

Doctrinal Statement

Timothy Petersen

Salvation

Growing up in a Christian home, I heard the gospel frequently. I believe that I was saved when I was 9 or 10. However, because I was young, I do not remember a whole lot about it. Because of that, I doubted my salvation for a number of years. Finally, when I was around 13, I heard a testimony from a college student who also doubted her salvation when she was young. But she said that it was not about the words she used, or the exact feeling she had; she knew that she was trusting in Jesus as her only Savior and that was what mattered. That was encouraging to me and helped me understand that it is not about me, but about God's grace. The letter to the Romans makes this point very clear. No one achieves righteousness because they pursue it by their own actions.

Romans 9:30-32 – What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith; but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone.¹

Romans 10:2-3 – For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. For not knowing about God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God.

Romans 10:11-13 – For the Scripture says, "WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; for "WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED."

The Scriptures again and again take the focus away from us and turn it back to the Lord. What a wonderful blessing that is! The certainty of our salvation does not waver, even if we do, because our salvation is founded on Christ, He who is the same yesterday and today and forever (Hebrews 13:8). He is abounding in riches. Whoever believes in HIM will not be disappointed. All glory belongs to Him!

Call to Ministry

I appreciated the story Pastor Minnick shared recently about his homiletics professor who told the students to ask him how he knew he was called to preach. When they asked, he would say, "I just know."

¹ Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE®, Copyright, ©1960,1962,1963,1968,1971,1972,1973,1975, 1977,1995 by the Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

I was a senior in high school when God burdened me to go back to Poland as a missionary. But there was a problem because I did not want to be a missionary. Growing up as a missionary kid, I saw what being a missionary in Poland would involve, and to me it was too much work for too little reward. Besides, the idea of having to get in front of people and to preach every single week was terrible. So, I just said, "No. That's not for me." But I could not get away from this thought, "I grew up in Poland. I know the great need for the gospel and for laborers. How could I go back to the States and tell others that they need to go preach the gospel, and yet flat-out refuse to go myself?" But what about my aversion to public speaking? Not only was I afraid of it, I thought I did not have the right kind of personality for it. I am not a dynamic person who just naturally captures people's attention. So even if I wanted to be a missionary, I would not be a good one. But the Lord brought another passage into my mind: **God called Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, but Moses refused at first** (Exodus 4). He said, *O my Lord, I am not eloquent. I am slow of speech and of a slow tongue. Please send someone else. But the LORD said unto him, Who made man's mouth. Or who makes Him mute or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD?* The Lord knows better than anyone what I am capable of. **HE** gave me my mouth, my gifts and my weaknesses. If He is calling me to missions, surely He will equip me. One thing God is teaching me more and more is that it is not about me. It is not about what I can accomplish for Him. It is about how He can accomplish His work through flawed and weak people like me. His power is made perfect in my weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9). So I said, "Lord, I will start pursuing this path to being a missionary. But if I somehow missed what you are calling me to, and if that is not what you want me to do, please make it clear." So I took that first step of faith and enrolled at BJU, majoring in Bible instead of Engineering or something similar. It has not always been an easy path, but God has continued to make it clear that this is what obedience involves for me. And it is not that it does not continue to require taking steps of faith, but it is true that in a special way, "I just know."

Bibliology: The Doctrine of the Bible

God has revealed Himself to humanity throughout history. How He has revealed Himself can be classified into two categories: general revelation and special revelation. Through general revelation, God has revealed Himself to every human being. He has revealed Himself by creation (Psalm 19:1-4), human conscience (Romans 2:14-15), and providence (Acts 14:17). General revelation is sufficient to give each person an awareness that there is a God, and thereby leaves Him without excuse for rejecting God (Romans 1:19-25). General revelation on its own is not sufficient to save someone, which is why we need special revelation. Special revelation is God communicating directly to humanity through a variety of means such as dreams and visions (Genesis 15:1; 31:11; Numbers 12:6), angels (Luke 1:19), the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:2; 2 Peter 1:21), and Christ (Hebrews 1:2).

I believe in verbal, plenary inspiration. Every word in the Scriptures is inspired by God, so an argument can be based on a single word, if it is interpreted correctly (John 10:34-35). The Bible shows evidence of inspiration by the actions and beliefs of the prophets and apostles. The prophets claimed to be speaking God's words when they proclaimed their prophecies (Jeremiah 1:9). There were times when they did not understand their own prophecies because the words did not originate from themselves (Daniel 12:8; 1 Peter 1:10-12). The apostles also presented their teaching as the word of God to the churches which they ministered to (2 Thessalonians 2:13). This is consistent with what Jesus promised would happen, when He said that the Spirit would be with them in their teaching and preaching (Matthew 10:20; Luke 21:15). Ultimately, the writers of the Scriptures were moved by the Holy Spirit. He guided their thoughts

and words so that the words that they wrote were in fact God's words (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20-21), while still allowing them to express the ideas and terms in ways that were familiar to them (Mark 12:36). Therefore, the Bible is God's exact word and yet demonstrates differences in style from writer to writer.

