

Biographical Section

Conversion

When I was ten years old, my parents hosted a party at our house for many of their adult church friends. During that party, I remember growing afraid of death, hell, and Satan and also growing very envious of the joy and confidence that my parents and their church friends exhibited. The fear gnawed at me for the rest of the party, but later on that evening, when I heard my mom go into her bedroom, I went in and told her what I was feeling. My mom brought me to the passage in 2 Thes. 2:1-10, where the “man of lawlessness” is predicted to be destroyed by the mere breath of Jesus' mouth. This passage, along with all of the truth of the Gospel, was used to lead me to Christ that night at the foot of my parent's bed.

Laura's Conversion

Laura would be the first to tell you that she did not come to faith in Jesus Christ at one particular event, but rather that it was a progress that extended even into her first year at Moody. It was during that first year that the Gospel became very intimate to her as well as when she made Jesus the Lord of her life. Her spiritual gifts consist of serving, encouraging, hospitality, contributing to the needs of others, showing mercy, and leadership. She is very wise and is committed to serving the Lord with her life, wherever that may lead her.

Call and Commitment to Ministry

My call into ministry was a gradual process that God had been working in me since I was in Middle School. The call did not come through one specific event that I can remember, but rather it came through a series of steps. The call was birthed at a young age in view of the joy that came from being a part of my family and then continued to blossom in the years that followed through noticing God's work in my heart and in the events of my life. Looking back at all that God has brought me and my wife through, I am confident of the Lord's call to ministry in our lives, and I am committed to serving the Lord for the rest of my life.

Preparation for Ministry

The majority of my preparation, despite having gone to both Moody Bible Institute and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, has come as a result of growing up in a ministry family. My parents were inner-city church planters in New Orleans; thus, much of my thoughts and practices of ministry have come from watching them. I gained a phenomenal Biblical and pastoral foundation while at Moody Bible Institute and TEDS. While studying at both institutions, I was able to receive practical Christian ministry experience through helping lead youth and college ministries, and both experiences were joined with mentoring relationships with professors and pastors. For the last three years, I have been serving in Miami at La Viña

Community Church as the youth pastor. Through this experience, God has solidified my call into cross-cultural ministry, my love for students, my joy in doing ministry, and my specific gifts of teaching, leadership, and administration. I have been able to be mentored by Rollo Casiple and have gained a wide range of ministry practices.

Article # 1 Bibliology

The Nature of the Bible

I believe that the entire Bible is the verbally inspired word of God given to mankind. Scripture identifies itself as being “God-breathed” (2 Tim. 3:16), not having its origin in man but in God (Jer. 30:2; Pet. 1:20-21). The words of God were superintended by the Holy Spirit to the human authors as they wrote within their historical and cultural contexts and within their own personalities. It is important to note the Verbal Inspiration of the Bible because it holds that the inspiration of Scripture does not just simply touch the stories, themes, and ethics of the Bible but that inspiration reaches directly to the precise written wording, order, and parts-of-speech of the original manuscripts (Mat. 5:18).

I believe that the Bible directly coincides with the character and nature of God in that it is perfect (2 Sam. 22:31, Psa. 12:6), true (Psa. 119:160), eternal (Psa. 119:160), unchanging (Num. 23:19), complete (Deut. 29:29; 2 Tim. 3:15-17), trustworthy (2 Sam. 7:28), living and active (Heb. 4:12), and life-giving (Deut. 32:47; Deut. 8:3). I believe that the Bible is inerrant in its original manuscripts. Inerrancy means “that the Bible does not affirm anything that is contrary to fact” (Grudem, 42), and that it “always tells the truth and it always tells the truth concerning everything it talks about” (Grudem, 42). Scripture makes clear that God does not lie (Num. 23:19); His word is truth itself (John 17:17), and His word is without error (Psa. 12:6). I also believe that the Bible is infallible. The infallibility of the Bible means that the Bible will never lead people astray from truth; the Bible is reliable in all of its parts and subjects; and nothing will ever be found out in the future that will be able to prove the Bible wrong.

The Sufficiency of Scripture

All of the books of the Bible are the chosen and complete revelation of His Word (Deut. 29:29). No book or portion of Scripture has been left out that God intended to be included, and as a result nothing will be found that God will want to include in the future. The Bible as it stands contains everything God intends to reveal about Himself, about Christ, about salvation, and about the Christian life, and it is sufficient in and of itself to instruct individuals about those things (2 Tim. 3:15-17, Psa. 119:1). God wants mankind to know Him and Scripture has been revealed for this very purpose. In view of this reason, God has revealed Scripture in such a way that it be clear and simple to understand by any individual who has a heart seeking after God (Deut. 6:6-7; Psa. 119:130).

The Authority of the Bible

I believe that the Bible in its written form is authoritative for all of life, faith, and practice (Deut. 28:15; Josh. 1:7-8). The Bible is and must be the final authority for the practice and

doctrine of the church and the church must live in accordance to it (Mat. 7:24; 1 Tim. 4:15-16, Rev. 3:3). I believe that in disobeying or disregarding the Bible, one in actuality is disobeying God (2 Thes. 1:8; 2 Thes. 3:14). The Bible is the final authority for faith and practice over and above that of church tradition and the wisdom of men. The Protestant creed of “Sola Scriptura” is directly related to this theological issue because the creed upholds that Scripture is the final authority for salvation, for doctrine, for ethical issues, and the Christian life.

The Necessity of the Bible

I believe that every human throughout all of history has been given knowledge of God’s existence, knowledge of certain aspects of God’s character and nature, and an internal knowledge of right and wrong. This theological belief, which I adhere to, is known as General Revelation because it refers to the general commonality of every human to receive revelation from God of the items mentioned above. Scripture makes clear that God’s “invisible qualities” have been revealed to mankind through God’s work in creation (Rom. 1:18-20; Psa. 19:1), through the way that God has set eternity and moral conscience in the hearts of every man (Ecc. 3:10; Rom. 2:14-16), and in view of the way that God has worked in historical events. With this being said, General Revelation in no way can bring about salvation. General Revelation reveals the truth of God’s existence and certain aspects of his character and nature, but it is limited in its reach to salvation.

Salvation only comes through faith and trust in the promised Messiah of God—namely Jesus Christ (John 14:6; Rom. 10:13-17; John 3:16-18). Now, these truths about Jesus Christ and God’s plan of salvation can only be known through God’s specific revelation to mankind. This revelation, as opposed to General Revelation, is referred to as Special Revelation because it is revealed to specific people throughout history through specific methods of revelation by God—thus, making this revelation “special.” God’s audible address (Ex. 3:4; Mat 3:17), God’s written word (Ten Commandments, the Bible), God speaking through the prophets (Jer. 30:2; Isa. 56:1), and Christ Himself (Mat. 1:23) are all forms of Special Revelation. Salvation can only come about through special revelation—specific revelation of the Messiah / Christ, the necessity of His saving work, and trust in the promise of God to forgive and credit His righteousness (Gen. 15:6; Rom. 3:21-22).

The Bible is necessary because it reveals specific and certain truths about God—His character, His will, His plan and His promises. General Revelation does reveal aspects of God’s character, but when left by itself, it does not reveal the fullness of God’s love for humanity, His desire to choose for himself a people, his promise of the Messiah, his willingness to provide forgiveness, his immutability, etc. Just as importantly, the Bible is necessary because it reveals those specific truths about Christ and the Gospel. It reveals the nature of Christ, the words of Christ, the plan of salvation, and the message of the Gospel. Also, the Bible is necessary because it reveals the specific revelation of the Christian’s mission and purpose. Also, in view of the depravity of man, God’s gift of the Bible and Special Revelation is necessary and vital because, without it, man is left to the insufficiency and evil of the human heart and mind. God’s Word is true, sure, and absolutely reliable, which stands in contrast to the words of man. The Bible is necessary in order to provide assurance, truth, and a foundation to stand on.

The Impact of the Bible

I believe that the Bible is the sustenance and source of growth for the Christian (1 Pet. 1:23-2:3). On multiple occasions, the Bible claims that it is the believer's "source of life" itself, over and above food or military power even (Deut. 8:3, Deut. 32:47, Mat. 4:4). The Christian is called to meditate upon, memorize, know and obey the Bible (Deut. 6:1-10) because the Bible will equip the believer for every good work (2 Tim. 3:17), will show the believer how to walk blamelessly in God's sight (Psa. 119:1), and will guide and protect the believer in the face of the evil and temptations in this world (Eph. 6:17). The Bible enables people to avoid making wrong decisions and provides the wisdom necessary to know what is right and to do what is right.

I believe that the Scriptures are living and active (Heb. 4:12); they are able to convict and able to instruct one to salvation (Rom. 1:16). Although the Bible in and of itself is God's very words and is sufficient because of its nature to convict, change, and illuminate ("bring one to understanding"), I believe that the Holy Spirit uses and works through the very words of the Bible to open the eyes of an individual so that they might understand the truths of God, Christ, the Gospel, and / or the will and truths of God (John 14:16-17; John 16:13-14). I believe that the study of Scripture is the most important spiritual discipline for the maturity of the Christian.

Article 2: Theology Proper

I believe that God has always existed and will always exist. There was never a time when God was not; He was not created, and He is not bound by time as his creation is. He eternally exists (Gen. 21:33; Psa. 90:2; 1 Tim. 1:17). I believe that God is the Creator of the universe and of every living thing (Gen. 1:1; Col. 1:16). God created the universe "ex nihilo," or "out-of-nothing," simply by speaking and it came to be (Gen. 1; Psa. 33:9). I believe that each person of the Trinity had a distinct role in creation (Gen. 1:1-2; John 1:1-3; Psa. 104:30). God created the universe and every living thing for His glory (Isa. 43:7; Psa. 19:1-2) so that He might redeem a people for Himself who willingly love, serve and worship Him for all eternity (Eph. 1:3-12; Tit. 2:14). God is devoted to bringing Himself glory and is the only being that is unselfish in this desire because He is the only being who is deserving of glory (Isa. 42:8; 43:7).

The Trinity

I believe that God is one (Deut. 6:4; Eph. 4:6) and yet that He exists in three persons—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Mt. 3:16-17; Mt. 28:19). Each person eternally exists and each person is fully God (Gen. 21:33; Jn. 1:1; Acts 5:3-4), and at the same time, God is perfectly united in His being. I believe that, although each person is fully God, each person has a distinct role within the scope of God's redemptive plan (Heb. 10:5-7; Jn. 16:7-16). God the Father planned redemption, sent His son, and chose those to be saved (John 3:16; 1 Pet. 1:2). God the Son obeyed the Father and accomplished redemption through his life, death, and resurrection (Isa. 53; 1 Pet. 1:2; Heb. 10:5-7). God the Holy Spirit regenerates and sanctifies believers (John 3:5-8; 1 Pet. 1:2). Each of these functions is necessary for salvation and no person of the Trinity should be acknowledged as greater than the others.

