

DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

of

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<i>Testimony & Ministry Call</i>	2
<i>The Doctrine of God</i>	3
<i>The Doctrine of Creation</i>	6
<i>The Doctrine of Sin</i>	10
<i>The Doctrine of Revelation</i>	14
<i>The Doctrine of Father, Son & Spirit</i>	17
<i>The Doctrine of Salvation</i>	22
<i>The Doctrine of the People of God</i>	27
<i>The Doctrine of Last Things</i>	31

TESTIMONY & MINISTRY CALL

“One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.”

SALVATION TESTIMONY

By God’s grace, I was surrounded by the gospel before I understood any of it. I apparently made some kind of profession of faith when I was four years old. My earliest memory of spiritual awareness is as a 7-year-old, repeatedly asking God to save me. I was baptized soon after. I know that God saved me from my sin, and yet I can’t pinpoint a specific date. My confidence today rests in the fact that I am presently trusting in nothing but the blood of Christ for my eternity. I am also able to point to specific realities in my heart that can only be explained by the life-transforming work of the Spirit.

Sharing that testimony, however, has led to some interesting experiences. The absence of a specific date raises questions for some people—particularly those who had dramatic conversion experiences as adults. As one man pointedly asked, “weren’t you physically born on a specific day at a specific time? How then could the new birth be any less specific or memorable?” It’s true that my physical birth was a specific and dramatic event, but the truth is, I personally have no memory of it! While I can only trust the testimony of others, I have never doubted that my birth actually happened. In fact, the most basic type of evidence doesn’t rest on memory at all. I know I was born because I’m alive.

Scripture points us to the same confidence when it comes to the new birth. My confidence rests not in my own dimming memories of past events. My confidence is that repentant faith in the crucified and risen Lord has changed my life (1 John 5:13). Together with the blind man that Jesus healed, my testimony is that while I’ll never plumb the depths of what happened on the day of my new birth, I do know one thing—“though I was blind, now I see” (John 9:25).

CALL TO THE MINISTRY

During my teen years, I experienced a growing love for preaching while I also resisted the Lord’s leading in my heart towards full-time ministry. When I finally submitted to God’s direction He began confirming that call almost immediately. I am confident in my call to ministry based on 1) God’s personal leading in my heart, 2) a sense of compulsion that any other role would be disobedience to God’s leading for me, 3) an awareness of God’s gifts and preparation in my life, and 4) confirmation from God’s people that He truly has prepared and gifted me for that role.

In 2011, the Lord unexpectedly redirected us from Zambia to the Philippines. He confirmed His leading through godly counselors, our own desires, and by providentially suiting us to the needs there. We will be teaching, church planting, and offering short-term ministerial training across the 10/40 window.

*While the story of God’s gracious working in each life is a marvel in itself, nothing can compare to the magnificent story of His grace across the centuries. The story of grace begins with **God Himself, His creation of all things**, and the **corruption that came through man’s sin**. It continues with His gracious intervention in **revelation** through the eternal counsel of **Father, Son and Holy Spirit**, resulting in the **plan of salvation** for lost and dying men. The record of God’s grace culminates in the restored **people of God**, awaiting the consummation of all things **in the last days** when they will praise Him for all eternity. This is the grandest story of all time. This is the story of grace.*

THE DOCTRINE OF GOD

*A biblical understanding of the universe begins with the only one who transcends it—God Himself. This includes God’s **existence**, His **nature**, His **perfections** and His **works**.*

“He who comes to God must believe that He is.”

God’s Existence

Scripture assumes the existence of God (Gen. 1:1; John 1:1), but God also grants sufficient means for men to know of His existence even apart from Scripture (Rom. 1:19-20; Psa. 19:1-6). Fallen men suppress the obvious truth (Psa. 10:3-4; 14:1-3; John 1:9; Rom. 1:18), and it is legitimate to expose their inconsistencies with the **cosmological** (Rom. 1:20), **teleological** (Psa. 8:1-4; 19:1-6; Acts 14:17), **moral** (Psa. 97:6-7; Rom. 2:14-15), and **transcendental** (Prov. 1:7) arguments for God’s existence (1 Pet. 3:15-16).¹ Ultimately, the only effective apologetic is the reproof of Scripture (Rom. 10:17; Heb. 11:6) through the illuminating power of the Spirit (2 Cor. 4:6).

GOD’S NATURE

I believe that there is one God (Deut. 6:4; John 10:30) in three persons: The Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19; Acts 2:32-33; 2 Cor. 13:14). Each is fully divine (John 6:27; Mic. 5:2; 1 Cor. 2:11), each is distinct from the others (Matt. 3:16-17; John 14:26; Gal. 4:6; 1 Pet. 1:2), and each is personal (Gal. 1:4; 1 John 4:2; Eph. 4:30). These three persons have existed in unity and fellowship for all eternity (John 1:18; Heb. 9:14).²

I believe that God is a Spirit (John 4:24) and He is ultimately incomprehensible (Psa. 139:6; Rom. 11:33), but He can be truly known because He has revealed Himself in Creation and in His Word.³ As Creator,

¹ Presuppositionalism seeks to demonstrate that metaphysics, epistemology and ethics are impossible apart from the existence of God as Scripture reveals Him. While evidences are a necessary part of most presuppositional arguments, apologists should rebuke man’s suppression of the truth, recognizing the biblical realities of total depravity and the fact that Scripture assumes God’s existence as axiomatic. Presuppositionalism represents these foundations methodologically.

² The second Person of the godhead has existed eternally as the Son (Psa. 2:7) but there is no biblical support for making this an ontological (eternal generation) rather than economic category. The same is true of the eternal procession of the Spirit, recognizing that John 15:26 most naturally refers to Pentecost.

³ One of the key ways God has revealed Himself is through His titles:

- Yahweh: “I am that I am” (Exod. 3:14; Isa. 42:8), expressing His aseity and incomprehensibility. This title is often associated with God as the covenant maker.
- Elohim: “God”—The most general OT designation for divinity. It is plural to designate God’s majesty.
- Theos: “God”—The most general NT designation for divinity.
- El Shaddai: “God almighty” or “the overpowering God”—Often associated with the requirements of the covenant.
- El Elyon: “God Most High as possessor of heaven and earth” (Gen. 14:22)
- El Olam: “The Everlasting God”
- Adonai/Kurios: “Lord” as master—the title designates God’s authority.
- Yahweh Sabaoth: “Yahweh, God of armies”—probably referring to the armies of Israel, stars and angels.

God is separate from His creation and fully transcends it (Gen. 1:1; Exod. 20:11; John 1:3). God exists beyond and above time (Isa. 46:9-10; 2 Pet. 3:8), but also acts within time (Acts 17:30-31; Gal. 4:4).

GOD'S PERFECTIONS

Not only is it possible to know that God exists, but Scripture reveals many descriptions of His nature.⁴

God is Great

- God is **self-existent** – He exists necessarily of Himself and He is uncaused (aseity—Exod. 3:14; John 5:26; Acts 17:24-25).
- God is **invisible** – He cannot be seen by men (John 1:18; Col. 1:15; 1 Tim. 1:17), though He has sometimes chosen to represent Himself physically (Exod. 13:21; Luke 3:22).
- God is **immutable** – He is unchanging in His person (Psa. 55:19; 102:25-27), character (Mal. 3:6; Jam. 1:17), purposes (Psa. 33:11; Isa. 46:9-11), and promises (Num. 23:19; 1 Sam. 15:29), though He experiences emotions (Exod. 32:10; Isa 62:5; Eph. 4:30), responds to people's actions (Jonah 3:10), and answers prayer (Ex. 32:9-14; Jam. 5:16).
- God is **infinite** (Job 5:9; 11:7-9)—there are no limits to His being or attributes.
- God is **holy** (Isa. 6:3; Rev. 4:8)—He is perfectly free from all impurity (Psa. 24:3; 1 Pet. 1:15-16) and is unique over any other reality or category (Psa. 89:8; Isa. 40:18; 46:9).
- God is **omnipotent** (Gen. 18:14; Job 5:9; 42:2; Psa. 145:3) – He is capable of doing anything that is in keeping with His own nature (2 Tim. 2:13; Heb. 6:18).
- God is **omnipresent** – He is present everywhere, at once, in the totality of His being (1 Kings 8:27; Psa. 139:7-12; Jer. 23:23-24).⁵
- God is **omniscient** – He knows all things actual (Psa. 147:5; Isa. 46:10) and possible (1 Sam. 23:11-13; Matt. 11:21).⁶ I reject open theism as an unbiblical denial of God's omniscience and sovereignty over all things (Isa. 37:26-29; 41:21-29).
- God is **sovereign** – He is in complete and sovereign control over all things (Gen. 50:20; Acts 2:23; Eph. 1:11). There is no pure contingency in the universe and God's control includes both the means and the ends (2 Thess. 2:13).
- God is **eternal** – He has always been (Psa. 90:2; Mic. 5:2) and will always be (Rom. 16:26; 1 Tim. 1:17).⁷

God is Good

- God is **righteous** – He always acts according to His own moral standards of what is right (Deut. 32:4; Rom. 3:26).⁸ This also extends to His justice (Gen. 18:25; Zeph. 3:5)—God

⁴ Given the doctrine of divine simplicity, all of the perfections of God are technically predicable of the others. God is omnipresent, for instance, in His grace, power, sovereignty or eternity, and the same is true of every other combination. For this reason, it is best not to speak of a central or core perfection. Divine simplicity also guides one's choice of terminology. While "attributes" is an established term, it also implies that God's perfections are in some way disconnected from His essential being. "Perfections" represents the reality better. The categories of greatness and goodness also correspond to "incommunicable" and "communicable." God's holiness of purity is communicable though holiness of majesty is not.

⁵ Not only does God fill all creation, but He also transcends the limits of dimensionality itself (1 Kings 8:27). The same is true of God's relationship to time (Psa. 90:2, 40). The traditional term for this reality is God's immensity.

⁶ Not only does God possess all knowledge, but He has infinite wisdom in the best accomplishment of His perfect intentions (Psa. 104:24; Rom. 11:33).

⁷ Also Job 36:26; Psa. 90:2; John 8:58; 2 Pet. 3:8; Rev. 1:8.

⁸ Ultimately, God's nature is the only standard of what is morally right.

faithfully punishes wrongdoing (Ezra 9:15; Dan. 9:7, 14; Rom. 1:18) and rewards righteousness (1 Kings 8:32; Psa. 58:11; 89:14).

- God is **love** – He gives of Himself for the world (John 3:16) and for His people in particular (Jer. 31:3; 1 John 4:8).
- God is **gracious** – He gives favor to those that do not deserve it (Exod. 34:6; Psa. 145:8; Neh. 9:17).
- God is **merciful** – He grants favor and pardon to the destitute (Luke 1:50; Eph. 2:4).
- God is **longsuffering** – He is patient and endures long (Exod. 34:6; 2 Pet. 3:9).
- God is **good** – He is concerned with the well-being of His creatures in general (Psa. 86:5; Luke 6:35; Jam. 1:17) and of His people in particular (Rom. 8:28; 1 Pet. 5:7).
- God is **truth** – what He speaks corresponds to reality (John 14:6; 1 John 5:20) and His promises cannot fail (Num. 23:19; Tit. 1:2;).
- God is **faithful** – His words and His promises can be trusted as dependable (Deut. 7:9; Lam. 3:23).
- God is **patient**—He chooses to withhold His anger for a long time (Psa. 103:8; Rom. 2:4).

ACTS OF GOD

- I believe that creation and all of God's actions ultimate in His glory (Isa. 43:7; Rev. 4:11).
- I believe that before the foundation of the world, God graciously determined to save sinners through the cross (Eph. 1:3-14).
- I believe that attempts to place a logical order on the assumed decrees of God are methodologically and theologically flawed.
- I believe that God grants common grace by providing for His creatures (Psa. 145:15-16; Matt. 6:28-30; Luke 6:35), by keeping mankind from the full exercise of his depravity (Rom. 13:1-6), and through general revelation (Rom. 1:19-20).⁹
- I believe that God rules sovereignly over all creation (Psa. 135:6-7), and directs all of history according to His purposes (Dan. 4:32; Acts 4:27-28). Though He directs in concurrence with man's choices (Prov. 16:9; 20:24; Acts 2:23), God is ultimately in full control (Jer. 10:23; Rom. 9:16).
- From time to time, God has chosen to use miracles as a demonstration of His power over creation (Ex. 9:16; 15:11; John 2:11; 20:30-31) and to certify new revelation (John 14:11; Acts 2:22; 2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:4). As a result, miracles tend to be associated with periods when God has revealed Himself in new ways.¹⁰
- Though God never causes evil (Hab. 1:13; Jam. 1:13), He has chosen to allow and even direct it according to his glory (Exod. 14:8; 1 Sam. 2:25). This choice is perfectly just (Rom. 9:19-20).

God had no need or dependence on anything else. Eternity would have been completely full if the only thing that ever existed was God. And yet He chose to create. He chose to make something other than Himself, to show something about Himself, and ultimately to glorify Himself.

⁹ The ultimate basis for common grace is the payment of Christ (Rom. 3:25).

¹⁰ Specifically, these would include the foundation of Israel as God's covenant people (Moses, Joshua), the early prophets (Elijah and Elisha), and the founding of the church as God's new covenant people (Jesus, the apostles).

THE DOCTRINE OF CREATION

God chose to create according to His purposes and for His own glory (Rev. 4:11; 14:7). He is the only uncreated reality, and all other things were made by Him (John 1:3; Acts 17:24; Col. 1:16) including angels, the world, and man.

