

DOCTRINAL STATEMENT
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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

This doctrinal statement has been compiled in the context of three theology courses over a period of seven years at Western Seminary in Portland, Oregon, and Sacramento, California. As a result, it is more of a systematic theology than a practical theology; that is, it is more “what” than “so what”. It is also very much a work in progress; by virtue of the academic context in which it was written, many of the areas necessarily included contain belief statements I hold with a very open hand. I am now—and desire always to be—a learner, and theology is a field of constant learning. Consider the implications of these words from Jesus’ prayer toward the end of his life:

And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ
whom you have sent. (John 17:3, ESV)

In other words, eternal life is knowing God, and knowing God is an eternal process. No wonder Paul, after declaring “I want to know Christ,” wrote, “Not that I have already obtained all this...” (Php. 3:10 & 12, NIV).

CONTENTS

Introductory Note	i
Contents	ii
God.....	1
Jesus Christ	2
The Holy Spirit	2
Revelation & Inspiration.....	4
Humanity.....	5
Sin	6
Salvation	8
<i>Salvation in Eternity Past.</i>	8
<i>Salvation in the Present.</i>	8
<i>Salvation in the Future.</i>	9
The Church.....	10
Angels, Satan, & Demons	12
<i>Angels.</i>	12
<i>Satan and Demons.</i>	13
The End Times.....	13

GOD

NATURE OF GOD. There is one God (Deut. 6:4, Isa. 44:6), eternally existing (Ps. 90:2) in three distinct persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19). These share completely their essential attributes, yet operate distinctly in their unique personhoods. God is both personal (Exod. 34:6) and spiritual (John 4:24). He relates eternally within the Trinity and has chosen by His character of love to relate to His creation.

ATTRIBUTES OF GOD. God is unchanging in essence (Jas. 1:17): He is love (1 John 4:16), seeking the best of the other without regard to the cost to Himself. He is compassionate, caring unceasingly for His creation (Exod. 34:6, Lam. 3:22). He is gracious, helping those who are absolutely undeserving of His grace (Exod. 34:6, 2 Chr. 30:9, Neh. 9:17). He is faithful, unwavering in His accomplishment of that which He has promised to do (Deut. 7:9, 1 Cor. 1:9, Heb. 11:11). He does not change in His essence, character, knowledge, promise, or plan. He is holy (Ps. 99:9, 1 Pet. 1:15-16), omnipotent (Job 42:2, Matt. 19:26), omnipresent (Ps. 139:7-10), omniscient (Job 21:22, Rom. 11:33), just (2 Thess. 1:5ff), self-sufficient (John 5:26, Acts 17:25) ... and a host of other characteristics too numerous to list!

While God is unchanging in character and essence, His attitudes and actions may change in response to the repentance or rejection of individuals (Exod. 32:14; Jer. 26:13, 19; Amos 7:3, 6; Jon. 4:2).

WORK OF GOD. God is the creator of the universe, and each Person of the Trinity was an active agent in creation (Gen. 1-2, John 1:1-3). God is absolutely distinct from and transcendent over creation (Isa. 40:28, Rom. 1:25), yet fully present and active everywhere in creation (Ps. 139:7).

God has an eternal purpose for His glory by which He has ordained, either efficaciously or permissively, all that happens (Job 36:5, Rom. 8:28, 2 Cor. 5:5, Phil. 2:13). He does not orchestrate evil (Ps. 5:4, Hab. 1:13), nor is He surprised by it. Apart from a limited number of precepts in which God expressed a particular will, He gave men and women great freedom to choose the manner in which they will live in order to accomplish His purposive will; i.e., to glorify Him (Eph. 2:10, 1 Pet. 2:12). In that freedom, people are also able to live and act in ways that are contrary to His will but that can never frustrate His eternal plan. He holds each person responsible for his or her actions, exercising both temporal and eternal judgment (Eccl. 3:17, Rom. 2:16, Heb. 9:27).

God works His salvific plan in different ways with different people. His desire is for all to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4), yet He has appointed certain ones for eternal life (Acts 13:44-48). Some He draws irresistibly toward Himself (e.g., Saul/Paul, Acts 9), while others He allows to respond in their own free will (e.g., the centurion at the cross, Matt. 27:54; the Ethiopian eunuch, Acts 8:27-40; the Philippian jailer, Acts 16); in all cases, God knows how each person will respond. God's foreordained purpose for all who would believe is that they would be blessed and blameless (Eph. 1:4), and that through their good works, men and women would glorify God (Matt. 5:16, 1 Pet. 2:12).

JESUS CHRIST

The second person of the Trinity, the Logos, has no beginning and no end (Psa. 119:89, John 1:1-3, 8:58). He is fully equal in every way with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit (John 10:30, 14:9), sharing their divine attributes and prerogatives; participating fully in creation (John 1:3), redemption (Heb. 9:12), the coming judgment (Matt. 25:31ff, John 9:39, Rev. 14:7), and the eternal kingdom of God (2 Pet. 1:11).

The Logos became incarnate in the person of Jesus (John 1:1, 14), freely and willingly giving up His divine prerogative and lifestyle (Phil. 2:6). He became fully human without giving up any essence of His Godhood.