In view of the way the persons relate to each other in their distinct roles, I believe that the Bible gives evidence of how there is a subordination of role without negating the full and equal divinity of each person, and that these roles have existed eternally. Evidence of this is seen in how the Father sends the Son (John 3:16), the Son submits and obeys the Father (John 8:28-29; John 12:27-28), and how the Holy Spirit works to point people to the Son and the Father (John 16:7-15). Also, it is passages such as the ones found in John that make it very clear that the Trinity is not simply a belief in one God who constantly changes outfits or costumes (or changes modes), but that each person is fully God, fully active, and fully personal. Each person loves and relates perfectly to the other persons. There is no confusion, strife, or disunity among them.

In view of the doctrine of the Trinity, although the Bible does not reference the specific word, “Trinity,” I believe that the entire scope of Scripture points to and gives evidence of God existing as one God and, at the same time, existing in three persons. I believe that this revelation in Scripture is progressive, and that the revelation builds off of itself and crescendos in the NT in view of Jesus’ life and teachings and the Holy Spirit’s active work in salvation. I believe that the doctrine of the Trinity is essential to the character of God and to the redemptive plan.

Transcendence and Immanence

I believe that God is holy and transcendent (Isa. 6:3). He is independent of and far greater than His creation (Isa. 55:8-9). The only way that humans can specifically know God is through His own revelation of Himself to them. God is inexhaustible. He cannot be fully comprehended (Psa. 139:6, 17; 145:3; Psa. 147:5; I Cor. 2:10-12; Isa. 40:18; Job 11:7). Although God is transcendent, and we will never be able to fully comprehend Him, He is also immanent, and has revealed Himself to us through creation (Isa. 6:3; Rom. 1:18-23), Christ (John 1:1-18), and God’s Word; and we can actually know God (John 17:3). God desires for His creation to know Him and He rejoices in His people.

The Attributes of God

I believe that God is infinitely perfect (Matt. 5:48) in every attribute, action, power or judgment, whether known or unknown to us, at all times. God is without limit. I believe that the attributes of God can be delineated to a certain extent between those attributes which God, and God alone, only possesses (Incommunicable), and those attributes which God shares with humanity, either because God created humans in God’s image or because of their new identity in Christ (Communicable). Now, let it be clear that, although certain attributes of God are shared with humanity, God perfectly manifests those attributes, while humans only know them in part.

Certain incommunicable attributes are as follows: God is sovereign—He reigns over everything and is able to do whatever He pleases (Psa. 135:6). God is invisible (1 Tim. 6:16)—He is spirit (John 4:24) and is not contained by a physical body. He is not commonly seen by the naked eye. God is omnipresent (Psa. 139:7-10)—He is present everywhere all at the same time; there is no place that God is not. God is omnipotent (Jer. 32:17; Matt. 19:26), and immutable in terms of His being, character, and promises (Psa. 102:25-27; Mal. 3:6). God is omniscient (Job 37:16; 1 Jn. 3:30). He knows and has planned out everything from beginning to end and is fully aware and knowledgeable of all that has happened, is happening, and will happen (Psa. 139:16).

Certain communicable attributes are as follows: God is righteous (Psa. 7:9-11; Hab. 1:13)—He is perfectly right in all that He does and He cannot tolerate evil. God is merciful (2 Sam. 24:14)—He withholds punishment to those who are guilty. God is gracious (Rom. 3:23-24)—He gives unmerited gifts to those who are undeserving. God is good (Psa. 34:8) and just (Psa. 111:7) and patient (Ex. 34:6). God is truthful (Jer. 10:10-11; Num 23:19)—He cannot and will not lie. He will not lead astray and He can be trusted in everything. God is love (1 Jn. 4:8). God pours out wrath against sin and evil (Rom. 1:18). God is creative (Gen. 1) and perfectly beautiful (Psa. 27:4)—He is the utmost thing that all humanity is searching and longing for; and once realized, He is the place where true joy and satisfaction is found.

God's Providence

I believe that God had planned and ordained everything (people, places, things, events, times, causes, etc.) before the creation of the world (Est. 4:14; Prov. 16:33; Acts 17:26; Eph. 1:4). I believe that God has a specific plan for every individual and that God has planned every event, decision and act that we make before we are even born and I believe that God's plan is based upon His good will and purposes to bring about His glory (Eph. 1:3-12; Psa. 139). I believe that God sustains and preserves all things (Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:3); God is the Necessary being and all of His creation is contingent upon His existence. I believe that God directs our actions (Prov. 21:1; Psa. 139:16) while at the same time, I believe that God has created us with a free will—a will that is able to make real choices, effect real change, and which rightly deserves full accountability.

In view of this, I believe that it can be rightly said of human choices and actions that they were fully caused by God and fully caused by the free will of the person. Now, it could be rightly asked, "How this is possible?" And it is quite correct to say that ultimately the answer is a mystery to us and that God is God and we simply cannot understand the intricacies of it all. At the same time, though, we are able to respond that God works alongside human and creative actions to bring about his plan. God can use the hardness of someone's heart (Ex. 4); God can use our sin (2 Sam. 11 and 12); and God can use our choices and actions to bring about His plan (all at the same time ordaining those choices and actions). This point is especially relevant in view of the Christian's act of prayer. God has determined that his plan be effected by the prayers of Christians—that prayer can and will effect real change.

God's providence and my belief that God has ordained and specifically planned out all events and actions does not mean or necessitate the result that God is evil, has sinned, or is responsible for sin. God is righteous and holy; and man is sinful (Rom 3:23). God should never be accused of sinning or blamed for evil. Man, because of our selfishness and pride, is responsible for evil and all men are rightly deserving of death. I believe that God in no way had to display his grace to any of us, and I believe that every act of God's patience or grace is above and beyond what He has to do in the first place. I do not believe in double predestination. I believe that every person because of their sin is guilty and is deserving of death, and yet God has predestined some to life by His grace. Our sin condemns us; not God's predestination.

Article 3: Christology

God the Son

I believe that Jesus Christ is the second person of the Trinity, God the Son (Mt. 3:16-17). I believe that the Son is of the same nature as the Father and Holy Spirit in deity—each person of the Trinity is fully God. Logically then, I believe that there never was a time when the Son was not. The term “begotten” (John 3:16, *monogenes*) does not imply that the Son was created, but that the Son is the “one and only,” “unique,” and “one of a kind” Son. I believe that the Son has always existed and always will (Jn. 1:1; Rev. 1:17-18). I believe that Jesus was actively involved in creation (Jn. 1:3), and that life would not exist without Him, for in Him everything is held together (Col. 1:17).

Why the Incarnation?

I believe that before God created the world, the Triune God fully knew and chose that the Son, within his distinct role in the Trinity and within the redemptive plan, would be sent into the world at a particular, ordained time in history to save humanity from their sin (Jude 25, Eph. 1:4, 1 Pet. 1:20, Gen. 3:15). Scripture references God the Father as the one sending the Son (John 3:16) and references the Son as obeying the Father within this redemptive plan (John 10:18, Luke 22:42); but Scripture also references the Son as being totally united with the Father and also very intentionally active in this decision to come to bring salvation (John 10:18, Heb. 12:2). I believe that all of history was leading to and pointing to the Son coming into the world to provide salvation, and now I believe that history is pointing to that day when Christ will return and we will live with him for all eternity. In view of God’s purposes and in view of the plight of humanity, I believe that there was no other way for God to provide salvation than through the specific and particular plan of sending the Son into the world to live and die and rise again. This redemptive plan was necessary because of humanity’s sin (Mat. 1:21), and because of the love (John 3:16) and justice of God (Rom. 3:25).

How the Incarnation?

I believe that at God’s ordained point in history, God the Son became flesh (John 1:14-18) through being born of Mary. The Bible clearly explains that Mary was a virgin upon Jesus Christ’s conception, and that He was literally conceived of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1:18-25). I believe in the necessity of the Virgin Birth because it provided the perfect union between divinity and humanity. Jesus was born of God and flesh, i.e. Holy Spirit and Mary. I believe that the Virgin Birth was necessary because Jesus was able to avoid the inherited guilt and corruption that is descended from Adam (Rom. 5:12, 18-19; Eph. 2:3). Also, I believe that the Virgin Birth was necessary because it was essential for salvation that Jesus be fully God and fully man.

Jesus True God and True Man

I believe that Jesus Christ is both fully God and fully man. I believe that Jesus had two natures—a human nature and a divine nature. I believe, though, that in view of the two natures, it is incorrect to claim that Jesus was partially God and partially man (Eutyches), or that He was

God with a human suit on (Apollinarius), or a person who was conflicting between two voices as a Schizophrenic person might (Nestorius). I believe that Jesus, in his two natures, was True God and True man in one person. He was totally united in His persons but that distinction was not lost in that union. I believe that the two persons were not confused or at conflict with one another.

The Bible clearly affirms the Divinity of Christ. Passages such as John 1:1-18, Colossians 1:15-20, and Colossians 2:9 speak clearly to this fact. Also, there are multiple evidences from Jesus' life where one can see Jesus possessing attributes of deity, such as omnipotence (Mt. 8:26-27), eternity (John 8:58), omniscience (Mk. 2:8), true forgiveness (Mk. 2:5-7), and a worthiness to be worshipped (Heb. 1:6). The Bible clearly affirms the humanity of Christ. Passages such as such as Isaiah 53:2-3, Philippians 2:5-11, Hebrews 2:17 and Hebrews 4:15 speak clearly to this fact. Also, there are multiple evidences from Jesus life where one can see Jesus possessing attributes of humanity, such as the fact that He was born (Lk. 2:7), He grew in wisdom and stature (Lk. 2:52), He learned obedience (Heb. 5:8), He would become hungry (Mt. 4:2), He would grow tired (Jn. 4:6), He wept (Jn. 11:35), and He felt pain and died (Lk. 23:46).

I believe that it was necessary that Jesus be fully God and fully man for multiple reasons. It was essential that Jesus be fully God because Scripture proclaims that salvation is from the Lord (Jon. 2:9) for it is impossible for man to save himself (Rom. 3:23). Also, only God could bear the full penalty of all the sins of those who believe in Him. It was essential that Jesus be fully man because man had to be punished for their sin. If Jesus Christ had not been a man, then He could not have died in our place as the perfect substitute sacrifice. I believe that Jesus could not have simply swooped in and died as the sacrifice, but that He had to live a time and demonstrate His obedience and righteousness in order to be man's representative and so that His righteousness could be imputed to us upon faith in Him (Rom. 5:18-19). I also believe that it was essential for Jesus to be fully man in order to be our example (1 Pet. 2:21, 1 John 2:6). Finally, I believe that it was necessary for Jesus to be both fully God and fully man in order for Him to be the perfect mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5).

