

DOCTRINAL STATEMENT OF FAITH

PERSONAL TESTIMONY

I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see. (J. Newton)

Conversion

I am grateful for a Christian heritage of several generations. I professed faith in Christ around the age of 4 but struggled with doubts and sin through my teenage years. I was truly converted at age 17 in the middle of a sermon at a youth retreat. The Lord dealt with me in mercy (Lk. 18:13–14). Though I had acknowledged God and assented to the truths of the gospel, I had never humbled myself and cast my confidence on a risen Savior who sacrificed Himself to satisfy His Father’s wrath against my awful sin. God graciously called me to repent and believe in Christ alone. It was the beginning of new life from above (Jn. 3:3), and soon after I was baptized.

Ministry Calling

As college approached, I had a desire (1 Tim. 3:1) to pursue pastoral ministry. I studied history and Greek at BJU. Partway through my freshman year, I started attending Mount Calvary and became convinced of the importance of sound doctrine and expositional preaching. Along the way the Lord gave opportunities through His people’s invitation to lead and preach, and I remained committed to serving however He chose. I accepted His providential direction to invest in many years of student discipleship and administration. Pastor Minnick’s sermons in 2016 from the concluding verses of 1 Corinthians 12 renewed a conviction that I must pursue teaching and preaching the Word primarily, which led in 2021 to answering this congregation’s call to pastor.

BIBLIOLOGY: THE DOCTRINE OF REVELATION AND SCRIPTURE

How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord, is laid for your faith in His excellent Word! (J. Rippon’s *Hymns*)

General Revelation

I believe that the one true God has made Himself known both generally and specially to be glorified and enjoyed forever (Ps. 73:25). God is the ground of all true knowledge (Pro. 1:7; Rom. 1:19). Testimonies of God’s eternal existence can be used legitimately (e.g., cosmological, teleological), but the Bible assumes it rather than reasoning to it (Gen. 1:1; Heb. 11:6). Denial of God is fundamentally moral, not intellectual (Ps. 14:1).

I believe that God makes Himself known by **the universe He created** (Pss. 8; 19; 104). Since the beginning He has revealed His eternal power and divine nature to all people (Rom. 1:20). God has also made Himself known in the **conscience** of every person (Rom. 2:14–15) and by His **providential ordering** of all history (Acts 17:26–28) and *sustenance* of life day by day (Ps. 145:15–16; Acts 14:17). General revelation is sufficient to render us inexcusable before our Creator, as confirmed by His judgment of all unrepentant sinners (Rom. 1:18–20); however, we need the Bible’s lens to interpret general revelation rightly and to be saved (Acts 17:24–31).

Special Revelation

I believe that God has also revealed Himself personally and verbally “at many times and in many ways” (Heb. 1:1, ESV). Sometimes this revelation took visual form in dreams (1 Ki. 3:5), visions (Acts 10:10–16), theophanies (Num. 12:6–8), and angelic appearances (Gen. 18:1–2, 16–17). Special revelation more fully expresses God’s perfections, unveils them in relation to a fallen world, and culminates in the incarnation of God’s Son (Heb. 1:1–2). This personal, saving revelation is verbally communicated and divinely interpreted in **Scripture**, which God *breathed out* (2 Tim. 3:16). By authoring these words, God has ensured a precision, preservation, and proliferation that far surpass oral transmission. These “sacred writings” are essential for eternal

life and present godliness by faith (Rom. 10:17; 2 Tim. 3:15). The **inspiration** of the Bible is **plenary**, meaning all and not just some parts. The words that “men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” *are* forever His Word and do not merely *become* so at times. For example, the phrase “thus says the Lord” occurs 419x in the OT (NASB¹), while the NT speaks as an equal authority to the OT (1 Tim. 5:18; 2 Pet. 3:2, 16). Furthermore, the Bible’s inspiration is not merely conceptual but **verbal**. The very forms of words (Gal. 3:16) and smallest strokes of letters will endure “until heaven and earth pass away” (Mt. 5:18). “[T]he Scripture cannot be broken” (Jn. 10:35) but must be believed “not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God” (1 Th. 2:13).

I believe that Scripture, though ultimately divine, was **written by men**. Utilizing personal backgrounds and styles, prophets expressed themselves in normal human language as the Spirit *bore them along* (2 Pet. 1:19–21). Therefore, when prophets spoke (2 Sam. 23:2), it was the Holy Spirit speaking (Acts 1:16; 28:25). Some of the Bible is the result of divine dictation (Is. 38:4; Rev. 2:1). Yet, many places in Scripture indicate that these human authors were not ghost-writers (e.g., David’s praise; Jeremiah’s lament; Paul’s dictation to Tertius).

I believe that the Bible is completely true and without error. Christ testifies to its **inerrancy**, for example, by speaking of OT narratives as historical fact (e.g., Mt. 12:3–4, 40–42; Lk. 4:25–27). It is insidious to sequester matters of faith and practice from matters of history and science, as if the latter do not matter. Our understanding is imperfect, in part because Scripture contains “some things hard to understand” (2 Pet. 3:16), and we as readers presently “see in a mirror dimly” (1 Cor. 13:12). Yet, God cannot lie (Num. 23:19; Tit. 1:2; Heb. 6:18). All His words are truth (Ps. 19:7–9; Jn. 17:17; Rev. 22:6); none of them can fail (Jos. 23:14).

I believe in *sola Scriptura*, that God’s words are our “supreme and final **authority** in faith and life”² (cf. Ps. 119:24, 130). They sit in judgment over me, not vice versa (Is. 66:2). Christ affirms that Moses’ words are God’s words (Gen. 2:24; Mt. 19:5). Paul speaks with authority even when he does not have Christ’s earthly words to apply (1 Cor. 7:12). God’s Word is also **self-attesting**. In all of Scripture, sheep hear their Shepherd’s voice (Jn. 10:27), with plentiful reasons to believe (e.g., fulfilled prophecy, Mt. 1:22–23). I also affirm that the Bible is **sufficient**. There are “secret things” that God has not revealed (Dt. 29:29), but what He has spoken is enough for us to have eternal life (Jn. 6:63; 2 Tim. 3:15) and live for His glory (Mt. 4:4; 2 Pet. 1:3; 2 Tim. 3:17). Consequently, we dare not add to or subtract from the completed canon (Dt. 4:2; 12:32; Pro. 30:6; Rev. 22:18–19). I also affirm that the words of God are **clear**. The Bible sheds light for those with eyes to see (Ps. 119:130; 2 Pet. 1:19), especially as we compare Scripture with Scripture (Acts 15:15). When the Bible is misunderstood, the fault lies with the interpreter (Mt. 19:4; Lk. 24:45; Jn. 3:10). However, this perspicuity does not negate the need for spiritual illumination (Ps. 119:18; 1 Jn. 2:20, 27), gifted teachers (1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11), diligent study (Ezra 7:10; 2 Tim. 2:15), discernment (Heb. 5:14), and faith (Heb. 11:1).

I affirm that the 66 books of the OT and NT alone are God’s holy words. The early church did not *determine* but rather *recognized* what books are **canonical** “as the Spirit of God [bore] witness with [them] in [their] hearts” (*TT*³). God provides His own authorization in the pages of the Bible (Heb. 6:13). I deny that the Apocrypha or Pseudepigrapha measure up to the standard of written revelation that the OT and NT demonstrate. Christ and the apostles refer to an established OT canon (Mt. 5:17–18; Lk. 24:44–45), and the Spirit moved His apostles and their companions (e.g., Mark, Luke, Jude) to write the NT (Jn. 14:26; 16:13–14). God revealed Himself climactically “in His Son” (Heb. 1:2), who was prophesied in the OT and disclosed in the NT. No new revelation is needed; the biblical canon is closed (2 Tim. 3:15–17).

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² *Confession of Faith*, Mount Calvary Baptist Church

³ Adapted from *Treeology Theology Catechism (TT)*, Mount Calvary Baptist Church

Because the Spirit moved men to write His words in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, most of God's people need a **translation** to comprehend the Bible (1 Cor. 14:11). NT writers themselves used the Greek translation of the OT (e.g., Heb. 10:5–7).⁴ I believe that faithful translations are God's Word as He has preserved it in the totality of extant manuscripts. This providential process of **preservation** differs from the Spirit's miraculous inspiration of the *original manuscripts* (Jer. 36:32; Mt. 24:35). I deny that a particular translation is God's only preserved English text or that a particular edition of the Greek NT is inerrant. The KJV holds an honored, incomparable place in the history of the English Bible and is the version I used growing up. But recent translations that strive for formal equivalence—privileging word-for-word correspondence over a more conceptual correspondence—communicate the original text accurately and with greater clarity to most present-day readers and, therefore, are what seem best for corporate use (e.g., NASB 1995, ESV, NKJV).

