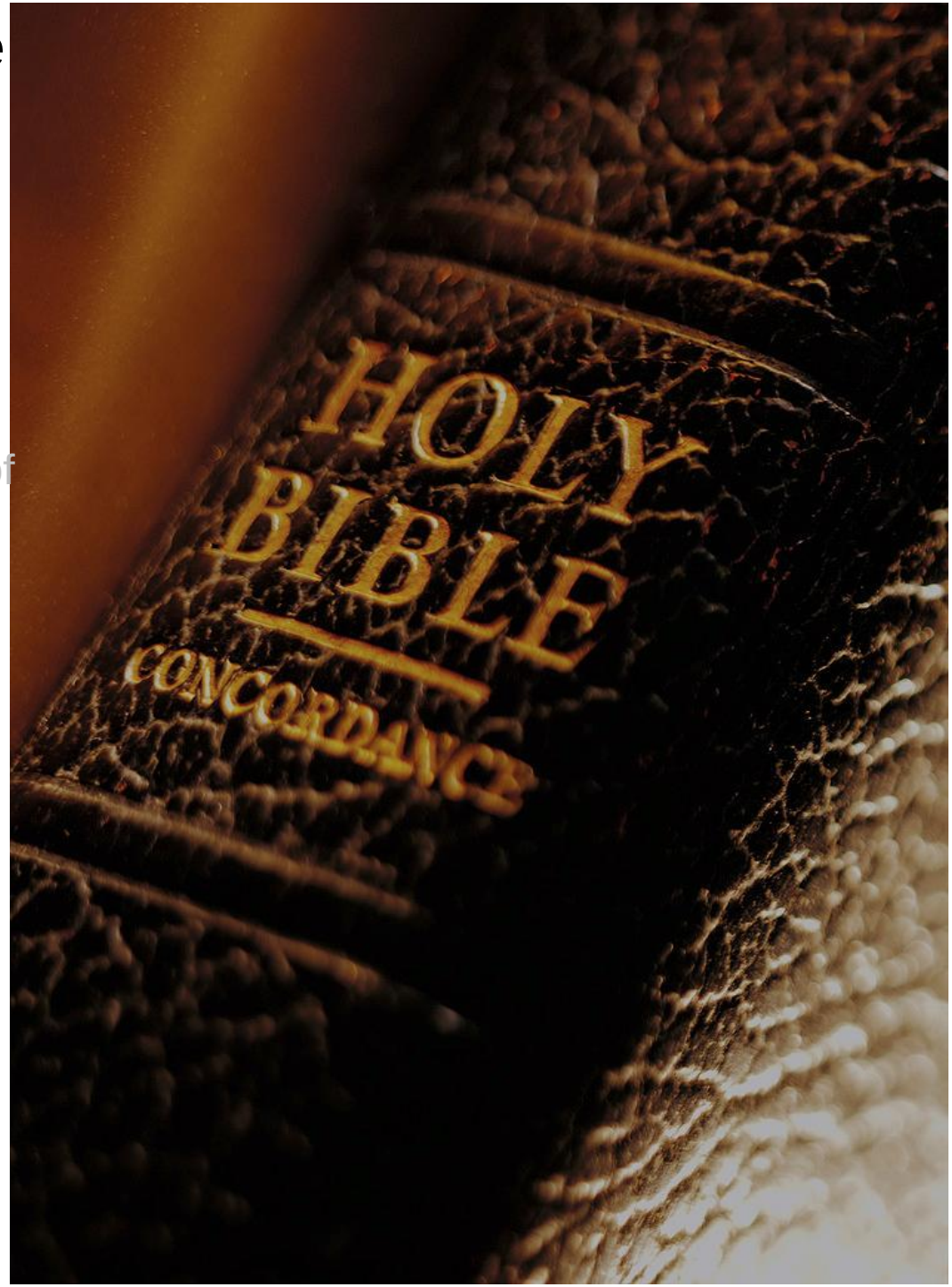
- 3. It offers a rational basis for doctrinal discipline in a denomination or local church.