Not all special revelation has been preserved for us, but what has been is fully sufficient for all our needs—"everything pertaining to life and godliness" (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:3). The 66 books of the Canon are God's special revelation preserved for us today. The 39 books of the Old Testament and the 27 books of the New Testament widely accepted by the Church across the globe have proven themselves to be divinely inspired and were recognized by the early Church and established as the biblical Canon. It is important to note that these books did not become inspired or authoritative because the Church approved of them. But rather the Church recognized that these books were inspired based on a number of criteria including authorship, sound teaching, and acceptance by the Apostles. Even by the act of establishing a written canon, the early Church was putting itself under the authority of God's written Word. There is a collection of books sometimes referred to as the deuterocanonical books (Tobit, Judith, additions to Esther, 1 & 2 Maccabees, Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach, Baruch, and additions to Daniel). These books are generally recognized as accurate records of history and traditions. Hebrews 11:35-37 even seems to be referring to events that are recorded in 2 Maccabees. However, these books are not inspired, and do not hold the same weight as the inspired 66 books of the Canon (partly because they never make those claims of inspiration for themselves). It is important to recognize that something can be true and accurate without being inspired. That is where I would place these deuterocanonical books, generally accurate, potentially helpful, but not inspired, and therefore also capable of containing errors.

The 66 books of Scripture are inerrant and sufficient for all things pertaining to life and godliness. Their inerrancy applies directly to the autographs, so that means copies can contain errors. However, God has promised that He will preserve His Word (Matthew 24:35). And that is visible simply by the sheer number of manuscripts we have available, which allow us to compare and discern to a high degree of certainty any differences that have come from copyist errors.

God intends His word to be understood, and therefore should be translated into other languages. Jesus Himself quoted from the Septuagint, a translation (Matthew 21:42). Any translation that is faithful to the original text should be understood as God's Word.

Theology Proper: The Doctrine of God

God is the only being who had no beginning. He has always existed, and by Him everything else was created. God is a spirit (John 4:24), infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth (Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q. 4). He is ultimately incomprehensible (Psalm 139:6; Malachi 3:6; Romans 11:33). God is one, but He exists in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This doctrine is called the Trinity (Deuteronomy 6:4; Jude 20-21; 1 Peter 1:2). Each person is distinct from one another, and yet still fully divine (John 14:9; 16:14-15; 1 Corinthians 2:11; 2 Corinthians 13:14).

The nature of God consists of many different aspects of His character, personality, and attributes, which have been revealed through nature (Psalm 19:1-4) and the Scriptures (John 21:24). God is self-existent

(Exodus 3:14–15); God is one (Deuteronomy 6:4); God is Spirit (John 4:24); God is unchanging (Malachi 3:6); God is infinite (Job 11:7-9); God is eternal (Revelation 1:8); God is omnipresent (Psalm 139:7-10); God is omniscient (Psalm 139:1-4); God is omnipotent (Job 42:2); God is glorious (Isaiah 6:3).

He is a holy God who cannot even look upon sin (Habakkuk 1:13). His holiness characterizes all that He is. He is a righteous God who must punish sin, but He is also a loving God who does not leave man without hope (2 Peter 3:9). He demonstrated His love by sending His Son to die in our place (John 3:16; 1 John 4:9) to show that He is right in forgiving us (Romans 5:19).

God created this world for the purpose of glorifying Himself. God is sufficient in Himself and did not require this creation to satisfy His needs. He created it based on His own will and for His own glory (Colossians 1:16; Revelations 4:11). God created all things *ex nihilo* (out of nothing). He created it without using any existing substance or matter. He started from nothing and created “something.” This includes heaven, the earth, all animals and life on earth, angels, and anything else that is not one of the three members of the Trinity (Genesis 1:1; Ephesians 3:9; Colossians 1:16). God created this world and everything in it in six literal days (“evening and morning” – Genesis 1:31; Exodus 20:11). All three members of the Trinity were active in creation. All things came from God the Father (1 Corinthians 8:6) through the works of His Son (Hebrews 1:10; John 1:1-3) and Holy Spirit (Genesis 1:2; Job 33:4; Isaiah 40:12-13).

Since creation God has continued to sustain this universe through providence (Nehemiah 9:6; Matthew 6:26-33). “Providence is the governing power of God that oversees His creation and works out His plans for it.”² God is sovereign over His creation (Daniel 4:35) and is ultimately in control of all things, though they may come about by man’s free choice or seemingly random acts (Genesis 50:20; Proverbs 16:1, 4, 9, 33; Ephesians 1:11). God’s providence extends over government and world rulers, both in their appointing (Daniel 2:21) and in their sustained activities and decisions (Exodus 7:3). God shows providence through our prayers. Ultimately, our prayers cannot change God’s sovereign will (2 Corinthians 12:8-9; Matthew 26:39-42), and yet we have been commanded to pray (James 5:16; Luke 11:8-10) and have been told that our prayers make a real difference (James 4:2-3; Luke 18:1-8). There is an aspect of mystery in how prayer works which we cannot fully understand.