Since God has preserved His words in perfect yet ordinary language, we should **interpret** them literally by following rules of grammar and syntax, appreciating literary devices, understanding historical context, and tracing the progression of revelation in God's unified Book. The original authorial meaning of Bible passages does not change but may be clarified or unpacked with fuller significance (Rom. 15:9; Heb. 8:7–12; 1 Pet. 1:10–12). Centrally, the Scriptures reveal the kingdom of God and its mediatorial ruler, Jesus Christ (Lk. 24:44–45; Jn. 5:39; 1 Cor. 15:21–28; Eph. 1:9–12). As indicated in this statement of faith, my hermeneutic is moderately dispensational.

THEOLOGY PROPER: THE DOCTRINE OF GOD

*Sing praise to God who reigns above, the God of all creation,
the God of pow'r, the God of love, the God of our salvation. (J. Schütz)*

I believe that there is only one true and living God (Dt. 6:4; 32:31; Jer. 10:10). Over against all other supposed gods, the LORD is Creator and ruler of heaven and earth (Ps. 121:2; Is. 37:16; 45:21). His knowledge of all things, including me, is inscrutable (Ps. 139:6; Rom. 11:33). Yet, though no one naturally understands or seeks after this unfathomable God (Rom. 3:12), by grace He can be known (Jer. 9:23–24; Jn. 17:3).

The Personal Name of God and the Persons of the Godhead

I affirm that *Yahweh* (the LORD) is the name of God (Ex. 3:14–15; 6:3). His name expresses His self-existence and designates His self-revelation. He has always been who He will always be, but He also freely and faithfully relates to His people by gracious covenant. All three members of the Trinity are *Yahweh* (1 Cor. 12:3; Phil. 2:11; 2 Cor. 3:17). Therefore, I confess that God is one (1 Cor. 8:4; 1 Tim. 2:5). The Father is God (2 Cor. 1:3); the Son is God (Col. 2:9); and the Holy Spirit is God (Jn. 15:26). These three Persons are distinct, as we know by their interpersonal relations and distinctive works. Yet, each Person possesses all the divine attributes and participates in each divine act, such as creation (Gen. 1:2; Col. 1:16). Three-in-One is not how God occasionally expresses Himself but who He eternally is. The OT points to the doctrine of the **Trinity** (Gen. 1:26; 18:1–2), but the NT more fully reveals it (John 14–16; cf. Mt. 3:16–17; 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14).

The Perfections of God

Divine perfections are attributes that are without defect and comprise God's entire being. I believe God is utterly **glorious**—weighty in all His being and worthy of fear and praise (Ps. 19:1; 24:10; Heb. 1:3)—and **jealous** (zealous) to be known and glorified, particularly by those on whom He has set His love (Ex. 20:5; 34:14;

⁴ Though the Masoretic Text is superior in certain respects to the Septuagint (LXX), the preface of the KJV recognizes that NT writers would not have used a translation “if it had been unworthy the appellation and name of the word of God” (“The Translators to the Reader,” 1611).

Is. 48:11). Theologians categorize these perfections in various ways, such as what is incommunicable (i.e., not finitely represented by mankind) and what is communicable (i.e., finitely represented in His human image-bearers). Scripture speaks of God most basically in terms of *greatness* and *goodness* (Ps. 145:3, 9). Our great God is a **spirit** (Ex. 20:4; Jn. 4:24). He is **incorporeal** and cannot be discerned by our physical senses. Scripture uses bodily descriptions, not because God is physical but because He truly knows and sees and listens and speaks, the kinds of capacities for which we (embodied image-bearers) need bodily members. As spirit, God is **invisible** (1 Tim. 6:16; 1 Jn. 4:12). His attributes are nonmaterial (Rom. 1:19). God has at times manifested His glorious presence visually (Ex. 33:20–23; 34:5–6), but I deny that man can see His essence, except as *exegeted* by the incarnate Son (Jn. 1:18). I also affirm that God is **simple** not segmented. His attributes never conflict but are always in perfect union (Ps. 85:10), so that each one can be predicated on every other (e.g., holy love).

I believe that God is **holy**, as Scripture often declares. The LORD is transcendent and completely set apart from His creation. He is sacred (Is. 6:3) and “majestic in holiness” (Ex. 15:11). He is pure and sinless, in contrast with men (Is. 6:5; Hab. 1:13). Yet in His holiness He condescends to dwell with contrite sinners (Is. 57:15). I believe that “the Holy One of Israel” is **independent** (*aseity*). He is self-defining (Ex. 3:14) and needs nothing (Acts 17:24–25). All things are for and through and to Him (Rom. 11:36). God is also **immutable**. He does not vacillate (1 Sam. 15:29) and cannot change (Ps. 102:25–27; Mal. 3:6). The LORD is invariably good (Jas. 1:17), and His trustworthy words testify to His absolute character (Pss. 33:11; 119:89; Heb. 6:17). I deny that instances of God “regretting” (1 Sam. 15:11, 35) or being “sorry” (1 Chr. 21:15) mean that His essence or purposes change. Rather, He manifests invariable perfection in responding rightly to disobedience or repentance. Though God is unaltered by external influences and without deficiency, I affirm His genuine affections in relating to people (e.g., joy, Lk. 15: 7, 10; grief, Eph. 4:30; wrath, Ex. 32:10; love, Ps. 103:17).

I believe that God is **infinite**. Though He relates to people in time (Gen. 21:33), He is **eternal** (Gen. 1:1; Ps. 90:2; Jn. 1:1, 3; 2 Tim. 1:9) and not bound or measured by time (Ps. 90:4; 2 Pet. 3:8). Nor is God limited by space; He is **omnipresent**. Heaven and earth cannot contain Him (1 Ki. 8:27). God is distinct from what He created yet dwells in all places (Ps. 139:7–10; Is. 6:3). Furthermore, “His understanding is infinite” (Ps. 147:5) and “unsearchable” (Is. 40:26; Rom. 11:33); He is **omniscient** and **all-wise**. He knows all things (1 Jn. 3:20), both actual (Ps. 139:2, 16; Mt. 6:8; Heb. 4:13) and possible (2 Ki. 13:19; Mt. 11:23). Therefore, I reject open theism—that God does not know the future because man has not yet made those choices. Lastly, God is **omnipotent** (Gen. 17:1). The Bible ascribes His unbounded power through names (e.g., *El Shaddai*), great deeds (Ex. 15:11–12; Dt. 3:24), and unfettered praise (Rev. 5:12; 7:12). Nothing (lit. “no word”) that accords with His perfections is impossible (Gen. 18:14; Mt. 19:26; Lk. 1:37). I believe that the LORD **sovereignly** exercises His power and purposes for His good pleasure (Ps. 115:3); no one can impede Him (Dan. 4:34–35).

God’s infinite greatness is matched only by His comprehensive goodness (Ex. 33:19). He always works what is upright and fitting (Ps. 119:68; Rom. 8:28). In fact, “no one is good except God alone” (Lk. 18:19). I also believe God is **true** and **faithful**, fundamentally to His Word and character (Ps. 138:2). He cannot lie (Num. 23:19; Rom. 3:4; Tit. 1:2). His trustworthiness is a hallmark of His self-revelation in the OT (Dt. 7:9; Ps. 103:8) and the NT (Jn. 1:14). He is also **love**, essentially (1 Jn. 4:8) and eternally (Ps. 136; Jn. 17:24), which He demonstrated by sacrificially sending His Son into the world (Jn. 3:16; 1 Jn. 4:12). I deny that love ignores sin or conflicts with wrath (Rom. 3:25). God is **merciful** and **gracious** toward sinners. His mercies blanket all He does (Ps. 145:9), benefiting both righteous and wicked (Mt. 5:45). Such unmerited compassion is the only way sinners can come into His presence (Ex. 25:22; Heb. 4:16) or even subsist (Acts 17:25). For us who are in Christ, He is “the God of all grace” (1 Pet. 5:10), showing saving kindness to those who deserve the opposite.

I believe that God is also **righteous** and **just** in all His ways (Dt. 32:4). Nothing He does deviates from the standard of His own perfect character (Ps. 145:17). He displays this righteousness magnificently in the gospel

(Rom. 1:16) and will ultimately judge the world and make all things right (Ps. 98:9). Because God is pure and good and righteous, He is also **wrathful** (Nah. 1:6–7). His anger is not impersonal but “the holy revulsion of God’s being against [all that is unholy]” (J. Murray). He reveals it presently in giving sinners over to their sin (Rom. 1:18–28) and will display it eternally in righteous judgment of all evil (Rev. 20:11–15). Yet, wrath is His “unusual task” (Is. 28:21), for He is “slow to anger” (Ps. 103:8) and delights in repentance (Ezek. 18:23).