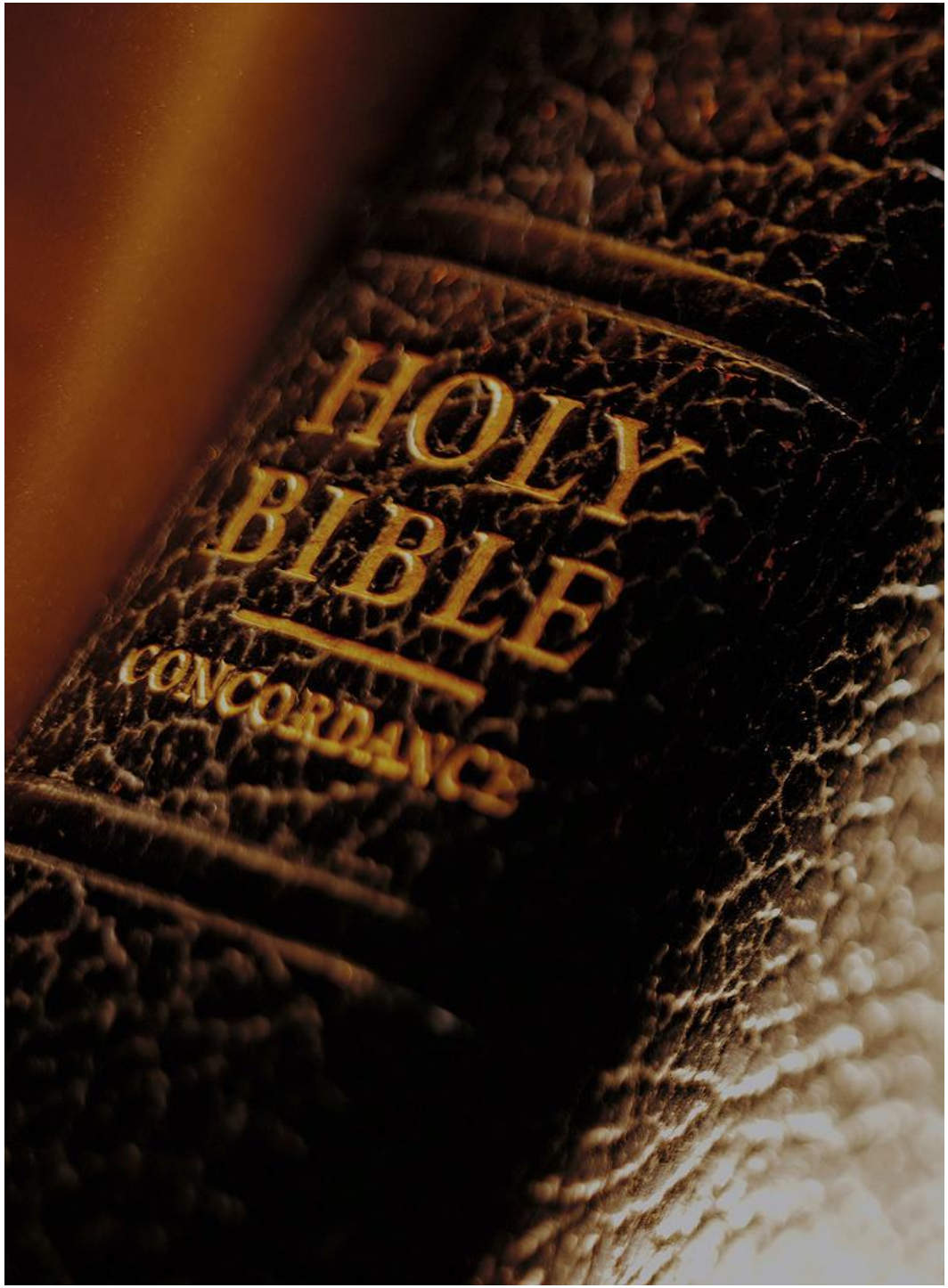
- "What is the practical value of using a rational, biblical process for distinguishing between what is essential and non-essential?"

- 1. It helps us to make informed decisions about appropriate levels of fellowship.
- 2. It can aid us with leadership decisions in the local church.
- 3. It offers a rational basis for doctrinal discipline in a denomination or local church.
- 4. It is useful in writing or evaluating a Statement of Faith.