Christology: The Doctrine of Christ

Scripture teaches the Deity of Christ. He is fully God, and not merely a good teacher or moral leader. He made clear, direct statements affirming His own deity. In Mark 2:10, Christ claims to have authority to forgive sin, even after those around Him had just stated in verse 7 that only God could forgive sin. Christ claims that He has power over the world and will judge it (Matthew 25:31-46), and that He is one with the Father (John 10:30; 14:7-9), and that He is the I AM (John 3:13), as well as many other claims. Other people also testify of His deity, such as Thomas (John 20:28), John (John 1:1), the author of Hebrews (1:8), and Paul (Colossians 2:9; Titus 2:13). Christ is God and not merely a good man or even an angel. This means that we can truly know God by knowing Jesus (John 14:9), that we can trust that God loves

² Gerald Bray, “Providence,” in *Lexham Survey of Theology*, ed. Mark Ward et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018).

us enough to have sent His only son (John 3:16), and that Christ must be held up and worshiped as God (Philippians 2:10-11).

Scripture also teaches that Christ became fully man at the incarnation (John 1:14; Philippians 2:7-8; Hebrews 2:14). He had a physical body as a man (1 John 1:1), grew tired as a man (John 4:6), and thirsted and hungered as a man (Matthew 4:2; John 19:28). His humanity is stated in Scripture (John 1:1; Philippians 2:7-8; 1 Timothy 3:16). Though a man, Jesus was sinless. Though Mary, Jesus' mother, was a sinner who needed a Savior (Luke 1:47), Jesus was born without sin because of the miraculous nature of His conception. Jesus was conceived in Mary's womb by the power of the Holy Spirit, though Mary was a virgin (Isaiah 7:14; Luke 1:34-35). He was tempted in every way, yet without sin³ (Hebrews 4:15). Many other clear statements also testify of Christ's sinlessness (Hebrews 9:14; 1 Peter 2:22; 2 John 3:5). It is vital that Jesus be fully human in order so that God's transcendent glory would be revealed personally and immanently (John 1:14, 18), so that His death could truly pay for our sins (2 Corinthians 5:21), and so that He could be the perfect Mediator (Hebrews 4:15). Christ is one person with two natures (Genesis 1:26; John 17:21-22; Galatians 4:4; 1 Timothy 3:16), fully God and fully man.

The atonement of Jesus Christ was the primary reason for His incarnation (Mark 10:45) and motivated by God's love (John 3:16; Romans 5:8) and His desire to glorify Himself (Romans 1:16-17; 3:25). Christ accomplished His atoning work through four key events: His perfect life (Matthew 3:13-15; Romans 8:3-4; Galatians 4:4-5; Hebrews 2:18), sacrificial death (Isaiah 53:1ff; Matthew 27:46; 2 Corinthians 5:21), resurrection (Romans 4:24-25; 1 Corinthians 15:1-8, 17, 54-55), and continued intercession (Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:24-27). Christ's death was the propitiation for our sin (i.e., the satisfaction of God's wrath against sin; Romans 3:25; 1 John 2:2; 4:10). The atonement that Jesus' death provided makes possible a renewed relationship between God and man (Romans 5:1, 9-11; 2 Corinthians 2:5-18-19).

Christ serves as a Mediator for believers in several ways. Specifically, He serves as **prophet** (Matthew 13:57; 21:11; Hebrews 1:1-2), **priest** (John 17; Hebrews 7:25; Romans 8:34; 1 John 2:1), and **king** (Isaiah 9:7; Psalm 45:6-7; Matthew 19:28; 13:41).

Primarily, a prophet is a spokesperson for someone else. Prophets throughout the Old Testament received revelation from God and spoke on His behalf, often beginning their pronouncement by saying, "Thus says the Lord" (Exodus 11:4; 2 Samuel 12:7; Isaiah 37:21; Amos 1:3). Jesus likewise received instruction from the Father and acted as a spokesperson for the Father (John 7:16; 10:18). Moses prophesied that there would be a future prophet that would be like Him (Deuteronomy 18:15). Jesus was that prophet (Acts 3:22). Like Moses, He delivered His people out of bondage (Galatians 1:4; Colossians 1:3; 1 Thessalonians 1:10) and was the Mediator of the new covenant (Hebrews 8:6).⁴

³ Jesus faced numerous temptations throughout His life, not just the three recorded in the wilderness. Though He was "without sin" He can still relate completely with us. If anything, His struggles actually exceeded what any human has experienced. Often the struggle of temptation is the hardest immediately before giving in, and to never give in would mean that the difficulty would just keep building and building. His sinlessness serves not just as an example, but as a source of inspiration, showing our High Priest understands human trials.