The Works of God [including Angelology]

I believe that the LORD God **created** the universe (Gen. 1:1) out of nothing (Rom. 4:17) in a perfect condition (Gen. 1:31) by His powerful word (Heb. 11:3) in the span of six literal days (Gen. 1:31; Ex. 20:11). Everything except for God had a beginning (Gen. 1:1; 2:1). I believe God made the heavens and earth—including all material, time, space, energy, and personal beings—less than 10,000 years ago. By this creation God displayed His uniqueness (Jer. 10:11; Is. 44:24), power (Ps. 33:6), authority (Pss. 24; 89:11–12), wisdom (Ps. 104:24; Pro. 3:19; Jer. 51:15), and goodness (Gen. 1:31; Ps. 119:64; 1 Tim. 4:4) so that we and all creation might worship Him (Pss. 95:6; 148). [*Concerning God’s creation of men and women, see Anthropology below.*]

I affirm that God also created **angels** (Col. 1:16; Ps. 148:5)—myriads of them (Heb. 12:22; Rev. 5:11)—evidently on the first day (Job 38:6–7). These spiritual beings are called *sons of God* (Job 1:6), *the holy ones* (Ps. 89:5), *spirits* (Ps. 104:4), *the host of heaven* (1 Ki. 22:19), and *rulers and authorities* (Col. 1:16). Scripture reveals unique kinds of angels: *cherubim* (Gen. 3:24; Ex. 25:18–20) and *seraphim* (Is. 6:2). Two unfallen angels are named: *Gabriel* (Dan. 8:16; Lk. 1:19) and *Michael* (Dan. 10:13; Rev. 12:7). Angels are nonmaterial (Lk. 24:39), characteristically invisible (2 Ki. 6:17; Col. 1:16), non-marrying (Mt. 22:30), localized (Dan. 10:12–14), and everlasting (Lk. 20:36). They serve God (Ps. 104:4), worship Him (Is. 6:3), communicate His words (Mt. 1:20; Heb. 2:2; Rev. 1:1), enact His wrath (Rev. 16:1–12), and strengthen and protect His people (Ps. 91:11–12; Heb. 1:14). We should never worship, venerate, or pray to angels (Col. 2:18; 1 Tim. 2:5; Rev. 19:10; 22:8–9).

Angels are moral beings. Some have remained holy (Mk. 8:38; Rev. 14:10), while others rebelled with **Satan** against God and their rightful position (Jude 6) and are irredeemable (Heb. 2:16; 2 Pet. 2:4). Satan is the devil who rules his demons (Mt. 25:41; Rev. 12:7), deceives and blinds human minds (Gen. 3:1–5; 2 Cor. 4:4; 11:14), and accuses believers before God (Rev. 12:10). Although he presently lords over the world and rebellious sinners (Mt. 12:26; Jn. 8:44; Eph. 2:2; 1 Jn. 5:19), he remains under God’s sovereignty (Job 1:12; Mt. 12:28; 1 Jn. 4:4). Demons are powerful, inspiring false worship (1 Cor. 10:20) and false prophets (1 Jn. 4:1) and false doctrine (1 Tim. 4:1–3). They can and do possess unbelievers (Mk. 1:23; 5:2) but not believers (1 Jn. 4:4; 5:18). Satan and his demons can effectively tempt (Lk. 22:31) and afflict Christians (2 Cor. 12:7) but cannot separate us from God’s saving love (Rom. 8:38). While their influence is grimly real (2 Cor. 11:3–4), their doom has been sealed by Christ (Col. 2:15) and is sure (Mt. 25:41; Rev. 20:10). I believe that Christians wage spiritual warfare, not through carnal or mystical means but by believing God’s words (Mt. 4:4), applying God’s armor through prayer (Eph. 6:10–20), and captivating our thoughts to obey Christ (2 Cor. 10:3–5). The lordship of evil is supernatural (Eph. 6:12), but not invincible (Jas. 4:7; 1 Pet. 5:8–9) or eternal (Rev. 20:10).

I affirm that God not only has created the universe but also continues to govern and sustain it. At times God performs **miracles**, suspending or accelerating the normal processes of nature to accomplish His will (Ex. 15:11; Jos. 10:13; Dan. 3:27; Jn. 20:30). Yet, even when the world is functioning with apparent normalcy (e.g., as described by laws of nature), nothing falls outside the purview of His **providence** (Eph. 1:11; Heb. 1:3). God’s “most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing of all His creatures and all their actions to His own glory” (*TT*) includes nature (Ps. 135:6–7; Lk. 12:24), calamity (Is. 45:7; Amos 3:6), human rulers (Dan. 4:25; Ps. 75:6–7; Rom. 13:1; Pro. 21:1), evil spirits (Job 1:12; Lk. 8:32), historical events (Is. 45:7), my life (Job 23:14; Mt. 10:30), and all human actions (Pro. 16:9, 33), even sinful ones (1 Sam. 2:25; Jdg. 14:4; Acts 4:27–28). I deny that a scriptural teaching of divine sovereignty and providence in any way makes God the

author of sin (Jas. 1:13–14) or diminishes human responsibility (Gen. 50:20; Phil. 1:12–13) or negates the necessity of prayer, which God commands (Mt. 7:7) and answers to accomplish His purposes (Jas. 5:16).

CHRISTOLOGY: THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST

*Veiled in flesh the Godhead see; Hail th' Incarnate Deity,
Pleased as man with men to dwell, Jesus, our Emmanuel.* (C. Wesley)

The Person of the Lord Jesus Christ

I affirm the Chalcedonian creedal statement that Jesus Christ is one person with two natures—divine and human—that are “without confusion, without change, without division, and without separation.” In this hypostatic union, His divine nature was not humanized; nor has His human nature been divinized.

Fully God

I believe that Jesus Christ is the eternal, **second Person of the Trinity** (Gal. 4:4; 1 Jn. 1:2), “the only begotten from the Father” (Jn. 1:14) and “the exact representation of His nature” (Heb. 1:3). He preexisted time (Jn. 8:58) and came into the world (Mk. 10:45; Jn. 8:23, 42), having previously created it (Col. 1:16). Scripture identifies Christ as the God of the OT (cf. Is. 6:1 with Jn. 12:41; Is. 40:3 with Mt. 3:3; Is. 44:6 with Rev. 1:17; Is. 45:23 with Phil. 2:10–11). Scripture identifies Christ as God in the NT (Jn. 1:1, 18; 20:28; Rom. 9:5; Tit. 2:13). Scripture records Christ’s accomplishment of divine actions. He created (1 Cor. 8:6; Heb. 1:2) and sustains (Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3) and governs all creation (Mt. 8:27). He forgives sins (Mk. 2:5–10), poured out the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:17, 33), raises the dead (Jn. 11:43–44), receives divine acclaim (Mt. 16:16) and worship (Lk. 24:52; Jn. 5:23; Heb. 1:6; Rev. 5:12–14), and sits as eternal judge (Jn. 5:22–23, 27). He personally testified to being God (Mt. 26:64; 22:43–44; Lk. 4:17ff; Jn. 8:58).

Fully Man

I believe that God the Son assumed a human body in “the fullness of time” (Gal. 4:4) by miraculous conception and will remain fully God and fully man forever (Jn. 1:18; 1 Tim. 3:16). Jesus Christ acts according to both natures as one person (Acts 20:28). I affirm that Jesus Christ was conceived by and born of the virgin Mary (Is. 7:14; Gal. 4:4), whom the Holy Spirit had “overshadowed” (Mt. 1:18–25; Lk. 1:35). I deny that He merely *appeared* to be human (1 Jn. 4:2–3; 2 Jn. 7). The Son took on a full human nature, which entailed bodily weakness and finite knowledge (Mk. 13:32; Heb. 4:15). He set aside His heavenly position and the independent exercise of some divine prerogatives (Jn. 1:14; 5:19), but I deny that He divested Himself of any divine attributes (Phil. 2:6). By age 12 He had evidenced divine self-awareness in the Temple (Lk. 2:49).

I believe that Christ was born with a sinless nature and has never sinned (Heb. 4:15; 7:26). He perfectly experienced human emotions (Jn. 11:35) and genuine temptation (Heb. 4:15); however, as God, He is *impeccable* (i.e., not able to sin; Jn. 14:30). God’s law was unerringly “within [His] heart” (Ps. 40:8), because He “learned obedience” (Heb. 5:9; cf. Mt. 26:42; Phil. 2:7–8), obeyed His parents (Lk. 2:51), trusted His heavenly Father (Lk. 22:42), walked in the Spirit (Lk. 4:1, 14), and ultimately offered Himself as a vicarious atonement to the Father “through the eternal Spirit” (Heb. 9:14).

