

Doctrinal Statement

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Compiled for Ordination Council

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“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR? Or WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him *be* the glory forever. Amen.”

Romans 11:33-36

My Testimony

I grew up in a Christian home in northern Minnesota and heard the gospel from a young age. At the age of four and a half, my pastor preached a sermon about Jesus' death on the cross. He so vividly painted the picture of God's love that I was overwhelmed. I finally realized that God loved *me*, not just the whole world. When we got home, my dad explained how I could receive eternal life, and I asked Jesus to be my Savior. Today I am still amazed at the gospel—simple enough for a child to understand but too profound for any human to fully comprehend.

During high school I worked at Bass Lake Camp in Winnebago, Minnesota, for three summers. I had never had so much fun shoveling slime from a lake, scrubbing toilets, washing dishes, or cleaning up after messy junior campers. I loved it! Of course, I wondered why I was enjoying myself so intensely. Finally, it hit me—I was serving God and not myself! Not only did I scrub bathrooms, but I also heard missionary speakers, who usually asked the campers the question, “Does God want you to serve Him on the mission field?” Gradually, God gave me a deep-seated conviction that He wanted me to serve Him in that way.

In order to gain training for ministry, I attended Faith Baptist Bible College in Ankeny, Iowa, and continued my education at the seminary, where I received the Master of Divinity degree. Most vital to my training has been my experience in our church, Campus Baptist Church of Ames, Iowa, whose members and staff have supported, loved, and stretched me.

I am married to Holly (Davis), whose parents were missionaries in Bogotá, Colombia. We have been married for over five years and have two children (Lucas—2 1/2 and Eliana—10 months).

Since July of 2002, we have served as pre-field missionaries with the Association of Baptists for World Evangelism (ABWE) on our way to Colombia, South America. When we arrive in Bogotá, we will assist Colombians in reaching their country for Christ. I will teach in the Colombia Baptist Seminary and help to plant new Baptist churches.

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Revelation

I believe that God has revealed Himself to us through various means. Nature declares His glory, prophets have proclaimed His words, and at times He has even spoken directly to people. His ultimate disclosure, Jesus, can now only be understood clearly through His written Word, the Bible. The sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments are indeed the very Word of God, recorded without error in the original manuscripts. The Bible is my sole and sufficient guide for all that I believe and do.

General revelation is God's disclosure of Himself through natural phenomena that are accessible to all people. These phenomena include the heavens (Psalm 19:1), man's conscience (Romans 2:14-15), the seasons (Acts 14:17), and ultimately all created things (Romans 1:20). This general revelation renders every person without excuse before the wrath of God, but does not give us enough information to be saved (Romans 10:13-14).

Special revelation is God's disclosure of Himself through supernatural phenomena to certain people. These phenomena include theophanies (Genesis 32:24-30), personal communication (Genesis 2:16), visions (Ezekiel 1:1), miracles (Exodus 14:21-31), prophecy (Hebrews 1:1) the Incarnation (John 1:14; Hebrews 1:2), and Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16).

Scripture has four primary characteristics.

(1) The Bible is my *authority* because it is "inspired by God" (2 Timothy 3:16). As such, the Scriptures must be believed and obeyed. The Word of God is self-authenticating—nothing can sit in judgment over the Scriptures because they are the highest authority (1 Thessalonians 2:13; John 17:17). The Bible we possess today is trustworthy (infallible) throughout and was recorded without error (inerrant) in the original manuscripts. The Holy Spirit guided the writers (2 Peter 1:20-21), so that they used their skills, abilities, and personalities to record the exact words that God wanted.

(2) The Bible is *clear* in its teaching. God expects us to understand the Scriptures and obey them. In fact, the Scriptures are clear enough for children to learn and obey their precepts (Deuteronomy 6:6-7).

(3) The Bible is *necessary* for accurately knowing God and relating to Him in the 21st Century. Without the written Word, we would not know the gospel, nor would we understand anything of God's special revelation throughout history, nor would we understand His program for us today (1 Timothy 4:13; 2 Timothy 3:17).