“In the beginning, God created”

GOD CREATED ANGELS

- While Scripture gives only minimal information about the event, it is clear that God created angels (Neh. 9:6; Psa. 148:2, 5; Col. 1:16) and that He did so before the end of the sixth day of creation (Gen. 2:1; Exod. 20:11; Gen. 3:1-15; c.f. Rev. 12:9).¹ Like the rest of creation, all angels were created sinless. God created angels as messengers (Luke 2:10-14; Dan. 10:11, 21), God’s agents for inspection (Zech. 1:10-11; Heb. 13:2) or judgment (2 Sam. 24:16-17; Acts 12:23), God’s armed host (Matt. 16:27; 2 Thess. 1:7), God’s ministers, (Psa. 34:7; 91:11; Heb. 1:14), and to praise Him for His glory (Psa. 103:20; Isa. 6:1-3; Luke 15:10; Rev. 4:6-8).
- Scripture does give some information about the nature of angels. They are spirits and do not reproduce (Matt. 22:30), have a physical body (Luke 24:39; Heb. 1:14) or die (Luke 20:36), but they manifest the same variety as other things God has made (Ezek. 1:4-25; Rev. 4:6-7). Apparently, they are very great in number (Deut. 33:2; Ps. 68:17; Matt. 26:53; Rev. 5:11).² They also possess great power (Matt. 28:2; 2 Pet. 2:11; Heb. 2:7), though redeemed people will eventually be exalted above them (1 Cor. 6:3). Angels are not omniscient (1 Pet. 1:12), omnipotent or omnipresent (Dan. 10:13) and they are not worthy of worship (Col. 2:18; Rev. 19:10). Individual angels may be assigned to watch over specific nations or groups of people (Dan. 10:13, 20-21; Matt. 18:10; Acts 12:15). Scripture seems to indicate that like every other aspect of God’s creation, angelic beings are ordered in ranks with a hierarchy (1 Thess. 4:16; Jude 9).³

GOD CREATED THE WORLD

God created the world out of nothing (John 1:3; Rom. 4:17; Heb. 11:3) with the power of His voice (Gen. 1:3ff; Psa. 33:6, 9; 2 Cor. 4:6).⁴ Some biblical scholars have sought to integrate the biblical account of

¹ The angels may have predated creation based on Job 38:6-7 or been created on the first day. Notice also that Gen. 1:2 specifically describes “earth” as formless and void but not the heavens (Gen. 1:1).

² There is no way to know the number of demons or of the angels God originally created. Luke 8:30 speaks of a legion (3,000-6,000) dwelling in one man. Scripture also speaks of “ten thousands” (Deut. 33:2), “tens of thousands and thousands of thousands” (Psa. 68:17), “innumerable angels” (Heb. 12:22), and “myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands” (Rev. 5:11—a myriad refers to “a very large number, not exactly defined” according to BDAG).

³ Scripture records at least three types of angelic creatures: Cherubim (Gen. 3:4; Psa. 18:10; Ezek. 10:1-22; Exod. 25:18-22), Seraphim (Isa. 6:2-7), and the “living creatures” (Ezek. 1:5-14; Rev. 4:6-8). It also identifies two specific personalities: Gabriel (Dan. 8:16; 9:21; Luke 1:19, 26-27) and Michael, who is apparently a ruler among the angels (Dan. 10:13, 21; Jude 9; Rev. 12:7-8).

⁴ The fact that God created all things is a bedrock theological foundation throughout Scripture, implying among other things, (1) His power and Godhead (Psa. 33:6,9; Isa. 45:18), (2) that He owns everything (Rom. 9:21), and (3) that He has all authority (Acts 4:24).

creation with the theory of evolution but Scripture clearly affirms that God directly created the world in 6 literal days (Gen. 1:31-2:3; Exod. 20:11).⁵

- I reject the secular theory of **evolution** because it attributes fundamental reality to the physical world rather than God, and because it offers an explanation of the world that contradicts the biblical record.
- I reject the **gap theory** because there is no valid exegetical support for extra time between Gen. 1:1 and 1:2 or biblical indication of a previous creation, and because Scripture teaches that all creation happened within the 6 days of Gen. 1:1-31 (c.f. Exod. 20:11).⁶
- I reject **progressive creationism**⁷ and **theistic evolution**⁸ because creation occurred in six 24-hour periods (Exod. 20:8-11), because life came into existence immediately after God's spoken word (Gen. 1:21, 25; Psalms 33:6, 9), because God created life to reproduce after its kind (Gen. 1:11, 24),⁹ because of the special creation of Adam and Eve (Gen. 2:7, 21-23; 1 Tim. 2:13),¹⁰ and because death entered the world at the fall, after everything had been created (Rom. 5:12; 1 Cor. 15:56).

God declared that everything He had made was good, and the creation was originally without sin or death (Gen. 1:31). Subsequent to the fall, creation continues to show both its goodness in God's original design in tension with the ravaging effects of sin (Rom. 8:22).

One result of God's creative acts is that He is distinct from everything He has made (Isa. 40:18-26). **Pantheism**, **panentheism** and **process theism** are therefore distortions of the biblical truth.¹¹ On the opposite extreme, **deism** is untrue because God is intimately involved, sovereignly guiding every aspect of His creation (Job 12:10; Acts 17:24-25).¹² In fact, all of creation is causally dependent on God for its continued existence (Acts 17:25, 28; Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3). Ultimately, God will restore His creation and show the beauty of what He always intended His world to be (Isa. 11:1-9; 65:17-25).

⁵ Though progressive creationists or theistic evolutionists point to instances where "day" (יָמִים) refers to a period of time, there are exegetical reasons to understand it as literal days here: (1) Each day in Gen. 1 ends with the formula, "there was evening, and there was morning." (2) God created plants on the third day but the sun on the fourth—how did photosynthesis occur in the meantime? (3) Exodus 23:10-11 takes the six days of creation and final day of rest as the basis for the recurring 7-day week.

⁶ The primary exegetical arguments for the gap theory are that the words "without form (תֹּהוֹ) and "void" (בְּהוֹ) in Gen. 1:2 elsewhere describe places that have suffered God's judgment (Isa. 34:11; Jer. 4:23), since darkness can be a sign of divine judgment. On balance, the more natural conclusion is that darkness was only a necessary condition since the sun had not been created yet. "Without form" occurs 19x and sometimes simply means empty without any implication of judgment (Deut. 32:10; Job 12:24; 26:7; Psalms 107:40) and "void" only occurs two other times—too few to draw lexical conclusions.

⁷ Progressive creationism rejects Darwinian evolution but does accept the old earth view. In other words, God sequentially created the individuated species, but He acted across thousands or millions of years.

⁸ Theistic evolution posits that God created basic life and sovereignly superintended over the process, but that biological diversity and complexity arose through the same processes that secular evolution suggests.

⁹ Wayne Grudem (*ST*, 277) helpfully points out that biblical "kinds" (מִינֵי) are as narrow as falcons, ravens, hawks, herons, buzzards, kites, sea gulls, storks, locusts, crickets, grasshoppers and great lizards (Lev. 11:14-20; Deut. 14:13-18).

¹⁰ The fact that Paul goes on to use Adam's sin as a conceptual basis for our redemption in the second Adam (Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:21-22, 45-49) makes the idea of a historical individual critical for theological reasons.

¹¹ Two other erroneous metaphysical views are materialistic monism and dualism. Both deny the biblical teaching that God created the physical world (Psalms 90:2).

¹² The terms "transcendent" and "immanent" are one way of affirming both sides of this tension (that God is both distinct from and also intimately involved with His creation). See Isa. 12:6 and Eph. 4:6.

GOD CREATED MAN

Among all of creation, man is unique. Not only does man receive special attention in the creation record and a special blessing from God (Gen. 1:26-30; 2:7), but He was also created in God's image (Gen. 1:27; 5:1-3; 9:6; Jam. 3:9) and with unique dignity (Psa. 8; Matt. 6:26; 12:12).¹³ The first man, Adam, was created in **innocent holiness** (Gen. 1:31; Eccl. 7:29) and enjoyed unmarred fellowship with his creator (Gen. 1:31; 3:8). God charged mankind to act as His vice-regent over the created world, subduing and having dominion (Gen. 1:28; Psa. 8). As a result, man has an ongoing responsibility to preserve and exercise dominion over the earth without making it an end in itself.

Man as Male and Female

God created humanity as male and female (Gen. 1:27). Men and women are equal in personhood and importance (Joel 2:28-29; 1 Cor. 1:11-12; Gal. 3:28; 1 Pet. 3:7) but intended for distinct roles (Gen. 2:18; 1 Cor. 11:3, 9; Col. 3:18-19). These roles are permanent and have existed since creation: (1) Eve was created after Adam to be a helper (Gen. 2:7, 18; 1 Cor. 11:9; 1 Tim. 2:13); (2) Even though Eve sinned first, God held Adam responsible as the representative of the human race (Gen. 3:9; Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:22).

God instituted marriage for the purpose of (1) companionship (Gen. 2:20, 23-25), (2) pleasure (Prov. 5:18-20; Eccl. 9:9; **Song** 1:2-4; Heb. 13:4; c.f. 1 Cor. 7:2, 9), (3) procreation (Gen. 1:28; Mal. 2:15), (4) and as an illustration of Christ's relationship with the church (Eph. 5:22-32). Marriage is an exclusive covenant (Prov. 2:16-17; Mal. 2:14) strictly including one man and one woman for life (Eccl. 9:9; Mark 10:6-8). Only death (Rom. 7:1-3; 1 Cor. 7:39) or forcible desertion (1 Cor. 7:10-16) can break this covenant. This forbids several other aberrations.

- **Homosexuality** is not only a violation of God's original intentions for human sexuality (Lev. 18:22; 20:13; 1 Tim. 1:8-10), but it represents one of the nadir points in the self-destructive process of sin (Gen. 19:1-11; Judg. 19:16-24; Rom. 1:24-28; Jude 7). Like every other sin, victory over these desires is possible in the gospel (1 Cor. 6:9-11).
- **Divorce** likewise distorts God's intention for the permanence and indissolubility of marriage. Divorce is always a tragedy (Prov. 2:16-17; Mal. 2:14-16) and the OT provides regulation only because it does happen in a corrupt society (Matt. 19:8). A number of passages strictly forbid remarriage after divorce (Mark 10:11-12; Luke 16:18; 1 Cor. 7:11). Matthew's "exception clause" is ambiguous at best (5:31-32; 19:1-12), and may refer to adultery during the betrothal period.¹⁴

Man's Nature

Scripture describes the complexity of man's being with various words:

- The *spirit* (רוּחַ, πνεῦμα) referring broadly to man's immaterial component (Job 32:8; Eccl. 3:21; 1 Cor. 5:5; 2 Cor. 7:1; Col. 2:5)

¹³ Theologians have posited any number of specific suggestions for the *imago dei*: dominion over the rest of creation, man's relational nature, man's intellectual understanding, his religious instinct, trichotomy (as a parallel to the Trinity), speech, creativity, or even the fact that man walks erect! Other than the last, all of these suggestions have some merit and the *imago dei* probably includes them all. The basic idea is that man shows various similarities to God's own nature. However, the only suggestion with direct exegetical basis is the creation mandate—that mankind is to subdue and have dominion over the earth. Millard Erickson (*ST*, 498-510) helpfully classifies the major views as substantive (some quality of man's nature), relational, and functional (something we carry out or a role we play). Wayne Grudem lists moral, spiritual, mental, relational and physical aspects (*ST*, 445-449). It is also important to note that the image has been marred, man does retain that likeness after the fall (Gen. 9:6; Jam. 3:9).

¹⁴ Because biblical support for divorce and remarriage is very unclear, I am not willing to perform weddings for divorcees (Rom. 14:23).

- The *soul* (נַפְשׁוֹ, ψυχή) referring broadly to man’s immaterial component and of the center of inner human life including desires and emotions (Gen. 42:21; Deut. 10:12; Matt. 16:26; 1 Pet. 1:9).
- The *heart* (לֵב, καρδία) as the seat of physical, spiritual and intellectual life (Deut. 6:5; 10:16; Eph. 3:17; Phil. 4:7).
- The *mind* (νοῦς, φρόνημα) of the seat of the intellect (Rom. 8:5-7; Eph. 4:23).
- The *will* (θέλημα) of the seat of volition and desire (Eph. 2:3; 2 Pet. 1:21)
- The *body* (σῶμα, σῶμα) of man’s physical component (Ecc. 12:12; Isa. 10:18; Rom. 8:10; 1 Cor. 5:3).
- The *flesh* (some instances of σὰρξ) of man’s unredeemable aspect (Rom. 7:18; 8:7; Gal. 5:24).
- The *conscience* (συνείδησις) of the God-given inner awareness of God’s moral standards (Rom. 2:15; 1 Tim. 1:5; 4:2; Heb. 10:22).

Scripture uses many of these words with significant overlap, indicating that humans are complex. **Trichotomy** is reductionistic for several reasons: (1) “Soul” and “spirit” can be used interchangeably (John 12:17 with 13:21; Lk. 1:46-47; Heb. 12:23 or 1 Pet. 3:19 with Rev. 6:9; 20:4). (2) Either the soul (Gen. 35:18; Isa. 53:12; Luke 12:20) or spirit (Psa. 31:5; John 19:30; Acts 7:59) depart at death. (3) Either “soul” (Psa. 31:9; Matt. 10:28) or “spirit” (1 Cor. 5:5; Jam. 2:26) are used as the counterpart to the body. (4) There is no set of distinguishing characteristics for either soul or spirit. Either can sin (1 Pet. 1:22 with Deut. 2:30; Psa. 78:8; Isa. 29:24; 2 Cor. 7:1), think, feel or act (Matt. 11:29; 22:37 with 1 Cor. 2:11; John 13:21; Rom. 1:9), and pray or worship (1 Sam. 1:15; Psa. 25:1; 119:20; Luke 1:46 with Matt. 26:41; Luke 1:47; 1 Cor. 14:15). Scripture does not support a sharp division between the soul and spirit.¹⁵

What Scripture does clearly support is the fact that all men possess material and immaterial components and that the immaterial component will endure beyond death (Acts 7:59; Phil. 1:23-24; 2 Cor. 5:8; Rev. 6:9). Believers are immediately present with the Lord (Luke 23:43; 2 Cor. 5:8; Heb. 12:23) and Scripture gives no support for purgatory or soul sleep.¹⁶ The spirits of unbelievers likewise pass immediately into eternal punishment in Hades (Luke 16:24-26; Heb. 9:27), where there is no second chance for repentance (Matt. 25:31-46; Rom. 2:5-10; 2 Cor. 5:10). Eventually, the physical bodies of believers and unbelievers will be resurrected and reunited with their spirits for all of eternity (Dan. 12:2; Matt. 25:46; John 5:28-29).