The Work of the Lord Jesus Christ

I believe that Jesus is the promised Messiah, the only Mediator between God and men (1 Tim. 2:5). Therefore, I reject that Mary, or any saint or merely human priest, is a mediator. By His life, death, resurrection, and exaltation He has fulfilled the Mosaic Covenant’s shadows and obligations (Rom. 10:4–5) and inaugurated the saving benefits of the Abrahamic (Gal. 3:16), Davidic (Lk. 1:32–33), and New Covenants (1 Cor. 11:25; Heb. 9:15) for all who believe, Jew and Gentile (Eph. 2:12–13). He has sent the promised Spirit to indwell His

people individually and corporately (Gal. 3:14); He reigns as King at the Father's right hand over all whose hearts He has conquered (Acts 2:30–33); and He mediates a better covenant based on better promises for those who trust in His once-for-all sacrifice (Heb. 10:14). I believe that, although God has governed His image-bearers under various dispensations (e.g., pre-Fall, OT theocracy, NT church), faith in Christ alone—first promised, now come—has always been the only way of salvation (Gen. 3:15; Ps. 2:12; Rom. 4:1–8; Gal. 3:8).

Through Mediatorial Offices

I believe that Jesus Christ fulfills His saving work through three offices anticipated in the OT by the act of anointing: prophet (1 Ki. 19:16), priest (Ex. 28:41), and king (1 Sam. 16:3). In validation of Jesus as the Messiah, the Spirit anointed our Lord “without measure” (Jn. 3:34), empowering Him for ministry as had been promised (Is. 42:1–4; Mt. 12:18–21). He came in *humiliation* as the Father's servant (Is. 49:5–7) but also continues in His state of *exaltation* as Messianic prophet, priest, and king. First, He is the *Prophet* (Mt. 4:17; Lk. 4:18–21; Acts 3:22), who is Himself God's climactic Word (Heb. 1:1–2). On earth He taught as one having revelatory authority (Mt. 5:17, 21–22; 7:29), the greatest Prophet (Acts 3:22), who by the Spirit discloses truth (Jn. 16:12–15). Prior to His incarnation, the Son appeared as *the angel of the Lord* to reveal divine truth (Gen. 16:10–13; Jos. 5:13–6:2). Second, He is the *Priest* (Ps. 110:4; Heb. 7:17; 10:12). He offered the greatest sacrifice possible, His own life (Jn. 15:13), as a substitutionary atonement to pay for our sins (Is. 53:5–6; 1 Cor. 15:3). Now, Christ lives to make intercession for those who trust Him (Jn. 17:9; Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25). Third, the Lord Jesus is the *King* (Pss. 2:6–7; 110:1) and exalted Lord (Acts 2:33–36), who presently possesses authority over all the earth (Mt. 28:18; 1 Cor. 15:25) and reigns over those whom He has rescued (Col. 1:13), and who will return to rule on this earth for 1000 years (Rev. 20:4) and then judge all mankind (Jn. 5:22; Acts 17:31).

For Our Salvation

I believe that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world (Jn. 4:42). As our substitute He voluntarily obeyed all His Father's will, including all righteousness required by the Law (Mt. 3:15; Heb. 10:5–7). I affirm that Christ demonstrated perfect righteousness through His preceptive (active) obedience (Rom. 8:3–4; Heb. 7:26) and paid for our sins through His penal (passive) obedience (Phil. 2:8; 1 Pet. 3:18). He suffered this life's miseries and His Father's undiminished wrath as the just penalties of the Law's curse (Gal. 3:10, 13). I also affirm that Jesus Christ rose *bodily* from the grave three days after His death (Mt. 28:6), according to OT Scriptures (1 Cor. 15:4) and His own prophecies (Mt. 12:40; 16:21). We know that Christ died because He was buried, though without “decay” (Acts 13:37); we know that Christ was raised because He appeared to many (1 Cor. 15:3–6). I reject that this resurrection was a myth or a hallucination (Mt. 28:13–15). Forty days later, Christ was further exalted by ascending back to heaven (Lk. 24:51; Eph. 4:10) to be seated rightfully at the right hand of His Father (Acts 2:33; Eph. 1:20; Phil. 2:9; Heb. 1:3).

PNEUMATOLOGY: THE DOCTRINE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

*Thou holy Light, our Guide Divine, oh, cause the Word of Life to shine!
Teach us to know our God aright and call Him Father with delight.* (R. Massie)

The Person of the Holy Spirit

I believe that the Holy Spirit is God, **the Third Person of the Trinity**, the Giver of life (Job 33:4; Jn 6:63). Scripture declares His **deity** in many ways. First, the Spirit is identified as God. Sins against Him, such as blasphemy and lying, elicit strong divine judgment (Mt. 12:31; Acts 5:3–4). Also, to be the temple of God is to be indwelt by the Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16). Second, the Spirit accomplishes the works of God. He creates (Gen. 1:2; Job 33:4), sustains life (Ps. 104:30), breathes out inscripturated words (2 Tim. 3:16), and saves sinners (Tit. 3:5). Third, the Holy Spirit demonstrates the perfections of God. He is omnipotent (Lk. 1:35), omniscient

(Is. 40:13–14), omnipresent (Ps. 139:7–10), sovereign (1 Cor. 12:11), truthful (Jn. 14:17), good (Ps. 143:10), and holy (Ps. 51:11; Is. 63:10–11; 93x in the NT [NASB]). Fourth, the Holy Spirit is coequal with and honored alongside the Father and the Son (Mt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14). Yet, He is distinct from both the Father, to whom He intercedes (Rom. 8:26), and the Son, whom He led on earth (Lk. 4:1, 14). As the Spirit of both the Father (Matt. 10:20) and the Son (Rom. 8:9; Gal. 4:6), who was sent in time by the Father (Jn. 14:26) and the Son (Jn. 15:26; Eph. 4:8, 11), the Holy Spirit has eternally proceeded from both the Father and the Son.

I believe that the Holy Spirit is a divine **Person**, not a force. He is not a power but rather possesses power (Lk. 4:14). He exhibits personal characteristics (e.g., capacity to instruct, Jn. 14:26), volition (1 Cor. 12:11), and emotions such as grief (Eph. 4:30). He ministers as a Person to people (e.g., as the Comforter, Jn. 16:14). He interacts personally with other persons, such as Christ and His disciples (Jn. 16:13) and early church leaders (Acts 15:28). He acts in personal ways: striving with men (Gen. 6:3), reproving sinners (Jn. 16:8), teaching (Lk. 12:12; 1 Jn. 2:27), speaking (Acts 8:29), and making intercession (Rom. 8:26).

The Work of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit performs divine works. I believe the Spirit moved OT prophets to speak and write revelation (2 Sam. 23:2; 2 Pet. 1:21). The Spirit granted wisdom to rule (Gen. 41:38; Num. 27:18; Dt. 34:9), to interpret dreams (Dan. 4:8), and to accomplish skillful tasks (Ex. 31:3), as well as power to lead and achieve victory (Jdg. 3:10; 14:6). His enabling presence in the OT was not necessarily permanent (1 Sam. 11:6; 16:14). I believe that OT saints were regenerated because loving God requires circumcision of the heart (Dt. 10:16), which only God can achieve (Dt. 30:6). Even in the OT, true “circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter” (Rom. 2:28–29). However, because of the newness of the Spirit’s New Covenant ministry (Ezek. 36:26; Jn. 7:38–39; 14:17), I am unconvinced that He permanently indwelt OT saints.

I affirm that the Holy Spirit works in the lives of both unbelievers and believers. The Spirit confronts and exposes the world by the scriptural truth concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment in order to convince sinners that life is found only in Christ (Jn. 16:8–15). I also believe that the Spirit presently restrains the devil in the world and will do so until the Rapture (2 Th. 2:6–7). The most extensive revelation regarding the Spirit’s ministry concerns NT believers. OT prophets enunciate an expectation that His ministry will abound in a new way in the New Covenant (Ezek. 36:27; Joel 2:28), and the NT affirms this (2 Cor. 3:3, 6, 17–18). The essential differences between the Spirit’s OT and NT ministry are an occasional, temporary work in and for only certain persons (OT) versus a pervasive, permanent work in and for all believers (NT).

I believe that repentant sinners are **born again** by the Holy Spirit (Jn. 3:5–8). The New Covenant promises the Spirit’s permanent **indwelling** of all who believe, both individually (1 Cor. 6:19; Jas. 4:5) and corporately (1 Cor. 3:16; Eph. 2:22). Beginning at Pentecost (Acts 1:5; 2:33), Christ **baptizes** His people into His body by His Spirit in the moment of their regeneration (Jn. 1:33; 1 Cor. 12:13), as John baptized by water for repentance (Mt. 3:11). I reject that the baptism of the Spirit is a second blessing to be pursued; instead, Christ pours out His Spirit fully to indwell every believer (Tit. 3:6). Unlike *indwelling*, we are commanded to be “filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18). Although the Spirit’s descent at Pentecost was accompanied by speaking in tongues (Acts 2:4), I reject the teaching that filling entails sign gifts. Miraculous gifts do not define spirituality (1 Cor. 12:31; Gal. 5:22–23). **Filling** is not obtaining more of the Spirit but submitting more to the Spirit in sanctification (Gal. 5:16, 25) through the indwelling Word (Col. 3:16) so that the believer bears Spiritual fruit rather than producing fleshly works (Gal. 5:19–23) and follows the Spirit’s **leading** (Rom. 8:14; Gal. 5:18).

