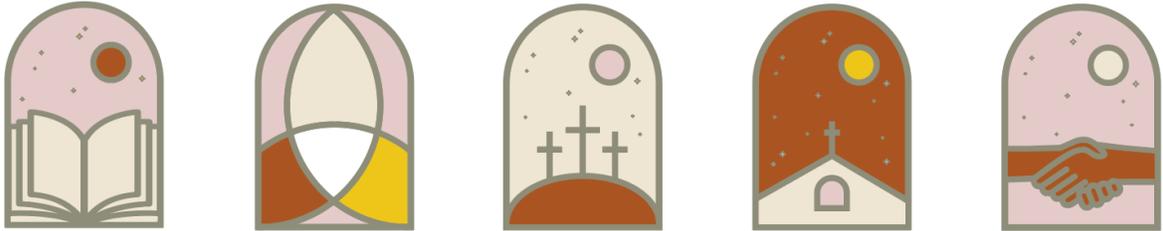


# Immanuel Bible Church

## Membership Class Syllabus



**W**elcome! We're glad that you've made the decision to take this membership class.

The ultimate reason for this class is to explain IBC's doctrinal position and to provide the biblical basis for it. In so doing, we believe that this will give the prospective member a thorough understanding of the gospel, as well as the church's doctrinal convictions that make it distinct. This will provide the needed information to discern whether IBC is the right fit or not. Certainly the most important fundamental requirement necessary to become a member at IBC is salvation and yet, there may be significant doctrinal differences on secondary issues that could prevent us from worshipping in the same church. This class is part of the process of determining whether that is the case or not.

Church life *is* Christian life and Christian life *is* church life. It is living in the favor of God in a community of God for the glory of God. After all, we will spend eternity together worshipping the Lord! This course is designed to help you to know and practice the biblical doctrines of community life so that your belief will coincide with your practice. In Colossians 1:10 Paul prays "that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God" (NKJV). A "worthy walk" and "increasing in the knowledge of God" go together. One without the other is impossible, and thus the necessity to pursue the knowledge of God. Part 1 of this syllabus deals with the essential doctrines of Immanuel Bible Church whereas part 2 deals with the relevant practice of those doctrines. Please note: this is not a comprehensive treatise on all Immanuel Bible Church's doctrines. Rather, it is a summary of the essentials of the faith, especially as it relates to church life.

Our desire is that you come to each study session with a prayerful and submissive heart. Please be diligent in reading all the material and come with any questions that you might have regarding the material. May this course equip you to be a better disciple of Jesus Christ.

With much expectation,

Pastor Nam Park

Elder George Park

Pastor Gary Takahashi

Elder Danny Yoo

Pastor David Yu

Elder Frank Chiu

Elder Bryant Huang

Elder Adam Pawley

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## IBC's Statement of Faith<sup>1</sup>

### I. The Holy Scriptures

- A. We believe that the Bible is God's written revelation to man, and that the 66 books of the Bible given to us by the Holy Spirit constitute the plenary (inspired equally in all parts) Word of God (1 Cor. 2:7-14; 2 Pet. 1:20, 21).
- B. We believe that the Word of God is an objective, propositional revelation (1 Cor. 2:13; 1 Thess. 2:13), verbally inspired in every word (2 Tim. 3:16), absolutely inerrant in the original autographs, infallible, and God-breathed. We teach the literal, grammatical-historical interpretation of Scripture, meaning that we understand Scripture in the way that the author originally intended it.
- C. We believe that the Bible constitutes the only infallible rule of faith and practice (Matt. 5:18; 24:35; John 10:35; 16:12, 13; 17:17; 1 Cor. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3:15-17; Heb. 4:12; 2 Pet. 1:20, 21), and thus even when it conflicts with your culture, you must adhere to the Scripture regardless of the consequences.
- D. We believe that God spoke in His written Word by a process of dual authorship. The Holy Spirit superintended the human authors in such a way that through their individual personalities and different styles of writing, they composed and recorded God's Word to man (2 Pet. 1:20, 21) without error in the whole or in the part (Matt. 5:18; 2 Tim. 3:16).
- E. We believe that, whereas there may be many applications of any given passage of Scripture, there is but one true interpretation. The meaning of Scripture is to be found as one diligently applies the literal, grammatical-historical method of interpretation under the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit (John 7:17; 16:12-15; 1 Cor. 2:7-15; 1 John 2:20). It is the responsibility of believers to ascertain carefully the true intent and meaning of Scripture, recognizing that proper application is binding on all generations. Yet the truth of Scripture stands in judgment of men; never do men stand in judgment of it.