Scripture never specifically addresses where our souls come from, but the most natural suggestion is that God providentially creates each soul (Psa. 139:13; Isa. 42:5; Zech. 12:1; Heb. 12:9).¹⁷ Scripture is clear that an unborn child is a human person, enjoying the biblical protections of the sanctity of life (Psa. 51:31-15; 139:13-16; Luke 1:41-44; Exod. 21:22-25).¹⁸

Whether angels, the physical world or humanity, everything that God created was beautiful and good (Gen. 1:4, 31). But it all changed in the most tragic event of the biblical story—the day that sin infiltrated the world.

¹⁵ 1 Thess. 5:23 and Heb. 4:12 are not intended as a taxonomy of the inner man (see also Matt. 22:37; Mark 12:30) any more than “joints and marrow” (Heb. 4:12) describe all of anatomy. “Spiritual” in 1 Cor. 2:14-3:4 refers to the Holy Spirit, not the human spirit. Note also Eccl. 3:21 that speaks of beasts having a spirit.

¹⁶ OT believers were also in the presence of God immediately after death (Gen. 5:24 with 2 Kings 2:11 with Matt. 17:3; Psa. 17:15; 23:6; Matt. 22:32; Luke 16:25).

¹⁷ It is also completely biblically possible that our souls come into being through natural generation (Gen. 1:27; 5:3; Psa. 51:5; Heb. 7:9-10).

¹⁸ The NIV’s rendering of Exod. 21:22-25 (also Jack Cottrell, Keil and Delitzsch) grants the infant life equal status with adults.

THE DOCTRINE OF SIN

Through Adam's transgression, sin infected God's perfect creation, distorting, corrupting and destroying everywhere it went. Even after thousands of years of human suffering and death, the world still has yet to see the full range of horrors that began with this tragic event.

“and so death passed upon all men”

THE DEFINITION OF SIN

Sin is an act of disobedience against God, resulting in death and eternal destruction.

- Scripture describes sin with a variety of terms: **תַּחַת** (“deviation from God’s way”), **תְּוָה** (“crookedness, perversion”), **שִׁשְׁבַּע** (“apostasy, rebellion”), **רָשָׁע** (“habituated evil”), **רָעָה** (“evil as worthlessness”), **ἀμαρτία** (“violating divine standards”), **ἀνομία** (“lawlessness”), **παράβασις** (“transgression”), **ἀδικία** (“unrighteousness”) **ἀσέβεια** (“opposition to God”), **παράπτωμα** (“trespass”), **ἀγνοήματα** (“sins of ignorance”), and **παρακούειν** (“to disobey”).
- Scripture also defines sin as unrighteousness (1 John 5:17), violating the law (1 John 3:4), violating one’s conscience through faithlessness (Rom. 14:23; 1 Cor. 8:9–12), failure to do what is right (Jam. 4:17), unbelief (Heb. 11:6), and failure to love (selfishness—Matt. 22:40; Rom. 13:8; Gal. 5:13).
- Sin is any failure to follow God’s commands in action, attitude (Exod. 20:17; Matt. 5:22) or state (Jer. 17:9; Psa. 51:5; Eph. 2:3). Sins can be either active, doing what is forbidden (commission—Numb. 5:6) or passive, neglecting what is commanded (omission—Deut. 22:1–4; Jam. 4:17).¹

While all sins are worth of eternal death (Jam. 2:10–11), sins also have varying degrees of seriousness.² The most serious sin is a wholesale rejection of Christ in the face of privileged knowledge of the gospel and conviction from the Spirit. Called the **unpardonable sin** (Matt. 12:31–32; Mark 3:28–30), this obdurate rebellion precludes the repentant faith that all sinners must exercise to receive salvation. All who apostatize from the truth demonstrate their unconverted state by committing the unpardonable sin (Heb. 6:4–8; 10:26–31), but true believers cannot because of the doctrine of perseverance.

¹ Believers have not obeyed God’s commands until they are willing to make authoritative and spiritually guided application of biblical principles to every area of life (2 Tim. 4:2; Tit. 2:15). There are a few debatable applications in which believers might justifiably differ (Rom. 14; 1 Cor. 8, 10). In such cases, liberty is not a right or a mandate but something which is often voluntarily set aside (Rom. 14:17–19). On debatable questions, believers should ask: (1) Is this enslaving (1 Cor. 6:12) or ensnaring (Heb. 12:1)? (2) Will my liberty embolden another believer to sin by going beyond his weaker conscience (Rom. 14:13–23; 1 Cor. 8:9–13; 10:23–30)? (3) What most contributes to the gospel and edification of believers (1 Cor. 9:1–27; 10:32–33; Philip. 1:9–10)? (4) Am I myself fully persuaded (Rom. 14:23)? (5) Does this decision glorify God (1 Cor. 10:31)?

² (1) The OT law gives different penalties for different sins or types of sins (Exod. 22; Num. 15:27–30), (2) Jesus spoke of “weightier matters” (Matt. 23:23), (3) Jesus spoke of Judas’ sin being “greater” than Pilate’s (John 19:11), and (4) some sins may invite the penalty of death (Acts 5:1–11; 1 Cor. 11:29–31; 1 John 5:16–17) or church discipline (1 Cor. 5:1) while others do not. Greater knowledge of biblical truth does heighten a person’s accountability (Matt. 11:20–24).

THE RESULTS OF SIN

When sin entered the world, the results were immediate and disastrous. Scripture does not tell us the cause or source of sin, but only that it did not originate with God (Jam. 1:13; 1 John 1:5)³ and the first recorded manifestation is in Satan (John 8:44; 1 John 3:8). The poisonous epidemic immediately spread through some of the *angels* and *man* until its consequences were evident in the entire *created world*. The end result of sin is eternal death—separation from God in *hell*.

Corruption in the Angelic Host

God created Satan as a leader among the angelic company (Matt. 12:24), and with great prominence among the angelic throng (Ezek. 28:11-19). At some point between the end of creation and the fall of man, evil first expressed itself through Satan's ambition to be greater than God Himself (1 Tim. 3:6).⁴

Besides his proper name (Job 1:6; Matt. 4:10; Luke 10:18; 22:3; Rev. 12:9), **Satan** is also called the devil (meaning "slanderer"— Luke 4:2; John 8:44; 1 Pet. 5:8), the serpent (Gen. 3:1; 2 Cor. 11:3; Rev. 12:9), Beelzebub (Matt. 10:25; 12:27), the evil one (John 17:15; Eph. 6:16; 1 John 5:18-19), the dragon (Rev. 12-13, 16, 20), the ruler of this world (John 12:31), Belial ("empty" or "worthless"—2 Cor. 6:15), and the prince of the power of the air (Eph. 2:2). Satan continues his deception today, appearing as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14), hindering the spread of the gospel (Matt. 13:19, 38-39), enabling false teaching (1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 2:24-26; 1 John 4:1-4), and actively seeking to destroy individuals (2 Cor. 4:4; Gal. 4:8; Eph. 6:11-13; a roaring lion in 1 Pet. 5:8).

As a result of Satan's sin, corruption spread beyond him to a third of the angelic host who joined in his rebellion (2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6; Rev. 12:4). These demons are obdurately opposed to God and His purposes. **Demons** have knowledge of God and His purposes (Jam. 2:19) and even grudgingly acknowledge their rightful subordination under Him (Job 1:9-12; Matt. 8:29). The cross of Christ accomplished a great victory that seals their doom (John 12:31; Col. 2:15).⁵ God has not made available a way for demons to repent of their rebellion and be restored (Heb. 2:16; 1 Pet. 1:12; 2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6;).

A portion of the demons was immediately imprisoned in bondage and will not be released until the end (Luke 8:31; Rev. 9:1-11; 2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 1:6). Ultimately, Satan will be consigned eternally to the lake of fire together with all demons, where they will suffer torment for all eternity (Matt. 25:41; Rev. 20:10).

Spiritual warfare is one unfortunate consequence of sin's corruption in the angelic host (Eph. 6:12; 1 Pet. 5:8). Because of the doctrine of perseverance and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, it is not possible for a believer to be demon possessed (Matt. 12:43-45; 1 Cor. 6:19; 1 John 4:4; 5:18). Believers are cautioned from rebuking or expelling demons (Jude 8-9). Still, Scripture does encourage us to be aware and cautious (2 Cor. 2:11; 1 Pet. 5:8), particularly when it comes to doctrine and false religions (1 Cor. 10:20-21; 2 Cor. 11:13-15; 1 Tim. 4:1-3; 1 John 4:1-3). The answer to demonic or satanic attacks is the same as every spiritual struggle: Scripture and prayer (Matt. 4:4-10; Eph. 6:13-18), mortification of sin (Eph. 4:26-27) and resisting temptation through humble dependence on God (Jam. 4:6-7).

³ Also Gen. 18:25; Deut. 32:4; Job 34:10; Psalms 11:5. On the other hand, many passages clearly affirm that nothing takes place outside of God's complete control (Dan. 4:35; Eph. 1:11). Ultimately, the origin of evil is a mystery.

⁴ Isa. 14:12-21 and Ezek. 28:11-19 describe human kings but may also draw strong comparisons to Satan's fall from heaven. While Isa. 14 certainly records pride parallel to diabolical arrogance, Ezek. 28 certainly has a much stronger interpretational connection to Satan's fall.

⁵ Also Gen. 3:15; John 16:11; Eph. 1:19-21; Heb. 2:14-15; 1 John 3:8.

Corruption in Man

Sin spread to humanity when Satan deceived Eve, poisoning her with the same wicked ambition that corrupted him (2 Cor. 11:3). Humanity's share in Satan's sin was complete when Adam also disobeyed God's simple instructions (Gen. 3:6-7; 1 Cor. 15:22). The results included a loss of fellowship with God (Gen. 3:8), sin and depravity in each generation (Gen. 4:7-8), and ultimately death (Gen. 2:17; 3:19; Rom. 5:14; 1 Cor. 15:22).

Each person enters the world with a corrupted nature, total guilt before God, and a predisposition of rebellion against Him (Psa. 51:5; 58:3; Rom. 5:12-21). Because of **original sin**, no one since the fall has experienced Adam's state of unconfirmed innocent holiness (Psa. 51:5; Rom. 5:14-15).⁶ This means that each person's guilt and righteous condemnation before God does not await their own personal, conscious choice (Psa. 51:5; 58:3). **Total depravity** does not mean that every person is as guilty as they could be (Isa. 64:6), but it does mean that sin has infected every aspect of human nature—heart (Jer. 17:9), mind (Eph. 4:17), will (Rom. 8:7), conscience (Tit. 1:15), emotions (2 Pet. 1:4; 3:3; Jude 1:16), and body (Gen. 3:16, 19; Rom. 8:23; 1 Cor. 15:42, 52-54). Sin has impaired man's will so that He cannot please God (Isa. 64:6; Rom. 8:7-8) or choose to believe in Christ (John 1:13; 6:44, 65), and people will always reject God's free offer of salvation unless God intervenes (Eph. 4:18).

Scripture indicates in several ways that young children or incompetents who die without the capacity for understanding will not suffer damnation: (1) Scripture does assert a diminished responsibility for people too young to make personal, considered decisions (Deut. 1:39; Isa. 7:14-16; Jonah 4:11; Matt. 18:3; Rom. 9:11; 1 Cor. 14:20). (2) There is at least one instance of God's working salvifically in an infant heart (Luke 1:15, 41, 44). (3) While original sin is sufficient for eternal condemnation, God's judgment does presume that there are works to be judged (Gen. 18:20-21; Jer. 17:10; Matt. 16:27; Rev. 20:12; 22:12). (4) David found comfort in the confidence that he would see his infant son again (2 Sam. 12:23; c.f. 2 Sam. 18:33; 1 Thess. 4:13).

Corruption in the World

Because of the central role given to man, Adam's sin affected not only himself but also the physical world. Though disorder, decay, and death are part of our daily experience, they are a distortion of God's original intentions for the earth.

The fact that the creation continues to be beautiful and function with any amount of order testifies to two things: (1) God's wisdom in engineering his creation so that it can still function in spite of the ravages of sin (Rom. 8:21-22), and (2) God's common grace in restraining sin from the full force of its destructive power (Psa. 145:9; Luke 6:35; Ezek. 33:11).

Corruption in Hell

The end of sin must have the same results as its beginning—**separation from God**. Individuals who die in rebellion against God go immediately to a place of torment called *Hades*, (sometimes described in the OT as *Sheol* or in the NT as *Gehenna*). This is a temporary place of judgment until the final judgment (Rev. 20:14).

In the last day, the bodies of unbelievers will be resurrected and reunited with their spirits (Dan. 12:2; Matt. 25:31-46; John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15). After being condemned for their deeds, they will be cast into

⁶ This would technically include Jesus Himself, since His own human nature was either confirmed holiness (not in a state that could be defiled as Adam's) or a nature inherited from Adam's sinful race that was fully sanctified and restored.

the lake of fire (along with death and hell themselves— Matt. 25:31-46; Rev. 20:10-15). There they will suffer eternal torment in complete separation from God (Matt. 25:30, 41, 46; Rev. 14:10-11; 20:10).

The doctrine of hell is an unsettling reality and one that raises the desire for an alternative explanation. This desire has spawned a number of biblical aberrations:

- I reject **annihilationism** as unbiblical because (1) Scripture explicitly speaks of eternal, conscious torment (Mark 9:43, 47-48; Luke 16:23-24, 28), (2) and because eternal life is described in parallel with death in hell (Matt. 25:46).⁷
- I reject **universalism** as unbiblical because Scripture clearly teaches that (1) repentant faith in Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 John 5:11-12), (2) authentically warns that those who do not repent face eternal condemnation (Psa. 7:11-12; Ezek. 33:11; John 3:18), (3) and indicates that some will ultimately suffer that condemnation (Matt. 23:33; Mark 9:43-47; Rev. 21:8).
- I reject the **metaphorical view of hell** (1) because Scripture describes hell in specific, physical terms (Matt. 5:29-30; 10:28; 13:42; Luke 16:24; Rev. 19:20), (2) because Scripture describes hell as following death (hell is not earthly human suffering— Luke 16:22-23; Rev. 20:12-15), and because there is no biblical indication of anything but a literal interpretation.