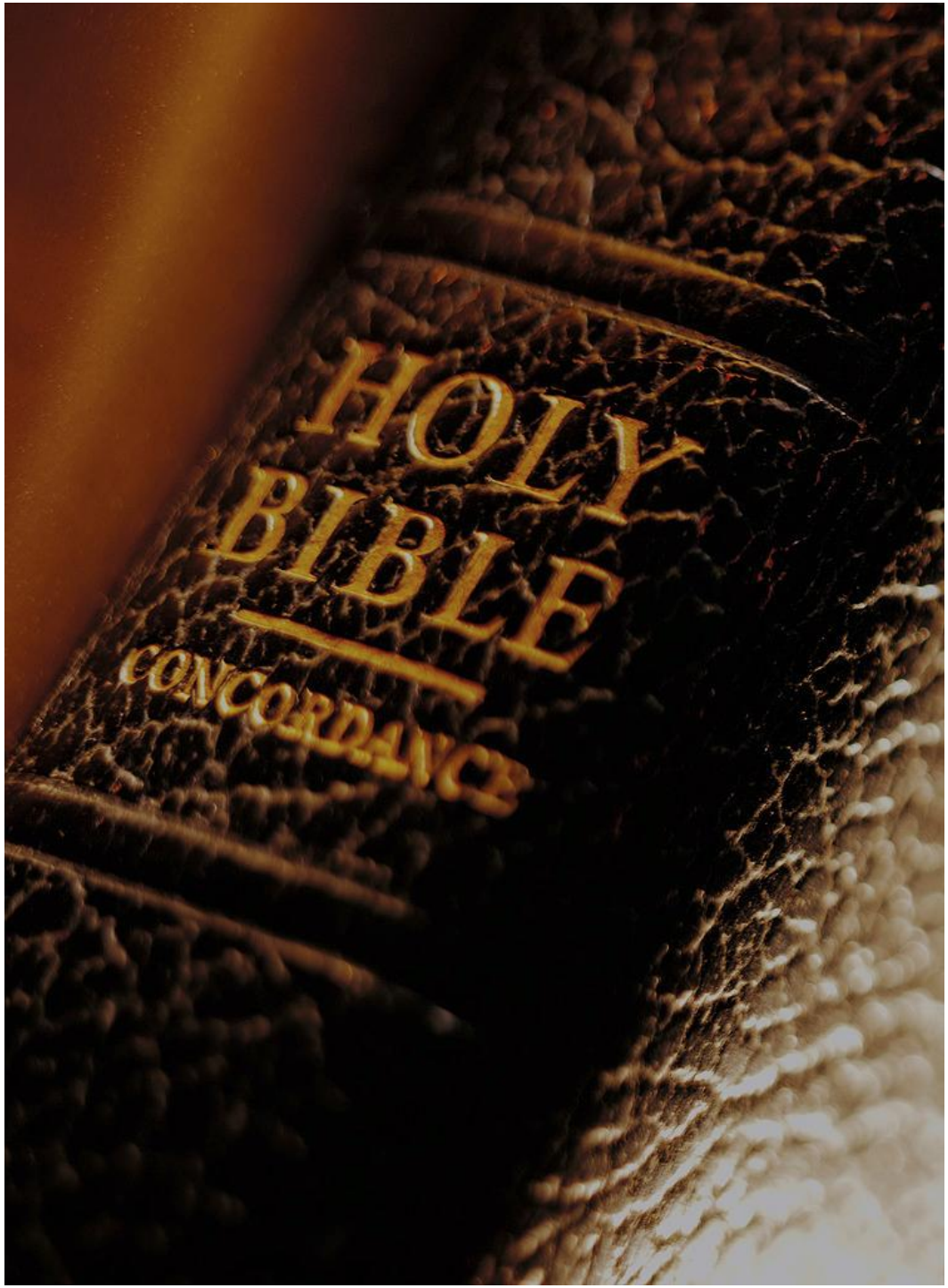


- Principle:

  A Statement of Faith should *include* all the dogmas of its constituency and *steer clear* of all matters which fall into the categories of theory or speculation.