Now, what does it mean in Philippians 2:7 when it says that Jesus Christ "emptied himself" in becoming man? I do not believe that this phrase means that Jesus emptied himself of His deity, for then there are complications in proclaiming that Jesus was both fully man and fully God. I believe that this phrase is pointing out Christ's humbling of himself by being willing to empty Himself of the privilege and glory that were His as God prior to the Incarnation. Now, Jesus will receive these again as we see in Phil. 2:9-11, but the phrase emphasizes the incredible act of humility and love, as opposed to the limitations that He placed upon his divinity.

In view of Jesus being both fully God and fully man, could Jesus have sinned? First off, let me state that the Bible affirms that Jesus never actually sinned (John 15:10, Heb. 4:15), which is necessary for the efficaciousness of Jesus' life and death and bringing salvation. With that being said, I do not believe that Jesus was able to sin. I believe that Jesus was able to be tempted in every way just as we are (Mt. 4:1-11, Heb. 4:15), but that He was unable to sin. The easy explanation is this: because Jesus is both God and Man, and because God cannot sin, Jesus'

divine nature could not contradict itself, even with the human nature. An act of sin would have involved the whole person of Jesus—His divine and human natures, and this could not be so.

The Atonement

I believe that God's love for us (John 3:16) and God's justice (Rom. 3:21-26) necessitated the fact that in order for salvation to be brought to a sinful people, the sin had to be dealt with and God's righteousness had to be given. I believe that Christ's life was just as necessary for our atonement as His death on the cross. Emphasis should be placed on both the life and the death of Christ—both were necessary. Theologians sometimes define Christ's perfect obedience in His life as His "Active Obedience" and then they define Christ suffering and sacrifice on the cross as His "Passive Obedience." I believe that these are good classifications because what they do is emphasize the necessity of both in terms of the salvation that Christ's atonement brings. It was necessary for Christ to shed His blood on the cross in order to be the substitutionary sacrifice for our sins—sin had to be dealt with (Heb. 9:26; 1 John 2:2); and it was also necessary for Christ to fulfill that perfect obedience in order that Christ's righteousness could be passed on to all those who believe in Him (Rom. 5:19).

I believe that the Bible uses a lot of terms and images to describe the atonement and the work that Christ accomplished in His life, death and resurrection. Some of the terms that are used are the following: Christ was our substitutionary sacrifice in that He took the punishment that was due to us upon Himself (Heb. 9:26); Christ is our propitiation in that He bore upon Himself all of God's wrath that was due to us (Rom. 3:25-26; 1 Jn. 2:2); Christ has provided reconciliation for us in that we were once separated from Him and now we have fellowship with Him (Rom. 5:10); Christ is our redemption in that He has brought us out and freed us from sin and death (Mark 10:45; Rom. 6:11, 14).

In view of the fact that we are talking about the atonement and the work of Christ, I think that this is a good time to address the theological question concerning "For whom did Christ die?" This question dives into the theological areas of Unlimited and Limited Atonement. Unlimited Atonement takes the position that God wants all men to be saved therefore Christ's atoning work and shed blood was for all people—even for those whom are not saved (1 John 2:2). Limited Atonement takes the position that, although Christ's sacrifice was sufficient to save all people, Christ's shed blood and atoning work is limited to the elect only (John 17:6; Rom. 8:29-30; Eph. 1:3-14). I believe that, although Christ's sacrifice was sufficient to save all people, Christ's shed blood and atoning work is limited to the elect only.

The Resurrection

I believe that the resurrection of Christ is a historical fact. I believe this because of Scripture (Luke 24:5; 1 Cor. 15:3-8); but I also believe it because of the evidence surrounding the empty tomb, the many witnesses that saw Christ after His resurrection, and the radical change in His disciples and the rapid growth and influence of the church through the centuries. I believe that Christ rose bodily from the dead and that He was raised in a glorified body. This means that Christ's body was physical, but that His body was made perfect and that it was immortal (1 Cor. 15:42-44). His body no longer suffered from the pain and decay that our

fleshly bodies go through. I also believe that Christ's glorified body was recognizable (Luke 24:36-37).

I believe that the resurrection of Christ implies many things for us. I believe that Christ's resurrection is evidence that He is God and that His sacrifice for us was perfect and sufficient (1 Cor. 15:17; Phil 2:9-11). I believe that Christ's resurrection insures and shows us that we will also rise from the dead (1 Cor. 15:12-58). I believe that it is through Christ's resurrection that those who put their faith in Christ are given new life or new birth (1 Pet. 1:3). I believe that the resurrection of Christ implies that the Christian live free of sin and live for God (Rom. 6:11-14).

I believe that Christ, 40 days after His resurrection, ascended into heaven (Acts 1:9) and was seated at the right hand of God (Psa. 110:1; Heb. 1:3), as a demonstration of His honor (Phil. 2:9-11), completed work (Phil. 2:9-11), and authority (Eph. 1:20-21). Theologians refer to Christ being seated at the right hand of the Father as the "Session of Christ." This does not limit Christ to this fixed position for all eternity, but it certainly does imply literal and figurative truth. Christ deserves all glory and will receive all glory.

Article 4: The Holy Spirit

God the Holy Spirit

I believe that the Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity (Matt. 28:19, 2 Cor. 13:14). I believe that the Holy Spirit is of the same nature as the Father and Son in deity (Acts 5:3-4; 1 Cor. 2:11-12). Logically then, I believe that there never was a time when the Holy Spirit was not. I believe that the Holy Spirit has always existed and always will (Gen. 1:2). I believe that the Holy Spirit was actively involved in creation (Job 33:4, Psa. 33:6) and that He possesses all of the qualities of deity, some of which being omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence. I also believe that the Holy Spirit possesses all of the attributes of the Father and Son in that they are perfectly loving, truthful, trustworthy, merciful, just, and righteous. I believe in the personality of the Holy Spirit, namely that He has an intellect, will, and emotions; Scripture attributes to the Holy Spirit the same personality that is attributed to God the Father and God the Son (Jn. 14:26; Jn. 16:7-8; Rom. 8:14; 1 Cor. 2:10-11; 1 Cor. 12:11; Eph. 4:30).

The Holy Spirit's Distinct Function

I believe that, just as God the Father and God the Son have a distinct role within the scope of God's redemptive plan and how they each relate distinctly to creation, the Holy Spirit has a distinct role and relates distinctly as well. We see through Scripture that is the Holy Spirit whose primary role is to "applies salvation" (Grudem, 116) and to point people to the Son and the Father (John 16:7-15). I believe that the Holy Spirit has eternally existed as God the Holy Spirit and, although He is equal to God the Father and God the Son, I believe that He, just like God the Son, acts in subordination to God the Father within the Godhead.

The Work of the Holy Spirit

I believe that it is the work of the Holy Spirit that awakens (Eph. 5:14) and enables individuals to God's effective grace given to them (Jn. 3:3-7; Rom. 8:1-10, 28-30; Eph. 2:8; Tit. 3:5). I believe that without the work of the Holy Spirit in an individual's life to awaken their Spirit and enable their hearts to believe, the individual will remain dead in their sins and will not understand or submit their lives to the work of Christ on the cross for their sins (Eph. 2:1-5; Rom. 3:10-12). This simply emphasizes the necessity of the Holy Spirit's work in applying salvation, and it is at this point that the specifics of that work must be explained.

The Holy Spirit's work can be broken down into two main parts—(1) that work which the Holy Spirit does in bringing an individual to salvation, and then (2) that work which the Holy Spirit does in sanctifying and equipping the believer. There are a few important terms to note when discussing the Holy Spirit's work in bringing an individual to salvation. These important terms are the following: regeneration, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and the sealing of the Holy Spirit. I believe that regeneration is a term used to refer to the act of the Holy Spirit whereby He imparts new spiritual life to the individual (John 3:3-8; 1 Pet. 1:3). Regeneration is totally a work of God; it takes place in the spirit of the individual, and I believe that it comes before saving faith (although the timing seems very close to being simultaneous with saving faith). I believe that simultaneously, as a person has been regenerated, the Holy Spirit indwells that person forever (Jn. 14:16-17; Rom. 8:11; 1 Cor. 6:19-20), which is what is meant in reference to the "indwelling of the Holy Spirit." I believe that once the Holy Spirit regenerates a person, that person is also simultaneously baptized and sealed by the Holy Spirit (Mk. 1:8; 1 Cor. 12:13; 2 Cor. 1:21-22; Eph. 1:13-14; Eph. 4:30). This baptism and sealing of the Holy Spirit occurs only once—at conversion, and does not have to be experiential for the believer. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is a Biblical phrase referencing the Holy Spirit's act of coming over the believer and identifying Himself with and in that believer forever (Acts. 1:5; Acts 11:16). The baptism of the Holy Spirit is also referencing the believer being dead to sin and the rebirth that is now theirs in Christ. I believe that the Bible speaks of the sealing of the Holy Spirit as an act of the Holy Spirit whereby He is the guarantee (authentication) and evidence to the believer of their new life in Christ. The Bible speaks of the Holy Spirit being the conduit of our assurance of salvation in that Romans 8:16 speaks of the Holy Spirit confirming with our spirit that we are children of God.

The Holy Spirit's regeneration, indwelling and work in the life of the believer begins that person in the process of sanctification (1 Pet. 1:2) and enables the believer to bear and live in the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:16, 22). I believe in the filling of the Holy Spirit, but I differentiate between the filling of the Spirit and the baptism and indwelling of the Spirit. I believe that the filling of the Spirit is a repeated experience happening as a person gives more control to the Holy Spirit in their life (Gal. 5:16; Eph. 5:18; 1 Thes. 5:19). I do not believe that the filling of the Spirit has to be experiential for the believer. I believe that its primary purposes are to equip the believer to be empowered for ministry and to incline their hearts to more clearly know the will of God and believe and obey God.