The ravaging effects of sin are evident in every corner of the world God made. Because of sin and the death that followed, there would be no hope for the world or for mankind.

But God intervened.

⁷ Many passages speak of the “destruction” of the wicked (Phil. 3:19; 1 Thess. 5:3; 2 Thess. 1:9; 2 Pet. 3:7). In each case, the words used (*ἀπολεία* and *ὄλεθρος*) can refer to corruption or something being made useless rather than causing something to go out of existence (Matt. 26:8 or 1 Thess. 5:3; 2 Thess. 1:9).

THE DOCTRINE OF REVELATION

*No one can know the truth unless God reveals Himself, but hope enters the world with the wonderful reality that He has spoken. The doctrine of revelation teaches that through **general revelation, special revelation**, and most importantly through **Scripture**, God has chosen to make Himself known.*

“God has spoken in His Word.”

GENERAL REVELATION

God has revealed Himself in creation (Ps. 19:1-6), the conscience (Rom. 1:32; 2:14-15), His gracious care (Matt. 5:45; Acts 14:16-17) and history (Exod. 9:16; Isa. 37:20)¹ in a way that is available to all people and renders them responsible (Rom. 1:18-19; 2:1-2).² **General revelation** is sufficient to show God’s existence and aspects of His nature such as His power (Rom. 1:20), goodness (Matt. 5:45; Acts 14:17;), and morality (Rom. 2:14-15). Men are therefore accountable before God for rejecting this truth (Rom. 1:18-20),³ though general revelation by itself is insufficient for salvation (Rom. 1:21; 10:13-14; 1 Cor. 1:21).⁴

SPECIAL REVELATION

I believe that God has also revealed Himself at numerous times in human history through visions (Acts 10:10-16), dreams (Gen. 20:3), miracles (Psa. 77:14; Matt. 15:31), prophets (Eph. 3:5), or visible manifestations of Himself (Exod. 3:2 c.f. Mark 12:26). The climax of God’s **special revelation** is the person of Jesus Christ (John 1:1; Heb. 1:1-2). Not all special revelation is recorded in Scripture (Rev. 10:4), and no other revelation bears the special significance that God grants to His inscripturated revelation (2 Pet. 1:16-19). This is the only source of special revelation that we have access to today.

INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE

Outside of His Son, God’s supreme revelation of Himself is in the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments. I believe in the **verbal** (every word—Matt. 5:18; 22:31-32; Luke 16:17), **plenary** (all-

¹ Also Acts 17:26; Job 12:23; Dan. 2:21

² Another aspect of general revelation is the image of God in man.

³ Even in the state of innocence (before the fall), man could not know God by his own efforts because of divine transcendence (Job 11:7-9). Subsequent to Adam’s sin, the barrier to knowledge is only greater because of the noetic effects of the fall (Rom. 1:18, 21-22). On that basis, all knowledge of God (or any knowledge itself) is the direct result of God’s intervention in revelation (Prov. 1:7; 9:10).

⁴ The requirement for salvation is faith in Jesus Christ (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; Acts 16:31) and it is impossible to believe on Jesus without knowing Him (Rom. 10:14). Scripture teaches that people consistently respond to general revelation by rejecting and suppressing it (Rom. 3:11). Thus, the view that people will be saved if they respond to the light they have received in general revelation speaks only to a hypothetical that has never happened. Even the universal witness of Acts 14:16-17 stands even while the nations continue “to walk in their own ways.” Only the Word of God can bring about spiritual life (Jam. 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:23).

inclusive—2 Tim. 3:16) inspiration of Scripture.⁵ **Inspiration** is the process whereby God breathed out the exact words of Scriptures in the original autographs (2 Tim. 3:16; c.f. 2 Sam. 23:2; 2 Pet. 1:21).⁶ Approximately 40 human authors were sovereignly prepared and guided by the Holy Spirit to write exactly as God intended them, but they also wrote in keeping with their own experiences, vocabularies, and personalities (2 Sam. 23:2; Luke 1:1; 2 Cor. 10:10-11; 2 Pet. 3:15-16).⁷

The resulting books were recorded without error of any kind in matters of theology, ethics, history or science (Psa. 12:6; Prov. 30:5; John 10:35).⁸ As the Word of God, Scripture is fully authoritative and determinative for all issues of doctrine and practice (2 Tim. 4:1-3; Acts 6:7). I reject as unbiblical and untenable the theories of **dictation** (Luke 1:1-3; 2 Cor. 10:10-11),⁹ **natural inspiration** (2 Pet. 1:21), **dynamic** and **concept inspiration** (Matt. 5:18), and **Neo-Orthodoxy** (1 Thess. 2:13).

CANONICITY AND PRESERVATION

The Bible claims **authority** for itself (Isa. 43:1; 1 Cor. 2:13) and that authority resonates in the hearts of God's people (Isa. 66:2; John 10:27). **Canonicity** is the process whereby believers came to recognize the writings that had been breathed out by God. The OT writers regularly claimed Divine authority for their words (Lev. 1:1; Hos. 1:1) and acknowledge the authority of other OT books (Josh. 1:7-9; 1 Kings 2:3; Dan. 9:2). The NT writers quote from every OT book but one, often explicitly calling them Scripture or attributing to them absolute authority (Luke 1:70; Gal. 3:8; Heb. 1:1-2; Jam. 2:8; 1 Pet. 1:10-12). Jesus Himself verified that the OT books were Scripture (Matt. 5:17-18; Luke 24:44-45), and promised that new revelation would come through the apostles (John 14:26; 16:13). The NT writers also regarded their own writings and other NT books as Scripture (1 Cor. 14:37; 1 Tim. 5:17-18; 2 Pet. 3:16) and authoritative (1 Thess. 4:15; 2 Pet. 3:2; Rev. 1:1-2). Each of the NT books was written by an apostle or with the involvement of an apostle. Finally, the early church confirmed the traditional OT canon and recognized the authority accorded to the NT books by the apostles.¹⁰ The books of the Bible manifested themselves as God's Word by their powerful work in the hearts of believers and the ultimate confirmation is the self-authenticating power of God's Word (Jer. 23:28-29; John 16:13-14; Rom. 10:7; 1 Cor. 2:14; 1 Thess. 2:13).

Although God gave His Word across 1,600 years of history, the Bible clearly indicates that the text of Scripture is complete (Prov. 30:6; Rev. 22:18). Anyone who adds to Scripture is a false prophet (Deut.

⁵ Also Num. 23:19; Psa. 12:6; 119:89, 96; Prov. 30:5; Matt. 24:35.

⁶ While 2 Tim. 3:16 describes God "exhaling" His words, 2 Pet. 1:21 describes the Spirit directing the authors by "moving" them and 2 Sam. 23:2 describes God speaking through a human author. It is also clear that the proper object of inspiration is the words, not the authors. These compressed descriptions demonstrate that inspiration was not an ecstatic or paranormal mental state but providential oversight so that the words each author chose were exactly those that God intended for His Word.

⁷ 1 Cor. 1:14-16 illustrates the natural limitations of Scripture's human authors—even under inspiration, they were not omniscient or somehow transcending normal human consciousness. On the other hand, it is also clear that the human authors of Scripture sometimes spoke better than they knew (Dan. 8:26-27; 1 Pet. 1:10).

⁸ Since the authors sometimes used an amanuensis, God's superintendence also extended to their role in recording Scripture (Jer. 36:4; Rom. 16:22; 1 Cor. 16:21). Where Scripture approvingly cites or incorporates other sources, this information is also accurate and authoritative, though there may be inaccuracies at other places in the same source (Acts 17:28).

⁹ There are a number of cases where Scripture was given by direct dictation (Exod. 34:27-28; Rev. 2-3; 14:13). These instances are clear in the text, and Scripture indicates that this was not normal in the process of inspiration. Even these instances of dictation occurred within the conscious awareness of the writers.

¹⁰ Canonicity refers to the standards or measures by which the early church recognized Scripture. These included the authorship or oversight of an apostle, agreement with other known Scripture and acceptance by the rest of the church. However, the early church did not choose the books of Scripture. They merely recognized the power of Scripture through the inner testimony of the Spirit. The fact that the biblical canon was settled broadly across the church demonstrates both the Spirit's oversight and the uniqueness of Scripture.

18:20). Scripture also teaches that God will providentially **preserve** His Word (Psa. 119:152, 160; Matt. 24:35), and He has chosen to do so in a remarkable multiplicity of copies.¹¹ By quoting the Septuagint, the NT sets a precedent for faithful translations that represent the original texts (Mark 12:10 c.f. Psa. 118:22).¹² The result is that believers can know with confidence that their Bibles are the Word of God.

INTERPRETATION

God's people are responsible to exercise biblical wisdom as they read and understand God's Word (Neh. 8:8; 2 Tim. 2:15). The proper hermeneutical method should be:

- **Literal/Normal**, because of the perspicuity of Scripture (Deut. 30:11-14; Psa. 119:130).¹³
- **Historical**, because the events recorded actually occurred in a specific place and time (Dan. 9:1-2; Luke 1:1-5).
- **Contextual/Theological**, because the best commentary on Scripture is other Scripture (Matt. 22:29-34; John 5:39; Acts 17:11).
- **Humble**, recognizing that many things are beyond human understanding (Deut. 29:29; 1 Pet. 1:10-12), and that understanding depends on the illumination of the Spirit (Rom. 2:13).

Unbelievers can intellectually apprehend Scripture (Ezek. 12:3), and faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Rom. 10:17), but apart from God's help the truth will remain opaque to the natural man (1 Cor. 2:14). This is because the Spirit plays a critical role in **illuminating** human understanding, both for unbelievers and believers alike (Luke 24:45; John 16:8-11; 2 Cor. 3:18). Because Scripture is the highest authority affirming its own veracity, it is self-attesting to those who read it believingly (John 7:17; 8:32).

Even though the Bible does not record all truth (Rev. 10:4), believers can be confident that Scripture is clear (Psa. 119:105, 130) and sufficient for all matters of faith and obedience (2 Tim. 3:17). This also means that the primary source for guidance in personal decisions should always be the Word of God (Psa. 119:105; Jam. 1:5-8). Scripture is internally coherent, so that believers can correlate multiple passages and draw good and necessary inferences to gain a sufficient understanding of the truth and of their moral responsibilities (Matt. 22:23-33).¹⁴

The infinite God has spoke in a finite book to fallen men. His words, miraculously spoken so that they are both completely true and genuinely comprehensible to simple human minds, are too full, too wonderful and too deep for anyone to exhaust. Most wonderfully, they tell us that in eternity past, God engineered a plan to restore His marred creation.

¹¹ The Bible nowhere indicates that God will continue to preserve His Word in a single family of manuscripts or in a specific translation. In the absence of direction from Scripture, the choice to identify one translation as the sole standard is arbitrary by definition. Rather, we must exercise good judgment in handling the multiplicity of copies (the eclectic method), recognizing that textual differences nowhere affect our doctrine.

¹² One natural corollary of verbal inspiration is that the precise wording of Scripture is critical, not merely the general message. As a result, translations should follow formal equivalence as much as possible. Still, Jesus' citation of the Septuagint demonstrates that a translation need not be perfect to be useful and to be called the Word of God.

¹³ Scripture certainly uses metaphors and other literary devices (Judg. 9:8-20; Dan. 7:1-8). But for meaning to be accessible and stable, there must be sufficient contextual indicators to identify each literary device. In the absence of such signals, interpreters should assume a literal interpretation. This rests on the fact that Scripture is intended to reveal truth, not conceal it (John 17:17; Eph. 4:17-24). It also necessitates an abiding distinction between Israel and the church (dispensationalism).

¹⁴ The commitment to literal/normal hermeneutics leads naturally to moderate dispensationalism, a topic discussed further under the doctrine of the people of God.

THE DOCTRINE OF FATHER, SON & SPIRIT

Scripture happily reveals that God’s wonderful plan of redemption starts with Himself in the eternal counsels of the Trinity—Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

“God in three persons, blessed Trinity.”

Scripture clearly indicates that there is one God (Deut. 6:4-5; 1 Cor. 8:6; 1 Tim. 2:5; Jam. 2:19)¹ Who exists in three persons (Matt. 28:19; 1 Cor. 12:4-6; 2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 4:4-6; Jude 20-21). All three persons are God, each exists in the one divine essence, and each is capable of relating individually to the others (Matt. 3:16-17). Scripture teaches that there is a voluntary subordination within the Trinity (1 Cor. 15:28)² and that while all persons participate in every action,³ certain roles are primarily the action of one person (Eph. 1:3-14; 1 Pet. 1:2).⁴

FATHER

Person

Scripture is clear that the Father is fully God (John 6:27; 20:17; 1 Pet. 1:2). The title “Father” does not refer to the origin of the other persons but to the His voluntary authority. It is also clear that within the inter-Trinitarian relationships, the Father is the first member of the Godhead (John 5:19; 14:28).

Work

- The Father is the initiating agent in creation (Psa. 33:6-9; Mark 10:6) though all three persons were incrementally involved (Gen. 1:2; John 1:1-3; Col. 1:16).⁵
- The Father is the primary architect and initiator of the plan of redemption (Eph. 1:9-10; 1 Pet. 1:2), sending the Son and Spirit (John 3:16; Gal. 4:4; John 14:26; Gal. 4:6).

¹ See also Exod. 15:11; 1 Kings 8:60; Isa. 45: 5-6, 21-22; 44:6-8; Rom. 3:30.

² The ontological relationships within the Trinity (generation and spiration) are nearly impossible to support with clear biblical data. There are multiple basic problems with the ontological relationships in the Trinity. (1) Exegetical support is also almost nonexistent. (2) There is no real logical basis for inferring the concept from other doctrines. (3) Worse than the nearly total absence of support for the ontological relationships is the logical problems it causes. The ontological relationships distinguish the three Persons in terms of their essence. If the Father, Son, and Spirit differ in their essence, what remains for their unity? (4) Theologians have also chronically disagreed about the specific details of the ontological Trinity, with little recourse to any objective way to settle the dispute. All of this betrays the lack of an objective foundation for discussing the relationships within the ontological Trinity. See Feinberg, 488-492.