### II. God

#### A. God the Father

- 1. We believe that God the Father is the first person of the Trinity, who orders and disposes all things according to His own purpose and grace (Ps. 145:8, 9; 1 Cor. 8:6). He is the Creator of all things (Gen. 1:1-31; Eph. 3:9). As the only absolute

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<sup>1</sup> This is an adaptation of Grace Community Church's Doctrinal Statement.

and omnipotent ruler in the universe, He is sovereign in creation, providence, and redemption (Ps. 103:19; Rom. 11:36). His fatherhood involves both His designation within the Trinity and His relationship with mankind. As Creator He is Father to all men (Eph. 4:6), but He is Spiritual Father only to believers (Rom. 8:14; 2 Cor. 6:18). He has decreed for His own glory all things that come to pass (Eph. 1:11). He continually upholds, directs, and governs all creatures and events (1 Chr. 29:11). In His sovereignty He is neither author nor approver of sin (Hab. 1:13), nor does He abridge the accountability of moral, intelligent creatures (1 Pet. 1:17). He has graciously chosen before the foundation of the world those whom He would have as His own (Eph. 1:4-6); He saves from sin all those who humbly come to Him, and He becomes, upon adoption, Father to His own (John 1:12; Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:5; Heb. 12:5-9).

## B. God the Son

1. We believe that Jesus Christ is the second person of the Trinity, and possesses all the divine excellencies, and thus He is coequal, consubstantial, and coeternal with the Father (John 10:30; 14:9). We believe that God the Father created “the heavens and the earth and all that is in them” according to His own will, through His Son, Jesus Christ, by whom all things continue in existence and in operations (John 1:3; Col. 1:15-17; Heb. 1:2).
2. We believe that in the incarnation (God becoming man) Christ surrendered only the independent use of His divine prerogatives but nothing of the divine essence, either in degree or kind. In other words, Jesus Christ laid aside His right to the full prerogatives of coexistence with God, assumed the place of a Son, and took on an existence appropriate to a servant while never divesting Himself of His divine attributes (Phil. 2:5-8). In His incarnation, the eternally existing second person of the Trinity accepted all the essential characteristics of humanity and so became the God-man (Phil. 2:5-8; Col. 2:9), and forever exists as the God-Man.
3. We believe that our Lord Jesus Christ was virgin born (Is. 7:14; Matt. 1:23, 25; Luke 1:26-35); that He was God incarnate (John 1:1, 14); and that the purpose of the incarnation was to reveal God, redeem men, and rule over God's kingdom (Ps. 2:7-9; Is. 9:6; John 1:29; Phil. 2:9-11; Heb. 7:25, 26; 1 Pet. 1:18, 19).
4. We believe that our Lord Jesus Christ accomplished our redemption through the shedding of His blood and sacrificial death on the cross and that His death was voluntary, vicarious, substitutionary, propitiatory, and redemptive (John 10:15; Rom. 3:24, 25; 5:8; 1 Pet. 2:24).
5. We believe that on the basis of the efficacy of the death of our Lord Jesus Christ, the believing sinner is freed from the punishment, the penalty, the power, and one day the very presence of sin; and that he is declared righteous, given eternal life, and adopted into the family of God (Rom. 3:25; 5:8, 9; 2 Cor. 5:14, 15; 1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18).

6. We believe that our justification is made sure by His literal, physical resurrection from the dead and that He is now ascended to the right hand of the Father, where He mediates as our Advocate and High-Priest (Matt. 28:6; Luke 24:38, 39; Acts 2:30, 31; Rom. 4:25; 8:34; Heb. 7:25; 9:24; 1 John 2:1).
7. We believe that in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave, God confirmed the deity of His Son and gave proof that God has accepted the atoning work of Christ on the cross. Jesus' bodily resurrection is also the guarantee of a future bodily resurrection life for all believers (John 5:26-29; 14:19; Rom. 4:25; 6:5-10; 1 Cor. 15:20, 23).
8. We believe that Jesus Christ will return to receive the church, which is His body, unto Himself at the Rapture and, returning with His church in glory, will establish His millennial kingdom on earth (Acts 1:9-11; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; Rev. 20).
9. We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is the One through whom God will judge all mankind (John 5:22, 23):
  - a) Believers at the Bema-Seat Judgment for the purpose of rewards (1 Cor. 3:10-15; 2 Cor. 5:10).
  - b) The Unbelieving Dead at the Great White Throne Judgment for each of their sins (Rev. 20:11-15).

### C. God the Holy Spirit

1. We believe that the Holy Spirit is the third Person of the Trinity, a divine person, eternal, underived, possessing all the attributes of personality and deity, including intellect (1 Cor. 2:10-13), emotions (Eph. 4:30), will (1 Cor. 12:11), eternality (Heb. 9:14), omnipresence (Ps. 139:7-10), omniscience (Is. 40:13, 14), omnipotence (Rom. 15:13), and truthfulness (John 16:13). In all the divine attributes He is coequal and consubstantial with the Father and the Son (Matt. 28:19; Acts 5:3, 4; 28:25, 26; 1 Cor. 12:4-6; 2 Cor. 13:14; and Jer. 31:31-34 with Heb. 10:15-17).
2. We believe that it is the work of the Holy Spirit to execute the divine will with relation to all mankind. We recognize His sovereign activity in creation (Gen. 1:2), the incarnation (Matt. 1:18), the written revelation (2 Pet. 1:20, 21), and the work of salvation (John 3:5-7).
3. We believe that a unique work of the Holy Spirit in this age began at Pentecost when He came from the Father as promised by Christ (John 14:16, 17; 15:26) to initiate and complete the building of the body of Christ. His activity includes convicting the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment; glorifying the

Lord Jesus Christ and transforming believers into the image of Christ (John 16:7-9; Acts 1:5; 2:4; Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 2:22).