Jesus was conceived in and born of a virgin (Is. 7:14, Matt. 1:22-23, Luke 1:26-35), grew naturally through boyhood into manhood (Luke 2:52), and—in the midst of being tempted in every way just as we are—lived a perfectly sinless life (Matt. 4:1, Heb. 4:15) as a Spirit-filled human (Mark 1:10). He was fully submitted to the will of the Father (Matt. 26:42, Heb. 10:5-9) and led by the Holy Spirit in order to redeem the world to the Father and become the messianic king (John 1:41, Rev. 11:15).

Jesus died on a cross, experiencing both physical and spiritual death (Mark 15:25-34, Acts 2:23). Three days later, He rose again to life by the power of the Holy Spirit (Mark 16:1-8) and walked again on earth for forty days, appearing on numerous occasions to as many as five hundred of his disciples (Acts 1:3, 1 Cor. 15:5-8). Jesus then ascended into heaven (Luke 24:51) where He sits exalted at the right hand of the Father with all things placed under His feet (Eph. 1:20-22). He will one day return in glory to gather His people, judge the world, and establish His eternal reign in a new heaven and new earth (Rev. 19:1-5, Rev. 21:1).

THE HOLY SPIRIT

PERSONHOOD. The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity, eternally equal with God the Father and Jesus the Son. The personhood of the Spirit is evidenced by his personal attributes: emotions (Isa. 63:10, Eph. 4:30, Acts 9:31), mind (Acts 15:28, Rom. 8:27), and will (1 Cor. 2:10-11, 12:11); by the fruit born of the Spirit in the lives of believers (Gal. 5:22-23); by his personal activity: teaching (Luke 12:12; John 14:26), counseling (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7), speaking (Acts 13:2, 21:11, 28:25), sending (Acts 13:4), restraining (Acts 16:6), warning (Acts 20:23); and by the personal treatment of Him by others (Acts 5:30, 7:51).

Prior to the incarnation, the Holy Spirit came upon individuals for a particular task, and for particular time. The Spirit came upon four classes of individuals: judges (Jdg. 3:10, 11:29, 14:6 & 19), prophets (2 Ki. 2:15, 2 Chr. 15:1-2), craftsmen (Exod. 31:2-3), and civil rulers (Num. 11, 1 Sam. 11-12, 1 Sam. 16). These same passages further suggest that, in general, the Spirit's empowerment was for a particular task in time. (Moses and David seem to be possible exceptions to this temporary empowerment.)

The Spirit was present and at work in Jesus from the literal conception of the incarnation (Matt. 1:18, Luke. 1:35). He was present at the baptism of Jesus (Matt. 3:16, Mark

1:10, Luke. 3:22, John 1:32), led Him to the desert to be tempted (Matt. 4, Luke 4), and empowered Him after the temptation as He began His public ministry (Luke 4:14) and throughout His ministry (Matt 12:22-32) up to and including his death and resurrection (Heb. 9:14, Rom. 8:11).

Jesus promised that same power to his disciples (Acts 1:8), but unlike the pre-incarnational work, the Spirit would now fill them (Acts 2:4, 4:8, *passim*). The Holy Spirit empowers and equips believers to do the good works for which we were created (Eph. 2:10), by distributing gifts to believers and bearing fruit in their lives (Gal. 5:22-23). In the exercise of his divine will and prerogative, the Holy Spirit today continues to distribute gifts—including the sign gifts—as He deems necessary for the glorification of Jesus Christ (John 16:13-15) through the edification and building up of his body, the church (cf. 1 Co. 12, Eph. 4). I believe that a significant reason for the apparent lack of the sign gifts (especially in the West) is lack of faith (cf. Mark 6:4-6, where Jesus' ability to perform miracles seems to have been inhibited by lack of faith).

SPIRITUAL GIFTS. The purpose of spiritual gifts is to serve the common good (Eph. 4:11, 1 Pet. 4:10; 1 Cor. 12), so that the body of Christ may be built up in unity of faith, knowledge of Christ, and maturity in Christ (Eph. 4:11-13). The sign gifts have a special priority in the Spirit's purpose (1 Cor. 13:31, 14:1ff) and should be “eagerly desired.” They are unique among the gifts, in that their use may sometimes benefit a particular individual rather than the church as a whole. (This is certainly true of healing, but also applies to tongues; cf. 1 Cor. 14:4. Prophecy is the exception; cf. 1 Cor. 14:5.) All gifts—including the sign gifts—are eclipsed by love, the preeminent fruit of the spirit (1 Cor. 12:31-13:13; Gal. 5:22).

The Holy Spirit works also in the lives of unbelievers, contending with man’s sinfulness as He has since the fall (Gen. 3:8, 6:3) and convicting of sin (John 16:8). When that conviction results in repentance, it is the Spirit who renews and regenerates (Tit. 3:5).

At regeneration, the Holy Spirit comes to live in (“indwell”) and fill the believer, (John 14:17, Rom. 8:9) and empower him for life and service in the body of Christ. This indwelling occurs with the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which the resurrected Christ promised would take place “in a few days” (Acts 1:5), a promise fulfilled at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). This Spirit-baptism and its accompanying indwelling represents a marked difference compared to the previous work of the Spirit. Whereas the Old Testament primarily shows the Spirit “coming upon” an individual for a certain task and a limited time, after Pentecost the Spirit is both “with” and “in” the believer (John 14:17). Additionally, there is no indication from Scripture that the Spirit departs from a believer as he departed from Saul¹ (1 Sam. 16:14). As for the imperative, “be filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18), I believe this is Paul’s way of saying that a believer’s life ought to reflect the reality of his Spirit-filled state. (See Paul’s similar command in 2 Cor. 5:18: “Be reconciled to God.”) Likewise, those passages that specifically point out that a certain person was “filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:4, 4:8, 4:31, 13:52) are calling special attention to the ongoing reality in the individual’s life for the purpose of ascribing proper recognition of

¹ Dr. Gerry Breshears, Western Seminary, suggests this is not a departure of the Holy Spirit, but rather the removal of the *anointing* of the HS. Cf 1 Samuel 10 for the anointing of Saul.

who it was accomplishing the work described. That is, these passages are a safeguard to the reader to ensure that we recognize that the power behind the words and actions described is not Peter's or Paul's, but is the power of the Spirit working through them.