³ There is even a recurring pattern in the way that these roles are played out. In both creation and redemption, for instance, the Father planned and initiated the action, sending the Son and Spirit to fulfill the specifics of His intentions.

⁴ Arianism is a hard ontological subordinationism that makes the Son less than God. Subordinationism in this vein is heretical, but Scripture does teach economic subordinationism—the voluntary relationships between the Persons of the Trinity of submission for Divine purposes.

⁵ As with nearly all of God’s actions, the Son (John 1:3; 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2) and the Holy Spirit (Gen. 1:2; Job 33:4; Psa. 104:30) were also directly involved in creation.

- The Father is the recipient of the redemptive payment of the Son (2 Cor. 5:21; Isa. 53:6, 10; Eph. 1:14) and the one whose just wrath against sin was satisfied by that payment (Rom. 3:25).

THE SON

Scripture teaches that the Son is one Person with two natures—Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man (hypostatic union). Neither nature is destroyed by this union, nor does the union result in two persons (Rom. 9:5).⁶ The *kenosis* explains some aspects of the incarnation by recognizing that Jesus voluntarily chose to set aside the full exercise of some aspects of His deity (John 5:19; 1 Cor. 6:14).⁷ Even so, the incarnation is marked by aspects of both natures, often paradoxically expressed in close proximity (Isa. 9:6; Matt. 8:24-27).⁸

The second person of the Trinity took on the nature of man at the time of His miraculous conception, adding a human nature to His Person (Philip. 2:7-8).⁹ Subsequent to His ascension and session, the Son continues forever in both His humanity and deity (1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 1:2-3).

Person

The Son is the second person of the Godhead and has existed in that title from all eternity (Psa. 2:7). Scripture clearly teaches that the Son is fully God:

- He is explicitly called God (John 1:1; Rom. 9:5; Heb. 1:2-3).¹⁰
- He regarded Himself as God (Matt. 26:64; John 8:58; Rev. 22:13).¹¹
- He possessed divine attributes (Matt. 28:20; John 2:11, 23-25; 8:58; 10:17-18; Heb. 4:15).¹²
- He has performed divine works (Mark 2:1-12; John 5:22-23; 20:30-31; Col. 1:16-17).¹³
- He is identified as Old Testament Yahweh (Heb. 1:8 with Psa. 45:6; John 12:39-41; Heb. 1:10-12 with Psa. 102:25-27 with Isa. 6:1-10).

⁶ The Chalcedonian formula is helpful: “two natures, without confusion, change, division, or separation; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two Persons.”

⁷ The *kenosis* or “emptying” does not mean that Christ ceased to be God or even gave up any aspect of His deity. Rather, by taking on an additional nature, He voluntarily limited the free exercise of His power. A strong man is no less powerful if he chooses not to exercise everything he is capable of doing.

⁸ Other passages with this tension include John 17, intertwining references that emphasize limitation (John 17:4, 8, 12, 24) and infinity (John 17:5, 22, 24); In Hebrews 1 Christ is the perfect messenger because He is God while in chapter 2 He is the perfect high priest because He is a man; The three major passages on Jesus’ limited knowledge specifically emphasize His deity by calling Him the Son (Matt. 24:36; Mark 13:32; Heb. 5:8); John 11 records contrasting and alternating ignorance (vv. 3, 6, 34-35) and omniscience (v. 11-14).

⁹ The idea of the *anhypostasia* or better, the *enhypostasia*, suggests that Christ’s human nature never existed with an independent human person apart from the divine Person. However, it is critical to recognize that the new theanthropic Person had to also include the personal elements of a human nature. In other words, a model suggesting that Christ’s human nature lacks a human mind, consciousness or will is no different than Apollinarianism (Macleod, 199-203).

¹⁰ See also Isa. 9:6; John 1:18; 20:28; Phil. 2:6; Col. 1:19; Tit. 2:13; 2 Pet. 1:1. Scripture also describes Christ with divine designations including “I AM” (John 8:58), Lord (1 Cor. 12:3), the Son of God (John 5:17-30) and the Son of Man (Dan. 7:13-14; Matt. 26:63-66).

¹¹ As C.S. Lewis famously pointed out, the fact that Jesus claimed to be God means He was either crazy or a liar or He was God. The one option that isn’t available is that He was merely a good man.

¹² These include His omnipotence (Matt. 8:26-27; 14:19; John 2:1-11), eternity (John 8:58; Rev. 22:13), omniscience (Mark 2:8; John 1:48; 2:25; 6:64; 16:30; 21:17), omnipresence (Matt. 18:20; 28:20), sovereignty (Mark 2:5-7; Matt. 5:22, 28; 11:25-27), immortality (John 2:19-22; 10:17-18; Heb. 7:16 with 1 Tim. 6:16), and the right to be worshipped (Phil. 2:9-11; Heb. 1:6; Rev. 5:12-13 with Rev. 19:10).

¹³ One other category of actions that only befits deity is Jesus’ acceptance of worship (Matt. 28:17; John 20:28; Rev. 5:12-13).

Scripture is equally clear that the Son became fully man

- Scripture states that He was and remains a man (1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 2:14; 1 John 4:2; 2 John 7).¹⁴
- He lived a full human lifetime including birth, growth, and death (Luke 2:7, 52; John 19:30-33).
- He had human characteristics and experiences including a body (Luke 2:7; 24:39) with normal physical needs (Matt. 4:2; 8:24; John 4:7), he experienced human emotions (Matt. 26:38; John 11:35),¹⁵ he suffered temptation (Matt. 4:1-11; Heb. 4:15),¹⁶ and He faced human weakness and limitations (Matt. 24:36; John 4:6).¹⁷
- Those around him viewed him as a normal man (Matt. 13:54-58; John 7:5).

Scripture uses a number of titles to describe the second person of the Godhead:¹⁸

- **Son of God**, emphasizing His deity and His voluntary subordination to the Father (Matt. 4:3; 14:33; John 10:36; 11:27; 19:7; 20:31).
- **Son of man**, emphasizing His incarnation but ultimately His deity and rights as receiving divine authority (Dan. 7:13-14; Matt. 26:64-66; Mark 2:10, 28; Acts 7:56).
- **Christ** or **Messiah**, emphasizing His anointing as the perfect prophet, priest and king (Dan. 9:25-26; Luke 23:35; John 1:41; Acts 26:23).¹⁹
- **Jesus**, meaning “Jehovah saves” (Matt. 1:21; Acts 13:23; Phil. 3:20).²⁰
- *Lord*, emphasizing His deity and authority (Matt. 20:30; John 21:17; Acts 16:31; Rom. 10:9).
- **Lamb of God** and **High Priest**, emphasizing His sacrifice of Himself for sin (John 1:29; 1 Cor. 5:7; Rev. 5:12-13 and Psa. 110:4; Heb. 4:14-15; 6:20; 7:26).
- The **Word**, emphasizing His role as an embodied revelation of God’s nature and character (John 1:1, 14; 1 John 1:1; Rev. 19:13).

Work

- The Son revealed Himself in the Old Testament as “the angel of the Lord,” sent by God to represent and speak for Him (Hos. 12:4-5; Zech. 2:3, 8-9; Mal. 3:1-3).
- Sent by the Father, the Son became flesh (John 1:14; Rom. 8:3), was born of a virgin (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:18; Luke 1:35), and lived a sinless life (John 8:29; Heb. 4:15; 7:26; 1 Pet. 1:19; 2:22; 3:18; 1 John 3:5).
- The Son suffered real and significant temptation (Matt. 4:1-11; Heb. 2:18) and overcame through His obedient reliance on the Spirit (Luke 4:14). As a result, the Son both completely understands what we suffer in temptation (Heb. 4:15), and He provides a perfect example of how we should respond.

¹⁴ Also Acts 17:31; Philip. 2:7-8

¹⁵ Also Matt. 8:10; 9:36; Luke 10:21; John 12:27; 13:21; Heb. 5:7

¹⁶ The question of Jesus’ peccability hinges on the meaning of “possible.” In His human nature Christ possessed the full capacity to sin. He chose not to by relying on the Spirit and depending on the Word of God just like every believer must. Any understanding of impeccability that makes Jesus’ temptation meaningless or His refusal to sin independent of His Spirit-enabled choice nullifies biblical teaching (Heb. 2:18; 4:15). On the other hand, there was never a possibility that Jesus would actually fail under temptation or that He would sin (John 14:30; Jam. 1:13).

¹⁷ These include his limited knowledge (Matt. 24:36; Mark 13:32; Heb. 5:8), limitations of space (John 11:15-17), limitations of strength (John 4:2, 6; Luke 23:26), and limitations of time (Matt. 1:16).

¹⁸ Other titles include the Angel of the Lord, the great Shepherd, and the 7 “I AM” statements of John (John 6:48; John 8:12; John 10:9; John 10:11; John 11:25; John 14:6; John 15:1).

¹⁹ This stems from the fact that these were the three OT offices that involved anointment: priests (Ex. 28:41; 40:15; Num. 3:3), prophets (1 Kings 19:16), and kings (1 Sam. 9:16; 16:3; 2 Sam. 12:7).

²⁰ The derivation is from **יָשַׁע** (to save) in the name Hoshea to Joshua to Jesus (Num. 13:8, 16; Heb. 13:8).

- In obedience to the Father's will (Luke 22:42; Heb. 5:7-8) Jesus offered Himself as a perfect sacrifice for sin (Heb. 7:27; 10:10, 12). Suffering a cruel death on the cross, He voluntarily laid down His life (John 10:15, 17; 15:13; 1 John 3:16), entrusting Himself to the Father (Luke 23:46). Following His death, Jesus did not suffer in *Sheol* but fellowshiped in perfect communion with the Father (Psa. 16:10; Luke 23:43, 46; John 19:30; Acts 2:25-32).²¹
- After three days, the Son was bodily raised from the dead (Luke 24:5-7; Acts 2:31-32) by the Father's power (Acts 5:30; Rom. 4:24; 6:4; 8:11; 10:9; Gal. 1:1) as both a confirmation that His sacrifice for sin had been accepted (Rom. 1:4) and that victory over death had been won (Rom. 6:9; 14:9; 1 Cor. 6:14; 15:12-20; 2 Cor. 4:14).
- The Son ascended to the presence of the Father and sat down on the Davidic throne at God's right hand (Mark 16:19; Heb. 1:3; 10:12; 12:2), having fully completed the work of His earthly incarnation (John 17:4; 19:30; Heb. 10:12-14) and having received all authority and power (Matt. 28:18; Acts 5:26; Eph. 1:20-22; Phil. 2:9-11).
- As the head of the church (Eph. 1:22; 4:15; 5:23; Col. 1:18; 2:19), He presently intercedes for believers at the right hand of the throne of God (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:24-25). He is actively building (Matt. 16:18), overseeing (Eph. 1:20-23; Rev. 1:13-20) and sanctifying His body (Eph. 4:7-16) through the power of the Spirit (John 14:16-18; Acts 2:33; Eph. 3:16).
- At an unknown future time, He will return bodily (Acts 1:11) to receive believers to Himself (John 14:3; 1 Thess. 4:13-17). Seven years later He will return to vanquish the forces of evil and rebellion and to take His rightful earthly throne (Zech. 9:9-10; Rev. 19:11-21). In fulfillment of the Davidic promises, the Son will rule over the restored earth for all eternity (Jer. 23:5-6; 33:14-22).

HOLY SPIRIT

Person

The third person of the Trinity is described in both testaments as Spirit (Gen. 1:2; Job 33:4; Isa. 61:1; Luke 1:35; Rom. 8:14), and He is voluntarily subordinate to both Father and Son (John 14:26; 15:26; Acts 2:33).

The Spirit is not merely an impersonal force:

- The Spirit has every aspect of personality including mind (Rom. 8:27; 1 Cor. 2:10-11), will (1 Cor. 12:11), and emotions (Isa. 63:10; Eph. 4:30).
- He possesses personal attributes (2 Sam. 23:2; Acts 8:39; Rom. 8:26; Eph. 4:30; Heb. 10:29).
- He is distinct from His own power or the power of God (Luke 4:14; Acts 10:38; Rom. 15:13, 19).²²

It is also clear that the Spirit is fully God:

- The Spirit is designated as God (Acts 5:3-4) and the Spirit of God (Rom. 8:9-11), and He is identified as equal with the Father and the Son (1 Cor. 12:4-6; 2 Cor. 13:14; 1 Pet. 1:2).
- He possesses the divine attributes of eternality (Heb. 9:14), omnipresence (Psa. 139:7-10) and omniscience (1 Cor. 2:10-11).
- He was involved in creation (Gen. 1:2; Job 33:4), inspiration (Acts 1:16; 2 Pet. 1:21), regeneration (John 3:5-8; Tit. 3:5) and the resurrection of Christ (Rom. 8:11).

²¹ See Wayne Grudem for a table showing the gradual formation of the apostles creed (*ST*, 583-585) and demonstrating that "he descended into hell" is the least attested and latest of all the phrases that were added.

²² The most common heretical distortion in pneumatology is to regard the Spirit as a metaphor for God's power. But in many passages that speak of the Spirit's power this understanding is redundant and meaningless.

Work

- As a manifestation of common grace, the Spirit restrains depravity from its natural full expression in the world (2 Thess. 2:7). The Spirit also convicts unbelievers of sin and their fallen condition before God (John 16:8; 1 Thess. 1:5).
- The Spirit empowered OT saints for special service (Exod. 31:1-6; Num. 11:17; Judg. 6:34; 14:6) and enabled Jesus during His life (Isa. 11:2; 42:1; Matt. 12:18; Luke 4:1, 14, 18; 10:21; John 1:32; 3:34). The Spirit even played a role in Christ's death (Heb. 9:14) and resurrection (Rom. 1:4; 8:11).
- The Spirit was the primary agent in breathing out the words of Scripture (2 Sam. 23:2; 2 Pet. 1:21) and illuminates believers' understanding of the Word of God (1 Cor. 2:11-16; 2 Cor. 3:16-18; Eph. 3:14-19; 1 John 2:20, 27).
- Sent by the Father and the Son to inaugurate the New Testament church at Pentecost (Acts 1:5; 2:33), the Spirit indwells all New Testament believers (Rom. 8:9-11; 1 Cor. 6:19; 12:13; Gal. 4:6; 1 John 4:13) as Christ's representative on earth (John 15:26; 16:12-14; Rom. 8:9).
- As helper/advocate (παράκλητος—John 14:16, 26; 15:26), the Spirit intercedes for believers and aids in their prayers (Rom. 8:26-27), empowers believers for evangelism (Acts 1:8) and exercising their spiritual gifts in the local church (Acts 4:31; 1 Cor. 12:4, 7-9, 11), enables obedience and spiritual growth (Acts 1:8; Rom. 8:13; 1 Cor. 12:4; Gal. 5:16-22), convicts believers of sin (1 Thess. 4:8; Rev. 2:7), enables the process of sanctification (Rom. 8:13; 2 Cor. 3:18; Gal. 5:16, 22-23; Eph. 5:18), directs them to make wise decisions in godly conduct (Luke 12:12; Acts 13:2; 16:6-7; 20:22-23), and assures true believers that they are God's children (Rom. 8:14-16; 1 John 3:24; 4:13).