4. We believe that the Holy Spirit is the supernatural and sovereign agent in regeneration, baptizing *all* believers into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). The Holy Spirit likewise indwells, sanctifies, instructs, empowers for service, and seals *all* believers unto the day of redemption (Rom. 8:9-11; 2 Cor. 3:6; Eph. 1:13). We reject any notion of “subsequence,” “second blessing,” or “second work of grace,” in the life of the believer in order to attain a fully developed spiritual life and ministry.
5. We believe that the Holy Spirit is the divine teacher who guided the apostles and prophets into all truth as they committed to writing God’s revelation, the Bible (2 Pet. 1:19-21). Every believer possesses the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit from the moment of salvation, and it is the duty of all those born of the Spirit to be filled with (controlled by) the Spirit (Rom. 8:9-11; Eph. 5:18; 1 John 2:20, 27; Gal. 5:25).
6. We believe that the Holy Spirit administers spiritual gifts to the church. The Holy Spirit glorifies neither Himself nor His gifts by ostentatious displays, but He does glorify Christ by implementing His work of redeeming the lost and building up believers in the most holy faith (John 16:13, 14; Acts 1:8; 1 Cor. 12:4-11; 2 Cor. 3:18).
7. We believe that God the Holy Spirit is sovereign in the bestowing of all His gifts for the perfecting of the saints today, but that the working of sign miracles in the beginning days of the church were for the purpose of pointing to and authenticating the apostles as revealers of divine truth, and were never intended to be characteristic of the lives of believers (1 Cor. 12:4-11; 13:8-10; 2 Cor. 12:12; Eph. 4:7-12; Heb. 2:1-4). We also believe that the gift of tongues was the ability to speak in foreign languages previously unstudied, and that this gift has also ceased to operate within the Church.

### III. Man

- A. We believe that man was directly and immediately created by God in His image and likeness. Man was created free of sin with a rational nature, intelligence, volition, self-determination, and moral responsibility to God (Gen. 2:7, 15-25; James 3:9).
- B. We believe that God’s intention in the creation of man was that man should glorify God, enjoy fellowship with Him, live life in the will of God, and by doing so will accomplish God’s purpose for him in the world (Is. 43:7; Col. 1:16; Rev. 4:11).
- C. We believe that in Adam’s sin of disobedience to the revealed will and Word of God, man lost his innocence and subsequently incurred the penalty of spiritual and physical death. He also became subject to the wrath of God; and became inherently

corrupt and utterly incapable of choosing or doing that which is acceptable to God apart from divine grace. Since man possesses no recuperative powers to enable him to recover himself, he is hopelessly lost. Man's salvation is thereby wholly of God's grace through the redemptive work of our Lord Jesus Christ (Gen. 2:16, 17; 3:1-19; John 3:36; Rom. 3:23; 6:23; 1 Cor. 2:14; Eph. 2:1-3; 1 Tim. 2:13, 14; 1 John 1:8).

- D. We believe that because all men were in Adam, a nature corrupted by Adam's sin has been transmitted to all men of all ages, with Jesus Christ being the only exception. All men inherit the sin -nature from birth, by choice, and by divine declaration (Ps. 14:1-3; Jer. 17:9; Rom. 3:9-18, 23; 5:10-12).

#### IV. Salvation

We believe that salvation is wholly of God by grace *alone*, through faith *alone*, in Christ *alone*. It is on the basis of the redemption of Jesus Christ, the merit of His shed blood, and not on the basis of human merit or works (John 1:12; Eph. 1:4-7; 2:8-10; 1 Pet. 1:18, 19).

##### A. Election

1. We believe that election is the act of God by which, before the foundation of the world, He chose in Christ those whom He graciously regenerates, saves, and sanctifies (Rom. 8:28-30; Eph. 1:4-11; 2 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 2:10; 1 Pet. 1:1, 2).
2. We don't believe that sovereign election contradicts or negates the responsibility of man to repent and trust Christ as Savior and Lord (Ezek. 18:23, 32; 33:11; John 3:18, 19, 36; 5:40; 2 Thess. 2:10-12; Rev. 22:17). Nevertheless, since sovereign grace includes the means of receiving the gift of salvation as well as the gift itself, sovereign election will result in what God determines. All whom the Father calls to Himself will come in faith, and all who come in faith the Father will receive (John 6:37-40, 44; Acts 13:48; James 4:8). We believe that the unmerited favor that God grants to totally depraved sinners is not related to any initiative of their own part nor to God's anticipation of what they might do by their own will, but is solely of His sovereign grace and mercy (Eph. 1:4-7; Titus 3:4-7; 1 Pet. 1:2).
3. We believe that election should not be looked upon as based merely on abstract sovereignty. God is truly sovereign but He exercises this sovereignty in harmony with His other attributes, especially His goodness, omniscience, justice, holiness, wisdom, grace, and love (Rom. 9:11-16). This sovereignty will always exalt the will of God in a manner totally consistent with His character as revealed in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 11:25-28; 2 Tim. 1:9).