The Holy Spirit is a seal certifying the God-given authority and authenticity of our salvation by grace through faith. He is the guarantee that we will receive our future inheritance, eternity in the presence of God. (Eph. 1:3-14; 2 Cor. 5:5) Finally, the Spirit will stand with us as we receive that inheritance at the wedding feast of the Lamb, rejoicing with us as the Bride is united with her Groom. (Rev. 22:17)

REVELATION & INSPIRATION

The unknowable, unsearchable God has graciously revealed Himself to mankind. Apart from this revelation, man would have no way of knowing God and would therefore be utterly without hope for reconciliation to God. Revelation comes to man in three primary ways: general, special, and written.

GENERAL REVELATION. God has revealed Himself generally through nature (Ps. 19, Rom. 1:19-20), history (Isa. 10:5-13, Acts 17:26), and humanity (Rom. 2:12-16). The clearest and most objective form of revelation is nature; from the magnitude of the galaxies to the tiniest strand of DNA, nature cries out for the existence and character of God. History also speaks to God's active work, though less objectively than nature; one can look backward at history and see only coincidence and repetition, or one can see the hand of God. Finally, humanity itself offers evidence, created as we are "in the image of God" – namely, as moral and spiritual beings. As with history, however, the evidence from humanity can be (and has been) used almost as often as a case *against* a creator...certainly a benevolent one. (Rom. 1:21)

While none of these areas of revelation—nor any combination of them—is adequate to draw a person to saving faith in God, they nonetheless all give substantial evidence for the existence and character of God to all people in all times; that is, to "those who have ears to hear."

SPECIAL REVELATION. In part due to the inadequacy of general revelation for salvation, and in part out of the depths of His very character, God has revealed Himself specially to individuals and groups through a variety of means, beginning with His personal relationship with Adam and Eve (Gen. 2:15ff, 3:8ff) and culminating in His incarnation in the Person of Jesus Christ (John 1:1-18). In the intervening millennia, marred as they were by sin, God's special revelation came in the form of dreams and visions (Gen. 15:1, 1 Kings 3:5, Acts 9:10), direct speech (Exod. 8, Josh. 7:10ff), angelic visits (Num. 22), and prophetic voices (over 1,500x in the prophets is a phrase like, "the LORD says"). Salvation ultimately came to all mankind through God's greatest and most gracious revelation of Himself in the Person of Jesus Christ.

SCRIPTURE. Apart from a continual *re*-incarnation of His Son—which would have diminished Jesus' humanity—God's most lasting special revelation available to the masses of humanity is His written Word, the Bible. The Bible is "God-breathed;" that is, it is inspired by God. Inspiration is both plenary (*all* Scripture; 2 Tim. 3:16-17) and verbal (the very words; John

10:34-35). It is a work of both divine and human origin, the Spirit of God having inspired human authors such that the resulting text is confidently and correctly asserted to be the Word of God.

The Bible is inerrant in its original writings and contains all that is needed for salvation and right living in relationship to God and mankind. Authoritative Scripture is complete in the sixty-six books we know as the Canon. The claim of inerrancy cannot be equally applied to copies and translations beyond the original autographs, which alone are wholly true; nor should it be applied to books outside the Canon, regardless of their apparent accuracy or harmony with the Canon. Nonetheless, we can approach Scripture today with the highest confidence that we have the full Word of God at our disposal.

Just as the Holy Spirit inspired the original authors of Scripture, so He illuminates that same Scripture for believers (2 Pet. 1:20-21) to the end that they recognize its authority, are able to grasp its enduring and personal meaning, and apply it appropriately to their own lives. It is the privilege and responsibility of believers to study Scripture individually (2 Tim. 2:15) and in community (Acts 17:11), yet without quarrelling or divisiveness (2 Tim. 2:14).

HUMANITY

CREATION OF MAN. I believe that God created mankind—male and female—directly and immediately on the sixth day of creation (Gen. 1:26-27). He spoke them into being, first forming Man from the dust of the newly-created earth, breathing life and spirit into him (Gen. 2:7); then forming Woman out of Man’s side (Gen. 2:22-23). Mankind is both material and immaterial, possessing body, soul, and spirit (Job 32:8, 1 Thess. 5:23, Heb. 4:12). I believe that Man and Woman alike are created in the image of God as spiritual, personal, and relational beings, designed to glorify the Creator by loving him and each other (Matt. 22:37-40), ruling the creation (Gen. 1:28), and reflecting the image of God in the whole of creation, both natural and supernatural (Eph. 3:10).