To restore His lost creation, God took on a new nature and personally experienced the suffering and shame that sin brings. Through the cooperative work of Father Son and Holy Spirit, He accomplished the costliest rescue the world has ever known. Only the wisdom, power, love, and mercy of an infinite God could have accomplished so great a work.

THE DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

*Salvation is such a complex and multi-faceted reality that Scripture uses a panorama of words to describe it. The process extends from eternity past with **the preparation and provision of salvation**, to **salvation applied** in justification and sanctification, and **salvation consummated** in eternity.*

“So great a salvation”

Restoring fallen humanity from its desperate state involved much more than a single event. Salvation is a process stretching from the moment a person first trusts in Christ to their final glorification. Believers “have been saved” (Rom. 8:24; Eph. 2:5), are presently “being saved” (1 Cor. 1:18; 2 Cor. 2:15), and “will be saved” in the future (Rom. 5:9; 1 Thess. 5:9–10).¹

THE PREPARATION AND PROVISION OF SALVATION

Salvation begins with the intervention of God. Before the foundation of the world, when God Himself was all that existed, He determined to save certain people. The most ultimate basis that Scripture gives for this choice is that He **loved** them (2 Thess. 2:13). Those who He loved He also **foreknew** (Rom. 8:29; 11:2; 1 Pet. 1:2). As a relational word, foreknowledge denotes far more than simple knowledge of future choices. Rather, it speaks of God making someone the object of His special loving favor for redemptive purposes (Acts 2:23; 1 Pet. 1:20).² **Election** (“choosing”), is God’s selection of certain individuals as the objects of His saving grace (Matt. 24:31; Rom. 8:33; 1 Cor. 1:27–28; Eph. 1:4; Col. 3:12; 2 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 2:10; Tit. 1:1; 1 Pet. 1:1–2; c.f. Luke 6:13). The elect will certainly inherit eternal life because they are **predestined** both to adoption (Eph. 1:5, 11) and to be conformed to the image of God’s Son (Rom. 8:29–30).

Not only did God plan for the salvation of specific people, but He also provided for that salvation in the death of His Son. Jesus’ death on the cross provided **atonement**—a perfect covering for sin that brings peace with God (Exod. 32:30; Lev. 4:20; Dan. 9:24; Rom. 3:25; 5:1).³ The atonement involves a number of other biblical concepts:

¹ From the standpoint of believers presently being sanctified, the past and future aspects mean that there is an already / not yet dynamic to many aspects of salvation. Examples would include justification, sanctification, adoption, and redemption.

² Another significant reason that the word denotes more than prescience is the OT background for **יָדָע** which continues in the NT **προγινώσκω** (Gen. 18:17–19; Ps. 1:6; Amos 3:2).

³ “Atonement” is used in the OT of the sacrifices that cover the guilt of sin. The only NT occurrence is Rom. 5:11 (AV) where it translates “reconciliation.” Theologically, it is used as an umbrella term for the entire substitutionary work Christ accomplished on the cross. Layton Talbert defines atonement as “God’s provision for the RECONCILIATION of man to Himself by means of an EXPIATION which requires PROPITIATION effected through the VICARIOUS and SUBSTITUTIONARY SACRIFICE of Christ on behalf of and in the place of guilty sinners.”

- **Propitiation**—Appeasement of God’s just wrath because of sin (Luke 18:13; Rom. 3:25; Heb. 2:17; I John 2:2, 4:10).⁴
- **Expiation**—Forgiveness of sin and redress of man’s guilty state (Heb. 10:18-22).
- **Vicarious penal substitution**—Christ standing in place of those who justly deserve condemnation and death. (Isa. 53:4-6; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 3:18)⁵ Just as Adam represented humanity, condemning them to guilt and death, so Jesus stands in place of believers, bringing righteousness and eternal life (Rom. 5:12-21).
- **Imputation**—exchange of Christ’s righteousness for our sin (2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9). Imputation includes both the fact that Christ voluntarily took on Himself the sin of the world in spite of His perfect innocence (passive obedience—Matt. 3:15; Rom. 5:19; 1 Cor. 1:30) and that He made available a perfect righteousness through His own obedient and righteous life (active obedience—Isa. 53:6, 12; John 1:29; Gal. 3:13; Heb. 9:28; 1 Pet. 2:24).⁶

Though God has predetermined the specific people who will receive salvation, Scripture teaches that the payment Christ accomplished on the cross was not limited to them (John 1:29; 3:16; 6:51; Rom. 14:15; 1 Cor. 8:11; 2 Cor. 5:19; 1 Tim. 2:6; Heb. 2:9; 10:29; 2 Pet. 2:1; 1 John 2:2). Rather, Christ made available an infinite payment that is applied contingent on faith (John 3:16-18, 36; Rom. 3:25; 1 Tim. 4:10).⁷ Not only does this render all men fully accountable, but it is also the basis for the general call (Isa. 45:22; Matt. 11:28; 22:14; Luke 14:16-24; John 3:16; 12:32) and for believers to zealously offer the gospel to all men (Acts 2:38; 10:43; 13:39).⁸

SALVATION APPLIED

Scripture describes the moment when a person first trusts in Christ with various terms.

*Godward terms*⁹

- **Drawing**—God works through His Word, the conviction of the Spirit, and by His effectual grace to draw sinners to Himself (John 16:8; 1 Cor. 2:14). Because of depravity, no one comes to God apart from God drawing him (John 6:44, 65).
- **Calling**—Though God calls all men to repentance (Matt. 22:14; Tit. 2:11), He irresistibly and effectually calls those who will inherit salvation (Rom. 8:28-30; 1 Cor. 1:26; Eph. 1:18; 1 Pet. 2:9; 2 Pet. 1:3).

⁴ Propitiation is unique as the only soteriological word that does not have man for either its subject or object. We are not propitiated—God is. Propitiation is sometimes translated as “expiation” with an emphasis on remedying the offense without the sense of God’s wrath. While this idea is certainly true, Scripture is quite clear that not only man’s guilt must be redressed, but God’s just wrath must also be appeased.

⁵ Invalid theories of the atonement include *Christus victor*, ransom to Satan, moral influence, moral example, governmental, universal reconciliation, therapeutic, kaleidoscopic, and the “powerful weakness” theory of Brian McLaren.

⁶ Those who trust in Christ receive a perfect “alien” righteousness—righteous obedience that is not their own but is credited to them through union with Christ.

⁷ The debate over of the extent of the atonement actually has more to do with its nature—did Christ actually accomplish an applied atonement at the moment of His crucifixion or did He make available a sufficient payment? This pushes the question one step further to an issue of timing. Specifically, if Christ fully and actually atoned for my sins at the time of His death, why was God justly angry with me until the day I trusted in Him? Plagued by this many conceptual problems, one is reminded of the need to look first and foremost to exegesis, which definitely points away from limited atonement.

⁸ Opposite from the common assumption that election will inhibit evangelism, this truth gives confidence that some will definitely be saved as the gospel is faithfully proclaimed (Acts 18:9-11; 2 Tim. 2:10).

⁹ Other possible terms could include the new birth (παλιγγενεσία) and sprinkling (ράντισμός).

- **Sanctification**—God cleanses man from the defilement and sin of his natural state (Acts 26:18; 1 Cor. 6:11; 2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:2; Heb. 10:10; 12:14).
- **Regeneration**—God delivers from spiritual death and grants new life (John 3:3; Eph. 2:1-5; Col. 2:13; Tit. 3:5; 1 Pet. 1:3; 3:18). Scripture describes regeneration as a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17), a new man (Rom. 6:6; Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10) and becoming a partaker of God’s nature (2 Pet. 1:4). It also results in a new mind (Rom. 8:6) and a new heart (Jer. 31:33; Ezek. 36:26-27; Heb. 8:10).
- **Justification**—God’s judicial declares that the believer is positively righteous based on the alien righteousness of His Son (Rom. 3:24-28; 4:25-5:1, 9, 18; 8:30; Gal. 2:16-17; Tit. 3:7).
- **Forgiveness**—Based on the righteous payment of Christ, God lays aside the charges of guilt that justly stand against sinners (Psa. 32:1; 130:4; Jer. 31:34; Matt. 9:5-6; 26:28; Luke 24:47; Acts 26:18; Eph. 1:7; 1 John 1:9).
- **Reconciliation**—God restores the relationship with Him that has become broken and alienated by man’s sin (Rom. 5:10-11; 2 Cor. 5:18-20; Col. 1:20, 22).
- **Redemption**—God buys back the believer from the slave market of sin through the sufficient payment of Christ’s blood (Mark 10:45; Rom. 3:24; Eph. 1:7; Tit. 2:14; Heb. 9:12; 1 Pet. 1:18).¹⁰
- **Adoption**—Having restored a broken relationship, God forms a new relationship with His children that will ultimately culminate in their glorification (Rom. 8:14-17; 9:4; Gal. 4:1-7; Eph. 1:5).

Manward terms

- **Conversion**—An overarching term for the human response in salvation, conversion speaks of turning from one’s sinful ways and turning instead to faith in Christ (Acts 15:3).
- **Faith**—The first and most basic human response that Scripture requires for salvation is faith, accepting God’s words as true and responding to them obediently (Acts 15:7; Rom. 1:16; Eph. 1:13).¹¹ Scripture also calls this “receiving” (John 1:12), “coming” (Matt. 11:28; John 6:37), or “calling” (Rom. 10:13). Faith comes through hearing God’s words (Rom. 10:17), together with the illumination and conviction of the Spirit (John 5:39; 2 Cor. 3:18). Faith is always a gift from God (Mark 9:24; Acts 14:27; 1 Cor. 12:3; Eph. 2:8-9; Phil. 1:29; 2 Pet. 1:3).
- **Repentance**—Man turns from His sin, repudiating everything about his past, sinful conduct, and obediently turning instead to God’s Word (Psa. 51:3; Isa. 55:6-7; Matt. 3:8; Acts 3:19; 26:20; 2 Cor. 7:9-10). Repentance is necessary for salvation (Matt. 21:32; Mark 1:15; Luke 3:3; 24:47; Acts 20:21; Heb. 6:1).
- **Obedience**—Man submissively responds to God’s righteous demands and responds in the repentant faith that He requires (Rom. 1:5).

Contrary to every other false religion and even the intuitions of fallen man, salvation is not contingent on our good works but on grace alone, accessed through repentant faith in Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:8-9). For NT believers, the minimum content of saving faith includes the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ

¹⁰ Redemption also has a future aspect (Rom. 8:23; Eph. 1:14; 4:30).

¹¹ The classic analysis of faith includes knowledge of the facts (*notitia*), assent to those facts as true (*assensus*) and trust to rely and respond to those facts personally (*fiducia*).

I find it wholly unhelpful to distinguish regeneration as logically precedent to faith. Either faith or regeneration is a spiritual miracle that can only happen as a work of God. The question, then, becomes exegetical—where does Scripture place the emphasis as the earliest (or logically antecedent) event in salvation. To this the answer is clear. Scripture never enjoins us to become alive or be regenerated but constantly confronts us with the call to faith (Luke 7:50; John 12:36; Acts 15:9; 16:30-31; 26:18; Rom. 1:17; 3:22, 26; 4:5; 5:1).

as a payment for sin and His Lordship (Rom. 19:9-10).¹² Though God is the first actor in salvation (Acts 13:48; Rom. 9:15-16), He desires the salvation of every person (Ezek. 33:11; Matt. 23:37; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9) and those who reject salvation are fully responsible for that choice (Acts 2:23).

Results of salvation

- **Sanctification**—An overarching term for the continuing process of salvation in the lives of believers, sanctification describes believers' ongoing mortification of sin and real growth in holiness (John 17:17; Rom. 6:19; 2 Cor. 7:1; 1 Thess. 4:3; 5:23)
- **Spirit Baptism and Indwelling**—Spirit baptism occurred at Pentecost in fulfillment of prophecy (Matt. 3:11-12; Acts 1:5; 2:1-14; 11:15-16; 1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 4:5). Today, Spirit baptism occurs at conversion (Rom. 6:1-4) and every New Testament believer enjoys the continual indwelling of the Holy Spirit for conviction, illumination, empowerment and guidance (John 14:17; Rom. 8:9, 11; 1 Cor. 3:16).¹³
- **Spirit-filling**—While Spirit indwelling is true of every genuine believer, Spirit-filling is true to varying degrees and at varying times. Filling represents the extent to which a believer is willingly submitted to the control of the Spirit (Eph. 5:18; 1 Thess. 5:19).
- **Perseverance**—Because of the permanent residence of the Spirit and the believers' new nature, those who are truly believers will ultimately endure in their faith (Matt. 10:22; Heb. 6:9; 10:39; 1 John 5:4; Rev. 2:26). Scripture variously describes their changed conduct as (1) not practicing continual sin (1 John 1:6; 3:9; 5:18), (2) practicing righteousness (1 John 2:3, 29), (3) love towards other believers (1 John 2:10; 3:14; 4:7), and not capitulating to the world (1 John 5:3). It is impossible that true believers would not inherit eternal life (John 5:24; Rom. 8:33-39; Philip. 1:6), but this fact should never result in complacency (Phil. 2:12; 2 Pet. 2:9-10). In fact, one of the results of the new birth is a continual yearning for greater holiness (Matt. 5:6; Tit. 2:14). Those who continue in long-term, obdurate rebellion show that they have never truly been redeemed (Heb. 6:1-9; 10:26-31; 1 John 2:19; c.f. 2 Cor. 11:26; Gal. 2:4).