(4) The Bible is *sufficient* for "everything pertaining to life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3). We do not need any other revelation from God because He has given us the Scriptures, which enable us to be "adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:17).

Interpretation of Scripture. The Scriptures should be interpreted according to the grammatical-historical method. The interpreter seeks the intended meaning in the text by studying the literary and historical context, the grammar and syntax of the passage, the semantics of the words used, and the theological context of the passage in relation to God's progressive revelation. I believe that the interpreter must take into account the various dispensations (distinctive economies) of God's program, consistently distinguishing between Israel and the church (1 Corinthians 10:32; Ephesians 2:15). After the passage is interpreted it must be appropriately applied to the contemporary culture and obeyed (James 1:21-27).¹

¹ On biblical interpretation I recommend Grant Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991).

God

I believe in the one true God, who is infinite in being and perfection. He is the “self-existent One,” the eternal “I AM,” who does not rely on anyone or anything for His existence. He is the Creator, Sustainer, and Lord of all things. I believe that the three Persons of the Godhead—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—share one divine nature (essence). In the face of God’s incomparable glory, we must worship Him alone.

The existence of God is assumed in the Word of God (Genesis 1:1). Man has an innate knowledge of God, which renders him accountable to the Righteous Judge (Romans 1:20-21). Our approach to God must begin with the understanding that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him (Hebrews 11:6).

The essence of God. God is separate from all that is created (Genesis 1:1; John 1:3). He is spirit (John 4:24), and as such He is without division. God is self-existent (Exodus 3:14; “I AM WHO I AM”), meaning that He relies on nothing for His existence (Acts 17:24-25). God transcends all spatial dimensions, and yet is also present in them at all times (Ephesians 4:6). God is timeless (Psalm 90:2), yet He can act within time as He chooses (Galatians 4:4). God is immutable and infinite—He cannot change in His essence (Malachi 3:6; James 1:17), and He is immeasurable in His being (Job 11:7-9).

The personality of God. God is a personal being, having intellect (Isaiah 40:13), emotions (Isaiah 62:5), and a will (Ephesians 1:11). Throughout the Scriptures He interacts with people (e.g. Genesis 3:9, “Where are you?”). God possesses infinite creativity to which His creation attests (Psalm 8:3-4; Romans 1:20). His knowledge, wisdom, and power have no limits (1 John 3:20; Romans 16:27; Isaiah 40:28). He is good (Psalm 100:5), holy (Isaiah 6:3), sovereign (Daniel 4:35), righteous (Romans 2:5-6), and merciful (Deuteronomy 4:31). God exhibits perfection in all that He does (Deuteronomy 32:4).

God the Creator. God created the heavens and the earth in six literal twenty-four hour days by simply speaking (Genesis 1). The universe was created by Him, is sustained by Him, and is ultimately directed toward His glory. “For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him *be* the glory forever. Amen” (Romans 11:36).

The Trinity.² We often think of the Trinity as a doctrine, when in fact the Trinity is God! Although we cannot fully comprehend God’s triune nature, by faith we can accept what the Bible teaches.

In Scripture, there are three who are recognized as God. The Father (John 6:27), the Son (Hebrews 1:8), and the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3-4). These three are so described in Scripture that we are compelled to think of them as three distinct Persons. The Father and the Son are distinct (Matthew 3:16-17). The Father and the Son are distinct from the Holy Spirit (John 14:16). The Holy Spirit is a Person, not an impersonal force (John 16:13). These three Persons fully and eternally share one divine nature, or essence (John 10:30-38). The distinction of the Persons is eternal and necessary (John 1:1). This does not mean that there are three Gods because the three Persons exist in the one divine nature. These three Persons are equal in essence (Matthew 28:19).

The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are ontologically equal but unique in their relationships to one another. The Son is subject to the Father (1 Corinthians 11:3; 15:24-28). The Spirit proceeds from the Father and was sent by the Son (John 15:26; 16:7) to bring the Son glory (John 16:13-14).