MALE/FEMALE. I believe men and women were created equal in essence, personhood, and nature (Gen. 1:27); they are equal in spiritual standing as sinners (Gen. 3:16-19) and as believers (Gal. 3:27-28, 1 Pet. 3:7); and they are equal in gifting from the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:4-7, 1 Pet. 4:10-11). Nonetheless, I believe that men and women have been graced by God with distinct roles in the home and in the Church (Eph. 5:22-23)—a reflection of the image of the triune God, in whom the three Divine Persons each has a unique role, though co-equal and co-participants in many aspects of Divine prerogative (e.g., creation).

THE NATURE OF MAN. Mankind was created sinless (Gen. 1:31) but with freedom—though not permission—to choose between good and evil (Gen. 2:16). Adam and Eve both chose evil, and in their choice, brought sin and death to all mankind (Rom. 5:12); thus, all mankind is sinful (Isa. 53:6, Rom. 3:23) and destined for judgment (Heb. 9:27). Sin has marred—but not removed—the image of God in mankind; it is tarnished, yet is being transformed in the lives of believers through Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:29, 2 Cor. 3:18, Col. 3:10). This transformation will be completed at the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:49).

RACIAL EQUALITY. I believe that just as men and women were created equal, so all races are equal (Gal. 3:28), are equally image-bearers of God, are equal beneficiaries of God's blessing (Gen. 12:3), and are equal participants in the grace of salvation and eternal life (John 3:16, Rev. 7:9-10).

SIN

THE DEFINITION AND EXTENT OF SIN. I believe that sin is, at its core, a state of rebellion against and enmity toward God, which leads to specific acts of rebellion and enmity. Although created good and in the image of God, mankind has inherited a sin nature from Adam since his sin in the garden (Rom. 5:19). This nature affects—and infects—each individual such that we each must say with the Psalmist, "I was conceived in sin" (Ps. 51:5), and must acknowledge that we are (or were) enslaved to sin (Rom. 6:16-22).

The nature of sin in man—what Paul typically refers to as “the flesh” (Rom. 7-8, Gal. 5:13ff, Eph. 2:3, *et seq*)—breeds in him sins; i.e., specific acts of rebellion of which each person is guilty (Lev. 16:16, Num. 5:6, Matt. 9:2ff; Jam. 5:16). The Bible differentiates between intentional and unintentional sins (Lev. 4:2, 13, 22, 27), and between sins of commission (i.e., a sinful action) and sins of omission (i.e., failure to act; Jam. 4:17). Beyond these specific acts, there seem to be mindsets that either reveal our sinfulness (that is, our sin nature) or are, in and of themselves, sin (Rom. 14:23, 1 John 5:17).

The Bible—whether in Hebrew, Greek, or English—uses well over two dozen different words to identify and demonstrate the character of sin, both as nature and as actions; a sampling of these words: bad, blasphemy, deceive, defile, disobedience, evil, guilt, idolatry, iniquity, lawlessness, profane, rebel, shame, sin, transgression, trespass, unclean², unrighteousness, wickedness (Rom. 1:29-31; Gal. 5:19-21). These different words give voice to the vastness and diversity of our rebellion, as well as to its intensity, malignancy, and consequence. While our sin nature is deserving of death, we see that individual sins are distinguished by a diverse array of temporal penalties that correlate to their intent, intensity, and result (cf. Exod. 21:12-14; 22:1-4; Lev. 26:14ff; Num. 35). In a similar fashion, there seem to be varying degrees of eternal punishment reserved for those who die in a state of separation from God, such that judgment and punishment will be greater for those whose sins were greater (Matt. 11:21-24, Luke 12:47-48).

THE ORIGIN OF SIN. I believe that sin began when Lucifer, the created guardian cherub (Eze. 28:14ff), fell as a result of his prideful desire to elevate himself above God (Isa. 14:12-14). Lucifer became Satan, the deceiver (Rev. 12:9), and many angels sinned by following him in his pride (Matt. 25:41). Satan deceived Eve (Gen. 3:13; 2 Cor. 11:3) and Eve enticed Adam (Gen. 3:12), who was not deceived but sinned by eating fruit he knew to be forbidden (1 Tim. 2:14). Thus sin entered the world through Adam (Rom. 5:12).

² It is critical to note, I think, that the Biblical concept of “uncleanness” does not always or solely refer to sin or its results. Many of the laws about cleanliness were as much about hygiene as about religious practice.

THE RESULTS OF SIN. God had warned that disobedience would result in death (Gen. 2:17). It is clear that this did not mean immediate physical death as the record of Adam's 930 years of life show (Gen. 5:3-5). It was, rather, a spiritual death of separation from God. This death is experienced through man's shame and hiding from God (Gen. 3:8), as well as through God's punitive decree (Gen. 3:23-24, Ex. 32:33-34, Hos. 9:15).

Sin also resulted in physical death, beginning (most likely) with the deaths of the animals whose coats were necessary to clothe the man and woman in the garden (Gen. 3:21). Certain sins may result in immediate or nearly immediate physical death as a divine judgment (Ex. 32:27; Lev. 10:1-2; Lev. 20; 1 Chr. 13:10; Acts 5:1-5). Some sins may result in a deterioration of life leading to eventual physical death (as suggested in Rom. 1:27), and sin as nature results in the decay or "corruption" of life (Rom. 8:21).

Physical death is, except in rare cases, absolute and irreversible short of eternity (Heb. 9:27; cp. Enoch in Gen. 5:24, Elijah in 2 Ki. 2:11, and the many who were resurrected in both Old and New Testaments). Spiritual death is reversible by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:17-18, 6:4-11). Those who die physically while in a state of spiritual death are condemned to the "second death", an eternal death of unending punishment and judgment in the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14, 21:8).