##### B. Regeneration

1. We believe that regeneration is a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit by which the divine nature and divine life are given to the believer (John 3:3-8; Titus 3:5). It is an instantaneous act, accomplished solely by the power of the Holy Spirit through the instrumentality of the Word of God (John 5:24), when the repentant sinner, enabled by the Holy Spirit, responds in faith to the divine provision of salvation. Scripture seems to suggest that the effectual call to salvation and the believer's regeneration and saving faith take place at the same (1 Pet. 1:23, 25; Jam. 1:18).
2. Genuine regeneration will be manifested by fruits worthy of repentance as demonstrated in righteous attitudes and conduct. In other words, genuine faith produces good works (James 2:14-26), ie. the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23) which is always its proper evidence and fruit (1 Cor. 6:19-20; Eph. 5:17-21; Phil. 2:12b; Col. 3:12-17; 2 Pet. 1:4-11).

#### C. Justification

1. We believe that justification before God is an act of God (Rom. 8:30, 33) by which He declares righteous those who, through faith in Christ, repent of their sins (Is. 55:6, 7; Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 11:18; Rom. 2:4; 2 Cor. 7:10) and confess Him as sovereign Lord (Rom. 10:9, 10; 1 Cor. 12:3; 2 Cor. 4:5; Phil. 2:11). This righteousness is apart from any virtue or work of man (Rom. 3:20; 4:6) and involves the placing of our sins on Christ (Col. 2:14; 1 Pet. 2:24) and the imputation of Christ's righteousness to us (1 Cor. 1:2, 30; 6:11; 2 Cor. 5:21) (ie. "The great exchange"). Because of this "foreign righteousness" God is demonstrated to "be just, and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Rom. 3:26).

#### D. Sanctification

1. **Definitive Sanctification.** We believe that every believer is sanctified (set apart) unto God at the moment of justification and is therefore declared to be righteous, and is consequently identified as a saint. This sanctification (aka. "definitive sanctification") describes the moral change that takes place within us, when the power of sin is initially broken in our lives (I Cor. 6:11), and should not be confused with progressive sanctification (see below). This is decisive and irreversible break from the ruling power of sin takes place through the ministry of the Holy Spirit at the moment of conversion. Definitive sanctification has to do with the believer's status before God as a saint, not his present walk or condition (Acts 20:32; 1 Cor. 1:2, 30; 6:11; 2 Thess. 2:13; Heb. 2:11; 3:1; 10:10, 14; 13:12; 1 Pet. 1:2).
2. **Progressive Sanctification.** We also believe in the ongoing, sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit (aka progressive sanctification), by which the life of the believer is brought closer to the likeness of Christ through obedience to the Word of God and the Spirit's empowering. As a result, the believer is able to live a life of

increasing holiness in conformity to the will of God, while becoming more and more like our Lord Jesus Christ (John 17:17, 19; Rom. 6:1-22; 2 Cor. 3:18; 1 Thess. 4:3, 4; 5:23). In this respect, we teach that every saved person is involved in a daily conflict: the new nature in Christ doing battle against the flesh (ie. sin-nature). But adequate provision is made for victory through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. This struggle nevertheless stays with the believer all through this earthly life and is never completely ended. All claims to the eradication of sin in this life are unscriptural. We therefore reject any notion of sinless perfectionism. However even though total eradication of sin is not possible, the Holy Spirit does provide the means for victory over sin (Gal. 5:16-25; Eph. 4:22-24; Phil. 3:12; Col. 3:9, 10; 1 Pet. 1:14-16; 1 John 3:5-9).

#### E. Security (aka. Perseverance of the Saints)

1. We believe that anyone who has truly been saved by Christ are kept by God's power and are thus secure in His Son forever (John 5:24; 6:37-40; 10:27-30; Rom. 5:9, 10; 8:1, 31-39; 1 Cor. 1:4-9; Eph. 4:30; Heb. 7:25; 13:5; 1 Pet. 1:4, 5; Jude 24). The Reformers referred to this as the "perseverance of the saints," which to put it another way, simply means that all true born again believers will persevere in their God-given faith until the end of their lives and thus, cannot and will not, lose their salvation (Col. 1:23; Heb. 3:14).
2. We believe that it is the privilege of believers to rejoice in the assurance of their salvation through the testimony of God's Word (I Jn. 3:36, 5:13; Jn. 5:24, 6:47).

#### F. Separation

1. We believe that separation from sin is clearly called for throughout the Old and New Testaments, and that the Scriptures clearly indicate that in the last days apostasy and worldliness shall increase (2 Cor. 6:14 -7:1; 2 Tim. 3:1-5).
2. We believe that out of deep gratitude for the undeserved grace of God granted to us and because our glorious God is so worthy of our total consecration, all the elect should live in such a way as to demonstrate our adoring love to God, and should strive not to bring reproach upon our Lord and Savior. We also believe that separation from any association with religious apostasy (e.g. Roman Catholicism), and worldly and sinful practices (eg. LGBTQ practices, abortion, drug and alcohol abuse) are commanded of us by God (Rom. 12:1, 2; 1 Cor. 5:9-13; 2 Cor. 6:14 - 7:1; 1 John 2:15-17; 2 John 9-11).
3. We believe that Christians should be separated unto our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thess. 1:11, 12; Heb. 12:1, 2) and affirm that the Christian life is characterized by a life of obedience, demonstrated by a kingdom ethic (Matt. 5:2-12) and a continual pursuit of holiness (Rom. 12:1, 2; 2 Cor. 7:1; Heb. 12:14; Titus 2:11-14; 1 John 3:1-10).