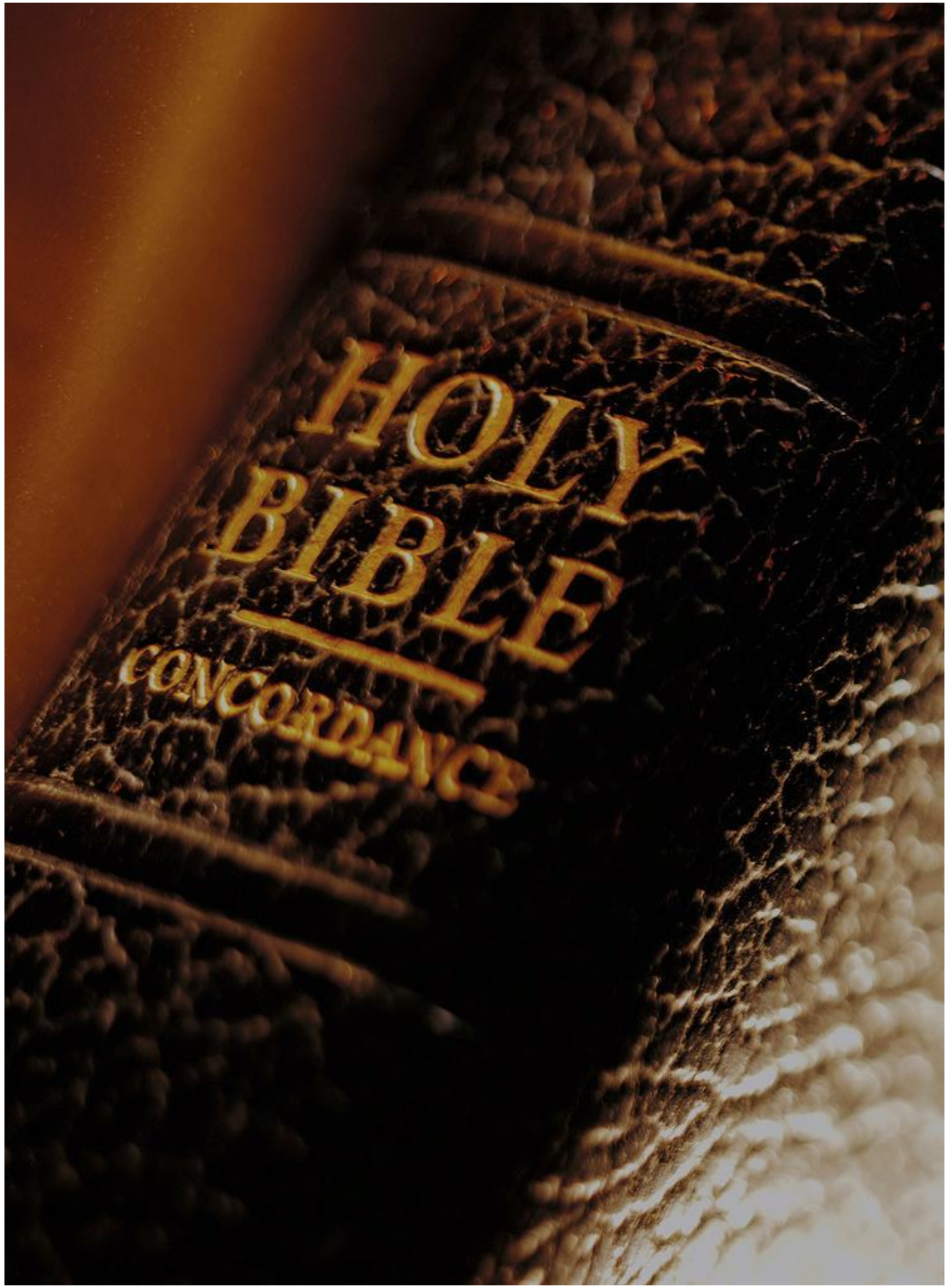


The most difficult decisions in writing or evaluating a Statement of Faith are found in the category of doctrine (defined as truths with a fairly high degree of importance, certainty, emphasis, and uniformity).