While death—spiritual, physical, and eternal—is the ultimate result of sin and is most significantly a separation from God, there are other temporal results, as well. These results impact ourselves and our relationships with others and include such effects as: guilt (as an objective state of violation, not merely guilt feelings), shame (Gen. 3:8-10), punishment (up to and including death; also including retribution and repayment; Lev. 6:4-5), physical enslavement and/or exile (Jer. 29:4), spiritual or mental enslavement (e.g., to a habitual sin or pattern; Gen. 12:10-20 and Gen. 20; Rom. 6:6), and deception (Jer. 17:9; 2 Sam. 12:1-15), among others. Sin can even hinder our prayers (1 Pet. 3:7).

The sins of one generation affect and are often repeated by subsequent generations (Gen. 20 & 26:6-10; Ex. 34:7; 1 Ki. 14:22, 15:3, *et seq*), yet each person is individually responsible for his own sins (Deut. 24:16; 2 Ki. 14:6; Ezek. 18:14-20).

THE EXTENT OF SIN. I believe that just as each person is responsible for his own sins, so each one has the freedom to choose good or evil (Josh. 24:15; Isa. 7:15-16, 65:12, 66:4; Ezek. 20:8; Rom. 7:18; Philem. 14). This is by no means an absolute freedom; sin has thoroughly defiled the nature of man (2 Cor. 7:1) and grossly limited his ability to do good (Rom. 7:7-25). Yet sin did not eradicate from man the image of God in which he was created and which outfits him for good. Thus, though grossly limited by our sin nature, men are equipped for good, drawn by God to do good, resurrected from spiritual death to righteousness by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and empowered for good by the indwelling Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 9:8, Eph. 2:10, Phil. 2:13).

Thus it is no contradiction to state that, apart from Christ, no one is righteous and no one seeks God (Ps. 14:1-3, Ps. 51:1-3, Rom. 3:10-11). No one can change his sinful actions or nature; apart from Christ, no one has the ability to seek God, hear his voice, understand his word, or know his Spirit. (Jer. 13:23, Matt. 19:25-26, John 6:44, 8:43, 12:39). Apart from Christ, we are

spiritually dead; there is no spiritual life or ability within us (Eph. 2:1-5, Col. 2:13). We are even incapable of approaching God for forgiveness, relying instead on God's own initiating work (Isa. 6:6-7; Luke 23:34). And in spite of our complete inability to hear or respond to God apart from his initiating work, we have the hope of freedom from slavery to sin and a release from condemnation (Rom. 8:1-2)!

SALVATION

SALVATION IN ETERNITY PAST.

THE DECREE OF GOD. The decree of God is his eternal purpose, based on His most wise and holy counsel, whereby He freely and unchangeably, for His own glory, ordained, either efficaciously [that is, with purpose] or permissively (preceptively), all that comes to pass.³

ELECTION. I believe that before the foundation of the world, God chose to give certain people every spiritual blessing in Christ; those whom he thus chose are the elect (Eph. 1:3-4). His desire is that all would be saved (John 3:16; 1 Tim. 2:3-6; 2 Pet. 3:9), and his salvation is available to all (Titus 2:11, 1 Tim. 2:4); yet he has foreknown that some would receive that salvation (John 1:12, Acts 2:41, Rom. 8:29) and others would reject it (Acts 7:51, Rom. 2:4-10). Since before the foundation of the world, God has written in the book of life the names of those who would believe (Rev. 13:8). These were not chosen on the basis of any merit of their own, whether good deeds or belief; but on the basis of God's perfect and holy will and his free gift of grace.

I believe that in the working out of God's perfect and holy will, some (like Saul/Paul) respond because of God's effectual calling; in a word, they could not reject the calling even if they wanted to. Others respond because of God's permissive call, his desire and will that none should perish (2 Pet. 3:9). In God's omniscience, he knows who will respond; he is not surprised pleasantly or otherwise by the choice of any individual. I do not believe that either God's foreknowledge or his foreordained plan is subject one to the other or that one precedes the other; both are inextricably linked to God's sovereignty and his omniscience.

PREDESTINATION. Whereas election relates to salvation (2 Tim. 2:10), predestination relates to glorification through conformity to the image of Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:29-30). Predestination guarantees that the elect of God have received the inheritance of sons (Eph. 1:5, 11) – presently, the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit; eternally, glorification in God's presence.

SALVATION IN THE PRESENT.

I believe the gospel can be simply stated: God defeated sin and death by offering his son, Jesus Christ, as a substitutionary sacrifice on our behalf; and he calls us to respond in faith and

³ Henry Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (2nd Ed.), p. 100.

repentance. Concise statements of the gospel can be found in many Biblical passages, not the least of which are 1 Cor. 15:3-4, John 3:16, and a series of verses in Romans (3:23, 6:23, 5:8, 10:9-10).

By his death and resurrection, Jesus Christ accomplished the perfect and complete atonement of all who believe. The guilt and liability of sin were completely removed (Ps. 103:3) and, from an eternal perspective, sin and death were defeated. Those who through faith believe are made new and are reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:17-18), no longer enemies (Rom. 5:10) but friends (John 15:15). Jesus' sacrifice purchased our redemption (Rom. 3:24, Eph. 1:7), buying us out of slavery (John 8:34, Rom. 6:16-17) into freedom and sonship (Rom. 6:18, Gal. 3:7). On the cross, Jesus became the propitiation—the substitutionary sacrifice—for the sins of mankind; he became sin (2 Cor. 5:21) and bore the wrath of God (Rom. 5:9) for our sins so that we can experience God's mercy (Luke 1:50, Rom. 11:32).