⁴ People usually think of mediating the new covenant as part of Christ's priestly role, which it is. However, Moses received and delivered the Law, God's covenant (Exodus 34:27-28), and Jesus was a prophet like Moses (Acts 3:22). So an argument can be made that it is also part of His prophetic role.

A priest was someone who was responsible for offering sacrifices and who served as an intercessor for others. During His earthly ministry, Jesus identified Himself as a priest by pointing to Psalm 110:4 ("You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek") and revealed that this prophecy was looking forward to Himself (Matthew 22:42-45). The letter to the Hebrews expands and elaborates on Christ's priestly role. It emphasizes that Christ is the perfect High Priest. He does not need to offer sacrifices for His own sins like other priests (Hebrews 7:26-28). He was able to offer a perfect sacrifice, Himself, once for all (Hebrews 7:27, 10:10-14). He mediates a better covenant (Hebrews 8:6). His priesthood is like Melchizedek's priesthood, which testifies that He is greater than all the other priests of Levi (Hebrews 7:4-10), that His priesthood is eternal (Hebrews 7:3), and that He can be a priest and king, since Levitical priests do not come from Judah (Hebrews 7:1, 11, 14, 17). In short, Christ's activity as priest was necessary from the beginning. All the priests and sacrifices of the past were shadows, and only effective because of Christ's ministry to come (Hebrews 10:1-4, 10-12, 18).

Scripture clearly portrays Christ's kingship from the very beginning. God, as creator, has rule over all that He made; then He delegates some of the responsibility to mankind (Genesis 1:26) but retains ultimate rule by placing limits on man's dominion (Genesis 2:15-17). Israel rejected God as their king (1 Samuel 8:7; 12:1, 12). David was eventually made king, and a promise was given that one of His descendants would be an eternal king (2 Samuel 7:12-13; Isaiah 9:7). Scripture affirms that Jesus was the fulfillment of that prophecy (Luke 1:32; Hebrews 1:8). Jesus also confirms that He is king, though not of this world (John 18:36-37). Jesus did not establish His kingdom during His earthly ministry as assumed by many of His followers but will at a future time (John 12:13-16; Acts 1:6-7).

Pneumatology: The Doctrine on the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. Therefore, He is equal with the Father and the Son as fully divine (Acts 5:3-4). The Holy Spirit is not just a force, but a person with a mind and a will (1 Corinthians 2:10-11; 12:11). He also interacts with people in personal ways. He can intercede (Romans 8:26-27), and convict (John 16:8). He can also be grieved (Ephesians 4:30), lied to (Acts 5:3), blasphemed (Matthew 12:31-32), and insulted (Hebrews 10:29).

The Holy Spirit is eternal and has been active throughout history: involved in creation (Genesis 1:2), in the inspiration of Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16), and in convicting people of sin (John 16:8). He has a special relationship with believers: granting spiritual life (John 3:5-6), indwelling them (1 Corinthians 3:16), granting gifts for serving the church (1 Corinthians 12:4, 9), interceding for them (Romans 8:26-27), and sanctifying them (1 Peter 1:2).

Spiritual gifts are certain, special abilities that the Holy Spirit gives to Christians for the edification of the Church and confirmation of the arrival of the Spirit. It was prophesied in Joel 2:28-29 that God would pour out the Spirit in a special way, which was fulfilled in Acts 2. The primary passage that discusses Spiritual gifts and their proper use is 1 Corinthians 12-14. This section emphasizes that these gifts vary from one another, but their source and purpose are all the same—the Holy Spirit and the edification of the Church (1 Corinthians 12:4; 14:12, 26). The list of gifts given in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 include: wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, distinguishing of spirits, tongues, and

interpretation of tongues.⁵ The question arises, “Are these gifts still active today?” They came as part of the fulfillment of a specific prophecy (Joel 2:28-29), for the purpose of the edification of the Church and to confirm the genuineness of the arrival of the Holy Spirit (Hebrews 2:3-4). Since the Canon of Scripture is now complete and we know that the Spirit has come and indwells all believers (Romans 8:9; 1 Corinthians 3:16), the Spiritual gifts have fulfilled their purpose and are no longer needed.⁶

Angelology: The Doctrine of Angels

Angels are “Ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation” (Hebrews 1:14). As spirits they have no physical bodies. Scripture does not specify when exactly they were created, only that they were created without sin. But a portion of them committed sin and became fallen angels/demons (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6).

God uses angels to accomplish His works including revelation (Luke 1:35), safety and deliverance (Acts 5:19), and judgment (Acts 12:23). Some angels have been given special roles (Genesis 3:24; Isaiah 6:2), and God has revealed the names of two of them, Gabriel (Daniel 9:21; Luke 1:19) and Michael (Jude 9).

Demons and demon possession are realities (Mark 5); however, we have no evidence in Scripture of a demon possessing a believer. The Holy Spirit will never leave a true believer (John 14:16-18), and the Holy Spirit is greater than any demon or demonic force (1 John 4:4). Even demons are under God’s providential control and will in the end confess that Jesus Christ is LORD (Philippians 2:10-11). So, I believe that it is impossible for a demon to possess a true Christian.