² Dr. Myron Houghton has greatly helped me in formulating my views on the Trinity.

Jesus Christ

I believe in Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary in Bethlehem, lived a perfect life, and went to the cross to pay for my sins and those of the whole world. He rose again on the third day, conquering death and confirming that He is the Son of God. He ascended into heaven and now sits at the right hand of God the Father. He will return for His own at the rapture, and later come in power to set up His millennial kingdom on the earth.

Jesus Christ has always existed as the Son of God. As such, He shares the essence of deity with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit (John 1:1; Colossians 1:19). For all eternity the Son of God has enjoyed the glories of His relationship within the Godhead (John 17:5).

The Son of God became a sinless human being and lived among us. In order to bring Himself glory, God sent His Son to this sin-cursed earth to provide a way of salvation for us (John 1:14; Luke 19:10). He was born of a virgin in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:1), a miracle that kept Him from sin and attested to His deity (Luke 1:35). He lived a perfect life of obedience to God the Father (Hebrews 4:15; 5:8-9). His life perfectly communicated who God is (John 1:18; Colossians 1:15-19). He is both fully God (John 1:1) and fully man (Hebrews 2:14-18). He has two natures perfectly united in one Person (Acts 3:15; 1 Corinthians 2:8).

Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the prophecies of the Old Testament. He perfectly fulfilled the prophecies relating to the birth of the Messiah (Isaiah 7:14; Micah 5:2), the ministry of the Messiah (Isaiah 42:1), the death of the Messiah (Isaiah 53), and the resurrection of the Messiah (Psalm 16:10). He will fulfill the prophecies concerning the future Davidic kingdom (Luke 1:32-33).

Jesus Christ died on a cross to pay for the sins of the world. He willingly bore our sins on the cross (1 Peter 2:24) as our sinless Substitute. The “gospel” is the good news that Jesus Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day (1 Corinthians 15:1-5). His death secured the salvation of the elect (Ephesians 5:25) and made possible the salvation of all people (John 3:17). His death provides redemption, which is freedom from the slave market of sin (Galatians 3:13; Ephesians 1:7). God provided a way for us to have peace with Him through the shed blood of His Son (Colossians 1:20) because Christ’s death was a propitiation for our sin (Romans 3:25; 1 John 2:2). In other words, His wrath towards sin was perfectly satisfied by the death of His Son.

Jesus Christ rose from the dead on the third day in the body, though glorified, in which He was crucified. Many people saw Jesus Christ after His resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:5-8), and He ate fish before them, showing His corporeal existence (Luke 24:41-43). God declared Jesus Christ the “Son of God with power” by the resurrection (Romans 1:4). He conquered death through the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:54-57), and assured the resurrection of believers (1 Corinthians 15:21-23).

Jesus Christ ascended into heaven, where He sits at the right hand of the Father. After forty days of post-resurrection ministry to the disciples, Jesus ascended to heaven (Acts 1:3, 9). On the day of Pentecost, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to those who believed in Him (John 15:26; Acts 2; 11:15-17). At this very moment, Jesus sits interceding for believers before God the Father (Romans 8:34).

Jesus Christ will return for His own at the rapture and later come in power and glory to set up His kingdom. The Lord Jesus could return at any moment. He will catch those who believe in Him away to be with Him forever (John 14:1-3; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). The Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah coming as a mighty king will begin being fulfilled at the Second Coming of Christ (Daniel 7:13-14).

Holy Spirit

I believe in the Holy Spirit, a Person who shares the full essence of deity with God the Father and God the Son. Although He cannot be seen, the Holy Spirit is dynamically moving in the world today, bringing people to faith in Jesus Christ and guiding believers to be vibrant witnesses in a dark world.

The Holy Spirit is God. The Holy Spirit is one of the three Persons of the Trinity. Jesus said, speaking of the Father's giving of the Spirit, "He will give you another Helper" (John 14:16). Jesus was clearly saying that the Spirit was of the same essence as He was, and He even spoke of the Spirit's coming to them in personal terms: "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you" (John 14:18).