God applies salvation by his grace to those whom he has called (2 Tim. 1:9) and who respond in faith and repentance (Acts 2:38; 2 Cor. 7:10). He regenerates (makes new – 2 Cor. 5:17) by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5) and justifies those who are thus made new (Rom. 4:5, Titus 3:6), counting as theirs the righteousness of Christ (Rom. 4:3ff, Php. 1:11, Php. 3:9) and adopting them as not only heirs, but sons also⁴. He has sanctified (1 Cor. 6:11) and is sanctifying (Heb. 10:14) those who are justified as we await the day that we will be glorified with Christ (Rom. 8:17, 30). Until that day, we do the works that God has for us (2 Cor. 9:8; Eph. 2:10), not to earn or maintain our salvation, but to bring him glory (Matt. 5:16; 1 Pet. 2:12).

Evangelism is the act of sharing the gospel (the good news; the “*evangel*”) with those who have not yet accepted Jesus Christ’s invitation to reconciliation with God. Missions is the extension of evangelism as the global work of the church taking the gospel to the ends of the earth (Matt. 28:18-20).

SALVATION IN THE FUTURE.

As followers of Jesus Christ, we not only have reconciliation now but also the certain hope of eternal life with God (John 3:16, Rev. 7:9). The ongoing sanctification of a believer’s character is a part of her glorification in which she is, even now, being transformed into the image of Christ (2 Cor. 3:18). When Christ returns, we will be glorified with him (Rom. 8:17, 30; verse 30 speaks of glorification as a completed thing – not necessarily completed in the past, but its completion is certain); at that time we will receive a new, glorified body (1 Cor. 15:42ff, Php. 3:21) with which we will glorify God eternally as we worship, finally and fully, “in spirit and truth” (John 4:23-24).

⁴ This adoption seems to be both a present reality (Rom. 8:15) and a future hope (Rom. 8:23, Eph. 1:5).

THE CHURCH

THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH is comprised of all who are now living or ever have lived and who have been reconciled to God by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. **Its purpose** is to be the visible representation of Jesus Christ on earth and to participate with Him in building the kingdom of God by “making disciples of all nations, baptizing...and teaching them....” (Matt. 28:19-20)

THE CHURCH IS THE BODY OF CHRIST (Col. 1:24), with **Christ as the head** (Eph. 5:23) from whom the church derives its power, authority, purpose...its very life. The power of Christ is imparted to the church through the power and indwelling of **the Holy Spirit** in the lives of individual believers (Acts 1:8), who gifts each one specially and uniquely according to His good purposes. The authority of Christ is imparted to the church generally (Matt. 18:19-20), but also specifically through the giving of Christ-ordained leaders (Eph. 4:11-12; 2 Tim. 1:6)

THE CHURCH IS ANTICIPATED IN JESUS’ RESPONSE to Peter’s great confession that Jesus is “...the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16), the bedrock truth upon which the church would be built; and in Jesus’ instruction regarding discipline and reconciliation (Matt. 18:17). It was first empowered for its representative purpose when the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4).

The universal church is manifested locally primarily through gatherings of believers who have organized formally into congregations, the “**local church**.” It is also manifested through formal associations of churches (denomination, convention, presbytery, etc.); geographic location (e.g., “the American church” or “the Ethiopian church”); and through small gatherings of believers, whether meeting formally or informally (e.g., a home community, a mission team meeting with national believers, etc.). The church, then, is both organism (the universal church) and organization (the local church).

THE PURPOSE OF A LOCAL CHURCH is no different than that of the universal church: to build the kingdom of God by “making disciples of all nations, baptizing...and teaching them....” Local churches relate to each other through a variety of both formal and informal associations. Formally, this may take the shape of a denomination, presbytery, synod, etc. Less formally, it may entail cooperation in events such as an evangelistic campaign (e.g., Billy Graham, Luis Palau), a local service project (e.g., Love Portland), a mission initiative (often through a parachurch organization such as Campus Crusade for Christ or Northwest Medical Teams), or an endless array of other possibilities.

A LOCAL CHURCH is characterized by organizational and physical elements foreign to (and unnecessary for) the universal church. Among these are particular leaders (pastor, elder/overseer, deacon), a meeting place (which may be static; i.e., an owned or leased building), and the need for some formal order (whether organizational or ecclesiastical). These elements can be at least loosely associated with **the historical marks of the church**: the proclamation of the gospel to the end that disciples are made and taught; the carrying out of the ordinances of the Lord’s Supper and Baptism; and the exercise of discipline.

By the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit, **the church has been given leaders** in the persons of pastors, teachers, elders/overseers, deacons, evangelists, and apostles. These exist for the purpose of serving and equipping the church to carry its role (Eph. 4:11-12).

While the universal church is, by definition, comprised only of believers, the local church as an organization often includes unbelievers. Whether or not this is by the design of the particular local church is, for the present purpose, moot; the fact, however, must be realized, as it has great impact on the organization and operation of a local church. We must note, as well, that this is an extra-biblical reality; instructions given in Scripture to local congregations seem to assume that those congregations were comprised solely of believers. Thus, we must prayerfully determine appropriate, God-honoring, and kingdom-building ways of operating in this reality. One such method is to adopt criteria and procedures for membership in a local church—an extra-biblical concept that is an appropriate (though not wholly necessary) means to ensure that the activities of a congregation are not unduly guided by those whose eternal destiny is at best uncertain.