Anthropology: The Doctrine of Man

God created man on the sixth day of creation (Genesis 1:26, 31; 2:7). Only human beings are made “in the image of God” (Genesis 1:27). Because of being made in the image of God, human life is sacred. God instituted the death penalty for murder, even before giving the Law to Moses, and the reason given is because man is made in the image of God. Genesis 9:6 says, “Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made man.” In the Law, stoning was even prescribed for an ox who gored and killed a person (Exodus 21:28). Clearly the death penalty is not just given as a deterrent against murder, but an actual statement about the sanctity of human life.

⁵ There are a few other places where Spiritual gifts are listed out (Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:28-30; 1 Peter 4:10-11). They are not all the same, and it does not say that the list is exhaustive, so there may have been others as well.

⁶ Indeed, the common practice of Spiritual Gifts disappeared after the 1st century for most of church history. It has only been in the 20th century that they began to come back into the spotlight. I believe that these are not legitimate or genuine. First, why would such gifts disappear for such a long time, only to suddenly reappear nearly 2000 years later? They fulfilled their purpose back in the 1st century. Second, the people practicing them are not following biblical directions for the proper use of the gifts. “If anyone speaks in a tongue, it should be by two or at the most three, and each in turn, and one must interpret; but if there is no interpreter, he must keep silent in the church; and let Him speak to himself and to God” (1 Corinthians 14:27-28; also verses 29-31).

God has given us dominion over the rest of creation (Genesis 1:28-30). Man is made up of two parts, physical and spiritual (Genesis 2:7; Matthew 10:28). The immaterial/spiritual part of man is often referred to as the “soul” or “spirit” in Scripture (Psalm 31:5; Proverbs 18:14; Matthew 10:28; 26:41; 1 Corinthians 15:45). Man was created for the purpose of glorifying God, and that continues to be his highest calling (Ecclesiastes 12:13; Psalm 145; Revelation 4:11).

God created humanity in two genders, male and female (Genesis 1:27; Matthew 19:4). They are both created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27), and both men and women have equal value and spiritual status (Galatians 3:28). Marriage was given by God as a blessing (Genesis 2:18, 24) and was created to be a permanent union between one man and one woman while both are living (Genesis 2:24; Mark 10:8-9; 1 Corinthians 7:39). Jesus makes a very strong judgment against divorce and remarriage (Matthew 19:4-12; Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:18). He states that anyone who gets a divorce and then remarries commits adultery. In the epistles we have some further instruction, that if a believer is married to an unbeliever, the believer is not supposed to seek a divorce, but divorce is permitted if the unbelieving spouse leaves (1 Corinthians 7:15). But if someone is divorced, they should either remarry their original spouse, or not remarry at all (1 Corinthians 7:10-11). Someone who was remarried after a divorce cannot serve in the role of an elder or deacon (1 Timothy 3:2, 12).

Hamartiology: The Doctrine of Sin

God created all things perfect. However, sin entered the world through Adam, the first created man (Romans 5:12), when he chose to disobey God’s command to not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:17; 3:17). Because of his sin, sin entered into the world, so that now all humans are born with a sin nature (Romans 5:12, 19).

Scripture defines sin in a variety of ways in order to emphasize different aspects of it. Some common terms are:

- Error, based on the Hebrew word *shagah*, emphasizes the aspect of going astray (Ezekiel 34:6)
- Missing the mark, based on the Hebrew word *chata’* and the Greek word *hamartano*, emphasizes the idea of choosing to miss the right way. Though fairly common in today’s use, this term is not the best since its references are usually used figuratively and can be vague (literal use in Proverbs 29:2)
- Transgression, based on the Hebrew word *‘abar*, literally meaning “to cross over” or “to pass by,” used in Numbers 14:41-42 to show that the Israelites disobeyed God’s command
- Iniquity, based on the Hebrew word *‘awal*, meaning to deviate from right conduct such as committing an injustice (Leviticus 19:15)
- Rebellion, most commonly based on the Hebrew word *pasha’*, most often referring to rebellion against God and his commandments (Isaiah 1:2).

The source of sin is the desires of our hearts that have been corrupted by the fall (James 1:14-15). Some different explanations for the source of our sin include our anxiety of finiteness, our existential

estrangement, our economic struggle, and our individualism and competitiveness. All contain aspects of our sinful nature, but each one of them is lacking in certain respects. 1 John 2:16 reveals that the source is our lusts which are of the world and have been corrupted.

The consequence of sin is death, both physical death and eternal damnation. Romans 5:12 states that death came because of Adam's sin and death through sin. After Adam and Eve sinned, they no longer belonged in God's presence and felt guilty and ashamed, so they hid themselves (Genesis 3:8-10). Because they were now spiritually dead (Ephesians 2:1-6; Colossians 2:12-13), they recognized that their former fellowship with God was broken (Genesis 3:8). The death that came through sin was not limited to physical death. Jesus said that at the final judgment all people will be divided up into two groups. The righteous are told they will "inherit the kingdom" and go "into eternal life" (Matthew 25:34, 46), but the others will be told "Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels" and they will "go away into eternal punishment" (Matthew 25:41, 46). Those who do not receive the gospel will pay the penalty of eternal destruction (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9).