I believe that the Holy Spirit is active in the life of the believer teaching and guiding them (John 14:26), convicting them (John 16:8-10), equipping them with power (Acts. 1:8), bearing forth the fruits of the Spirit in them (Gal. 5:16, 22), and giving them spiritual gifts in order that each believer might use their gifts to build up and expand the church (1 Cor. 12:7-11). I believe

that the Holy Spirit is active in the Church as a whole equipping and strengthening it so that it might grow and mature (Acts 9:31). I believe that it is the Holy Spirit who sparks revival in the Church (Acts 10:44), brings unity to the Church (Eph. 4:3), gives spiritual gifts to the Church (1 Cor. 12:7-11; Eph. 4:12), and guides the Church into all truth (John 16:13). I believe that the Holy Spirit is active in the world today bringing regeneration to those elected individuals throughout the world (John 3:8), leading and guiding and equipping the Church to transform the world, and preserving some semblance of safety, common grace, and ethics in the world.

Article 5: Anthropology

Man—Created in God’s Image

I believe that God created man and that man is totally dependent on God for existence (Gen. 1:26-27; Gen. 2:7; Col. 1:17). God did not need to create man, but God chose to create man for His own glory (Isa. 43:7; Eph. 1:11-12). The purpose of man is to bring glory to God and I believe man brings glory to God when he willingly chooses to delight in, worship, and love God. I believe that ultimately included in delighting in and worshiping and loving God is the reality and sense of fearing God and obeying His commandments (Eccl. 12:13). I believe that as a result of man living up to the purpose for his existence, man will experience the absolute joy and blessing of life because it will be lived as it was intended—in relationship with God (Psa. 37:4; Psa. 73:25-26; John 10:10).

I believe that man was created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27), which means that man is similar to God in that God created man with the ability to reason, make choices, experience emotion, create, have dominion over the earth, and have fellowship with God. It absolutely does not mean that man is god or is a type of god. I also believe that man's desire for fellowship, love, and eternity all spring from being created in the image of God. I believe that man is the highest of all God's earthly creatures and that God has given man the unique role of representing God in the world. I believe that God created the world as a place where man could populate and subdue the earth and have a personal relationship with God, thus bringing Him glory (Gen. 1:26, 28; Isa. 43:7; Col. 2:2-3).

I believe in the dichotomy of man, which means that man is made up of two parts—body (material part) and soul / spirit (immaterial part) and that there is unity between the two. I believe that man and woman were created ontologically equal but that they were created with different roles. I believe that man was given headship (authority) over woman and that man, in view of the human race, was given the responsibility of representing women (1 Cor. 11:3) to God, but I do not believe that God holds man as more important than woman or that man's role gives him the right to lord it over women. I believe that these roles can be seen in the creation account, where God granted Adam authority and where the Bible claims that Eve was created for man (Gen. 2:18; 1 Cor. 1:19). I also believe that the ideal intended relationship between man and woman can be seen in how the Trinity relates to each—there is ontological equality and yet difference in function. This intended relationship is also seen in how the Bible speaks of the way a husband ought to lead and protect and love his wife. Although this is true, I believe that sin has corrupted man and woman's ability to live perfectly, humbly, peacefully and contentedly within these roles.

The Fall and Its Effects

In order to create a people who could willingly love Him, God created a people who could make real choices and who could choose to sin against Him. This is what happened in the Garden of Eden. I believe that sin entered the world through Adam's disobedience in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3; Rom. 5:12). The Fall of Man (Gen. 3) brought sin into the world and, as a result, sin brought physical death (Gen 5:5) and spiritual death (Rom. 6:23a). I believe that sin is any intentional, or even unintentional, failure to live up to God's moral law. The Bible speaks of all sin as being lawlessness (1 John 3:4). The Bible also most commonly refers to sin as being any willful rebellion against God and his moral law in our actions, attitude, and even thoughts. Ultimately, sin has brought separation between man and God (Rom. 3:23; Rom. 6:23a), and man can do nothing on his own to earn righteousness.

I believe that sin has brought about a sin nature that was instituted through Adam's sin and that has been passed along from him to every human being (Rom. 5:12). The sin nature is universal and has made man totally depraved (Rom. 6:17; Rom. 8:8). The total depravity of man is the belief that man's entire being is corrupted due to sin. Sin effects every part of our being. Sin has corrupted our mind, will and emotions (Rom. 1:18-32; Rom. 14:23; Eph. 4:17). Man's heart and will is bent towards rebellion against God; man has an inability to submit to God, and Romans 14:23 declares that "Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin," which leaves all of us before we put our faith in God in a totally desperate situation. Now, although man possesses the sinful nature and has sinned against God, the image of God in man has not been destroyed totally, but it has been distorted. Sin has also effected the world. Sin has brought imperfection to God's good creation (Gen. 1) and Scripture even speaks of how the physical creation longs for redemption (Rom 8:18-21).

Now, above I stated that the sin nature has been passed along from Adam to every human being. This sin nature brings inherited guilt, corruption, and a will that is depraved and bent towards sin (1 John 1:9). I believe that God chose Adam to be humanity's representative and that Adam's sin not only brought condemnation to him but also brought condemnation to us (Rom. 5:12-21). Adam's sin passed along the sin nature and the corruption that all of us experience daily. This sin nature and the consequences have been passed along to every living being that has ever existed, except for Jesus Christ due to the Virgin Birth (see Christology). The implications of this statement lead me to affirm that all those who do not put their faith and trust in Christ will not be saved and will eternally be separated from God. There are no exceptions because all have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God (Rom. 3).

Article 6: Soteriology

I believe that salvation is totally an act of God (Jonah 2:9) and that faith in Christ and His work are the only means by which a person is saved (Eph. 4:12; Eph. 2:8-9). I believe that Jesus Christ's life, death, and resurrection has abolished sin (Rom. 5:18-19; Rom. 8:2) and death (1 Cor. 15:54-57), and has provided the way for those dead in their sins to be made alive unto salvation (Jn. 14:6; Rom. 10:9-10). Without Christ's sacrifice and without faith in Christ, all would deservingly die in and due to their sins. I believe that salvation is totally by the grace of

God (Eph. 2:8-9). Grace is defined as an “unmerited gift”—no person is deserving of salvation—it is a gift from God. I believe that the phrase, “Salvation by grace through faith,” means (as explained above) that salvation is not earned by man’s works but is totally a gift from God and it comes as a result of simply putting our faith in Christ.

I believe that, even before the creation of the world, God sovereignly elected some to be saved solely based upon His purpose and pleasure (Eph. 1:4-6; Rom 9:11-13; Acts 13:48; Rom. 8:28-30; 2 Thes. 2:13). I do not believe that the elect were chosen based upon God’s foreknowledge of their faith, but that their saving faith happened as a result of their election. I also believe, as logically follows, in the doctrine of reprobation, which acknowledges that before the creation of the world, God sovereignly chose to pass over some persons—in that they would not be saved and that they would be punished for their sins (Jude 4; Rom. 11:7; 1 Pet. 2:8; Rom. 9:17-23). This is definitely one of the most difficult doctrines from our human perspective and it is important to offer a few explanatory statements in regards to it. First, we must remember that although the doctrine is true, the reality of this doctrine brings sorrow to God’s heart (Eze. 33:11). Second, God is sovereign and good (Rom. 9:21). He can do whatever he pleases and we are called to trust Him. Third, despite the reality of the doctrine, God is not to be blamed for our condemnation for we are condemned on account of our sin. We are responsible for our rebellion against God (Jam. 1:13-15; John 3:18-19; 5:40). Finally, I believe that in God deciding not to save everyone, God understood that through the condemnation of some on behalf of their sin, God manifests His justice thereby displaying His character and thereby receiving glory.

I believe that in order to be made alive, the Holy Spirit must regenerate the dead man (Eph. 2:5, Col. 2:13, 1 Pet. 1:3, 1 Cor. 2:10). Regeneration enables a person’s will to be able to respond in saving faith towards Christ. I believe that saving faith has two components: repentance and trust. The Bible describes true repentance as a turning away from sin and turning towards God. Repentance is a giving up of our evil ways (Jon. 3:8) and a returning to God (Hos. 14:1; Joel 2:13). I believe that Biblical faith goes beyond mere intellectual assent or acknowledgment—it is a trusting in and dependence upon God (John 3:16, Acts. 16:31, James 2:19). Biblical faith is a strong trust that displays itself in action (Rom. 10:9-10) and in hope (Heb. 11:1). I believe that regeneration and saving faith are both in mind in Romans 8:30 in the description of those whom God has called. I believe that regeneration and saving faith occur simultaneously, although regeneration must occur in order for there to be saving faith.

In regards to saving faith, there is an element whereby a person responds to God (Rom. 10:13). This element was touched upon above in regards to repentance and trust, but it is important to note the dual aspect of God regenerating and the person’s response. It is also important to note that God uses human proclamation (in the majority of situations) to bring about this call in people’s lives. This call is referred to by theologians as an effectual call or the gospel call (Rom. 10:14-15). It is a call of God through human proclamation whereby they respond in saving faith. From our perspective, this is speaking of the many situations and stories that we have heard whereby a person hears the Gospel and responds in faith to Christ. I believe that the Gospel is the good news claiming that Jesus Christ died for our sins (1 Cor. 15:3). The Gospel is the message that proclaims that everyone has sinned (Rom. 3:23), that there is a punishment for that sin (Rom. 6:23a), but that God has provided us a gift in that He sent His Son to earth to live, to die in our place for our sins, and to rise from the dead conquering sin and death for us (Rom.

6:23b; Rom. 5:8). Imbedded in the Gospel is also a call—an invitation whereby people are given an opportunity to respond to the good news of Christ (Rom. 10:9-10).

When a person is regenerated and has saving faith, he is also justified. Justification is a legal term referring to God's declaration of the person's being made righteous (Rom. 3:23-24); and again, this justification only comes by God's grace through faith. I believe that when we respond in saving faith, God's righteousness (His perfection, His nature of being totally right), based in the perfect and sinless life of Christ, was imputed (or credited) to us (Rom. 4:18-25). Thus, when God looks at the believer, He does not see their identity as one being a sinner any longer, but He sees their identity as being one who has been forgiven and covered by Christ's righteousness. Once one is justified, the believer is no longer seen as guilty, but as a set apart child of God. Once one is saved, he is adopted into God's household and made a member of his family (John 1:12, Eph. 2:19, Gal. 3:26). This act of adoption gains the believer privileges and rights as a child of God (Gal. 3:29).

Once one is justified before God, God begins to sanctify him—cleansing and purifying him in order to make him more and more like Christ (Rom. 8:28, 1 Thes. 5:23, Heb. 13:20-21). Sanctification begins right at conversion and goes until the person is glorified. I believe that, while in this fallen world, believers will never attain perfection as Jesus did. The Holy Spirit is the means by which a person is sanctified, but man is not passive in this act either. Man has a responsibility to strive to make himself more and more like Christ (John 15; 2 Pet. 1:5).