THE ORDINANCES. Scripture has provided us with **two** ordinances to be carried out: communion (the Lord's Supper) and baptism. Both are representative and both carry great symbolism, but neither conveys grace to the participant. **Communion** represents not merely the last meal Christ shared with his followers, but evokes the image of God's rescuing and redeeming work all the way back to the exodus from Egypt...a work that was completed in Christ's substitutionary death on the cross and perfected in His resurrection from the grave. Because we partake symbolically of Jesus' body and blood as evidence of our reconciliation to God through His death and resurrection, it is of the utmost importance that we do so only after having assured ourselves through careful self-examination that we stand in right relationship before God and others (1 Cor. 11). Only believers should partake, as only believers are reconciled to God.

I am not as concerned about the administrator of or physical elements used in communion as I am about standing right before God. Certainly anyone administering the elements must also stand in right relationship to God and others, but beyond that I make no further demands. As to the elements, the closer they are to that used by Jesus, the better our minds will be able to remember his words and actions; thus, a piece of bread and either wine or grape juice are preferable. However, if circumstances dictate the use of other elements, then the conscience of those participating should be allowed to guide.

BAPTISM, likewise, is a vivid symbol of Christ's death and resurrection that should be portrayed only by one who has, through faith, entered into that death and resurrection (Gal. 6:1ff). In the act of baptism, one testifies to that faith, thereby publicly identifying himself with Jesus Christ. Full immersion will best convey the image of death and resurrection that baptism symbolizes and should be the preferred mode. Because baptism is a public identification with Christ, it should be done in as public a setting as practical. (See, however, Acts 8:26-39.)

ISRAEL. There is both continuity and discontinuity between the nation of Israel in the Old Testament and the Church in the New: both are referred to as the people of God (Exod. 19:5; Acts 15:14), but Israel is the subject of an everlasting covenant with God (1 Chron. 16:17, Ps.

105:10), into which Gentiles have been grafted (Eph. 2:11-13). Gentiles are the beneficiaries of a New Covenant...that was given to Israel! (Jer. 31:31; Luke 22:20)

Paul offers a powerful treatise on God's dealings with Israel and the impact of that on Gentiles (Romans 9-11; see especially 11:15). He concludes that treatise with this doxology:

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable his judgments,
and his paths beyond tracing out!
“Who has known the mind of the Lord?
Or who has been his counselor?”
“Who has ever given to God,
that God should repay him?”
For from him and through him and to him are all things.
To him be the glory forever! Amen.

ANGELS, SATAN, & DEMONS

ANGELS.

I believe that angels are spiritual, heavenly beings created by God before he created earth and all that inhabits earth (Job 38:4-7, Col. 1:16). Angels were created higher than man (Ps. 8:4-6, Heb. 2:5-9) but will one day be subject to judgment by man (1 Cor. 6:3). As with man, angels were all created as good (Gen. 1:31); as with man—though before man—some angels sinned and were subjected to judgment (2 Pet. 2:4). These fallen angels are called demons and are led by Satan, the prince of demons (Matt. 12:24ff).

PERSONALITY AND NAMES. Angels are personal beings (Heb. 1:5-7) with unique personalities, characteristics, and roles. They have minds (Eph. 3:10), emotions (Luke 2:13 & 15:10), and wills (Dan. 4:17, 1 Pet. 1:12). They communicate with God (Job 1-2), man (Num. 22:32, Matt. 1:20, Heb. 2:2), and each other (Isa. 6:3, 1 Cor. 13:1). They are holy (Mark 8:38, Acts 10:22, Rev. 14:10). Two angels are named: Michael (Jude 9) and Gabriel (Dan. 8:16 & 9:21; Luke 1:19 & 26).

KINDS AND CLASSIFICATIONS. Three kinds or ranks of angels are explicitly identified: archangels, cherubim, and seraphim. Michael is called “the archangel” (Jude 9), but is not the only one of that rank (1 Thess. 4:16). The cherubim—most often associated with God’s presence and glory (Ezek. 9:3, 10:4ff, 11:22)—take many forms, having differing numbers of wings and numbers and types of faces (Exod. 25:20 & 37:7-9; Ezek. 10:14 & 41:18). The LORD is said to ride on a cherub (2 Sam. 22:11, Ps. 18:10). The seraphim—mentioned only in Isa. 6:2 & 6—are associated there with the throne room of God, where they constantly praise and worship him and seem to participate with him as ministers (though not agents) of atonement (Isa. 6:7). Their name means “burning ones.” The angels are called sons of God (Gen. 6:2; Deut. 32:8; Job 1:6, 2:1, & 38:7), watchers (Dan. 4:13 & 17), and princes (Dan. 10:13).