God provides specific **means for progressive sanctification** including Scripture (John 17:17; 1 Tim. 3:16; 1 Pet. 2:2), prayer (Mark 14:38; Eph. 6:18; Phil. 4:6), self-discipline (1 Cor. 9:24-27; Tit. 1:8; Gal. 5:23), or fellowship, accountability and the ministry of other believers (Acts 2:42; Gal. 6:1-2; Heb. 10:24-25 Eph. 4:11-16, 29).¹⁴

Scripture also provides **assurance** only to believers who are faithful in their walk with God (2 Pet. 1:9). Believers can seek assurance through their present faith in Christ (Col. 1:23), the Spirit's testimony in their hearts (Rom. 8:16; Gal. 4:6; 1 John 4:13), and the fruits of obedience manifest in their lives (1 John 2:4; Jam. 2:17; John 8:31-32; 2 Pet. 1:5-10). The connection between genuine regeneration and holy living is so absolute, that the presence of either verifies the reality of the other (Matt. 7:16; Rom. 8:5; 1 John 1:6). It is on this basis that Scripture teaches that only those who endure to the end will be saved (Matt. 24:13; Heb. 4:11; Rev. 21:7).

¹² Though OT believers looked forward to the Messiah without full knowledge of His death and resurrection, these facts are part of the requirement for salvation in the New Testament. In other words, the minimum content for saving faith has increased as God progressively revealed more truth about salvation.

¹³ 1 Cor. 6 draws a contrastive parallelism with the Shekinah glory of God in the OT temple. For that reason, there is apparently a special blessing for NT believers in the absence of a literal, physical temple. While it is possible that OT believers also enjoyed this New Covenant blessing proleptically, on balance it seems more likely that they were not indwelt.

¹⁴ It is also possible to speak of the ordinances as means of grace as believers turn their hearts to the truths they represent (Acts 2:42). However, it is all too easy to regard the elements themselves as talismans.

Like justification, it is clear that sanctification is not accomplished by personal effort alone (Gal. 3:3; Phil. 2:13). And yet sanctification also differs from justification in important ways. Even as we rely on God's gracious enablement and rejoice in our standing in Christ, Scripture does command and require personal effort and self-discipline (Phil. 2:12; 1 Tim. 4:7). Anything less than passionate, dedicated pursuit of holiness belies God's purposes in salvation (John 15:16; Eph. 2:10; 5:27; Tit. 2:12-14).¹⁵

I reject certain **Keswick** or "higher life" understandings of sanctification for the following reasons:

- Every true believer will show some amount of fruit (Matt. 7:16-20; John 15:2-5).
- Sanctification is a progressive, lifelong process, without any final endpoint before death (1 Cor. 9:24; Phil. 3:13-15).
- While God's grace is always central, sanctification requires ongoing effort (Rom. 8:13; 2 Cor. 7:1; 1 Thess. 4:3; Heb. 12:14; 2 Pet. 1:5; 1 John 3:3).¹⁶
- A dualistic view of the redeemed person does not accurately represent the biblical information.

Sanctification is growth in likeness to Jesus Christ. As the last Adam who perfectly displays what the image of God in man should be (2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15), Jesus is the archetype for redeemed, restored humanity (Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18; Col. 3:10). This anticipates our full conformity to Christ's image in the final stage of salvation (1 Cor. 15:49; 1 John 3:2).

SALVATION CONSUMMATED

- **Glorification**—After the final resurrection when believers are reunited with their restored bodies, the process of salvation will be complete and believers will fully manifest God's perfect intentions for restored humanity (1 Cor. 15:49; 1 John 3:2), including not only the soul but also the resurrected body (Dan 12:3; Matt. 13:43; 1 Cor. 15:42-44; Phil. 3:20-21). Unlike the state of man before the fall, this will be a confirmed and unchangeable righteousness (Heb. 10:10, 14; Rev. 21:4, 8, 27; 22:15).
- **Conformity to Christ**—Believers will become like Christ Himself in all of His moral or communicable perfections (2 Cor. 3:18; Phil. 3:20-21; 1 John 3:2).
- **Adoption**—Believers will enjoy the full rights and privileges of their inheritance as adult sons (Rom. 8:17-23; Gal. 4:7).

Scripture describes salvation using many different terms and metaphors. But every aspect of salvation is dependent on one fundamental reality—**union with Christ** (John 15:1-10; Rom. 6:5; 1 John 4:13). It is "in Him" that believers were chosen in eternity past to receive salvation (Eph. 1:4; 2 Tim. 1:9), in Him that we are declared righteous (Rom. 8:1; 2 Cor. 5:21), sanctified (John 15:5; Gal. 2:20), and ultimately united with Him that we will become like Him (John 17:21; 1 Cor. 15:22).¹⁷

From beginning to end, salvation rests on the believer's relationship with God's Son. This is the only way to salvation and the only way that anyone has become a part of the redeemed people of God.

¹⁵ Believers are responsible to actively labor against sin (Rom. 8:13; 12:1-2; 2 Cor. 7:1; Phil. 3:13-15; 1 John 2:15-17) with the recognition that progress is only possible through God's strength (1 Cor. 15:10; 2 Cor. 9:8; 1 Pet. 5:10; 2 Pet. 3:18).

¹⁶ Besides numerous commands to mortify sin and grow in love towards God, Scripture gives specific practical disciplines all believers must regularly practice: reading Scripture (Psa. 1:2; Matt. 4:4; John 17:17), prayer (Eph. 6:18; Phil. 4:6), worship (Eph. 5:18-20), witnessing (Matt. 28:19-20; 1 Pet. 3:15), fellowship with other believers (Heb. 10:24-25) and self-discipline (Gal. 5:23; Tit. 1:8).

¹⁷ Union with Christ actually summarizes four different ideas: (1) We are in Christ, (2) Christ is in us, (3) we are like Christ, and (4) we are with Christ. See Grudem's *ST*, 840-847.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD

One of the marvelous results of salvation is that there is now a people of God—a people uniquely set apart and beloved to Him (Deut. 7:6-8; Eph. 5:25). Dwelling in relationship with Him on earth, they longingly await the day when they will enjoy perfect fellowship with Him eternally.

“I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”

ISRAEL

In light of the rampant wickedness of humanity, God first called out Abraham and promised to constitute a nation from his descendants (Gen. 12:1-3). With moral requirements, civil laws, and ceremonial guidelines for worship, God intended this people to be a light to the nations, drawing the world to inquire about His blessing (Deut. 4:5-8; Psa. 67).

Israelites were not saved by works (Rom. 4:13-22; Gal. 3:6-12). Just as NT believers look back in faith on Christ's death and resurrection, OT saints looked forward and believed that a Redeemer would come (Num. 24:17; Mic. 5:2; 1 Pet. 1:10-11). While OT believers knew less about the specifics of salvation, the content of saving faith included both the truthfulness of the promise giver (Rom. 4:18-22) and the promise of a coming Redeemer (Acts 2:30-31). Obedience to the civil and ceremonial law were not salvific, properly speaking, but submission to God's requirements was a necessary aspect of repentant faith (Psa. 51:16-19).¹ OT believers who were truly regenerated experienced some aspects of the new covenant proleptically (Deut. 10:16; 30:11-12).

God's promises in the **Abrahamic covenant** include a nation (Gen. 12:2; 15:14; 17:4-6), a universal blessing (Gen. 12:2-3), and a land (Gen. 12:1; 15:7, 13; 17:8). The **Davidic Covenant** promised a permanent dynasty over Israel and an eternal king over the entire world (2 Sam. 7:12-16; Isa. 9:6-7; 11:1-10; Jer. 33:19-26; Acts 13:34). Eventually God also promised Israel spiritual restoration in the **New Covenant** (Jer. 31:31-40).² Even though the Jews rejected the first coming of their king, God has not repealed or neglected His promises (Jer. 31:35-37; Rom. 11:1-2). The Jewish nation will eventually trust in the Messiah (Zech. 12:10; Rom. 11:26), suffer much at the hands of the Antichrist (Rev. 12:13-17), and ultimately inherit the promised land for all eternity (Gen. 13:15; Jer. 7:7; Ezek. 37:25).³

¹ There was salvific significance for those who willingly obeyed God's commands and offered sacrifices from the heart (Lev. 4:20), but not to the sacrifices alone (Psa. 40:6). To the question of whether Israelites could be saved without sacrifice, if someone obdurately refused to obey God's requirements, their obduracy would bar them from exercising repentant faith. In fact, the situation is no different than someone today who cannot repentantly trust in Christ because he refuses to be baptized or to be willing to give up his sin (Mark 10:17-22).

² There are a number of New Covenant passages in the OT: Isa. 54:1-17; 55:3-13; 59:20-21; 61:8-11; Eze. 11:14-21; 16:60-63; 34:20-31; 36:16-38; 37:15-28; Jer. 31:31-40; 32:36-44; 33:14-36; 50:4-5

³ I would describe myself as a moderate (progressive) dispensationalist: (1) I believe that God has inaugurated His kingdom in the hearts of believers (2 Cor. 3:6; Heb. 8:8-12) but that He will bring about a literal, physical

God's covenant promises were made to Israel (Jer. 33:14; Rom. 11:1-2), and they can only be fulfilled literally. Thus, the ultimate realization of the **kingdom of God** must be at least in part, national, physical and Jewish (Rev. 21:12). Yet God also graciously chose to extend some of those promises to Gentile believers in the church (2 Cor. 3:6; Heb. 8:8-12). The church has not replaced Israel, but it does embody the inauguration of God's kingdom promises (Rom. 14:17; Col. 1:13).⁴ He who always fulfills His word has chosen to do even more than He promised.

THE CHURCH

Subsequent to Christ's ascension, the focus of God's redemptive plan has been the church. Anticipated in the OT (Isa. 49:6; 55:5; Zech. 2:10-11)⁵ and inaugurated at Pentecost (Acts 11:15), the church incorporates both Jewish and Gentile believers (Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11). It has a universal aspect that includes all individuals who are redeemed (1 Cor. 15:9; Eph. 1:22; 3:10, 21; 5:29-32)⁶ and a local aspect (Acts 13:1; 2 Cor. 1:1; Col. 4:15).⁷ The *sine qua non* of a local church include (1) a regular gathering of regenerated people (1 Cor. 14:23-25; Heb. 10:25), (2) the preaching of apostolic doctrine (1 Tim. 4:13; 2 Tim. 4:2-3; Tit. 2:1), and (3) the faithful practice of the ordinances (Acts 2:42). Scripture describes the church with several images:

- **The body of Christ**, emphasizing the mutually dependency and organic relationship between believers and the church's organic relationship with its head, Jesus Christ (Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:12, 27; Eph. 4:15-16).
- **The bride of Christ**, emphasizing the church's submissive relationship and relational closeness to its head (Eph. 5:23-27, 32; Rev. 19:7; 21:2, 9).
- **The temple of God and the priesthood**, emphasizing the church's holiness and mediatorial role to the lost (1 Cor. 3:17; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:21; 1 Pet. 2:5, 9; Rev. 1:6).
- **The pillar and support of the truth**, emphasizing the church's responsibility to accurately affirm and proclaim the truths of Scripture (1 Tim. 3:15).

The Ordinances

The ordinances of the church are **baptism** and **the Lord's Supper**. Baptism represents (1) union in Christ's death, burial and resurrection (Rom. 6:3-4; Col. 2:12), (2) cleansing from sin (Acts 2:38; 22:16; Heb. 10:22; 1 Pet. 3:21), and (3) the indwelling of the Spirit (Acts 1:5; 2:17-18, 38; 10:47-48; 11:16; 19:1-7; 1 Cor. 12:13). As a public identification with Christ, baptism visually represents a spiritual reality that has already taken place in the hearts of believers. For all of these reasons, there is no biblical basis for

kingdom on earth in the Millennium (Isa. 11:6-9; 65:17-25; Zech. 14:16-21; Rev. 20:3-6). (2) I do believe in a future for national Israel (Matt. 19:28; Acts 1:6-7; Rom. 11:25-32). (3) I believe that Christ is presently seated on the throne of David (Acts 2:30-35). (4) I recognize three dispensations: the OT economy, the NT church, and the Millennium. (5) I cautiously use a complementary hermeneutic, recognizing that God has extended His promises while still completely fulfilling it for the original recipients. (6) I believe in one New Covenant, fully enjoyed by the restored Jewish nation and partially enjoyed by NT gentiles (Jer. 31:31-34; Heb. 8:8-12). I do not accept the misuse of these ideas to redefine redemptive kingdom work as alleviating human suffering.

⁴ The shared characteristics between the two peoples of God explain the strong parallels the NT makes between Israel and the church (Rom. 9:6; Gal. 6:16; 1 Pet. 2:9-10; also Rom. 11:17-33; Eph. 2:11-3:10; Gen. 12:3). Still, Scripture clearly distinguishes the two (Rom. 9:3-5; 1 Cor. 10:23) in that the church is an international body (1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11). While Israel sought to draw people to itself (Deut. 4:5-8; Psalms 67), the church is to reach outward evangelistically to the world (Matt. 28:18-20).

⁵ Other important OT prophecies include Gen. 12:3; Deut. 32:43; Psalms 18:49; 22:27; 117:1; Isa. 11:10; 42:4; 49:6; 56:3-7; 60:1-3; Jer. 16:19-21; Zech. 2:11; Mal. 1:11; Rom. 9:25-26; 15:9-12.