Once a believer has genuinely repented of his sins, turned in faith to God, and has been indwelt by the Holy Spirit there is no way that he can fall out of grace. Once one is saved, he is always saved (John 10:27-29). One cannot lose his salvation, if he indeed is a true believer. The Holy Spirit will help one persevere to the very end—and this marks a true believer—one who perseveres to the very end (Heb 3:14).

I believe that glorification is the completion of sanctification in which we will be made like Jesus. A believer will be given a glorified body like Jesus'—one that is immortal, perfect, and sinless. A believer will no longer fight against flesh and blood, will (thankfully) not have to fight against sin, and will live with God for all eternity.

Ultimately, salvation is one divine, unified act that truly shows God's grace and love. Salvation unifies and makes a person one with Christ and it is only through salvation that human beings are able to find life and have a relationship with God. It must always be remembered that Jesus is the central and absolute truth of the doctrine of salvation for there is no other name under heaven by which one is saved (Acts 4:12).

Article VII: Ordinances

Ordinances

I am committed to and believe that the church ought to regularly practice the ordinances of water baptism and the Lord's Supper. I believe that both were commanded by Jesus to be practiced (Mt. 28:19-20; Mt. 26:26-30), thus making them ordinances. The word "ordinance"

simply refers to those ritualistic actions Christ “ordained” Christians and the Church to practice. I do not believe, however, that the ordinances confer any means of effective grace (Acts 4:12; Eph. 2:8-10; Rom. 10:9-10). I do not believe that referring to these two actions as sacraments is necessarily wrong because the term “sacrament” simply refers to these two actions as being sacred, which I believe they are—but their sacredness does not come because effective grace is imparted. They are sacred because Christ ordained them and because they both point to the redemptive work of Christ.

Baptism

I believe that baptism has been commanded by God (Matt. 28:18-20). One can clearly see from the Great Commission that Jesus is commanding His disciples to baptize, and implied in the baptism is the idea of leading people to identifying themselves solely with the Triune God and His followers.

The act of baptism symbolizes the cleansing and washing away of sins. In the Bible, water is often times associated with cleansing (Eze. 36:25, Acts 22:16). The baptism act is a symbol proclaiming Christ’s redemptive work and the believer’s union with Christ and that work (Rom. 6:5; Col. 2:9 – 3:3). Baptism symbolizes and pictures the union that the believer has in Christ’s death (Rom. 6:3), burial (Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12), and resurrection (Rom. 6:5). Baptism acts as a public profession of faith. Throughout the New Testament, it is commonly noted that after one put their faith and trust in Christ, that person very soon afterwards was baptized. Conversion and baptism went hand in hand in the early church. This strong relationship was probably due to a strict adherence of the great commission of Christ, and also due to the early church’s understanding of the great proclamation that accompanied the act of baptism. It is important to remember this. I believe that the act of baptism must be a public and visible act where the believer can make their profession of faith. The believer is identifying themselves with Christ and professing that they have made a response in faith to Christ. I believe that baptism acts as a pledge to God (1 Pet. 3:21) and also is symbol tying the believer to the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). The act of baptism, in view of all that it means and displays, helps the believer grow and mature in their faith, and I also believe that it helps the believer gain assurance and confidence in their faith.

Due to the many theological factors involved in baptism, I believe that only believers in Christ ought to be baptized. Only believers are able to confess and profess all of the many truths that baptism symbolizes. Thus, I believe that baptism ought to be reserved only for those individuals who are old enough to understand the Gospel and confess their faith in Christ. Also, I do not believe that baptism in any way confers effective grace to the individual (baptism does not save). Now, I understand that there are a few Biblical passages that seem as if they teach that baptism is linked to effective grace (Mark 16:16, Acts 2:38, 1 Pet. 3:21), but I believe that these passages are simply pointing us to the close tie that the early church had between an individual coming to faith and then being baptized. Also, the many Biblical passages teaching salvation by grace and faith alone (Eph. 2:8-10) point me away from concluding that baptism saves.

Concerning the mode of baptism (sprinkling or immersion), I do not think that either are necessarily Biblically wrong, although I personally believe that a greater case can be made for

immersion, since Scripture points to Jesus coming up out of the water (Mark 1:10) and since immersion better portrays the image of death, burial, and resurrection.

The Lord's Supper

I believe that Communion was instituted by Jesus Christ on the night of His arrest and trial, as He and His disciples were celebrating the Passover Meal (Mt. 26:26-30; Mk. 14:21-24; Lk. 22:14-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-26). I believe that Jesus' timing of the institution accentuates the linkage of Communion with the Passover Meal, most likely referencing Christ with the Passover's symbolism of the 2nd person of the Trinity and the Passover's emphasis upon the hope of the redeemer and Messiah. I believe that Communion is a sign and symbol of Jesus Christ's atoning sacrifice. Throughout church history, there has been debate regarding the interpretation of the joint phrases, "This is my body" and "This is my blood" (Mt. 26:27-28). I believe that those phrases are to be taken figuratively because they are said in reference to the bread and wine present during the last supper. Jesus was not identifying the bread and wine as literally being His body and blood. The breaking of bread symbolizes the breaking of Jesus' body for the redemption of sinners. The wine symbolizes the blood of Christ, being poured out for the sins of the world. Thus, when we practice communion, the elements are used to remind us of and symbolize Christ's sacrifice.

I believe that Communion has been instituted by Jesus Christ in order to develop, motivate, and model unity within the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 11:20-34). I believe that it has been instituted by Christ in order to help us remember, celebrate, and thank Jesus for his death and sacrifice (1 Cor. 11:24). I believe that Communion was commanded by Jesus to be carried out by the Church until His return in order that we might proclaim Jesus' death and sacrifice until He returns (1 Cor. 11:26). I believe that Christ has called us to practice communion in order to continually and consistently affirm Christ's love for myself and the Church, and to remember that one day the Church will all gather at the amazing wedding supper of the Lamb (Rev 19:9). I also believe that communion symbolizes and helps us recognize how all of Christ's followers can now enter into his presence as the priesthood of all believers because of the perfect sacrifice of Christ. I believe that communion challenges and motivates the followers of Christ to pursue personal holiness (1 Cor. 11:27-29).

I do not believe that Scripture prescribes how often it should be practiced, but Scripture does clearly imply that it is a practice for believers only and that the practice of it should not be abused (Mt. 26:26-30; 1 Cor. 11:18-34). I believe that the only two requirements for the participation in communion are that the participants are believers and that the participants recognize and honor Christ and the purposes of the practice. Membership is not a requirement. Concerning the type of elements, I do not have a preference so long as the Table is honored and the purposes are withheld.

Article 8: Ecclesiology

What is a Church?

I believe that a church is a called out group of believers that meets regularly with the intention of worshipping God, studying the Scriptures, and practicing the ordinances. I believe that a true church is centered around Christ and the Word of God; thus, the church holds firmly to the proclamation of Christ, truth, and right doctrine. I believe that these called out believers that make up the church must also be focused on the mission of Christ to be witnesses to the world of God's gospel.

The Nature of the Church

I believe that the church can be distinguished between the Universal Church and the local church. The Universal Church is invisible and is comprised of only true believers. I believe that at conversion, the believer is adopted into God's household and made a member of his body (1 Cor. 12:12-13; Gal. 3:26-29; Eph. 1:5; Eph. 2:19-22). Scripture equates the body of Christ with the Church (1 Cor. 12:12-31; Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:24). Now, I believe that the true body of Christ is composed only of those who are believers (1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 4:1-5) because in order to be included one must be united in and through Christ and His Spirit (1 Cor. 1:10; Eph. 1; Eph. 4:1-5; Phil. 2:1). The Universal Church is the church as only God sees. God is the only one who truly knows those who are His. The Universal Church is comprised of all those who believe all around the world, as well as all those who have believed through all of time.

The local church is visible and is limited to a certain location. The local church is the church as man sees it—thus, it can be comprised of true Christians and false Christians due to the fact that there are those who are false teachers and / or those who will fall away from the faith (Mark 4:1-20). I believe that every true believer is a member of God's Universal Church, but not every true believer is joined to the local church (this is a sad fact).

I believe that the church began at Pentecost (Acts 2) and I believe that the believers today make up that same church. I believe that the Church is distinct from Israel, and I believe that God is dealing with the church predominantly during this dispensation of Grace (Rom. 10 – 11).

Images

The Bible describes the church using many images and metaphors that help the believer better understand their relationship to God, God's relationship to them, and their relationship to other believers. Four (4) of such images are as follows: family (2 Cor. 6:18; Matt 12:49-50), bride and groom (Eph. 5:32), a body (1 Cor 12:12-27), and a temple (1 Pet. 2:4-8; Eph. 2:19-22).

The Purposes of the Church

I believe that the purpose of the church, just as the purpose of creation in general, is to glorify God. The church glorifies God through their willing worship, love, obedience and service. The purpose of the church is to also carry out the mandate and mission of God. I believe that God has chosen to use weak vessels (1 Cor. 1:27) in order to proclaim His mysteries to the world (1 Cor. 4:1; Eph. 3:9)—this is the nature (weak vessels saved by grace) and mission (proclaim the Gospel) of the church. I believe that God has commanded the church to be marked by love (Jn. 13:34-35; 1 Cor. 13) and unity (Jn. 17:20-26; Eph. 4:16), because the church is

God's tool during this age to extend His Gospel to the nations. I also believe that every follower of Christ has been mandated to "make disciples" (Mt. 28:19-20; Acts. 1:8), proclaim the Gospel (Rom. 10:14-15), and declare the praises of God (1 Pet. 2:9). I believe that another purpose of the church is to teach God's Word and to encourage one another daily (Heb. 3:12-13).

The Offices of the Church

I believe that two distinct offices are given in the New Testament for the local church—the office of elder (1 Tim 3:1-7; Tit 1:5-9) and the office of deacon (1 Tim 3:8-13; 5:17). I believe that elders (or pastor) are those who lead, rule, and oversee the duties of the church (1 Tim 5:17). I believe that the elder must know the Word of God and be able to teach (Tit 1:5-9; 1 Tim. 3:1-7). I believe that deacons are those who serve, set an example for, and encourage the congregation (1 Tim 3:8-13). I believe that a deacon should not be double-tongued, but should help unite the church, and help the church carry out its purpose of doing the will of God.

Church Government

I believe that the Bible clearly identifies both elders and deacons as leaders of the church (Acts 20:17-38; 1 Tim. 3:1-13; Tit. 1:5-9) and I believe that the role of "elder," "overseer," and "pastor" are closely synonymous and in view of each role the main priority is in the shepherding of God's people (Eph. 4:11-13; 1 Tim. 3:1; Tit. 1:5-9). In view of differentiating between the pastor and the elders, I believe that the pastor is an elder and ought to simply be just one of many elders in coming together to lead the church. I affirm Congregationalism and under that category I affirm the "Plural Local Elder Government."