## V. The Church

- A. We believe that all those who place their faith in Jesus Christ are immediately placed by the Holy Spirit into one united spiritual body, the church (1 Cor. 12:12, 13), the bride of Christ (2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:23-32; Rev. 19:7, 8), of which Christ is the head (Eph. 1:22; 4:15; Col. 1:18). This is a doctrine known as “Spirit-baptism.”
- B. We also believe that the formation of the church, the body of Christ, began on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-21, 38-47) and will be completed at the coming of Christ for His own at the Rapture (1 Cor. 15:51-52; 1 Thess. 4:13-18).
- C. We believe that the church is thus a unique spiritual organism designed by Christ, made up of all born-again believers in this present age (Eph. 2:11 - 3:6). The church is distinct from Israel (1 Cor. 10:32), and never is the Church identified as “the New Israel.” We therefore reject any notion of supercessionism, the idea that the New Testament Church replaces Israel. We believe that the establishment and continuity of local churches is clearly taught and defined in the New Testament Scriptures (Acts 14:23, 27; 20:17, 28; Gal. 1:2; Phil. 1:1; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1) and that the members of the one spiritual body are directed to associate themselves together in local assemblies (1 Cor. 11:18-20; Heb. 10:25).
- D. We believe that the one supreme authority for the church is Christ (Eph. 1:22; Col. 1:18) and that leadership, gifts, order, discipline, and worship in the church are all appointed through His sovereignty, as delineated in the Scriptures. The biblically designated officers serving under Christ and over the assembly are elders (males, who are also called bishops, pastors, and pastor-teachers; Acts 20:28; Eph. 4:11) and deacons (men and women), both of whom must meet biblical qualifications (1 Tim. 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Pet. 5:1-5). We believe that the Scripture is absolutely clear when it limits the office of pastor/elder to men, a command based upon the creation order and not culture or any other presumed contextual factor (1 Tim. 2:12-14).
- E. We believe that biblically qualified elders lead or rule as servants of Christ (1 Tim. 5:17-22) and have His authority in directing the church. The congregation is to submit to their leadership (Heb. 13:7, 17). We also believe in the importance of discipleship (Matt. 28:19, 20; 2 Tim. 2:2), the mutual accountability of all believers to each other (Matt. 18:15-17), as well as the need to discipline sinning members of the congregation in accord with the standards of Scripture (Matt. 18:15-22; Acts 5:1-11; 1 Cor. 5:1-13; 2 Thess. 3:6-15; 1 Tim. 1:19, 20; Titus 1:10-16).
- F. We believe in the autonomy of the local church, free from any external governing authority or control, with the right of self-government and freedom from the interference of any hierarchy of individuals or organizations (Titus 1:5). We believe that it is scriptural for true churches to cooperate with each other for the presentation and propagation of the faith. Local churches, however, through their elder board and their interpretation and application of Scripture, should be the sole

judges of the measure and method of their cooperation (Acts 15:19-31; 20:28; 1 Cor. 5:4-7, 13; 1 Pet. 5:1-4).

- G. We believe that the purpose of the church is to glorify God (Eph. 3:21) by building itself up in the faith (Eph. 4:13-16), by instruction of the Word (2 Tim. 2:2, 15; 3:16-17), by fellowship (Acts 2:47; 1 John 1:3), by keeping the ordinances (Luke 22:19; Acts 2:38-42) and by advancing and communicating the gospel to the entire world (Matt. 28:19; Acts 1:8).
- H. We believe that it is the calling of all saints to the work of service, and not just the pastors (1 Cor. 15:58; Eph. 4:11-12; Rev. 22:12).
- I. We believe that the need of the church is to cooperate with God as He accomplishes His purpose in the world. To that end, He gives the church spiritual gifts. He uniquely gifts certain men (elders/pastors) for the purpose of equipping the saints for the work of the ministry (Eph. 4:7-12), and He also gives unique and special spiritual abilities to each member of the body of Christ (Rom. 12:5-8; 1 Cor. 12:4-31; 1 Pet. 4:10, 11).
- J. We believe that there were two kinds of gifts given to the early church:
  - 1. Miraculous gifts of divine revelation (ie. Prophecy), miracles and healing, given temporarily in the apostolic era for the purpose of confirming the authenticity of the apostles' message ( 2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:3, 4). We don't believe that anyone possesses the gift of miracles or healing today but that doesn't mean that God doesn't do miraculous things today, nor does it mean that He cannot divinely heal someone according to His will. God does hear and answer the prayer of faith but will answer in accordance with His own perfect will for the sick, suffering, and afflicted (Luke 18:1-8; John 5:7-9; 2 Cor. 12:6-10; James 5:13-16; 1 John 5:14, 15; Is. 38).
  - 2. Ministering gifts, given to equip believers for the edification of one another. With the New Testament revelation now complete, Scripture becomes the sole test of the authenticity of a man's message, and confirming gifts of a miraculous nature are no longer necessary to validate a man or his message (1 Cor. 13:8-12). We believe that these are the only gifts in operation today, non-revelatory equipping gifts given for edification (Rom. 12:6-8).
- K. We believe that two ordinances have been committed to the local church:
  - 1. **Baptism.** We believe in what is commonly referred to as "believer's baptism," or "credo baptism." Simply put, this means we believe that a Christian is to be baptized subsequent to his repentance and faith in Christ as his first act of obedience (Acts 2:38). We believe that Christian baptism was always by immersion in the NT (Acts 8:36-39), and is the solemn and beautiful testimony of a believer showing forth his faith in the crucified, buried, and risen Savior, and