I believe that, due to being indwelt by and baptized through the Holy Spirit, every believer has received at least one **gift** to build up Christ’s body (1 Cor. 12:7; Eph. 4:7; 1 Pet. 4:10). The spiritual gifts are listed in various combinations in Rom. 12:6–8; 1 Cor. 12:8–10, 28–30; Eph. 4:11; and 1 Pet. 4:10–11. I deny that the Spirit imparts *miraculous gifts* (or *sign gifts*) to believers today. Miraculous gifts attested to the truth and power

of the gospel preached by Christ and His apostles in a unique, foundational era (Heb. 2:3–4; 2 Cor. 12:12), parallel to the signs performed by Moses (Ex. 15:25) and Elijah and Elisha (2 Ki. 2) during previous eras of new revelation. The apostles and NT prophets laid the foundation of the church with the doctrine of Christ (Eph. 2:20). For nineteen centuries no one has been an eyewitness of the resurrected Lord and therefore qualified to be an apostle (Mk. 3:14–15; Acts 1:21–22). Nor can any foundation other than Christ be laid (1 Cor. 3:11). Therefore, I believe that miraculous gifts—particularly prophecy, tongues and their interpretation, revelatory knowledge, and healing—have been done away and **ceased** (1 Cor. 13:8). Scriptural revelation is complete and sufficient (2 Tim. 3:17; 2 Pet. 1:3).

ANTHROPOLOGY: THE DOCTRINE OF MAN

*Praise ye the Lord, who with marvelous wisdom hath made thee!
Decked thee with health, and with loving hand guided and stayed thee.* (J. Neander)

I believe God created the first man and woman—Adam and Eve—on the sixth day of history to be upright, to commune with Him, and to serve uniquely in His creation for His glory (Gen. 1:27; 2:7, 22). God fashions and forms every human being in the womb (Pss. 119:73; 139:13–15) and numbers his or her days (Ps. 139:16).

Created in God's Image

I affirm God's declaration that He "created man in His own image" (Gen. 1:27). The essence of the *imago Dei* is ontological. In other words, we represent Him by finitely resembling Him. God gave Adam functional dominion—the responsibility to steward and rule over the earth for His glory (Gen. 1:26–28)—and moral responsibility to His Creator (Gen. 2:17; Rom. 1:20). Regardless of access to Scripture, all humans have a replica of God's moral law etched on our hearts—a divinely implanted understanding that God is God and God is right (Rom. 2:15). Even though Adam plunged all humanity into depravity (see Hamartiology), every person—including those in the womb—continues to bear God's image and possess innate dignity (Gen. 9:6; Ps. 8:3–4). The only solution to this marred image is renewal by faith to be conformed to Christ (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10), the perfect image of the Father (2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15, 19; 2:9; Heb. 1:3).

Attempts to accommodate evolutionary theory (e.g., theistic evolution) erode nearly every major doctrine. I affirm the clear teaching and longstanding interpretation that Genesis 1–11 is a seamless historical narrative of the first human generations. The first *homo sapiens*, Adam and Eve, were divine creations, not animal descendants. I reject all attempts to subvert the historicity of Adam, because the Bible declares him to be the first man and head of the human race through various testimonies, including genealogies (Gen. 5; 1 Chr. 1; Lk. 3), direct propositions (Acts 17:26; 1 Cor. 15:45), Christ's own preaching (Mk. 10:6–8; Lk. 11:50–51), and fundamental theology concerning original sin (Rom. 5:12–21) and bodily resurrection (1 Cor. 15:21–22).

Created with both Body and Soul

I believe that God creates every person with both a body (Gen. 2:7) and a soul (Ec. 12:7; Mt. 10:28). Scripture interchanges various terms to describe the internal functions of man (Dt. 6:5; 1 Th. 5:23; Heb. 4:12), rather than strictly distinguishing between soul and spirit. I believe that the body is to be neither glorified nor desecrated. It is not all or even primarily who we are. When a believer dies, his soul is instantly with the Lord (Lk. 23:43; 2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:23–24), though his body is committed back to earth (Gen. 3:19). Yet, except for the period between death and resurrection, body and soul are inextricably linked (Pro. 17:22; 1 Cor. 6:18). I reject metaphysical dualism that deems the immaterial good and the material evil. God created all things, including human bodies, and pronounced them "very good" (Gen. 1:31; Ps. 139:14). Our bodies are indeed the seat of sinful desires (Mk. 7:21–23), but our non-physical hearts are the root issue (Mt. 5:28). Also, future resurrection of all bodies to be reunited with their souls affirms the body's everlasting significance (Dan. 12:2).

Created Male and Female

I believe that God created man **male and female**. What God says is what man is (Gen. 1:26). I reject all attempts to reconstitute or blur the distinction between the two biological sexes that God created. What God has beautifully designed cannot truly be altered by redesignating one's identity or reassigning one's physicality. As God's image-bearers, men and women are created equal in dignity and value (Gen. 1:27) and interdependent (Gen. 2:23), yet distinct and complementary in constitution and function (Gen. 2:18–23). God created Adam first and has designed and called men to exercise benevolent, sacrificial authority, especially in the home (Gen. 3:9; 1 Cor. 11:3; 1 Tim. 2:13). God named humanity after Adam, who is the representative held responsible (Rom. 5:15; 1 Cor. 15:22). God created Eve to complete Adam as a honorable, fitting helper (Gen. 2:18).

I believe that biblically defined **marriage** is divinely designed and good (Gen. 2:24; Mt. 19:6; 1 Tim. 4:3). As a gospel mystery that pictures Christ and His church (Eph. 5:32), marriage is covenantal (Pro. 2:17; Mal. 2:14), joining one biological male and one biological female in a monogamous union for life (Gen. 2:24; 1 Cor. 7:2). I affirm that all sexual lust, communication, and activity outside of marriage is sin (Mt. 5:28; 1 Cor. 6:18; Heb. 13:4). I affirm that homosexuality is an abomination (Lev. 18:22; 20:13) and unnatural affections are a divine judgment (Rom. 1:26–27). Yet there is hope in the Lord, because like other sins (such as fornication, theft, and drunkenness), same-sex desires and behavior can be forgiven and mortified (1 Cor. 6:9–11).

I affirm that God hates divorce (Mal. 2:16), which contradicts His will that marriage persist until husband and wife are parted by death (Mt. 19:6; 1 Cor. 7:10). The OT allowance for divorce due to Israel's hard hearts does not diminish God's command to us (Mt. 5:31–32; 19:8). When an unbelieving spouse dreadfully deserts a believer, I affirm that the believing spouse is not culpable for a divorce but must remain unmarried (1 Cor. 7:11). Christ speaks of an exception in the case of *porneia* (Mt. 19:9), which is immorality, perhaps during a betrothal period (Mt. 1:18–19). This exception clause entails weighty interpretive considerations. Therefore, while acknowledging that divorce may be permissible for those whose spouses have adulterously violated their covenant vows, my counsel would be to pursue reconciliation, and I would not participate in a remarriage.

HAMARTIOLOGY: THE DOCTRINE OF SIN

*How sad our state by nature is, our sin how deep it stains;
And Satan binds our captive minds fast in his slavish chains.* (I. Watts)

Apart from four chapters (Gen. 1–2; Rev. 21–22), the entire Bible records God's dealings with man in his state of sin. I reject notions that man is inherently good and would improve with better resources or education or human government. "Sin is lawlessness" (1 Jn. 3:4), the *transgression* of image-bearers in rebellion against our Maker and His law (Ps. 51:1), which is summed up in the two great commandments (Mt. 22:37–40). People do not sincerely evolve toward God but idolatrously devolve away from worshiping Him (Rom. 1:21–23); we commit *iniquity* that is morally skewed (1 Ki. 8:47; Ps. 51:2); we woefully miss God's mark of righteousness (Ps. 51:3–4) due to unbelief (Gen. 3:4; Heb. 3:12–19; 11:6), pride (Gen. 3:5), and enmity against God (Rom. 5:10; 8:7). Sin originates internally, not externally (Mk. 7:21–23). The mind is sin's command center (Eph. 4:17–18); we imagine vain things and choose what our hearts want (Mt. 12:35).

The Imputation and Inheritance of Original Sin

I affirm that sin entered the world when Adam, who was able not to sin, forfeited original righteousness by transgressing God's command not to eat from the one forbidden tree in Eden (Gen. 3:6–7; Rom. 5:12). Satan, who as a serpent tempted Eve (Gen. 3:1; Rev. 12:9), had already rebelled against God (Ezek. 28:11–19; 2 Pet. 2:4). Because God declared His creation "very good" on the sixth day and then rested from His work on the seventh day (Gen. 1:31–2:3), I assume that Satan's revolt occurred no sooner than the second week of time.