Adam's sin has an on-going effect so that every human who is a descendant of Adam (every human other than Christ, who was conceived via the Holy Spirit) is born totally depraved. This does not mean that every person is as sinful as he could be, or that he has no conscience, but that every aspect of that person is affected by sin (Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 7:18; 8:7; Ephesians 2:1-3). Every person is born with an original sin nature. All people are sinners from the very beginning, before they are even able to make conscious choices to sin (Psalm 51:5; 58:3; Romans 5:16-18). People are born "slaves to sin" (Romans 6:6, 17), but this is a slavery that we enjoy. Apart from the grace of God we would want to continue in it (Romans 5:6-10; 8:7-8; Ephesians 2:1-9). This sin nature has affected every part of a person so that each person is not only predisposed to sin, but actually incapable of pleasing God and not sinning (Romans 3:10-11; 8:7-8). Because of our inability to do good as sinners, God had to act first in our salvation (Romans 5:6, 8, 10; Ephesians 2:5).

Soteriology: The Doctrine of Salvation

God's answer to the problem of human sin is to provide a means of salvation that does not rely on human goodness or righteousness but is given as a free gift (Ephesians 2:8-9) based on the substitutionary life and death of Jesus Christ (John 3:16; Romans 5:6; Hebrews 2:17-18; 10:12).

I believe in a universal atonement, that Christ died for all men, based on the vast amount of scriptural evidence (John 3:16; 1 Timothy 2:6; 4:10; 1 John 2:1-2; 4:14). Universal atonement also best accounts for the understanding of salvation being offered and provided to everyone, but only applied to those who believe. This shows God's patient and longsuffering nature (2 Peter 3:9). An effectual calling is necessary in order for one to come to know Christ. Because of man's depraved mind he cannot come to God unless God first calls him (John 6:37, 44, 65; Romans 9:11, 15-16). Scripture is clear that God has predestined certain people for salvation, not based on any act of their own, but according to His sovereign choice (Romans 9:11; 15-16; Acts 13:48; Ephesians 1:4, 11).

I believe in justification by grace through faith alone (Ephesians 2:8-9; Romans 4:1-8). Salvation is not something that people can achieve based on their own merit (or tapping into the merit of others, as

claimed by some⁷). Conversion involves repentance and faith. For one to truly be converted he must both repent and believe (Mark 1:15; Romans 10:9; 2 Peter 3:9). Faith involves believing the promises of God and trusting in them for one's salvation. The term "faith" is used heavily throughout the New Testament in reference to salvation; it is used by Jesus in his teaching (Mark 1:15; Luke 8:50), Paul in his writing (Galatians 2:16; Philippians 1:29), as well as others such as Peter (1 Peter 1:8). Repentance involves the turning away from and forsaking of sin. In order for true repentance to take place, one must have a change of mind about sin in general and particularly his own sin (2 Chronicles 7:14; Matthew 3:2). Repentance is a necessary aspect of saving faith as seen in Jesus' and Paul's preaching (Luke 24:46-47; Acts 17:30). Repentance is not a work that merits salvation for someone, but rather a proof that a person's faith is genuine and evidence that a person truly desires God to save him. It is possible to believe in God, but not *want* to be saved on His terms (Exodus 9:34-35; 10:7; Joshua 2:9-11; Matthew 21:15; 28:11-15; James 2:19).

I believe that conversion is logically prior to regeneration. The two events happen simultaneously, but regeneration is logically dependent on conversion based on the teaching in Scripture. Acts 16:31 says, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved." Acts 2:38 also testifies that if you repent and are baptized then "you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Regeneration is completely God's work. God is the one who takes someone who has turned from his sin and believed in Him and transforms him into a new creature, empowering him with the Holy Spirit, making him "born again" (John 3:5-8; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 2:1, 5).

When someone comes to saving faith in God and is born again, at the time of his conversion that person becomes united with Christ. He is united federally. God deals with the Christian as He would deal with Christ (Isaiah 53; Romans 5:18-19; 6:4-5; 2 Corinthians 5:21). He is also united organically. The Spirit of Christ lives within him (Romans 8:9-11), and he draws on Christ for his life like a branch draws upon the vine to grow (John 15:4-5). It is impossible to fully comprehend the extent of this unity, but we know that we are in Christ, as inseparably as Christ is in the Father (John 17:21); it is no longer we who live, but Christ who lives in us (Galatians 2:20); and there is a real presence of Christ in us (1 Corinthians 6:17; Colossians 1:27; 2:13; Ephesians 3:17).