his union with Him in death to sin and resurrection to a new life (Rom. 6: 1-11). It is also a sign of fellowship and identification with the visible body of Christ (Acts 2:41, 42). We reject infant baptism (aka “paedo-baptism”) as an unbiblical practice as there are no commands for parents to baptize their infants, nor are there any examples of infants being baptized.

2. **The Lord’s Supper** (Acts 2:38-42). We believe that the Lord’s Supper is the commemoration and proclamation of Christ’s death until He comes, and should always be preceded by solemn self-examination (1 Cor. 11:23-32). We also teach that whereas the elements of communion are only *representative* of the flesh and blood of Christ (in contradistinction to the Roman Catholic Mass), the Lord’s Supper is nevertheless an actual Communion with the risen Christ who is present in a unique way, fellowshiping with His people (1 Cor. 10:16).

## VI. Angels

### A. Holy Angels

1. We believe that angels are created beings and are therefore not to be worshipped. Although they are a higher order of creation than man, they are created to serve God and to worship Him (Luke 2:9-14; Heb. 1:6, 7, 14; 2:6, 7; Rev. 5:11-14).

### B. Fallen Angels

1. We believe that Satan is a real being, not fictional, a created angel and the author of sin. He incurred the judgment of God by pridefully rebelling against his Creator (Is. 14:12-17; Ezek. 28:11-19), by taking numerous angels with him in his fall (Matt. 25:41; Rev. 12:1-14), and by introducing sin into the human race by his temptation of Eve (Gen. 3:1-15).
2. We believe that Satan is the open and declared enemy of God and man (Is. 14:13, 14; Matt. 4:1-11; Rev. 12:9, 10), the prince of this world who has been defeated through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Rom. 16:20) and that he shall be eternally punished in the lake of fire (Is. 14:12-17; Ezek. 28:11-19; Matt. 25:41; Rev. 20:10).

## VII. Last Things (Eschatology)

### A. Death

1. We don’t believe that physical death involves a loss of our immaterial consciousness (ie. soul sleep)(Rev. 6:9-11), but even though there is a separation of soul and body (James 2:26), the soul of the redeemed person enters immediately into the presence of Christ (Luke 23:43; 2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:23), and that separation of the soul from the body will continue until the

Rapture (1 Thess. 4:13-17), which initiates the first resurrection (Rev. 20:4-6). It is at that time that the believer's soul and resurrected body will be reunited, to be glorified forever with our Lord (1 Cor. 15:35-44, 50-54; Phil. 3:21). Until that time, the souls of the redeemed in Christ remain in joyful fellowship with our Lord Jesus Christ in heaven (2 Cor. 5:8).

2. We believe in the bodily resurrection of all men, the saved to eternal life (John 6:39; Rom. 8:10, 11, 19-23; 2 Cor. 4:14), and the unsaved to judgment and everlasting punishment (Dan. 12:2; John 5:29; Rev. 20:13-15). We reject any notion of conditional immortality, aka. annihilationism.
3. We believe that the souls of the unsaved at death are kept under punishment until the second resurrection (Luke 16:19-26; Rev. 20:13-15), when their soul and resurrected body will also be reunited (John 5:28, 29). They shall then appear at the Great White Throne judgment to be judged for every one of their sins (Rev. 20:11-15), and then they shall be cast into hell, the lake of fire (Matt. 25:41-46), and be cut off from the life of God forever (Dan. 12:2; Matt. 25:41-46; 2 Thess. 1:7-9).

#### B. The Rapture of the Church

1. Although we don't make the timing of the Rapture a point of doctrinal contention, we do affirm a Pretribulational Rapture. That is, we believe in the personal, bodily return of our Lord Jesus Christ *before* the seven-year tribulation (1 Thess. 4:16) begins to translate His church from this earth (John 14:1-3; 1 Cor. 15:51-53; 1 Thess. 4:15 - 5:11) to heaven. Between this event (the Rapture) and His glorious return with His saints (the Second Coming), He will reward believers according to their works (1 Cor. 3:11-15; 2 Cor. 5:10).

#### C. The Tribulation

1. We believe that following the Rapture (John 14:1-3; 1 Thess. 4:13-18), the righteous judgments of God will be poured out upon an unbelieving world (Jer.30:7; Dan. 9:27; 12:1; 2 Thess. 2:7-12; Rev. 16) in an unprecedented seven year period of God's wrath (Rev. 6:16-17), and that these judgments will be climaxed by the pre-millennial return of Christ in glory to the earth (Matt. 24:27-31; 25:31-46; 2 Thess. 2:7-12). At that time the Old Testament and tribulation saints will be raised and the living will be judged (Dan. 12:2-3; Rev. 20:4-6). This period is the seventieth week of Daniel's prophecy (Dan. 9:24-27; Matt. 24:15-31; 25:31-46).