The Scriptures speak of the Holy Spirit doing works that only God can do. He was involved in creation (Job 33:4), inspiration of Scripture (2 Peter 1:21), and the virgin conception (Luke 1:35). Another clear text that points to His deity is found in Acts 5:3-4. Ananias lied "to the Holy Spirit," and in the next verse the text says that he lied "to God." This equates the Holy Spirit and God.

The Holy Spirit is a person. He has intellect (1 Corinthians 2:10-11), emotions (Ephesians 4:30), and a will (1 Corinthians 12:11). The Spirit also works in ways that show His personality, such as teaching (John 14:26), restraining (Genesis 6:3), and interceding (Romans 8:26).³

The Holy Spirit glorifies Jesus Christ. Everything that He does brings glory to Christ (John 16:14). In order to glorify Christ, the Holy Spirit carries out numerous ministries. He convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8). He regenerates the unsaved (John 3:3-8); He indwells the believer (1 Corinthians 6:19); He is involved in baptizing believers into the body of Christ at the moment of salvation (1 Corinthians 12:13); He is given to a believer as a "pledge," guaranteeing our inheritance (Ephesians 1:13-14). He distributes spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:11); He fills believers (Ephesians 5:18). He also teaches (John 16:12-15), guides (Romans 8:14), assures of salvation (Romans 8:16), and intercedes for believers (Romans 8:26).

The Holy Spirit has ministered in distinct ways throughout history. The Holy Spirit clearly has a different ministry in the church age than He did in the Old Testament (John 7:38-39). At times believers were indwelt by the Spirit in the Old Testament, but this ministry was not necessarily permanent (Psalm 51:11). Many passages in the Old Testament speak of the Spirit coming "upon" people, empowering them for service, or allowing them to prophesy (Judges 3:10; 14:6, 1 Samuel 10:6). The Holy Spirit also empowered people for special service in the NT period (Acts 4:31) and for prophecy (Acts 19:6).

Today believers are permanently indwelt by the Holy Spirit (John 7:38-39; 14:16-17; 1 Corinthians 6:19). The Holy Spirit gives spiritual gifts to believers upon their conversion (1 Corinthians 12:11; Romans 12:3-8). The sign gifts (i.e. prophecy, tongues, interpretation of tongues, miracles, and healing) are not for today because the church has already been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets (Ephesians 2:20), and the main purpose of the sign gifts was to authenticate the apostles and their message (Hebrews 2:3-4). The gift of tongues was the God-given ability to speak in a language unknown to the speaker (Acts 2:11). The use of tongues as a "personal prayer language" is foreign to the New Testament (1 Corinthians 14).

³ The use of masculine pronouns in reference to the Spirit (e.g. John 16:13-14) does not prove His personality. The masculine pronouns used of the Spirit relate grammatically to the masculine word *parakletos* ("Helper"), which is in each case introduced previously in the discourse. At the same time, the neuter pronouns used of the Spirit do not disprove His personality (e.g. Ephesians 4:30).

Angels, Demons, and Satan

I believe that angels are spirit beings created by God to serve and worship Him. They began their existence in a state of unconfirmed holiness. Satan, created as a good angel, rebelled against God in pride and as a result was cast out of heaven, leading a host of angels with him. Satan and his demons now attempt to thwart the work of God in this world. Those angels who remained faithful to God are now confirmed in holiness, while the demons are the confirmed enemies of God and His people. Satan and the demons will eventually be cast into the Lake of Fire, while the holy angels will forever praise and serve God.