I believe that sanctification is a process which the believer continues in throughout his entire Christian life. It is a process involving both the work of God (Colossians 3:3; Romans 8:9-10; Philippians 2:13) and the work of the believer (Colossians 3:1-2; Romans 8:12-13; Philippians 2:12).

I believe that a Christian can never lose his salvation. God chose Christians before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4). God will never fail one of His own. "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all" (John 10:27-29). Salvation belongs to God. We do not obtain salvation based on our own works, neither can we lose it because of our works. Passages that seem to suggest that a believer can lose his salvation are in fact not presenting true believers with the idea that they should doubt their salvation, but exhorting them to examine their hearts to see if they are truly saved. Hebrews 6 and 10 are both examples of warning passages followed by passages on assurance. In Hebrews 6 there seems to be a progression from a

⁷ CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH – paragraph 2027 – No one can merit the initial grace which is at the origin of conversion. Moved by the Holy Spirit, we can merit for ourselves and for others all the graces needed to attain eternal life, as well as necessary temporal goods. From <<http://www.scborromeo.org/cc/p3s1c3a2.htm#III>>

warning against those who may not be saved (vv. 4-6) to a comfort to those who know that they are saved (v. 9).

I believe that glorification is the final stage of salvation. Glorification takes place when the believer dies and is brought before the Lord. Though it will not be fully understood by the believer until he experiences it, we do know that it will be a complete transformation (Romans 8:18-25).

Ecclesiology: The Doctrine of the Church

I believe that the church began at Pentecost. The only two times that Jesus refers to the church is when he is giving the promise to build his church (in the future, Matthew 16:18), and when he is giving the plan for church discipline (Matthew 18:17). The church was not present before Pentecost, and Pentecost was the fulfillment of Jesus' promise in John 16 to send His Spirit.

I believe that the church is distinct from Israel, and that the church is not just the New Testament version of Israel. The church does have some connection with the nation Israel in the Old Testament since we are considered Abraham's seed (Galatians 3:29) and fellow heirs (Ephesians 3:6). Though there are connections, the church has not replaced Israel and is still contrasted with Israel in the New Testament (1 Corinthians 10:32), and Israel still has a future in God's plan (Romans 11:1-2).

"Ekklesia," the word most often translated "church," can refer to the universal church, to a local church or to a generic assembly (Universal church – Matthew 16:18 | local church – Acts 8:1 | non-church assembly – Acts 19:39). The universal church is the totality of born-again Christians. A local church is an individual assembly of Christians who gather together for the purpose of worship (Acts 2:42).

The very heart of the ministry of the church is the gospel. The church was created because of the gospel, the good news of Christ's death and resurrection (Mark 1:14-15). And its primary focus is to proclaim the gospel to others so that they can be saved (Matthew 28:28; Acts 1:8) and then grow as believers (2 Peter 3:18; Ephesians 4:11-12; Galatians 6:2; 2 Timothy 2:2). The four pillars of the church are described in Acts 2:42 – the apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer; all of these are aspects of worship if done with the purpose of obeying and honoring God. The local church has also been instructed to be mindful of social concerns, though these do not take the same priority as gathered worship (1 John 3:17-18; 1 Timothy 5:16; James 1:27), evangelism (Mark 16:15; Romans 15:20; 1 Corinthians 1:17), or edification (Romans 15:2; Ephesians 4:29).

The primary day of corporate worship for the local church is Sunday, the first day of the week. This was the practice of the early church (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2). It is never explained why, but most certainly it is because the first day of the week was the day Jesus Christ rose from the grave (Matthew 28:1).⁸

Christ is the head of the church (Ephesians 5:23). Scripture describes two offices for the local church, overseers/elders and deacons (Philippians 1:1). There are lists given for qualifications of both overseers

⁸ Incidentally, the initial pouring out of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was also on a Sunday, further supporting the reason to make the first day of the week the primary day of worship.

(1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-8) and deacons (1 Timothy 3:8-10, 12-13). Church leaders are often referred to as “pastors” in churches today. This is not a separate office in the church, but rather another title for an elder/overseer, which highlights their responsibility to “shepherd the church of God” (Acts 20:28). Though overseers/elders and deacons are supposed to exercise leadership in a church, giving the congregation the final vote best fits the model set forth in the Bible. In Acts 1, the congregation chooses Judas’s replacement. In Acts 6, the congregation chooses the first deacons. And other teachings such as church discipline (Matthew 18) place the final decision in the hands of the congregation. Membership is something that is never described in detail but is simply assumed. When addressing church discipline, Jesus says, “Tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church...” (Matthew 18:17). Obviously, there must be a group of people who are recognized as “the church.” Church leaders are called to “watch over your souls as those who will give an account” (Hebrews 13:17), and the congregation is told to “obey your leaders and submit to them” (Hebrews 13:17; also “have charge over you,” 1 Thessalonians 5:12). These commands clearly assume that there is a recognized membership for the purpose of accountability.