⁶ Also Matt. 16:18; Gal. 1:13

⁷ The local aspect of the church is evident because Scripture describes them as local (Acts 13:1), multiple (1 Cor. 11:8; 1 Thess. 2:14), distinct (1 Cor. 11:16), and with their own leadership (Acts 20:17).

baptizing unbelievers or infants (Matt. 28:19; Acts 2:41; 8:12; 16:30-34), and baptism should always be by immersion (Matt. 3:16; Acts 8:38).⁸

The Lord's Supper memorializes Christ's death (1 Cor. 11:24-25) and connects the two central events of redemptive history—the Exodus and the Cross (1 Cor. 5:7). The Lord's Supper also pictures union with Christ (John 6:51-56) and with one another (1 Cor. 5:8; 10:16-17), believers' enjoyment of the New Covenant (Luke 22:20), memorializing Jesus' death (Matt. 26:26-28; Luke 22:19), and our anticipation of Christ's return (Matt. 26:29; 1 Cor. 11:26). The table is available only to those whose profession and life identifies them as believers, and abuse of the table carries strict warnings (1 Cor. 11:27-32).⁹

The ordinances do not win God's favor but function as visual statements and recurring reminders of biblical truth (1 Cor. 11:26). While they are a critical part of obedience and worship, the preaching of Scripture must always retain its centrality in the life of the church (1 Tim. 4:13; 2 Tim. 4:1-4).

Structure

The NT reveals that God has given certain people as gifts for the good of His body, so that the entire church body can do the work of the ministry (Eph. 4:11-16). Scripture also outlines the requirements and function of two specific offices: elders and deacons. **Elders** (1 Pet. 5:1-5)—also called pastors (Acts 20:28, c.f. v. 17; Eph. 4:11) and overseers (Acts 20:28; 1 Tim. 3:1-7)—are charged to shepherd the flock and exercise oversight on important matters such as doctrine and the guidance of the church (Acts 15:6, 22; 16:4). Each church has a plurality of elders (Acts 4:23; Tit. 1:5). Some elders focus their entire labor on the ministry of the Word while others make their living apart from the ministry (1 Tim. 5:17).

Deacons are charged with the physical and practical care of the flock, making it possible for the elders to focus on spiritual oversight (Acts 6:1-6). Given Scripture's teaching on the role of women in church leadership (1 Cor. 14:35; 1 Tim. 2:12) and given the requirements for a deacon (1 Tim. 3:12), only men may fulfill this office. It also seems that Scripture bars divorced men from these offices (1 Tim. 3:2, 12).¹⁰

Faithful NT churches generally have a **primary pastoral leader** who exercises broad oversight and is charged with the primary teaching of the Word (Acts 15:13; 2 Tim. 4:2; Rev. 1:20). The **congregation** also exercises a critical role in decision-making (Acts 6:5; 13:1-3; 15:22; 1 Cor. 5:4-5; 2 Cor. 8:19) and shared accountability (1 Cor. 4:4-5; Gal. 6:1-3). The Word of God holds absolute authority over every church decision, and the individuals involved must exercise Spirit-led deference and mutual submission (Eph. 5:21; 1 Pet. 5:2-5) while also recognizing the distinct honor reserved for God-given leaders (1 Thess. 5:12-13; 1 Tim. 5:17; Heb. 13:17). Scripture gives no indication of authority existing above local churches. While churches may work together for joint purposes (Acts 15; 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 8-9), the local church enjoys a unique solidarity for oversight and decision-making.

All believers are biblically required to identify with a specific local body of believers (Heb. 10:25) and **church membership** exists as a means of doing so (Acts 2:41).¹¹ The commands to submit to church

⁸ The passages that speak of baptism in close connection with faith do not teach baptismal regeneration (Acts 2:38; 22:16; 1 Pet. 3:21), but do show God's expectation that all believers should be baptized.

⁹ The most natural understanding of Christ's words in Luke 22:19-20 is as a figure, just as He also described Himself elsewhere as bread (John 6:51), a door (John 10:7), or a vine (John 15:5).

¹⁰ This is not to imply lesser significance or dignity to either women or divorced persons. It is, however, a recognition that God has specific qualifications for church leadership that necessarily exclude others ().

¹¹ The biblical qualifications for church membership include regeneration (Acts 2:47; 1 Cor. 1:2), public identification as a believer (Rom. 10:9), water baptism (Matt. 28:19; Acts 2:41) and an orderly walk (1 Cor. 5:9-13; Jude 1:4).

leadership (1 Thess. 5:12-13; Heb. 13:17), exercise of spiritual gifts to benefit other believers (1 Cor. 12:7; Eph. 4:16), mutual accountability (Gal 6:1-2; James 5:16), and financial support of the church (1 Cor. 16:2) all imply ongoing connection to a specific body. Most critically, church membership provides accountability for **church discipline**. Those who walk contrary to the gospel or betray it through grossly sinful conduct must be removed from the church and regarded as unbelievers (Matt. 18:15-20; 1 Cor. 5:1-5).¹² Believers should also admonish and dissociate themselves from other believers who willfully violate lesser matters of Christian conduct (2 Thess. 3:6-15). Of course, the church is to have no countenance with the world (John 17:13-14; Rom. 12:1-2; 2 Cor. 6:15-7:1; Eph. 5:11; Jam. 4:4; 1 John 2:15-17)¹³ or with false teachers (Rom. 16:17-18).

The Life of the Church

The basic purposes of the church are worship (John 4:21-24; Rom. 15:9), edification of the saints (1 Cor. 14:4-5, 12; Eph. 4:11-16), and evangelization of the lost (Matt. 5:16; 28:18-20; 1 Cor. 14:23-25). To accomplish these purposes, God has given **spiritual gifts** to every individual believer (Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:4-11, 28; 1 Pet. 4:10-11). These manifest themselves in a variety of ways but are all enabled by the same Spirit for the benefit of the body. A number of miraculous gifts are no longer exercised today. (1) They were originally intended for certifying new inscripturated revelation (Heb. 2:4). (2) Scripture anticipates that they will pass away (1 Cor. 13:8-10).¹⁴ (3) Church history has shown only rare and questionable occurrences since the end of the first century. (4) At a minimum, any instance of tongues or prophecy should be in keeping with biblical guidelines (1 Cor. 14:27-38).

Worship is the response of redeemed hearts to the truth about God and should be the essence of a believer's daily life (Rom. 12:1). Corporate worship includes singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16) but extends to prayer (Isa. 56:7), giving (Deut. 16:16-17; 1 Cor. 9:11; 2 Cor. 9:7; 1 Tim. 6:18), and personal response to the preached Word (1 Tim. 4:13; Psalms 95:6-8). While some aspects of worship may be contextual, the ultimate determinate of worship is God's preferences, not our own (John 4:23-24). Therefore, every aspect should be self-consciously chosen for what it says about God.

The **first day of the week** is given to New Testament believers to gather together and dedicate their attention to the Lord. (1) Jesus was resurrected on that day (Matt. 28:1; Mark 16:2, 9; Luke 24:1; John 20:1). (2) The NT sets a precedent for it (John 20:19; Acts 20:7; Rev. 1:10). (3) The NT commands it (1 Cor. 16:2). The blessing and rest of giving focused attention to God each week anticipates the eternal rest believers will enjoy in perfect fellowship with God (Heb. 4:1-9).

God's plan to restore humanity began in Jesus Christ, the new Adam. Ever growing and expanding in the people of God, the redemptive, restorative news of Jesus Christ is spreading across the world. But at the end of time, God's redemptive plan will be complete with universal restoration. Completely delivered from the results of sin, the fall, and death itself, Creation will resonate with eternal praise, and our Redeemer God will at last be all in all.

¹² The goal of church discipline is always restorative (2 Cor. 2:5-8).

¹³ God graciously ordained government to restrain sin in the world (Rom. 13:1-4; 1 Pet. 2:13-14). Because the church and state exist in separate spheres (Matt. 22:21; John 18:36; Acts 5:29), government should not direct the affairs of the church and the church should not coopt governmental power for its own purposes. Scripture requires believers to submit to governmental authority as much as is possible (Rom. 13:1-5; 1 Pet. 2:13-15), honor governmental leaders (1 Pet. 2:17), and pray for them (Jer. 29:7; 1 Tim. 2:1-2).

¹⁴ While some have understood "the perfect" as the completion of the NT canon, it is probably better to identify it as the return of Christ or the completion of all things in the eschaton. On the other hand, it is clear that Paul twice distinguishes tongues as separate somehow from knowledge and prophecy and that the latter will pass away with the coming of the perfect. The fact that tongues stands apart inclines the reader to think it may be different than the others in this respect.

THE DOCTRINE OF LAST THINGS

*God's redemptive plan is drawing to a close as He draws all things to His intended purposes. The Almighty Creator will display His universal rule, the seriousness of sin, and the climax of His redemptive purposes in the events of the **tribulation**, the **Millennium**, and the **Eternal State**.*

“Behold, I am making all things new.”

TRIBULATION

The next event prophesied event in world history is the return of Christ (John 14:3; 1 Cor. 11:26). At any moment, He will instantaneously appear, resurrecting the bodies of all believers who have died and taking them along with living believers to heaven (Matt. 24:36–25:13; 1 Cor. 16:22; Phil. 3:20; 1 Thess. 4:13–18; 5:2–4; Tit. 2:12–13; Heb. 10:25; Jam. 5:7–9; 1 Pet. 4:7).

This **rapture** immediately begins the seven-year period of worldwide judgment called the **tribulation**. The rapture precedes the tribulation for several reasons:

- Christ's return is imminent—coming at any possible moment (Matt. 24:36–39, 42–44, 50; 25:6–13; Mark 13:32–37; Luke 12:40; 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Pet. 3:10; Rev. 1:3; 22:7, 12, 20).
- Believers will be delivered from God's tribulational wrath (1 Thess. 1:9–10; 5:9; Rev. 3:10).
- The logic of 1 Thess. 4:13–5:10 moves from the rapture to God's judgment on unbelievers and comforts believers that they are “not destined for wrath.”
- The difference between the rapture where believers are “caught up” (1 Thess. 4:13–18) and the second coming when they accompany Christ in His return (1 Thess. 3:13).

Following the rapture, a powerful, diabolically enabled figure (2 Thess. 2:9; Rev. 13:2) will arise and sign a treaty with Israel (Dan. 9:27), marking the beginning of the **tribulation**. Described as the **Antichrist** (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3), the beast (Rev. 11:7; 13:1–5, 14–15, 17–18; 20:10), and the little horn (Dan 7:8), he will institute draconian measures (Rev. 13:7, 16–18; 19:20), oppose God and His people (Dan 7:21, 25; Rev. 13:7), and demand worship only for himself (2 Thess. 2:4; Rev. 13:4, 8, 12; 16:2; 14:9–12).¹ This period will involve a series of worldwide catastrophes, judging the world for its rebellion against God (Jer. 30:7; Dan. 9:26–27; Rev. 6–18). At the mid-point of the tribulation, the Antichrist will betray his covenant with Israel (Rev. 12:6) and establish a blasphemous religion (Dan. 7:25; Matt. 24:15; Rev. 13:5–8), bringing about the **Great Tribulation** (Zech. 1:14–18; Matt. 24:21).²

In spite of continuing judgment from God and horrendous destruction, the world will continue in obdurate rebellion against God (Rev. 9:20; 16:9, 11), though a small minority will put their faith in Him

¹ 2 Thess. 2:3 also calls him “the man of lawlessness” and “the son of destruction.”

² Satan will also be cast out of heaven at the mid-point of the tribulation (Rev. 12:7–17).

(Rev. 12:17).³ Near the end of the tribulation, God will also use these difficult circumstances to draw the entire nation of Israel to faith in Him (Zech. 12:10; Rom. 11:26). At the end of the tribulation, Jesus will return victoriously in the **Battle of Armageddon**, vanquishing His enemies and establishing His rightful reign on earth (Zech. 14:3-9; Matt. 24:30-31; Rev. 16:13-16; 19:11-21).

MILLENNIUM

Following the tribulation, the righteous dead will be raised (Rev. 20:4-6). The **Second Coming** of Jesus will initiate the Millennium in which Christ will personally reign over a restored creation, inaugurating a period of peace for 1,000 years. During this time, Satan will be bound along with his demons (Rev. 20:1-3), and the kingdoms of the earth will willingly acknowledge the authority of Jesus Christ. This era follows Jesus personal return for several reasons: (1) Several passages speak of Him personally present and reigning (contra postmillennialism) (Ezek. 37:24-28; Zech. 13:9; Rev. 20:4), (2) it includes specific, earthly blessings (contra amillennialism) but which involve substantive, miraculous changes (contra postmillennialism— Isa. 65:17-25; Zech. 14:7-21).

At the end of the millennium, Satan will be temporarily released to battle against Christ and those loyal to Him (Rev. 20:7-10). After his defeat, Satan will be cast into the lake of fire for all eternity (Rev. 20:10).

ETERNAL STATE

Following the millennium and Satan's final rebellion, the bodies of saved and unsaved will be resurrected (Dan. 12:2-3; Rev. 20:11-12) and they will be brought before the **Great White Throne Judgment**. There they will be judged according to their deeds. Those who trusted in Jesus Christ and endured to the end will enter eternal life, and those whose words and deeds denied him will be eternally condemned to the lake of fire (Matt. 25:14-30; Rev. 20:11-15). At the **Judgment Seat of Christ** Believers will also be judged and rewarded for their deeds, though some will also suffer loss (Rom. 14:10; 1 Cor. 3:11-15; 2 Cor. 5:9-10).

Following the rapture, the tribulation, the millennium and Satan's final rebellion, God will create a **new heavens and a new earth**, free from sin, death and even the marks and scars of the fall (Isa. 65:17-18; Isa. 66:22-23; 2 Pet. 3:10-13; Rev. 21:1).⁴ With the story of creation and redemption complete, all things will resound to the glory of God (Rom. 8:28-30; 11:33-36; Eph. 1:6, 12, 14). He will create a **new Jerusalem**, at least 1,500 miles cubed, translucent and sparkling in the light of the glory of God (Rev. 21:1-22:5). There in His presence, God's redeemed people will worship Him and serve Him forever and ever.

“Even so Lord Jesus, quickly come.”

³ There are several reasons why it will still be possible for people who missed the rapture to trust in Jesus during the tribulation: (1) Scripture speaks of non-Jewish people who “hold to the testimony of Jesus” (Rev. 12:17), (2) and the need for non-Jewish, non-glorified people to repopulate the millennial earth (Rev. 20:7-9).

⁴ The only biblically supported exception is the wounds in the incarnate body of Jesus Christ (Rev. 5:6).