Angels were created by God to serve and worship Him. Although no passage explicitly tells us, we can infer that God created angels on the first day of the creation week (Genesis 2:1; Exodus 20:11; Job 38:6-7; Psalm 148:2). Angels serve God in many ways, including ministering to believers (Hebrews 1:14), worshipping Him (Isaiah 6:2-3; Revelation 4:8), meting out judgment (2 Chronicles 32:21), and bringing messages to people (Acts 7:53, “received the law as ordained by angels”; Luke 1:11-20). As created beings, angels should not be worshipped (Revelation 19:10; 22:8-9). The angels were created in a state of holiness (Colossians 1:16), which was unconfirmed, as the fall of some of the angels attests (Matthew 25:41). We can infer that the angels are now confirmed in their choice either to remain faithful to God (1 Timothy 5:21, “chosen angels”) or to follow Satan (Matthew 12:24). The angels that Satan rules are often called “demons.”

Angels are localized spirit beings. They do not have physical bodies (Hebrews 1:14, “ministering spirits”) but can appear to people (Genesis 19:1). Although they are spirit beings, they can only be in one place at one time (Daniel 9:21-23; 10:10-14).

The fall of Satan. Before his fall, Satan was the “anointed cherub” (Ezekiel 28:14). Sometime after the sixth day of creation, Satan’s heart filled with pride, and he wanted to be greater than God (Isaiah 14:13-14). For this wickedness, God cast him out of his privileged position (Isaiah 14:12; Ezekiel 28:17). Satan now opposes God with a fury (Luke 22:3; 1 Peter 5:8). He has a multitude of demons at his command (Matthew 12:26).

Satan’s domain and tactics. Satan now rules the demons (Mark 3:22-26) and controls the world system, blinding men to their true spiritual condition (Luke 4:6; Acts 26:18; Ephesians 2:2). Satan’s *modus operandi* includes lying (Genesis 3:4-5; John 8:44), deceiving (2 Corinthians 11:14; Revelation 12:9), tempting and scheming (1 Corinthians 7:5; Ephesians 6:11; 1 Peter 5:8), holding people in fear (Hebrews 2:14), filling people’s hearts with evil thoughts (Acts 5:3), and even entering people (John 13:27). Although Satan operates with much freedom in this world, his activities are limited by God’s control (Job 1:12; 2:6). His demons can possess unbelievers (Mark 5:1-20), but not believers because Satan’s rule and God’s rule (through the indwelling Spirit) are mutually exclusive (Matthew 12:22-29, 43-45).⁴ Demons may externally influence a believer (Ephesians 6:12; Colossians 2:8; 1 Timothy 4:1).

The fate of Satan and his demons. Satan and his demons will be cast into the Lake of Fire at the conclusion of the Millennium to suffer torment forever (Revelation 20:10).

The holy angels will continue to praise, worship, and serve God forever (Revelation 5:11-14).

⁴ For the best treatment of “demon possession” that I’ve found, see John F. Hart, “Demonology and the Mission Field,” in *Overcoming the World Missions Crisis*, ed. Russell L. Penney (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2001), 207-238.

Humans and Sin

I believe that God created humans in His image on the sixth day of the creation week. Humans began in a state of unconfirmed innocence, but as a result of Adam's sin are now sinners both by nature and by choice. Sin is any violation of God's moral law, whether by act, attitude, or nature. Our sin has separated us from God. Each person has an old nature, a complex of attributes that orient him or her to serve Satan, sin, and self. Through regeneration, the believer is given a new nature, a complex of attributes disposed towards holiness. Humans consist of two essential parts, an immaterial part and a material part. At death, the immaterial part is separated from the material part.

Humans were created directly by God on the sixth day of the creation week. God directly formed Adam from the dust of the ground, apart from any process of evolution (Genesis 1:27; 2:7). God formed Eve from Adam's side, so that Adam would not be alone (Genesis 2:18). Adam and Eve were created in a state of innocence (Genesis 1:31).