#### D. The Second Coming and the Millennial Reign

1. We also believe in the Pre-millennial reign of Christ. That is, we believe that after the tribulation period Christ will come back to earth to occupy the throne of David (Matt. 25:31; Luke 1:32, 33; Acts 1:10, 11; 2:29, 30) and establish His

Messianic Kingdom for a thousand years on the earth (Rev. 20:1-7). During this time the resurrected saints will rule and reign with Him over all the nations of the earth, and the apostles in a special role over Israel (Ezek. 37:21-28; Dan. 7:17-22; Matt. 19:28; Rev. 2:26, 19:11-16). This reign will be preceded by the overthrow of the Antichrist and the False Prophet and by the removal of Satan from the world (Dan. 7:17-27; Rev. 20:1-6).

2. We believe that the Millennial Kingdom itself will be the fulfillment of God's promise to Israel (Is. 65:17-25; Ezek. 37:21-28; Zech. 8:1-17) to restore them to the land which they previously forfeited through their disobedience (Deut. 28:15-68). The result of their disobedience was that Israel was temporarily set aside (Matt. 21:43; Rom. 11: 1-26) but will again be awakened through repentance to enter into the land of blessing (Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:22-32; Rom. 11:25-29).
3. We believe that this time of our Lord's reign will be characterized by harmony, justice, peace, righteousness, and long life (Is. 11; 65:17-25; Ezek. 36:33-38) and will be brought to an end with the release of Satan (Rev. 20:7).

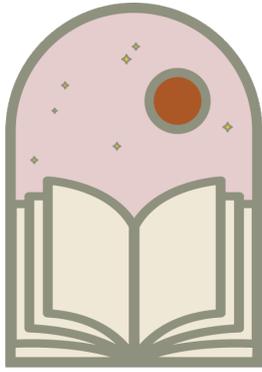
#### E. The Judgment of the Lost

1. We believe that following the release of Satan after the thousand year reign of Christ (Rev. 20:7), Satan will deceive the nations of the earth and gather them to battle against the saints and the beloved city, at which time Satan and his army will be devoured by fire from heaven (Rev. 20:9). Following this, Satan will be thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone (Matt. 25:41; Rev. 20:10) whereupon Christ, who is the Judge of all men (John 5:22), will resurrect and judge the great and small at the Great White Throne judgment.
2. We believe that this resurrection of the unsaved dead to judgment will be a physical resurrection, whereupon receiving their judgment (John 5:28, 29), they will be committed to eternal conscious punishment in the lake of fire (Matt. 25:41; Rev. 20:11-15).

#### F. Eternity

1. We believe that after the closing of the Millennium, the temporary release of Satan, and the judgment of unbelievers (2 Thess. 1:9; Rev. 20:7-15), the saved will enter the eternal state of glory with God, after which the elements of this earth are to be dissolved (2 Pet. 3:10) and a renovated new heaven and earth emerges, wherein righteousness alone dwells (Eph. 5:5; Rev. 20:15, 21, 22). It is at this time that the New Jerusalem will come down out of heaven (Rev. 21:2) and will be the dwelling place of the saints, where they will forever enjoy fellowship with God and one another (John 17:3; Rev. 21, 22). Our Lord Jesus Christ, having fulfilled His redemptive mission, will then deliver up the kingdom

to God the Father (1 Cor. 15:23-28) that in all spheres the triune God may reign forever and ever (1 Cor. 15:28).



# CHAPTER 1

## THE DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE

2 Timothy 3:16–17. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup> that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

**I**nspiration of Scripture is the most fundamental and foundational doctrine of Christianity. We start here because if you get this doctrine wrong, then you're very foundation as a Christian will be wrong. A believer must have a firm grip on the fact that part and parcel of living under the Lordship of Christ is living in submission to His Word. The Scripture tells us who to believe in, what to believe, what to think, and how to live. In short, Scripture interprets reality for us. And because Scripture originates from God and not man, we can rest assured that it is as free from error as God Himself. As we will emphasize in this section, Scripture is *inerrant* (free from error) and *infallible* (incapable of error). Our jumping off point for this discussion is the one quoted above, 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

### I. The Inspiration of Scripture

#### A. Definition

First, the word that is used for *Scripture* in Paul's day could refer to any writing whether it was sacred or secular. But in the New Testament, this word is used fifty times and all fifty uses are confined to the word of God (BAGD, 166),<sup>2</sup> thus making this a technical term for Scripture. Next, let's examine the word that is translated

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<sup>2</sup> See also George W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1992), 445.