I affirm that the sin of Adam, our representative, was **imputed** to every person. In him we all became guilty of sin and liable to death (Rom. 5:12, 19; 1 Cor. 15:22). I also affirm that, because of Adam's sin, everyone is conceived and born with **original sin**—a corrupt nature transmitted by our parents (Ps. 51:5). Our hearts are unimaginably deceitful (Jer. 17:9), and “nothing good dwells” in our flesh (Rom. 7:18). By frequently actualizing this indwelling sin (“corrupt desires,” 2 Pet. 2:10) in thought, word, and deed, we confirm that God condemns only the guilty. Everyone is a sinner (Ec. 7:20; 1 Jn. 1:10) and is personally responsible (Ezek. 18:4).

The Permeation and Manifestation of Sin

I affirm that all mankind is **totally depraved**. Ever since the Fall, sin is not just what we do but who we are (1 Jn. 1:8). This does not mean that we sin as much as we could or that we all sin in the same way or to the same degree (Ezek. 8:6; Mt. 23:23). Rather, everyone is corrupted in the entirety of his person—in his thoughts (Rom. 1:28), desires (Eph. 4:22), choices (Rom. 1:32; 7:20), and speech (Rom. 3:13–14). We cannot please God on our own, cannot save ourselves, and cannot initiate reconciliation (Eph. 2:1). We are slaves of sin (Rom. 6:6, 16–17, 20). Apart from God's grace, we cannot be saved (Mt. 19:26; Jn. 3:3, 5) or even comprehend Spiritual truth (1 Cor. 2:14). This inability is natural to our flesh, but that does not mean we are physically incapable, because every person believes and worships something (Rom. 1:25). We are *morally* incapable—we cannot because we will not (Jn. 8:43–46). We voluntarily make culpable decisions that indulge the desires of our flesh and mind as they are enticed by this world (Eph. 2:3; Jas. 1:14; 1 Jn. 2:15–17). Sin involves committing what God has prohibited and omitting what He has prescribed (Rom. 7:15, 19).

I believe that the **unpardonable sin** is a deliberate, blasphemous rejection of the Holy Spirit's ministry of Christ the Savior by someone who has witnessed this ministry (Mt. 12:31). While not identical, apostasy that rejects Christ's person and work also leads to certain death (Heb. 6:6; 1 Jn. 5:16). Though he may yet be outside of Christ, it is unlikely that someone with genuine concern for his soul has committed the unpardonable sin.

The Curse and Damnation Resulting from Sin

I believe that the resulting consequences of sin are misery and death (Gen. 3:17; Rom. 6:23). The death that Satan insinuated was impossible became an immediate *spiritual* reality—a life alienated from God (Gen. 3:7–9; Eph. 2:1). But death was *physical* too, as the cadence of Genesis 5 makes painfully clear (“and he died”). For millennia we have been returning to dust, as God judicially declared (Gen. 3:19; Heb. 9:27). Ultimately, unbelieving sinners incur God's judgment of *eternal* death, the pains and separation of the lake of fire forever (Rev. 20:14). God's righteous curse on Adam's sin has evidenced itself in fractured relationships (Gen. 3:16) and entailed other dramatic consequences for life on earth as well, including “pain in childbirth” (Gen. 3:16), struggle and futility in physical labor (Gen. 3:17–19; Ec. 1:2–3; Rom. 8:20), and animal death (Gen. 3:21).

SOTERIOLOGY: THE DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

Lamb of God, for sinners wounded, Sacrifice to cancel guilt!

None shall ever be confounded who on him their hope have built. (T. Kelly)

Authored by the Father

I believe that God the Father, knowing that man would fall into sin, determined before the world began to save certain sinners from eternal damnation through His Son (Eph. 1:11). By fixing His love on some (**foreknowledge**, Amos 3:2; 1 Pet. 1:2), God mercifully **predestined** their future—to become conformed to Christ and eternally enjoy the privileges of sonship (Rom. 8:29; Eph. 1:5). The Lord has revealed His **election** of those whom He foreknew (1) to display His glory and (2) to humble and assure us that salvation is entirely of His grace (Eph. 1:6; 1 Th. 1:4). I believe that divine election is individual, not just corporate (Rom. 9:6–13), and unconditionally flows from God's good pleasure, not due to any foreseen faith or merit on our part

(Jn. 15:16; Rom. 9:16). Beyond this, we should not presume why God elected some and not others (Eph. 1:3–6; 2 Tim. 1:9; Acts 13:48). I believe that the bases for election (God’s love) and damnation (man’s sin) are asymmetrical (Rom. 9:22; 1 Pet. 2:8). In foreseeing all people under condemnation, God the Father determined by His glorious grace to lift some from sin through Christ and to pass over others (Rom. 9:14, 23; Eph. 2:4).

Accomplished through the Son

Jesus Christ, the divine Son, fulfilled the OT sacrifices as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (Jn. 1:29; Heb. 10:9–10). The death of Christ was voluntary (Ps. 40:8; Is. 53:10; Jn. 10:18), penal (Rom. 4:25), substitutionary (Is. 53:5; Rom. 5:8), and atoning (Heb. 10:10, 14). The cross is the result, not the cause, of the Father’s love for fallen sinners (Jn. 3:16–17). By pouring out His lifeblood at Golgotha, Christ **redeemed** man from sin’s bondage and the Law’s curse (Mk. 10:45; Gal. 3:13; 4:4–5) so that our sins might be removed and forgiven—dismissed forever (Mt. 26:28; Col. 1:14). By His atonement Christ **reconciled** sinful enemies to His Father (Rom. 5:9–10; 2 Cor. 5:18; Col. 1:20), bringing peace by **propitiating** the wrath that His Father justly owes those who have sinned against His holy nature and law (Rom. 3:24–25; 1 Jn. 4:10).

I believe that Christ died for every person’s sins (1 Tim. 2:6; 1 Jn. 2:2). The **provision** of His atonement is *intentionally universal*. I also believe that the **application** of His atoning work is *particular* because sinners must repent and believe to be forgiven. This distinction can be seen in OT typology that Christ fulfilled. On the day of atonement Aaron placed his hands on the scapegoat and confessed “all the iniquities of the sons of Israel” (Lev. 16:21). But not all Israelites were saved. Paul also speaks of both universal provision and particular application by saying that we hope in “God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers” (1 Tim. 4:10).

Applied by the Holy Spirit

I believe in the universal proclamation of the gospel (Mt. 28:19). I also believe that the Holy Spirit applies the benefits of salvation only to those who believe into Christ (Jn. 3:16; Rom. 8:9–11; Eph. 1:3). Not everyone summoned outwardly responds in faith (Mt. 22:14). I affirm, however, that those whom God **effectually calls** through His living Word (1 Pet. 1:23) will certainly come (Jn. 6:37; 1 Pet. 2:9), because the Spirit illumines their understanding (2 Cor. 4:6; Heb. 10:32) and opens their hearts to turn to the Lord (Acts 16:14). Through faith in the Savior who is revealed by “the word of truth” (2 Cor. 5:17; Jas. 1:18), those who “were by nature children of wrath” (Eph. 2:3) are **regenerated** (born again from above) by the Holy Spirit (Jn. 3:5–6; Tit. 3:5).

I deny that anyone is saved but by grace (Eph. 2:8) or that there is any way to God but by Christ (Jn. 14:6; 1 Tim. 2:5). All of salvation, including faith (Phil. 1:29) and repentance (Acts 11:18; 2 Tim. 2:25), is a gift of God. Such grace prevents man from any boasting (1 Cor. 1:26–31; Eph 2:8–9). I believe that this God-given faith is the instrument by which the Holy Spirit **regenerates** us. What God assures us is that the Spirit gives new life (Jn. 3:8; Eph. 2:5); what we see is the sinner receiving “Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel” (*TT*; Jn. 1:12–13). I believe that **conversion** is the wholehearted turning from sin to trust in and serve a gracious Savior (Acts 26:18; 1 Th. 1:9). Conversion by necessity entails willing **repentance** (Mt. 3:2; 4:17; Acts 2:38). One cannot embrace Jesus Christ as His Savior unless he is renouncing his sin, including his reliance on anything else for salvation (Jn. 14:6; Acts 4:12). I also affirm that conversion requires **faith** (Rom. 3:21–26). Faith saves, not due to its subjective quality or merit but because of its divine Object (Acts 16:31); faith alone is the instrument through which God exercises His saving power (Rom. 1:16). Saving faith involves knowledge, sincere assent, and volitional confidence that the crucified and risen Christ alone redeems sinners from sin and death (Rom. 10:9–10). Because He is gracious (Ex. 20:6; Ps. 68:5) and because they have not willfully enacted their depravity (Ps. 51:5) or rejected God with understanding (Dt. 1:39; Jon. 4:11), I believe God saves the unborn and infants who die, as well as persons with severe intellectual disability. We can be comforted that, though they will not return to us, we will someday go to be where they are in God’s presence (2 Sam. 12:23).