Humans were created in the "image and likeness of God." This means that we are like God in a way unique from any other creature. The "image and likeness of God" includes our personality and intellect (Genesis 2:19-20), emotions (Genesis 3:8), will (Genesis 3:6-7), and dominion over the earth and its creatures (Genesis 1:27-28). The image of God in humans guarantees the intrinsic worth of human life (Genesis 9:6). Although the image of God was marred by the fall of the human race, through Jesus Christ we will eventually be restored to the perfect image of God (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Humans fell from their sinless and innocent state through the voluntary sin of Adam. Every person enters life spiritually dead and totally depraved because of Adam's sin in Eden (Romans 5:12-21). As totally depraved people, every aspect of our lives is polluted by sin (Romans 3:10-18), and we cannot please God (Romans 8:8). Because of our spiritual deadness, we personally sin against God (Romans 5:12; 1 John 1:8-10). We are sinners by nature and by choice.

Sin is any violation of God's moral law. Every sin violates God's moral law (1 John 3:4), which is an expression of His moral perfection. People fail to conform to God's moral law through their actions (Galatians 5:19-20), their attitudes (Hebrews 3:12), and their very nature (Romans 5:8; Ephesians 2:3). Our sin separates us from holy God (Isaiah 59:2; Romans 3:23).

Every person has an old nature.⁵ If we define "nature" as "a complex of attributes," we can say that every person has an old nature, or "a disposition that orients him to serve Satan, sin, and self" (Galatians 5:16-17).

Through regeneration a person is given a new nature. The new nature is "a complex of attributes" that disposes a person to holiness and love for God. Upon salvation, the believer receives a new nature (Romans 8:9-11; Colossians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:23). Although the struggle with indwelling sin continues throughout a believer's life (Romans 6:12), the believer has the ability through the Spirit to obey God (Romans 8:3-4).

Humans consist of two essential parts, an immaterial part and a material part. Although Scripture uses many terms to describe the inner being of a person (e.g. heart, soul, mind), only two *essential* parts of a person are differentiated: the immaterial part and the material part (Matthew 10:28). Upon death, our material part goes to the grave (Genesis 3:19), while our immaterial part either goes to judgment (Hebrews 9:27) or to be with Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:8). At the resurrection, the material and immaterial parts will be united (1 Corinthians 15:35-54).

⁵ For this paragraph and the next I am indebted to William W. Combs, "Does the Believer Have One Nature or Two?" *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 2 (Fall 1997): 81-103.

Salvation

In His grace and according to His own inscrutable purposes, God has chosen some to be saved. This salvation is entirely by His grace in Jesus Christ and is therefore unearned and unmerited. It is received through faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross. In order to be saved, a person must accept both the Person and work of Jesus Christ. When a person responds with saving faith in Jesus Christ, that person is positionally sanctified in Christ. The new Christian begins to produce good works and grow in conformity to Christ. When Christians die, they are ushered into the presence of Jesus, and salvation is completed.

In eternity past, God chose some people to be saved according to His good pleasure. Admittedly, this teaching of the Scriptures boggles our puny minds but ultimately gives God the glory that He deserves. Paul lifts his voice in praise to God (Romans 11:33-36) after explaining God's sovereignty in election. The Bible teaches that God chose some "according to the kind intention of His will" (Ephesians 1:4-5), not according to any foreseen faith in us (Acts 13:48; 2 Timothy 1:9). He did this before the creation of the world (Ephesians 1:4; cf. 1 Peter 1:20). Paul definitely felt the tension between God's sovereignty and man's freedom (Romans 9:20-21).

Salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Because of total depravity, our salvation must be entirely by God's grace, which is His undeserved and unmerited favor poured out on us through Jesus Christ (Titus 3:5-7). Salvation is received through faith, rather than by works, in order that God may receive all of the glory (Romans 3:27-28; Ch. 4; Ephesians 2:8-9). Saving faith requires knowledge of, assent to, and personal trust in the Lord Jesus Christ's death on the cross (Romans 10:8-15). Since Jesus Christ provides the only way of salvation (John 14:6; Acts 4:12), all other "roads" to God lead to destruction (Matthew 7:13).