MINISTRY. Angels are ministering spirits (Heb. 1:14) who guard, comfort, counsel, and direct men (2 Ki. 6:17, Dan. 10:2-9, Mark 1:13, Luke 22:43, Ac. 12). They carry messages from

God (Gen. 16:9-11, 1 Ki. 13:18, Matt. 1:20 & 2:13; Luke 1:11 & 26; Ac. 8:26) and at times compel obedience or enforce or carry out God's will (Gen. 3:24, Num. 22:2ff, 2 Sam. 24:16). They aid in believers' prayers (Rev. 8:2-4) and in answering those prayers (Ac. 12:5-7). Angels praise and worship God (Ps 103:20-21, Isa. 6:2-3). While most often unseen (2 Ki. 6:17), angels appear at times in superhuman form (Matt. 28:2-3, Luke 2:8ff) and at other times in human form (Gen. 18:2, 16, & 22; Num. 22:31, Luke 24:4). Whenever gender is ascribed to angels, whether grammatically or in physical description, it is always masculine. Though neither omniscient nor omnipotent, angels are described as having superhuman knowledge and power (2 Sam. 14:20, Matt. 24:36; 2 Pet 2:11, 2 Chr. 32:21). Nonetheless, they learn from humans (Eph. 3:10).

SATAN AND DEMONS.

I believe that Satan and demons are angels that fell from their exalted position in creation because of pride (Ezek. 28) and were cast into eternal judgment (John 16:11, 2 Pet. 2:4). Satan is a cherub (Ezek. 28:14ff), though fallen; he is the prince of demons (Matt. 9:34) and ruler of the world (John 14:30). His name means "adversary;" with his demons, Satan's primary purpose is to oppose God, his work, and his people. He is a liar (John 8:44) and deceiver (Gen. 3:13, Rev. 12:19).

Though judged already and subject to future, eternal judgment, Satan and the demons have power and authority to work in creation (Luke 4:5-6, 1 John 2:16); yet this power is limited by God's sovereignty (Job 1:12, 2:6; 2 Thess. 2:6) and God accomplishes his own purposes through Satan's evil schemes (Gen. 45:5, 8; 50:20; Est. 4:14). Satan and demons resist believers and the angels sent to aid them (Dan. 10:13). Their knowledge, power, and presence are limited; some demons are more powerful than others (Mark 9:28-29). As spiritual beings they influence and lead unbelievers (2 Cor. 4:4, Eph. 2:1-3) through lies and deception. They can and must be resisted by wearing the armor of God and wielding Word of God (Jas. 4:7; Luke 4:2ff; Eph. 6:11; 1 Pet. 5:8-9).

Ultimately, Satan and his angels will be cast into eternal torment (Matt. 25:41, Rev. 20:10) with no hope of redemption or salvation.

THE END TIMES

The question of eschatology is, by definition, the study of things future; it is speculation...*biblical* speculation, but speculation nonetheless. The Bible speaks of a number of significant events that will happen in the future: death, tribulation, rapture, a reign of Christ on earth, resurrection, judgment, creation of a new heaven and a new earth, eternity. *That* each will take place is certain; *when* each will take place is known only to the Father (Matt. 24:36). It is my firm conviction that an understanding of these events will be an encouragement to right living (2 Pet. 3:14) and a motivation for mission (Matt. 24:14), but that undue emphasis on plotting a timeline for them will lead (indeed, *has led*) to sinful divisiveness and a distraction from mission...and thus ought to be avoided.

The curse of sin is death (Gen. 2:17, Rom. 5:12), an event that will overtake each person (Heb. 9:27). Death marks the separation of body and soul (Luke 12:4-5); while the body may be buried or cremated and so return to the ground from which God formed Adam (Gen. 2:7, 3:19), the soul will enter an intermediate state based on the individual's relationship to Christ: The soul of the believer goes immediately into God's presence (Luke 23:42-43) and the soul of the unbeliever enters a place of ongoing punishment (Luke 16:19-31).

But the curse of sin is not merely the event of death; it is the state of being eternally separated from God, just as eternal life is to know Him (John 17:3). When Jesus comes in glory, there will be great mourning (Matt. 24:30) and great rejoicing; mourning from the nations who will finally realize that they missed the Anointed One, and rejoicing from the lips of all who believe and are being eternally joined with their Savior (1 Thess. 4:16ff). Paul seems to suggest that the rapture, the resurrection of the dead, and the final judgment will all be initiated by this glorious return of Christ.

I believe that the rapture will follow a period of great difficulty for and intense persecution of the church (Matt. 24:29, Mark 13:19). I hold very loosely the belief that this period of tribulation will last seven literal years (Dan. 12). Yet I firmly believe that there is a correlation between the tribulation and at least one of the uses of the phrase "the Day of the Lord" (cf. Joel 2:28-32, quoted by Jesus in Matt. 24 and Mark 13; cf. 1 Thess. 5:2). Thus, I believe that there is both ongoing tribulation as well as a particular eschatological period that will be characterized by great tribulation.

I believe, with Paul, that "all Israel will be saved" on the basis of God's irrevocable gifts and call (Rom. 11:25ff).

At the final judgment, those who did not believe in Christ will be condemned to eternal suffering and punishment, separated from God (Matt. 13:39-42, 25:41ff). The experience of this judgment will be greater for those whose sins were greater (Matt. 11:21-24, Luke 12:47-48). Satan and his angels will ultimately be cast with those whom he deceived (Matt. 25:41) into everlasting torment in the "lake of burning sulfur" (Rev. 20:10), to experience at an infinitely greater depth the punishment for their deception.

Those who believe in Christ will be given a renewed body through which to enjoy the presence of God for eternity, living with Him in the new heaven and new earth (2 Pet. 3:13, Rev. 21:1-3). Our reward in heaven will be proportional to our deeds on earth (Matt. 6:5-6, Jas. 3:1), but we will all thoroughly enjoy the presence of God.