I embrace the "Plural Local Elder Government" model of church government because I believe that it fits closest in line with what we see in Scripture (Acts 14:23; Acts 15:2; Tit. 1:5; Jam. 5:14; 1 Pet. 5:1). I also see from the Titus 1:5-9 passage the implication that it is important to understand the requirements for elders because the leaders of the church are to be raising up additional leaders and appointing them as elders to lead. I believe that the Jethro principle (Ex. 18:17-23) also comes into play within the form of church government.

I embrace Congregationalism because I believe it fits in line with what we see in Scripture. I believe that Scripture never mandates a ruler or final authority apart from Christ, His Word, and the Holy Spirit—all of which every believer possesses. I believe that congregationalism elevates the Priesthood of all Believers, the Headship of Christ, the unity and guidance of the Spirit, and mission of making disciples (because as we strive to make disciples we develop and train Godly leaders).

Spiritual Gifts and Their Place in the Church

I believe that Spiritual gifts are gifts given by the Spirit to each believer in order that that believer might edify and grow the Church. I believe that, at times, the spiritual gifts given work very closely along with the believer's personality and skill sets and passions, but I also believe that spiritual gifts are not restricted to having to do so; and definitely in no way does the gifts

working in conjunction with those traits disqualify the fact that they are gifts from the Spirit—they are not just some superhuman skills or traits.

I believe that there are different kinds of spiritual gifts and the different kinds of spiritual gifts can be seen in the following passages: 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, 1 Corinthians 12:28, 1 Corinthians 7:7, Ephesians 4:11, Romans 12:6-8, and 1 Peter 4:11. I believe that there is some overlap among the spiritual gifts that are noted among the different passages. I also believe that it is helpful to group the gifts of the Spirit in terms of broad functions of the church, such as witness, community, service, and leadership. I also believe that spiritual gifts are different than the fruits of the Spirit listed in Gal 5:16. Believers might exhibit multiple spiritual gifts, but I do not believe that believers are intended to exhibit all of the spiritual gifts. On the other hand, I do believe that believers are intended to exhibit all of the fruits of the Spirit.

Certain evangelical denominations emphasize certain gifts over and above the rest. The gifts that tend to be emphasized over the others are the sign gifts—the gifts of tongues, prophecy, and healing. This concept is taken from the phrase found in 1 Corinthians 12:31, “Eagerly desire the greater gifts.” Although the phrase is interpreted differently, I believe that Paul in this passage is encouraging the Corinthian church to eagerly desire those gifts that best edify the believers. Edification is not dependent, necessarily upon the gift itself, but on how that particular gift is carried out. The emphasis should not be on the amount of power or supernatural phenomena, but on the amount of unity, love, and encouragement that comes with the carrying out of that gift (1 Cor. 13).

Concerning sign gifts, I am not a Cessationist—I believe that the gift of tongues, healing, and prophecy are still very much at work today. I believe that it is arrogant for Christians to claim cessationism since I believe it tends to put God in a box. I also believe that one of the Cessationist’s main Scripture passage used for their argument is wrongly interpreted (1 Cor. 13:8). Now, although I am not a Cessationist, I am cautious. I believe that God has established guidelines for their use (1 Cor. 12-14). I follow the guidelines established by God in 1 Cor. 14 for handling the speaking of tongues in church. There must be an interpretation given if one speaks in tongues in church; otherwise, I would ask that person to cease speaking in tongues or remove himself from church. I believe that God has imparted the spiritual gifts for the edification and equipping of the body. Therefore, I am strongly against using the charismatic gifts as tools for personal power or success, as well as for marks of true or mature faith.

Article 9: Membership

Church Membership

Church membership, although not specifically spoken about in Scripture, is a very wise and practical tool the local church can use to carry out many principles that are spoken of in Scripture, such as keeping good watch of the flock (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2), being united in vision (Acts. 2:42-47; Phil. 2:1-5), holding members accountable (Heb. 10:24), practicing church discipline (Mt. 18:15-18), and ultimately training and equipping believers for ministry (Mt. 28:19-20; 1 Tim. 4:16; 2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Now, with this in view, I believe that church membership should only be reserved for those who are believers. I affirm this position for the following reasons: (1) the local church is a representation of the true Church and only believers are a part of the true church. (2) Unity only comes from the Spirit and unbelievers are not indwelt by the Spirit (2 Cor. 6:14-18). (3) Christ is the head of the church and only those who will willingly submit to the head should be allowed to be members. I do not believe that unbelievers can truly exhibit this submission. (4) I believe that the church has been called to be in the world but not of the world (2 Cor. 10:3; Mt. 5:14; Lev. 20:26).

As already stated above, one of the requirements for membership in the local church is and must be if that person is a Christian. A good and necessary follow-up question is as follows: What are the other requirements, if any, for membership? I believe that there are other requirements for membership, and I believe that these additional requirements are safeguards for the unity and purity of the local church, as well as pragmatic guidelines by which the local church can serve the believer and sustain its specific mission and vision within the local church community. These other requirements are as follows: (1) I believe that the believer should exhibit a lifestyle of holy living. (2) I believe that an additional requirement for membership is that the believer understand and embrace the church's specific mission, vision, core values and goals in the local community. (3) I believe that an additional requirement for membership is that the believer believe and embrace the church's statement of faith. (4) I believe that an additional requirement for membership is that the believer agrees to the submission to pastors and elders in matters of accountability to Biblical principles of holy living and church discipline.

In view of the above requirements of membership, many benefits of membership can be implicitly deduced, but it is important in closing to be very clear about these benefits. Membership serves to guard the testimony of the church and the core doctrines of the church. Membership promotes the unity in the church through ensuring that all members are in agreement over their core beliefs, mission, vision, core values, and goals. Through this unity, the mission of the church is protected as well as fueled. Membership helps the church as an organization in our society through protecting the church from liability. Membership also helps the church pool resources as the believers commit to giving, service, and compassion.

I believe that it is a privilege to be a member of a local church. I do not believe that it is appropriate to make the sweeping statement that if one is not a member of a local church then they are sinning. I believe that making that statement would lead us down a slippery slope of always having to clarify which scenario is sin and which is not. I will say, on the other extreme, that I do believe that if one is not committed to the body of Christ and if one does not love the local church, then that person is sinning. I believe this because of all of the Biblical statements concerning God's love for the church, Christ's headship of the church, Christ's love for the church, and the many mandates concerning our love for one another.

Article 10: Jesus Head of the Church

I believe that Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church (Col. 1:18; Eph. 1:22-23; Matt. 16:18). I believe that this means that Jesus Christ is the source of all sustenance and life for the church and body (Col. 2:18-19). I believe that to be disconnected from the head implies that one

is dead and will not grow in the Spirit. I believe that Jesus being the Head means that Jesus is the leader, overseer, and sovereign control over the church and body (Eph. 1:22-23; Eph. 4:15-16; Col. 1:18). I believe that He greatly loves the church (Eph. 5:22-32); and I believe that all of His purposes for the church will be accomplished (Eph. 1:3-23). Jesus is the one guiding the church; Jesus is the one protecting the church; Jesus is the one caring for the church; Jesus is the one building the church. I also believe that Jesus being the Head means that He is the only person worthy of worship and dependence. No other church or part of the body brings life as the Head. He is the one whom we worship and depend on. I believe and know that Christ and His redemptive work are the foundations upon which the church is built (Eph. 2:19-22). It is important to constantly remember that Jesus is the Head of the Church because it reminds us that He is in control; He is perfect; He is faithful. If anyone but Jesus was in control, then the body / church would be fallible, weak, and imperfect. Christ is in control and is leading His church (Matt. 16:18). We are simply called to trust Him and faithfully shepherd His flock (1 Pet. 5:2-4)

Article 11: Eschatology

I affirm Historic Premillennialism.

Personal Return of Christ

I believe that, just as Christ ascended into heaven in a personal, visible, and glorified body, Christ will return to earth in a personal, visible, and glorified body (Acts 1:11). I believe that Christ's return will be sudden (Matt. 24:44, 2 Pet. 3:10) and will be dramatic. I believe that Christ's return will be seen by everyone (Rev. 1:7). I believe that there will only be one return of Christ and that he will return at the end of the great tribulation (Matt. 24:21) and just before the establishment of His Millennial Kingdom (Rev. 20:1-6; Matt. 24:30-31).

Premillennialism / Contrast with Other Views.

I believe that the millennial kingdom is literal and that it will exist on this earth (Rev. 20:1-6) and that Jesus will be the ruler (Rev. 20:4). This millennial kingdom will be established after human kingdoms have been put to an end and it will in fact be the last kingdom (Rev. 19:11-20:1-6). I also believe that this kingdom will fulfill all of the covenantal promises made to Abraham, David, and Israel.

I believe in the millennial kingdom because I believe in the literal interpretation of Rev. 20:1-6, because I believe that it best fulfills the covenantal promises (Gen. 15:18-20; 2 Sam. 7:12-16; Psa. 110), and because I believe that this understanding allows us to best interpret many other Old Testament and New Testament passages that seem to be speaking of a time period that is not during this church age and is also not during eternity when all sin will be destroyed and when all sinners will be finally judged. Some of these passages include Psalm 72:8-14; Isaiah 11; Isaiah 20:17-25; Zechariah 14:5-17; Matthew 24:30-31.

Now, as one schooled in this discussion can observe, I do not affirm a Post-Millennial return of Christ because I believe that Scripture is very clear about the fact that the millennial kingdom will be established by Christ and that He will literally reign over the entire earth. I also

do not affirm Post-Millennialism because I do not believe that the earth is getting any better (Romans 8:18-24) and I do not believe that the Church will reign until Christ returns and establishes His kingdom (Matt. 24:15-31).

Also, I do not affirm Amillennialism. I do not believe that Amillennialist interpret Rev. 20:1-6 correctly. They interpret the millennium to be metaphorical—something that is happening now in the hearts of the believers. I believe that Christ is reigning in our hearts, but I believe that this interpretation is limiting the full implications of Rev. 20:1-6, as well as some other passages referring to the fulfillment of the covenantal promises to Abraham, David, and Israel. I also believe that the Amillennialist interpretation of what it means for “Satan to be bound” is a little weak. They claim that he is bound now due to Christ’s work on the cross and the power of the Gospel. Again, I agree to a certain extent, but I still see Satan’s work and power as being very active and I believe that there are many NT passages about spiritual warfare (Eph. 6:10-12) to be in agreement with me.