Saving faith. Saving faith requires acceptance of the Person of Jesus Christ—a person cannot be saved who does not at least implicitly accept the deity of Jesus Christ (Romans 10:9). Saving faith does not exist apart from repentance, an inward turn away from sin towards God (Acts 20:21; 1 Thessalonians 1:9).

The believer is positionally sanctified in Christ at the moment of salvation. When a person believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, he or she is justified. Justification is the action taken by God our Judge, whereby He wipes out our transgressions and imputes the righteousness of Christ to our account (Romans 3:20-28; 4:7, 24). In God's eyes, the believer is united with Christ (Romans 8:1, 10) and already seated in the heavenly realms with Christ (Ephesians 2:6). The Holy Spirit imparts spiritual life at the point of conversion through regeneration (Titus 3:5; 1 John 5:11-12).

The believer continues to grow in progressive sanctification throughout life. "Progressive sanctification" may be defined as "growing and changing to become more like Jesus Christ."⁶ At the moment of salvation, this process begins (2 Corinthians 3:18). A true believer will produce spiritual fruit (Ephesians 2:10; James 2:14-26). Believers grow in sanctification through various means, including Bible study, prayer, fellowship, evangelism, and worship.

Ultimate salvation. Upon death the believer is ushered into the presence of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:8), bringing salvation to completion (Philippians 1:6). All true believers will persevere in their faith because they are kept by God (John 10:28-29; Romans 8:28-39; 1 Peter 1:5).

⁶ For this definition I am indebted to Faith Baptist Counseling Ministries of Lafayette, IN.

The Church

I believe that the Church, the body of Christ, is the group of people saved from Pentecost until the rapture of the Church. Every believer is baptized by means of the Spirit into the body of Christ at conversion. This universal body is distinct from national Israel. Jesus Christ is the head of the Church. I believe that the local church is an assembly of saved individuals who have been baptized by immersion and covenant together to make disciples together by fulfilling the purposes of the Church.

The universal Church. All those who have believed in Jesus Christ from the day of Pentecost (Acts 1:5; Ch. 2; 10:47) until the rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18) are the universal Church—the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22-23). Believers are baptized by means of the Spirit into the body of Christ at salvation (1 Corinthians 12:13). The body of Christ is distinct from national Israel (Ezekiel 37; Romans 11; Ephesians 2:11-22). Christ is the Head of the Church (Colossians 1:18).

The local church. The local church is an assembly of saved individuals who have been baptized by single immersion and covenant together to make disciples together by fulfilling the commands of Christ for the Church (Matthew 28:18-20). These commands include the biblical responsibilities of evangelism, discipleship, service, worship, and fellowship (e.g. Acts 2:42-47). All believers should use the spiritual gift(s) that God has given them for the common good (Romans 12:4-8). The local church administers the two ordinances of baptism (Acts 2:41) and communion (1 Corinthians 11:23-34). The local church also practices church discipline on unrepentant members who have become involved in sin (Matthew 18:15-17). Church discipline may be exercised for sin problems such as immorality (1 Corinthians 5:1), disorderly behavior (2 Thessalonians 3:6-15), divisiveness (Titus 3:10), or false teaching (Galatians 1:8). The purpose of church discipline is to bring the sinning believer into restored fellowship with the Lord and the local church (Galatians 6:1).

Church organization. The local church should be self-governing (Matthew 18:15-17; Acts 6:1-6; 15:1-30), self-supporting (Acts 14:23), and self-propagating (Matthew 28:18-20). The local church has two offices: the pastor and deacons. Each local church is led by a pastor⁷ (or pastors) who oversees (1 Timothy 3:1), teaches (Titus 3:1), shepherds (1 Peter 5:2), preaches (2 Timothy 4:2), and rules (1 Timothy 5:17). The deacons serve the pastor and church (Acts 6:2-7; 1 Timothy 3:7-13).