In Christ believers receive all Spiritual blessings (Eph. 1:3). I affirm that **justification** is God’s righteous declaration that sinners who have been united to Christ by faith (Rom. 3:21–26) are entirely righteous before Him, not by their works (Gal. 2:16), but on the basis of His Son’s vicarious life and death (Phil. 3:9). A justified sinner receives forgiveness of sins (Col. 1:14), is no longer condemned (Rom. 8:1), and is clothed with the righteousness of his holy Savior (Is. 61:10; 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9). Justification in no way *makes* a sinner righteous, though that complementary work of sanctification begins simultaneously. In union with Christ, believers also receive **adoption** (sonship) from God the Father (Gal. 4:5), of which the Spirit testifies in our hearts (Rom. 8:16; Gal. 4:6). As with other aspects of our salvation (e.g., holiness), though we *already* are “fellow heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8:17; Gal. 4:7), we have *not yet* experienced the inheritance and full privileges of sonship that await our glorification (Rom. 8:23).

I believe that “no one will see the Lord” without being sanctified (Heb. 12:14). **Sanctification** is rooted in the holiness of God (Eph. 1:4; 1 Pet. 1:14–16) and entails positional (1 Cor. 1:2; Heb. 10:10), progressing (1 Cor. 1:18; Eph. 4:24), and perfected facets (**glorification**, Rom. 8:29; Phil. 3:21). Sanctification is the believer’s consecration and renewal (Rom. 12:1–2; Eph. 4:22–24) in union with and according to the image of the incarnate Son (1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 3:18; 2 Pet. 3:18) so that by God’s Spirit he is progressively enabled to die unto sin and to live unto righteousness in hope of glory (Rom. 8:13; 12:2; Col. 3:5; 1 Jn. 3:3). Unlike the monergistic work of justification, sanctification is a synergistic work of God and man. We can and must diligently work out by faith what God’s Spirit is actively enabling in Christ (Phil. 2:12–13). I deny that anyone is fully sanctified prior to death (Mt. 6:12; Rom. 7:18; 1 Jn. 1:8). If we experience God’s Spirit struggling within us against our flesh (Gal. 5:16–17), we should keep fighting with eyes trusting in and fixed on Christ, instead of despairing in our own residual sinfulness (Rom. 7:24–25; Phil. 1:6).

I believe that those whom God saves in Christ will evidence their faith by **perseverance** and cannot fall out of God’s grace (Jn. 10:27–29; Rom. 8:28–39). Christ’s atonement and intercession (2 Tim. 1:12; Heb. 7:25), as well as the Spirit’s pledge (Eph. 1:13–14), ensure the believer’s **security**. But we cannot have assurance merely by profession. Fruit flows from saving faith, not to earn but to evidence the new birth (Jas. 2:14–26). Those who fall away from the faith or remain satisfied in sin do not lose their salvation but demonstrate that they have never experienced the life of God in their soul (1 Jn. 2:19; 3:9). I believe that true Christians are to have **assurance** of their standing in Christ (2 Pet. 1:10), which is grounded fundamentally in the saving promises of a trustworthy God (Rom. 8:33–34; 2 Cor. 1:20). We also must rely on the Spirit who seals us (2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13) and bears witness in our soul of our sonship in Christ (Jn. 14:16; Rom. 8:16; Eph. 1:13). Finally, our assurance is validated through a daily, obedient walk toward God according to His Word (1 Jn. 2:3–6).

ECCLESIOLOGY: THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH

*Elect from ev’ry nation, Yet one o’er all the earth;
Her charter of salvation—one Lord, one faith, one birth.* (S. Stone)

The Identity and Inauguration of the Church

I believe that the church is **distinct from** and does not replace **Israel** (Rom. 11:28–29), the nation whom God chose to bless by covenant in three key ways: a promised (geopolitical) land, abundant seed, and a blessing through which God would grace all families of the earth (Gen. 12:1–3). The **church** began at Pentecost (Acts 2:1ff; 11:15) and is the multiethnic body of Christ comprised of all believers since then (Acts 15:14; Gal. 3:27–29). The church was still future during the earthly ministry of Christ, who promised to build it (Mt. 16:18). Though the OT anticipates divine blessing for Gentiles (Ps. 67:7), the union of believing Jews and Gentiles as “one new man” (Eph. 2:14–16) is a divine “mystery” revealed through Paul (Eph. 3:4–6). Today God displays multifaceted wisdom to a celestial audience by Christ’s work of building His church (Mt. 16:18; Eph. 3:10).

Individual believers are not independent entities but members of Christ's body, the church. I believe that Scripture speaks of the church in both *universal* and *local* manifestations. The **universal church** consists of all those since Pentecost who are in Christ and "enrolled in heaven" (Eph. 1:23; Heb. 12:23). This "household of God" transcends time and place (1 Tim. 3:15). The church is founded on the apostles' doctrine (Eph. 3:5), which has been handed down faithfully and preserved in Scripture (2 Th. 2:15), with Jesus Christ being its "corner *stone*" (Eph. 2:20). However, the church is not just all believers who are either asleep in Christ or alive today but **local assemblies** of those who have been baptized upon credible profession of faith and who have organized themselves by covenant under scriptural leadership (1 Cor. 4:17; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:1; 1 Th. 1:1).

The Life and Worship of the Church

I believe that Christ is the **head of the church** (Eph. 4:15; 5:23). Our life flows from and is governed by Him (Jn. 15:5; Col. 1:18; 3:4). God has designed Christ's church to fit together as stones (Eph. 2:21–22; 1 Pet. 2:5) that mature into Christlikeness by faithful, pastoral teaching that equips the body for mutual ministry (Eph. 4:13–16). The **Bible** directs the church in reverent worship, apostolic instruction (1 Tim. 4:11, 13), prayer (1 Tim. 2:8), fellowship (Acts 2:42), evangelism (Mt. 28:19–20), Christian service (1 Pet. 4:10), and the observance of Christ's ordinances. Word-saturated, gathered worship is "our offering up to God the united spiritual responses of which He alone is worthy" (PM) and involves singing (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16), reading the Scriptures (1 Tim. 4:13; Col. 4:16), praying (1 Tim. 2:1; Col. 4:2), preaching (2 Tim. 4:2), and giving (1 Cor. 16:1–2; 2 Cor. 9:7). I affirm the NT pattern of gathering on the Lord's Day (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2; Rev. 1:10) because Christ arose on the first day of the week (Mt. 28:1, 6). Although Sunday is not the Christian Sabbath (Col. 2:16), the Lord's Day should be set apart and filled with Godward delight (Ps. 118:24; Is. 58:13–14).

Though all true worship accords with Scripture (Jn. 4:24), I believe that Christ ordained two specific rites for His church to observe until His return. By corporately practicing these **ordinances**, we obey our Lord, portray His saving work, and testify to our individual participation in it. I believe that **baptism** is "the immersion in water of a new Christian, in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit" (Mt. 28:19; Acts 8:12, 38) to "signif[y] our spiritual union with our Savior in His death, burial, and resurrection for the forgiveness of our sins" (*TT*; Acts 2:38; Rom. 6:3–5). As a Baptist, I affirm that only those with credible testimonies of faith should be baptized, not merely professors of faith and certainly not infants (Acts 16:31–34). Immersion is the scriptural mode, based on NT pattern (Mt. 3:16; Jn. 3:23), symbolism (Col. 2:12), and the lexical meaning of βαπτίζω (to dip, submerge). I deny that baptism regenerates a sinner or contributes to salvation at all (Mk. 16:16; Acts 16:31; Rom. 10:9–10). However, I affirm that baptism is the first step of Christian obedience and is avoided only to a professing believer's peril (Mt. 28:19; Acts 2:38). I also affirm a second ordinance, the regular observance of **the Lord's Table** by baptized believers until He comes (Mt. 26:26–27; 1 Cor. 11:23–26). While Christ graciously renews His people through our self-examination and confession of sins and memorialization of His death for us (1 Cor. 10:16; 11:28, 31; Mt. 26:28), I deny that Christ's body is physically or spiritually present in the elements of bread or the fruit of the vine. Our incarnate Lord offered Himself on the cross as the once-for-all sacrifice (Heb. 10:10, 18) and is now seated in heaven (Heb. 1:3).

The Leadership and Polity of the Church

I believe that a local church under the headship of Christ has two **offices**: elder and deacon. I affirm that **elders** are qualified men (1 Tim. 3:2–7; Tit. 1:6–9) who fulfill the functions of overseeing and shepherding God's flock (Acts 20:17, 28). I also affirm that churches should have a multiplicity of elders (Acts 14:23; Phil. 1:1). However, there will usually be differentiation in function, with some elders accepting the responsibility to "work hard at preaching and teaching" (1 Tim. 5:17). I reject the notion that Scripture is unclear or culturally antiquated in prescribing this office for qualified men only (1 Tim. 2:12). Among the qualifications is that an overseer be a *one-woman man*, which I believe also means that he has never been divorced (1 Tim. 3:2). Christian

women serve the church in countless ways, including teaching other women and young children, but not by teaching or leading the congregation or holding office. I further affirm that Christ provides **deacons**, who are also qualified men (1 Tim. 3:12), to serve by coordinating practical care with a spiritual mindset (Acts 6:1–7).