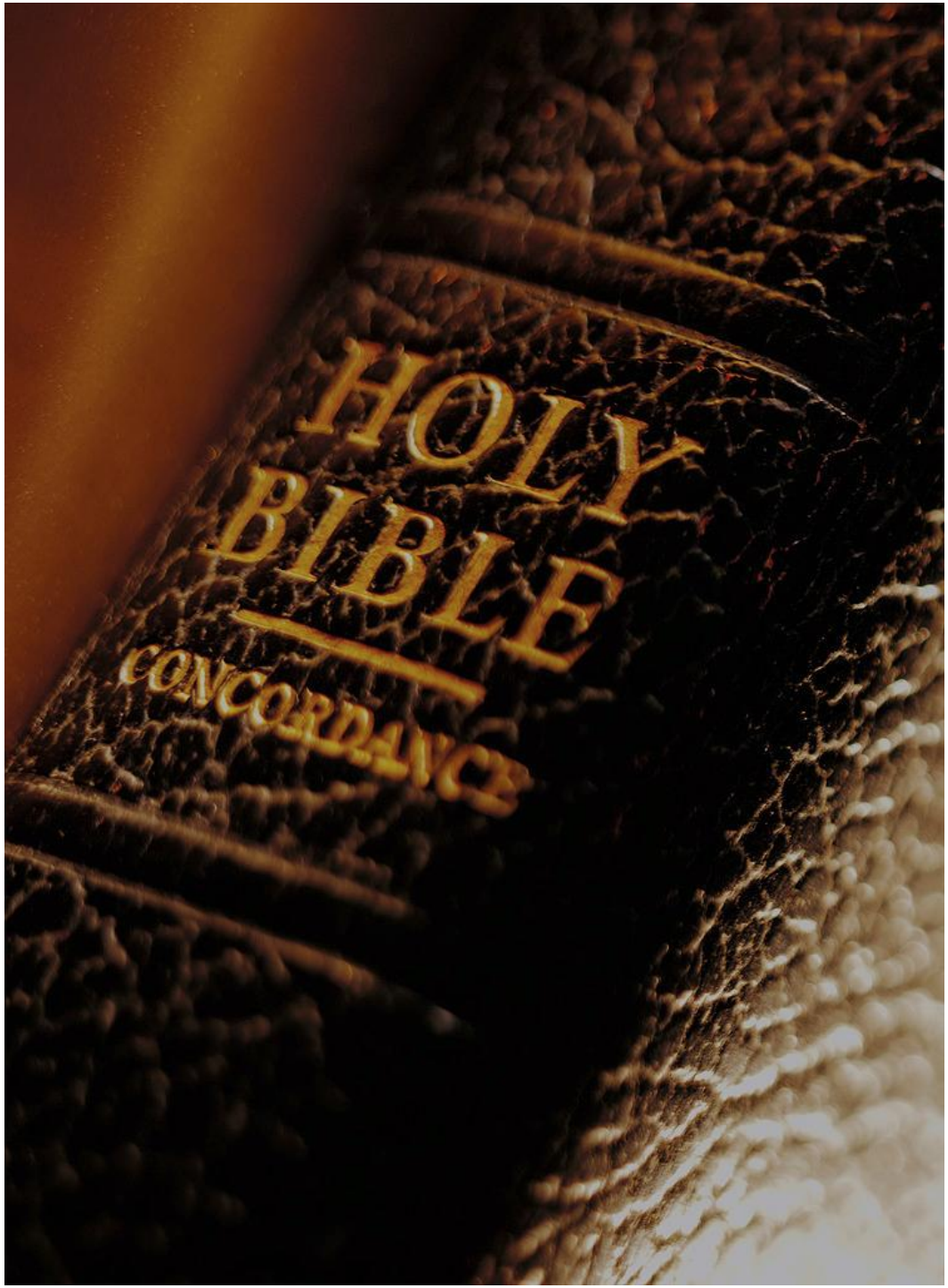
- If not only all dogmas but also many doctrines are nailed down, there is a price to be paid in terms of theological freedom, creativity, and critical thinking. The group as a whole may be more uniform, but it will also be more narrow and rigid.