Rapture

I affirm the Post-Tribulational rapture of the church. I believe that Scripture affirms Jesus returning to gather the elect *after* the terrible days of the Tribulation (Mt. 24:29-30; 1 Thes. 4:14-17). I believe that Christ will return bodily and visibly (Acts. 1:11; 1 Thes. 4:14-17). Although I understand that Rev. 3:10 alludes to the "keeping from the hour of trial," I believe that it is referring more to the perseverance of the saints within that particular context and the faithfulness of God. I also believe that many affirm the Pre-Tribulational rapture of the church because they cannot see how God could do such a thing to His people; but I believe that the perseverance and proclamation of the Gospel by His people throughout that period will actually work to bring God more glory.

Tribulation

I believe in the period of time which Matthew 24:21 refers to as a time of “great distress.” This Matthew 24 passage is the primary text pointing Christians to this time period that we refer to as the “tribulation.” Scripture describes this time period as being filled with evil (Matt. 24:12), false prophets (Matt. 24:11), suffering (Matt. 24:21), the reign of the man of lawlessness (2 Thes. 2:3), persecution (Matt. 24:9), cataclysmic events (Matt. 24:5-9, 26-29) and God’s wrath (Revelation’s seals, trumpets and bowls). There is debate whether or not the Church will be raptured out of this time period because it will be a time for God’s wrath to be poured out on the earth. I believe that the church will be called to persevere and remain faithful through this time period in order that in the midst of their suffering they might point people to Jesus.

I do believe that the tribulation will be a period of a literal 7 years. I believe this from the interpretations of the Daniel passages referring to the weeks (Dan. 9:27; Dan. 12:11-12). I believe that the consummation of the 7 year tribulation will be a visible and dramatic masquerade of peace with Israel and the middle of the tribulation will be marked by the “abomination of desolation” (Dan. 12:11-12; Matt. 24:15)

Immanency

I believe in the immanency of Christ (Mk. 24:50; Mt. 25:13; 1 Thes. 5:2), and take the term literally to mean "at any moment." With that being said, though, I acknowledge the problem between literal immanency and the many other passages of Scripture that refer to certain signs having to take place before Christ returns (Mk. 13:10; Mt. 24:15-22; Mt. 24:29-30). In dealing with the problem, I lean toward the view of Wayne Grudem, who reconciles the two with the view that although Christ's return' is unlikely, it is possible that the signs have already been fulfilled (Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1101). Also, it is unclear how quickly the signs will take place. It is possible that they could happen very fast. The main issue at stake is that I believe Scripture gives many passages admonishing the believer to be ready for the "Blessed Hope" (Tit. 2:13), and I believe that this hope gives fuel for the mission and the perseverance of the believer. This cannot be lost.

Death

I believe that Scripture delineates between physical death and spiritual death. The Bible speaks of physical death as being the cessation of life in our physical bodies (Matt. 10:28, Luke 12:4-5, Ecc. 12:7). At the point that a physical body dies, Scripture refers to the fact that there is a separation of the soul from the body (Luke 12:4-5). Scripture also attest to the fact that it is the destiny of every man to die physically and then to face judgment (Heb. 9:27). Now, this verse is also understood in light of the fact that at times God has chosen to make exceptions to that rule (i.e. in the life of Enoch, Elijah). Also, it is also understood that other Scripture references refer to those who will not have died a physical death at the point of Jesus' return.

I believe that spiritual death differs from physical death in that it refers, not necessarily to the cessation of the soul of the person, but rather more refers to the separation of the person from God (Eph. 2:1-2). What the Bible refers to as "Eternal Death" is connected to spiritual death in that it refers to the firming up of that separation for all of eternity—it does not refer to an annihilation of the soul.

Where are the unbelieving dead at present?

I believe that the souls of the unbelievers are in eternal punishment. Scripture speaks of the soul going immediately to judgment after death (Heb. 9:27). Also, Jesus tells a parable of an unbeliever who is placed in eternal punishment; the person is in anguish, and may never get out of it (Luke 16:24-26). Some scholars claim that the holding place for unbelievers until the final judgment is in Hades. I agree and believe that Hades refers to a temporary place of punishment, where unbelievers are sent (in soul only) until the Great White Throne Judgment (Rev. 20:13).

I believe that, in view of the events of Revelation, there will be a future time, a 2nd Resurrection, when all unbelievers (Rev. 20:11-15) will be gathered and will be given a final judgment, and then will be sent to the Lake of Fire (or Gehenna), the final place of eternal punishment. The 2nd Resurrection will also mark the reunion of the unbeliever's soul with their resurrected body (Matt. 10:28). They will reside in eternal punishment in body and soul in the lake of fire.

Where are the believing dead at present?

I believe that the souls of the believing dead go immediately into the presence of God (2 Cor. 5:8, Phil. 1:23, Lk 23:43, Heb. 12:23). I believe that the souls go instantly into heaven. I believe that the believer's dead physical bodies remain on earth until Christ returns to establish His Kingdom.

Article 12: Final Things

Resurrection

I believe that the dead in Christ (those believers who have physically died) will have a literal, physical bodily resurrection when Christ returns to the earth to usher in the Millennial Kingdom. I believe that this is the first resurrection (Rev. 20:4-6). Unbelievers will not have a part in the first resurrection. I believe that the believers will be given physical, and yet, glorified bodies at this resurrection (Lk. 24:39; Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 15:20, 42-49).

I believe that the unbelieving dead (those unbelievers who have died) will have a literal, physical bodily resurrection at the end of Christ's 1000 year reign. I believe that this is the second resurrection (Rev. 20:11-13). Unbelievers will be raised to judgment and eternal damnation (Jn. 5:29; Acts 24:15). Unbelievers will be given a body that is also not bound by time, but it will not be referred to as their spiritual or glorified body—I would simply refer to it as their eternal body.

Judgments

I believe in the literal interpretation of the Great White Throne Judgment written about in Rev. 20:11-15. I believe that Christ is the one seated on the throne (Rev. 20:11; 2 Tim. 4:1). I believe that the judgment will be about the eternal destinies of people (Rev. 20:12-15) and I believe that Mt. 25:31-46 is also speaking of this judgment, although I would say that an additional portion of the judgment scene in view of the believers concerns rewards. I do believe that Christians will be judged for the work that they had done while on earth, in terms of serving the Lord (2 Cor. 5:10) and rewards, and I do not believe that a separate time of judgment is necessary for that scene. Also, I tend to believe that the angels will be judged at this judgment as well (Jude 1:6).

I believe that the Great White Throne Judgment will take place upon the completion of the millennial reign of Christ (Rev. 20:1-6) and the condemnation of Satan (Rev. 20:7-10). I will say, though, that it seems as if there is some other implied, instantaneous judgment that takes place after the death of an individual (Heb. 9:27), which either sends them to Hades or Heaven (eternal paradise).

I also believe that Scripture refers to a judgment of the nations (Joel 3:1-3). I believe that this judgment will take place upon the return of Christ to establish His 1000 year reign. Christ will establish his rule over the entire earth.

Hell

I believe that hell is an actual place (Mt. 5:29), although I do not see a big functional difference between "hell" and the "lake of fire" (Rev. 20:15). I believe that hell is an eternal place and I believe that those in hell will face an eternal, conscious, physical torment—with the greatest torment not being the physical pain, but the eternal separation from God (Rev. 14:9-11; Rev. 20:10; Luke 16:22-24, 28).

Heaven

I believe that heaven is an actual place. I believe that Scripture paints the picture that when a believer dies, he faces judgment, and then the believer is ushered into the presence of God (Heb. 9:27, Luke 23:43), all of which possibly occur instantaneously. I believe that in function, the reference to "heaven" is the same as that of to "eternal paradise," although I do believe that there is a difference between the Biblical concepts of heaven / paradise and the New Heaven and New Earth (Rev. 21-22). I believe that every Biblical concept of heaven will be found in the Biblical concept of the New Heaven and the New Earth, with the exception that the New Heaven and the New Earth will surpass even that of the concept of heaven (it will have all and even more).

I believe that the most amazing part of heaven is that believers will be able to dwell in and with the presence of God (Matthew. 6:9, Rev. 21:4). The Bible refers to heaven as being the believers home (2 Cor. 5:8). Heaven is also described as a place where there will only be life (Rev. 2:7)—there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain (Rev. 21:3).

I believe that it is important to understand the distinction between simply "heaven" and the New Heaven and the New Earth for a few reasons. The reasons are as follows: (1) It is important because the Bible makes the distinction (Rev. 21-22). (2) The New Heaven and the New Earth point to a re-creation / type paralleling those things found in the Garden of Eden. (3) The New Heaven and the New Earth are a creation of something that no one has experienced throughout all of history. (4) I believe that the New Heaven and the New Earth, although two distinct places, serve as one interconnected concept.

Significance of Eschatology

I believe that the significance of eschatology is four fold. First, I believe that it is significant because it again manifests the grace and goodness of God in that God answers our questions and reveals to us as much as He has purposed is good and beneficial for us to know. Secondly, for the people of God, eschatology calls believers to persevere and to live in hope of Christ's return. The third point of significance is that eschatology is a call to urgency and to living a lifestyle of evangelism and mission because we know what the end holds for those who do not believe in Jesus. Fourthly, eschatology helps to keep people humble and moves the believer to continue to fear God and to focus on the main things because it shows the magnitude and power of God.

Christian Living, Article 8, New EFCA Statement of Faith

I believe that there is a direct connection between faith and practice. Throughout the Bible, God's Word teaches that one's faith in and love for God will be evidenced through one's love for their neighbors and one's display of love, service, justice, mercy, compassion, and reconciliation towards all people. We see the direct connection between faith and action through the Great Commandment (Matt. 22:38-39) where Jesus connects the love of God with the love for one's neighbor. We see the connection as we think about the inseparable flow of justification into sanctification. We also see the connection through the multiple passages that call believers to be holy (1 Pet. 1:13-16), to present oneself blameless (Rom. 12:1-3), and to be sanctified through and through (1 Thes. 5:23). Lastly, we see the connection in passages that speak about the Christian's fruit—fruit that will last (John 15), the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23), and how a person's actions will portray a person's heart (Matt. 7:17-18; 2 Tim. 2:19).