Two ordinances have been assigned to local churches, baptism and the Lord’s Supper (Matthew 28:19; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26). Water baptism is an outward, public display that symbolizes the internal, invisible baptism by the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38; 10:47-48). Because of the meaning of the word “baptizō” (to dip), and the symbol of being united in Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6:3-5), the New Testament demonstrates that baptism by immersion is the best mode. Scripture is clear that baptism is the next step after anyone trusts in Christ. It is a public declaration of their faith. However, the act of baptism does not contribute to someone’s salvation. Salvation is completely accomplished by grace through faith (John 3:15-16; Romans 10:8-14; Ephesians 2:8-9). The second ordinance is the Lord’s Supper (1 Corinthians 11:23-26) which is a ritual instituted by Jesus Christ (Luke 22:14-20) and practiced by the church (Acts 2:42, 46; 20:7). As with Baptism, receiving the Lord’s Supper is a symbol⁹ and does not in itself minister saving grace to a person.¹⁰

Unity within the church is something of vital importance. So much so that in His High Priestly Prayer, Jesus prayed for the unity of His church not once but three times (John 17:11, 20-21, 23). The church is supposed to be united in the same way that the Father and the Son are united (John 17:22), and this unity is supposed to be a witness to the world, “so that the world may know that [the Father] sent [Jesus Christ]” (John 17:23). Because unity is such an important issue, we are called to always have a gracious, gentle, and loving spirit when interacting with anyone, especially believers (1 Corinthians 13; Colossians 4:6; 1 Timothy 5:1; 2 Timothy 2:25). Because unity is so important, it also means that we cannot compromise on the truth and are called to “guard the truth” (1 Timothy 4:16; 6:3-5, 20; 2 Timothy 1:13-14; Titus 1:9-11), which may involve correcting or rebuking another believer (Luke 17:3; 1 Timothy 5:20; 2 Timothy 2:25), or even disassociating with someone or a group of people who is teaching or living in a way that is contrary to the gospel (1 Corinthians 5:9-13; Galatians 1:6-9; 2:11-16; 1 Timothy 6:3-5; Titus 1:9-11; 2:12; 3:10-11).

⁹ There are a few traditions that have been added to the practice of the Lord’s Supper that are not found in the Bible, such as the belief that the bread and blood are Christ’s physical body (as opposed to only symbolic), and the requirement for actual wine (as opposed to accepting grape juice as well).

¹⁰ CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH – paragraph **1416** – Communion with the Body and Blood of Christ increases the communicant’s union with the Lord, forgives his venial sins, and preserves him from grave sins. Since receiving this sacrament strengthens the bonds of charity between the communicant and Christ, it also reinforces the unity of the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ. From <<http://www.scborromeo.org/ccc/p2s2c1a3.htm#brief>>

Eschatology: The Doctrine of Last Things

The New Testament affirms that we are in the “last days” (Hebrews 1:2). Because of this, we are supposed to be alert and sober (1 Thessalonians 5:6). No one knows the exact day or hour that the day of the Lord will come, but every day is one day less that people have to come to repentance. As Christians, we are called to feel the urgency of this reality (John 9:4), though not panic, because we know that God is in control, and His plan is perfect (1 Thessalonians 5:8-11).

At death our souls are immediately taken away (Luke 23:42), and our bodies are laid to rest for a time. When the Lord returns, the dead in Christ will rise and be reunited with their resurrected bodies (1 Thessalonians 4:16). Those living who are united with Christ will be raptured with them where we will meet Him in the air.

Shortly after this event, God will send a seven-year period of Tribulation to punish those who remain on the earth (Daniel 9:26-27; Matthew 24:21; Revelation 3:10). I believe that the Tribulation will follow the Rapture because Christ promises to deliver His people from it (1 Thessalonians 5:1-11; Revelation 3:10). I believe that during the Tribulation, Christians in heaven will be judged and rewarded for their faithfulness (2 Corinthians 5:10; 1 Corinthians 3:13-15). I believe that the Tribulation will end with the triumphant and glorious return of Christ to earth (Revelation 19:11-16) to defeat His enemies (Revelation 19:19-21) and to establish His kingdom, which will last for a thousand years (Revelation 20:4). During this time Christ will reign on David’s throne (Luke 1:32) in righteousness (Isaiah 32:1). Nature’s curse will be nullified (Isaiah 11:6-9), and Christ will enforce obedience (Revelation 19:15).

I believe that the Millennium will end with Armageddon, the final battle against Satan (Revelation 20:7-9), and the relegation of Satan to the lake of fire (Revelation 20:10), where he will be shortly joined by the wicked condemned at the Great White Throne (Revelation 20:11-15). The present universe will be destroyed (2 Peter 3:10-11) and replaced with a new heaven and new earth (Revelation 21:1ff), where the righteous will enjoy God’s presence forever (Revelation 21).

God is not finished with Israel. The Church has not replaced Israel (Romans 11:1-2, 17-21), and God has promised that a remnant will remain (Romans 11:5). All Israel will be saved (Romans 11:26), though not all physical descendants of Israel are part of the true Israel (Romans 9:6).