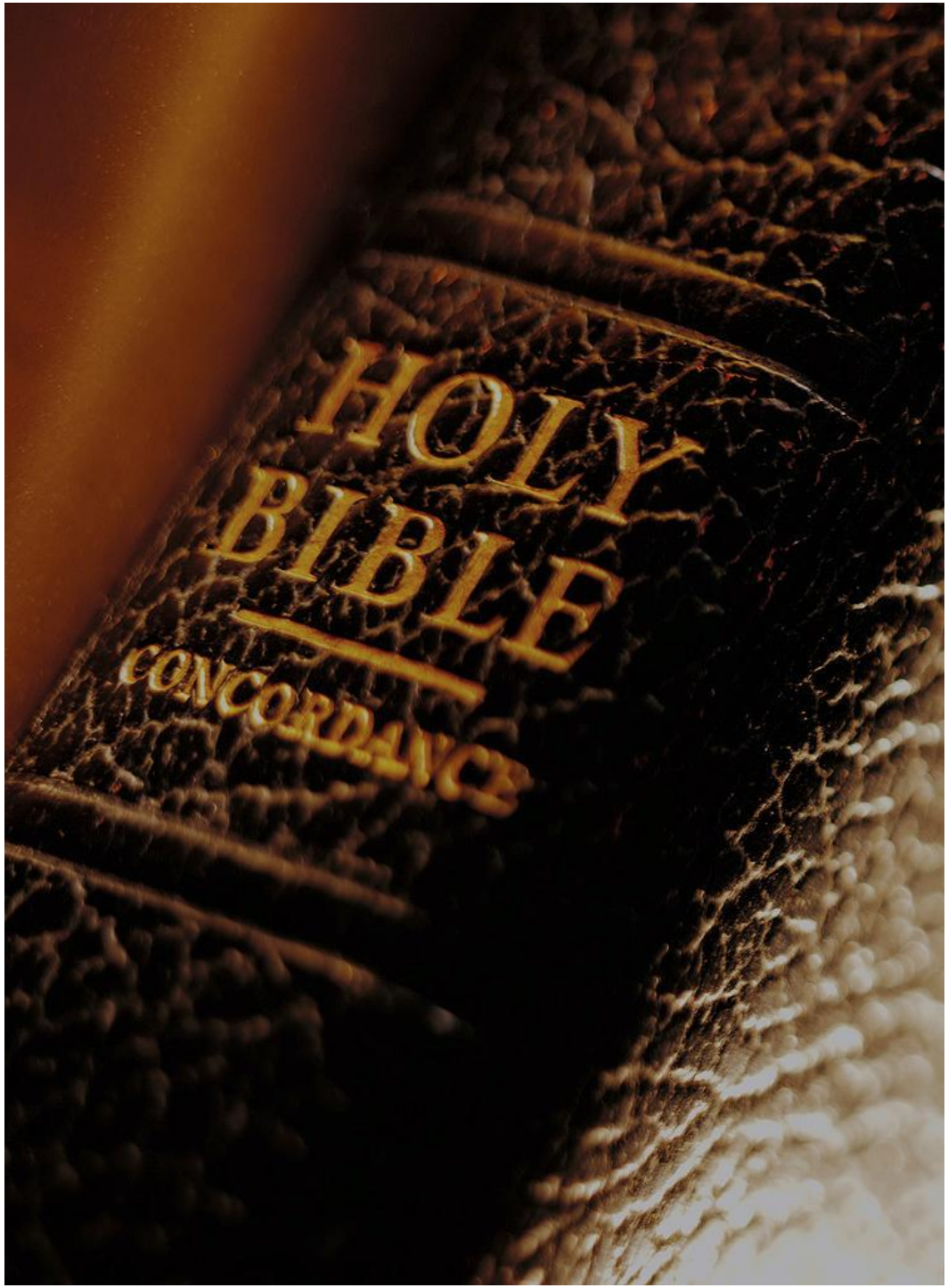
- On the other hand, if the church or organization wants to keep a Statement of Faith brief by focusing primarily on dogma, it must be prepared to accept a significant level of diversity, even on some issues that are highly controversial.



- *The Ministerial Forum, Fall, 1993*

  “However, the next several decades may not prove so peaceful. Issues such as the fate of the unevangelized, the premillenial/amillenial controversy, and women's ordination are coming to the fore in evangelicalism at large, and the limits of our tolerance will be pushed. The EFCA will be forced as never before to think carefully and precisely about a number of theological and biblical issues.



- *The Ministerial Forum, Fall, 1993 (continued)*

  It may even be valuable to strengthen our Statement of Faith by adding any dogmas that have been left out (e.g. the existence of Satan, demons, and angels), eliminating any theory or speculation, keeping doctrine issues to an absolute minimum, and removing ambiguity wherever possible.”