Church ordinances. Baptism is important because Christ commanded it (Matthew 28:18-20). Baptism is the immersion of a believer in water, symbolizing the believer's union with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6:1-5). Baptism follows salvation (Acts 10:44-48), and the New Testament knows nothing of an unbaptized Christian. The Lord's Supper, or communion, is a remembrance of Christ (1 Corinthians 11:24-26); this ordinance also symbolizes the unity of the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 10:16-17).

Separation. The local church is responsible before Christ for separation from unbelief and those who align themselves with apostates (2 Corinthians 6:14-18). We should also separate from those who disobey the clear commands of God's Word and from those who align themselves with those who disobey such clear commands (2 Thessalonians 3:6-15). Every member of the local church should also separate himself or herself from worldliness, which is "the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life" (1 John 2:15-17). The church should also remain separate from the state (Matthew 22:21; Romans 13).

⁷ The terms "pastor," "elder," and "overseer" emphasize different aspects of one office (Acts 20:17-28; Titus 1:5-7; 1 Peter 5:1-4).

Last Things

I believe that God's ultimate purpose is to bring glory to Himself. This He will ultimately do through the culmination of all things in Christ. Jesus will return for His Church at the rapture, then the world will experience a seven-year tribulation period of hideous proportions, following which Jesus Christ will return in power and glory to set up His kingdom. Christ will rule for 1,000 years, while Satan is bound. When Satan is released, he will rouse those who do not believe in Christ to attack Him one more time. At the end of Satan's rebellion, he will be cast into the lake of fire. All unbelievers will stand before the Lord at the Great White Throne judgment and receive the just punishment for their works. They will be thrown into the lake of fire, a torment that will continue for all eternity. God will create a new heaven and a new earth, and believers will enjoy His presence for all eternity.

The purpose of God in "last things." The ultimate purpose of God is to bring Himself glory (Isaiah 43:7; 48:11; Ephesians 1:3-14). This He will do by summing up all things in Christ (Ephesians 1:10), who will then subject Himself to God the Father, who is "all in all" (1 Corinthians 15:23-28). I mention this because "last things" should not become an exercise in pedantic speculations but an exploration of God's glory revealed.

The Rapture. Jesus Christ could return for His Church at any moment, delivering believers from the wrath to come (1 Thessalonians 1:10). Jesus Christ will descend; the dead in Christ will rise first; then the living believers will be caught up together with them to meet Him in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). Following the rapture, church-age saints will stand before the "judgment seat of Christ" to give an account for what they did while on earth (1 Corinthians 3:11-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10).

The Tribulation period. Daniel's seventieth week (Daniel 9:24-27), a period of seven years, will be the most intense period of judgment in all of history (Daniel 12:1; Matthew 24:21). The Tribulation will purify Israel (Daniel 12:1; Malachi 3:1-3), resulting in their coming to salvation (Zechariah 12:10; Romans 11:26). Many Gentiles will come to salvation during the Tribulation period (Revelation 7:9-17).

The Second Coming. At the end of the Tribulation period, the Lord Jesus Christ will descend in power and glory (Matthew 24:30). He will personally return to the Mount of Olives (Zechariah 14:4; Acts 1:11), and He will overcome the Antichrist at His coming (2 Thessalonians 2:8).

The Millennial Kingdom. At Christ's coming, He will bind Satan and set up His kingdom, which will last for 1,000 years (Revelation 20). The establishment of the millennial kingdom will fulfill the Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 12:1-3), the Davidic Covenant (2 Samuel 7:12-13), and the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34). During this time, Christ will rule with righteousness, and the nations will come to Jerusalem to learn from Him (Micah 4:1-3). At the end of the millennium, Satan will be released to deceive the nations one last time, rousing them to fight against the Lord. Satan will be cast into the lake of fire to suffer forever (Revelation 20:7-10).

The Great White Throne judgment. All unbelievers will stand before the Lord at the Great White Throne judgment to be judged according to their works. Those not found in the book of life will be thrown into the lake of fire for everlasting punishment (Revelation 20:11-15).

The Eternal State. God will create a new heaven and new earth, and believers will enjoy His presence forever and ever (Revelation 21, 22).