I affirm **congregational polity**, not presbyterian or episcopalian. Although elders lead a local church, Christ has entrusted its governance to the congregation itself. The keys of Christ’s kingdom to bind and loose (church discipline) are vested in the assembly gathered in Christ’s name (Mt. 18:18). The congregation also elects officers (Acts 6:5; 15:22, 25) and is responsible to discern sound doctrine (Gal. 1:6–9; 1 Th. 5:21; 1 Jn. 4:1). Furthermore, I believe that each local assembly should operate autonomously, rather than submitting to the governance of either a state-established religion or a denominational body (Mt. 22:21; Rev. 2:1, 8, etc.).

I believe that **membership** in a faithful local congregation is critical. There is no NT warrant for a churchless Christian. Instead, the converts in the Jerusalem church were numbered (Acts 2:41, 47); certain people selected the first deacons (Acts 6:5); those outside and those inside the church were clearly distinguished (1 Cor. 5:12); the assembly’s majority exercised church discipline (2 Cor. 2:6); and widows were enrolled for ministry purposes (1 Tim. 5:9–12). I believe that membership is essential for several reasons, including mutual edification (Heb. 10:25), accountability and discipline (Mt. 18:15–17; Heb. 13:17), pastoral care (1 Pet. 5:1–5; Acts 20:29–30), and one-another ministry among the covenanted body (1 Cor. 12:21).

The Unity and Holiness of the Church

I affirm that both the unity and the purity of His church are of utmost concern to Christ. He died to make all His sheep “one flock with one shepherd” (Jn. 10:16–18) and petitioned His Father that they “may be perfected in unity” (Jn. 17:23). Love for other believers is critical to maintaining true spiritual unity (Eph. 4:2; Col. 3:14). Christ also died to sanctify and present us “holy and blameless” (Eph. 5:25–27). Paul admonishes overseers to be alert to what would “draw away” the flock (Acts 20:28–30). Therefore, I affirm scriptural **separation** from individuals or groups whose lives or teachings deny or subvert the gospel. In our doctrine and through our lives we must “contend earnestly for the faith” (Jude 3–4). There are three primary categories of separation: from the world’s values and practices (Rom. 12:1–2; 1 Jn. 2:15–17); from false teaching and false teachers (Rom. 16:17–18; 2 Cor. 6:14–7:1; Gal. 1:8–9); and from professing Christians who persistently disobey biblical teaching (2 Th. 3:6–15; Tit. 3:10). I deny any Christian fellowship to those who deny fundamental doctrine or defy Scripture by lifestyle (2 Jn. 9–11). In addition, I believe in separating from those whose teaching or practice extends Christian fellowship to those who deny fundamental doctrine (Gal. 2:11).

For one whose moral conduct transgresses biblical teaching (1 Cor. 5:11; 6:9–10; Gal. 5:19–21) or whose doctrine is antithetical to the Christian faith (1 Tim. 1:19–20; 2 Tim. 2:17–18), we are first to confront him humbly, in order to restore him to obedience (Mt. 18:15–16; Gal. 6:1). If multiple confrontations do not yield repentance, we are to question his profession and exclude him from the church as an apparent unbeliever (Mt. 18:17). When local churches take this sobering step of delivering a person unto Satan “for the destruction of [the] flesh,” hope of salvation remains in view—that his “spirit may be saved” (1 Cor. 5:5; 1 Tim. 1:20).

ESCHATOLOGY: THE DOCTRINE OF LAST THINGS

*No more let sins and sorrows grow, nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make his blessings flow far as the curse is found.* (I. Watts)

Personal Eschatology

As final as death seems, there is life beyond the grave (Pss. 49:15; 73:24). I affirm that, except those whom God translated to heaven (Gen. 5:24; 2 Ki. 2:11) and those whom Christ raptures, everyone will physically die because of sin (Gen. 2:17) and face divine judgment (Heb. 9:27). I believe in a literal **hell**. Every individual

person will be resurrected (Job 19:26–27; Is. 26:19) and either blessed with everlasting life (Jn. 11:25–26) or banished from God’s presence (2 Th. 1:7–9) to everlasting conscious punishment in **the lake of fire** (Mt. 25:41–46; Mk. 9:48). Therefore, I reject the heresies of both annihilation, which denies the eternal existence of unbelievers (Jude 13), and universalism, which asserts that all people will ultimately be saved (Mt. 26:24; Jn. 3:36). I reject the concept of soul sleep as well. When believers die, their souls enter an **intermediate state** where they are immediately and consciously with the Lord (Lk. 23:43; 2 Cor. 5:8) and experience perfected sanctification (Heb. 12:23). Their bodies “have fallen asleep in Jesus” (1 Th. 4:14), so that in spite of material decay (Gen. 3:19; Jn. 11:39) they will not be obliterated but eventually transformed by resurrection into a glorious, imperishable form (1 Cor. 15:42–43; 1 Th. 4:16).

General Eschatology

God reveals truth about last things so that His people will hope in the appearing of our Savior, Jesus Christ (Tit. 2:13), and be diligent to be pure and blameless (2 Pet. 3:14; 1 Jn. 3:2–3). I affirm that we must live with expectancy that Jesus could come at any moment (Lk. 12:40), because His return is **imminent** (Mt. 25:13; Heb. 10:37; Rev. 22:20). Christ will return visibly and bodily, just as He ascended (Acts 1:10–11). I believe that Jesus Christ will bring from heaven all those who have died in Him and reunite them with resurrected bodies, while those in Christ who are still alive will join them in the air to be glorified (1 Jn. 3:2) and dwell with Him forever (1 Th. 4:14–17). After this **pretribulation Rapture** we will give an account before Christ’s judgment seat (Bema) for our works and stewardship as believers (1 Cor. 3:12–15; 2 Cor. 5:10). Those outside of Christ left on earth will enter the **Tribulation**, seven years of terrifying wrath poured out by God and the Lamb (Rev. 6–18), unparalleled in human history (Mt. 24:21) and dominated by the deceptive, abominable **Antichrist** (Dan. 9:27). He is “the man of lawlessness [and] son of destruction” who will exalt himself to be worshiped in the temple (Mt. 24:15; 2 Th. 2:3–4). Our Lord will preserve all whom He raptures from this “hour of testing” (Rev. 3:10; 1 Th. 5:9). I believe that, after the Tribulation and immediately before the Millennium, Christ will **return** in power and glory with His saints and angels to rule the world (Mt. 24:29–31; 1 Th. 3:13). At this time the beast and false prophet will be cast into the lake of fire, their armies will be conquered at Armageddon, and Satan will be bound in an abyss for 1000 years (Zec. 14:3–5; Rev. 19:11–20:3).

I believe that the Gentile church presently participates in the spiritual blessings of the New Covenant (Heb. 8:6–12); yet this covenant still will be fulfilled on earth for **national Israel**, not just some Jews (Mt. 19:28). When Israel sees their crucified and risen Messiah at His second coming, they will repent and be cleansed of their sins (Zec. 12:10; 13:1). This spiritual transformation will coincide with Israel inheriting the land among the nations in fulfillment of OT promises and prophecies (Is. 2:1–4; Ezek. 36:28; Zec. 14:16–21). The NT also affirms Israel’s future, especially as part of Paul’s defense that God’s Word has not failed (Rom. 11:25–27).

I affirm a **futurist** understanding of prophetic Scriptures, such as Revelation. Therefore, I believe that after the tribulation Christ will personally, physically reign on this earth over its nations for 1000 literal years called the **Millennium** (Zec. 14:9; Rev. 20:1–6). This period is situated sequentially in the book of Revelation between the return of Christ (Rev. 19:11–16) and His final defeat and damnation of Satan (Rev. 20:7–10). After this victory Christ will judge from the great white throne (Rev. 20:11–15). All sinners whose names are not written in the Lamb’s book of life will be reunited with resurrected bodies (Dan. 12:2), doomed by the Man appointed to judge the world righteously (Jn. 5:28–29; Acts 17:31), and thrown into the lake of fire forever (Rev. 20:15).

I believe that this present heaven and earth with its works will burn and pass away (2 Pet. 3:10–11), and all God’s redeemed people will dwell in His presence in a New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:10–27) situated in a **new heaven and new earth** (Is. 66:22; 2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1–5). This glorious life “will be sinless, sorrowless, painless, tearless, [and] deathless” (*TTT*), the never-ending life of worshiping, communing with, and serving the Triune God who alone is worthy (Rev. 4–5). “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus” (Rev. 22:20).