I believe that Scripture describes certain characteristics of Christian living that are non-negotiable for the Christian's actions and I believe that the Bible describes these actions as being "true religion" (James 1:27). These marks of Christian living are central to the heart of God and a means by which Christians display the light of the Gospel to the unbelieving world. I believe that the Bible calls all Christians to live a life of humility and servanthood (John 13:12-17). I believe that God calls his people to love and care for the poor (Deut. 15:1-11; Matt. 25:40), the alien (Deut. 10:19), the widows (1 Tim. 5; Jam. 1:27), and the orphans (Jam. 1:27). I believe that the church has a responsibility to live out and model justice to the poor, to the aliens, and the disenfranchised. Scripture has called all Christians to be people of love (John 13:34-34; 1 John 4:7-12) and of mission (Matt. 28:19-20), and I believe that Christians should gradually be displaying the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23).

Some historians and scholars have claimed that the Bible maintains one major contradiction in that Paul proclaims a Gospel solely by grace through faith, but James holds to a gospel of faith through works because James 2:26 says, "Faith without works is dead." Now, I disagree with their assessment because I believe that they are misinterpreting the James 2 passage. I believe that James 2:14-26 fits right in line with this whole discussion of faith and practice. I believe that the point of James 2:14-26 is that faith and deeds go hand in hand (i.e. they are "working together," Jam. 2:22), and a person that is claiming to believe in God but whose actions do not align with the love and actions of God, then that person has a "dead faith."

Current Doctrinal Issues

1. Spiritual warfare, demons, and Satan.

I believe that Satan exists and that he is very active in the world, working to destroy the people and plans of God (1 Pet. 5:8; 2 Cor. 4:4; 2 Cor. 11:14). Satan's schemes and works are powerfully actual and have the ability to destroy (Lk. 13:16; 1 Pet. 5:8; 1 Thes. 2:18). Satan is the father of lies (Jn. 8:44), the prince of this world (Jn. 12:31); and yet will one day ultimately be judged by God (Rom. 16:20; 2 Pet. 2:4; Rev. 20:7-10). I believe in the existence of demons (Mt. 8:31; Jam. 2:19). Demons have power (Mk. 5:1-15) and work to accomplish the purposes of Satan. I believe that there is a real, invisible, spiritual battle waging between the forces of God and the forces of Satan (Dan. 10; Eph. 6:12). The people of God are not unaware (Eph. 6:12) of

this battle, but it is vitally important for the people of God to arm themselves in view of this battle (Eph. 6:10-18).

2. Homosexuality.

The Bible makes very clear that the homosexual act is a sin and a perversion of God's good and intended plan for sex and marriage (Lev. 18:22; Rom. 1:18-32), which He created to take place between a husband and wife (Gen. 1:27; Gen. 2:24). I believe that the act is most clearly a sin, although I also believe that it is no worse of a sin than any other sexual perversions, i.e. sex before marriage, adultery. Now, I believe that God has called Christians to love and minister to homosexuals, just as Scripture displays Jesus loving and ministering to sinners (Mk. 2:15-16). If a homosexual were to come to know the Lord, then the homosexual activity would be one of many sins that the person would be charged to put to death since he is in Christ.

3. Abortion, infanticide, and euthanasia.

I do not affirm any type of voluntary induced abortion, unless done to physically save the life of the mother. I believe that it is a sin. I believe that life and personhood begin at conception and that God is intricately involved in the details of creating that person (Psa. 139:13). I believe that abortion is tantamount to murder and I know that God hates murder (Ex. 21:22-25; Ex. 20:13). Therefore, I also completely disaffirm any type of infanticide for the same reasons that I disaffirm abortion. Humans have been created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27) and, on account of this, intentionally destroying that image is hated and will be punished by God (Gen. 9:6). I also believe that God has called us to defend the weak, the defenseless, and those whom cannot speak for themselves (Psalm 82:3-4)—babies in their mother's womb as well as those whom are in critical health situations qualify under these characteristics. Now, I do not agree with any form of euthanasia, unless it is voluntary, passive euthanasia. I think that an important question within the situation is whether or not that person would die of natural causes if the plug was pulled. I understand that situations differ and issues of euthanasia are very difficult, but I believe that even on the death bed, God desires for human life to be honored. I believe that God is the giver of life (Acts 17:25) and the taker of life (Job 27:28).

4. Divorce and remarriage.

On the issue of divorce, it must first be stated that divorce is the product of the fall and that God hates divorce (Mt. 19:8; Mal. 2:16). Divorce is the breaking of a covenant that was never supposed to be broken (Mt. 19:6). Now, God in His graciousness has permitted divorce because of the sinfulness of man, but only for two reasons: (1) marital unfaithfulness (Mt. 5:31-32; Mt. 19:1-12) and (2) in the case of an unbelieving spouse abandoning the believing spouse (1 Cor. 7:10-15).

On account of marital unfaithfulness, the marriage covenant has been broken and I believe that the covenant has been broken in the eyes of God; thus, God allows for divorce. In terms of remarriage, the innocent spouse is free to remarry. I believe that 1 Cor. 7:15-16 states the second exception allowing for divorce, which is in the case of an unbelieving spouse

abandoning the believing spouse. This exception is grounded upon one's interpretation of the phrase, "is not bound." I interpret the phrase to mean that the abandonment allows for divorce.

It is important to note that in view of this discussion, God's view of remarriage is also vitally important—especially since the Bible speaks about it in Matt. 5:32, Matt. 19:9, Mark 10:11-12, Luke 16:18, and 1 Cor. 7:10-11. The bottom line is this: If anyone divorces his spouse and remarries for anything less than committing adultery [*porneia*], that person commits adultery. I believe that without adultery taking place, even though people might have gotten divorced by human law, a couple is still seen to be married in the eyes of God because there has been no breach of covenant. The breach comes with adultery. Thus, when a couple is "humanly" divorced, but there has been no adultery, that couple ought not to get remarried (or have sex with anyone else) because they will commit adultery because marriage implies having sex with that "new" spouse (Mt. 5:32; Mk. 10:11-12). Now, if one's spouse has committed adultery, the innocent spouse is permitted to divorce and remarry because the covenant has been breached in the eyes of God.

5. Racism and the church.

Racism is a stench to God and a grievous sin of the church. God does not show favoritism (Rom. 2:11) and Scripture reveals that God loves the world (Jn. 3:16) and sent Jesus Christ to redeem people from every nation (Rev. 5:9). There will be a future day in the Kingdom of God when people from all nations who trust in God will be able to dwell together as the people of God in perfect harmony (Isa. 60:1-3; Mic. 4:1-5). Ultimately, all of the dividing lines are spiritually destroyed due to the blood of Christ (Gal. 3:26-29), and until that future day, Christ has called his church to unite (Eph. 4:3)—to show no favoritism (Jam. 2:1)—and to exhibit the power and reality of God's love by loving one another. I am committed to cultural and ethnic diversity in the church. I believe that it ought to mark the church, ought to be pursued by the church, and is actually one of the church's most effective proclamations of the power and unity of the Gospel.

6. Social drinking.

Concerning the consumption of alcohol, I believe that the Bible's main concern is with drunkenness, and not with simply drinking alcohol (Eph. 5:18). I believe that a case can easily be made Biblically for the consumption of alcohol (Jn. 2:1-11; 1 Tim. 5:23), but I also believe that when it comes to social drinking, as a Christian (and especially as a pastor or leader in the church), some additional important issues arise. First, the issue of the "weaker brother" (Rom. 14:13) comes into play. Secondly, the issue of "making the most of every opportunity" (Eph. 5:16) comes into play, and if my drinking alcohol in a social setting would detract from my witness of the Gospel, then I also believe that it would be inappropriate to drink. Thirdly, the Christian, and especially the pastor, needs to guard himself from falling into sin and bringing reproach upon God and His gospel—drinking alcohol is one of those things that could Satan could use to develop a foothold. With that being said, my wife and I drink alcohol every so often. We are very careful not to get drunk, and we are very careful concerning the context of drinking. We do not bring alcohol into our home, and more often than not, the only time that we consume alcohol is when we are out all alone on a special occasion.

7. The role of women in the church.

I understand that this issue is a touchy subject in our society, and I also understand that in our day the labels of pastor, elder, and deacon are used with a wide variety of meaning and function, which adds to the difficulty of the issue. For me, this issue comes down to one main issue: (1) I believe that women cannot be head pastors or elders (1 Tim. 2:11-12; 1 Tim. 3:1-7). I do not believe that a woman is to be placed in a position of primary leadership—this flows from my view of what is entailed in 1 Tim. 2:11-12. Now, before I go any further, I want to emphasize the fact that these restrictions on women have nothing to do with their nature / value, gifts, or qualifications. On the other hand, these restrictions have everything to do with proper obedience to God's word (1 Tim. 2:11-14; 1 Cor. 14:33-36; 1 Tim. 3:1-7 and Tit. 1:5-9). Now, concerning women teaching, I am a little less strict. I believe that it is alright for a woman to teach and lead in many positions in the church as long as she is under the umbrella (head) of the lead pastor(s) and elders.

8. Worship styles I prefer in the church.

The foundational issue for me concerning this question is the worship of God. I know that ultimately, we as the people of God are called to worship Him. We were created to bring Him glory (Isa. 43:7) and He is deservedly jealous for it (Ex. 20:5; 34:14). When this truth is held in focus while thinking through the issue of worship style, I am totally convinced that a church is able to worship God with whatever kind of worship style. I could effectively minister in a local church with any type of worship style so long as the music was done sincerely for the worship of God and as long as the music was an effective tool to help lead the congregation to worship God. Now, personally I lean more to the contemporary style, although I enjoy the traditional hymns and believe that they must be held on to. Ideally, I prefer a blend of both.

9. Purity and Accountability

God has called us to be pure (Eph. 5:3). I believe that the call for purity flows from two main springs: (1) first, it flows from the fact that God is pure and has called his people to represent Him; (2) secondly, it flows from the fact that God knows that fulfillment, joy, satisfaction, and the abundant life comes living pure and right lives—doing life as He originally intended. I believe that God has called his people to be pure (1 Thes. 4:3-8; Eph. 5:3; Phil. 4:8). In view of that command, I believe that sexual purity is one of the most difficult temptations that face Christians today. It is one of the most difficult temptations, as well as one of the most crippling and devastating sins to the believer's walk with the Lord, confidence with the Lord, and ministry. I believe that sexual sin is also one of the most devastating sins because I believe that the hunger for it becomes progressively stronger if not exposed and repented of quickly. Christians must place guards up in their lives in order to not give into lust and sexual sin. Christians must have people holding themselves accountable to cut off any and all areas of weakness in this regard (Ecc. 4:12; Heb. 3:12-13; Matt. 5:27-30). Married couples must not become naïve to these temptations, but should have open communication about the struggles that each face. Christians must be quick to repent from their sin in these regards, and must hold firmly to the truths of the Gospel (Rom. 8:1; 1 John 1:9; Eph. 2:8-10).