**“breathed out by God”** in the ESV, or more simply put, “God-breathed.”<sup>3</sup> This is the only place in the New Testament where this word occurs and is only rarely found in literature prior to the New Testament.<sup>4</sup> It yields a passive sense here, describing not the nature of Scripture itself (i.e. “scripture emits God’s breath”) but the *source* (“scripture is God-breathed”).<sup>5</sup> So, just as God breathed out life into Adam (Gen. 2:7), God breathed out the Scripture [maybe it’s more accurate to say “expiration”]. We learn elsewhere that the Holy Spirit is God’s divine breath; that is, He is the author of Scripture (2 Pet. 1:21). So, the Scriptures are as much a creation of God as life itself is.<sup>6</sup> The Scripture is not a record of man’s thoughts and opinions, it is the very words of God spoken through man, and thus authoritative (2 Pet. 1:20-21). This is what is known as the doctrine of Inspiration. Here’s a basic but good definition of *inspiration*:

Inspiration may be defined as the Holy Spirit’s superintending over the writers so that while writing according to their own styles and personalities, the result was God’s Word written—authoritative, trustworthy, and free from error in the original autographs.<sup>7</sup>

The rest of the chapter will seek to defend this definition by appeal to various other passages in addition to 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

#### B. Inspiration is Comprehensive

The adjective that begins 2 Timothy 3:16 points to the comprehensive nature of inspiration, *all* Scripture. This construction in the Greek text should be understood

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<sup>3</sup> H. Wayne House, “Biblical Inspiration in 2 Timothy 3:16” in *Vital Apologetic Issues*, ed., Roy B. Zuck (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1995), 220-21. Since this is the only place that this word occurs in Scripture, there has been some discussion concerning its translation. If it’s to be translated passive as we are arguing for here, then it emphasizes the fact that Scripture’s source is the breath of God, that it originates from God. If it is translated active, then it simply means that the Scripture is filled with the breath of God. Benjamin Warfield in his magnum opus, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia, PA: P & R, 1970) demonstrates the overwhelming evidence for translating it passively, “God-breathed.” As William Mounce noted in his commentary, “Warfield’s argument on this point seems to have been accepted nearly universally.” William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, vol. 46, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2000), 566.

<sup>4</sup> Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 565.

<sup>5</sup> Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield: Revelation and Inspiration*, vol. 1 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008), 245-96; Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 566.

<sup>6</sup> Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament: I Thessalonians to Philemon*, ed. Robert Frew (London: Blackie & Son, 1884–1885), 241.

<sup>7</sup> Paul P. Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1989), 160.

as “the whole,” or “the entirety” of Scripture.<sup>8</sup> This includes not only the Old Testament, but the New Testament Scriptures as well.<sup>9</sup> Cf. 1 Thess. 2:13; Matt. 5:17-18, 24:35; Gal. 3:16; I Pet. 1:23-25.

Does the rest of Scripture affirm this interpretation? Yes, it does.

1. **Psalm 119:160.** The sum of your word is truth, and every one of your righteous rules endures forever.

Both the integrity and the stability of Scripture is highlighted in this great Psalm that honors God’s word. The first declaration of the Psalmist is that the *sum*, or entirety of God’s Word is truth. First, the Psalmist looks at God’s word as a whole, or in its totality (Zemek, p. 347).<sup>10</sup> This first part of the verse can also be translated “the sum [totality] of your Word is truth,” or as Martin Luther translated, “thy Word is nothing but truth” (Leupold, p. 857). Regardless, the Psalmist makes it abundantly clear that the Scripture in its entirety is without error.

Then, after viewing the Scripture in its sum total, the Psalmist then looks at each individual parts of the whole: “**every one of Your righteous rules.**”<sup>11</sup> Keil & Delitzsch affirm this in their commentary: “ If he reckons up the word of God in its separate parts and as a whole, truth is the denominator of the whole, truth is

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<sup>8</sup> House, “Biblical Inspiration in 2 Timothy 3:16,” 218. When the noun accompanying  $\pi\acute{\alpha}\sigma\alpha$  (“all” or “every”) is a proper noun or collective term, the adjective may be translated “the whole” or “all.” This makes the most sense in the context since he goes on in verse 17 to speak of the Scripture’s profitability; more likely the whole of Scripture rather than each Scripture (Knight, 445). If one opts for the translation, *every*, the emphasis would shift from Scripture as a cohesive whole to the sum total of its parts (ie. that every part of Scripture originates from God) (See Mounce, 566).

<sup>9</sup> The previous verse is a reference to the Old Testament Scriptures (“the Holy Scriptures”), attesting to the fact that they can make one wise unto salvation. Paul then broadens the statement by placing the adjective, *all* in front of “Scripture” to refer to all of revelation (So Knight, 448; MacArthur, 144; contra. Lea, 235). Also, it makes no difference whether the writing was extant at the time Paul wrote this. Paul is making a general statement that all that is Scripture, is God-breathed. All the books that Paul wrote after 2 Timothy still apply, because it is still Scripture, and thus still God-breathed (cf. House, *Biblical Inspiration in 2 Timothy 3:16*, 219-20; Knight, 448). For example, if I said “all married men have wives,” it does not matter whether you exist before or after I said it, it will always be true. It is a timeless statement. Barnes, 240., displays his misunderstanding of this verse, “This properly refers to the Old Testament, and should not be applied to any part of the New Testament, unless it can be shown that that part was then written, and was included under the general name of *the Scriptures.*”

<sup>10</sup> George J. Zemek, *The Word of God in the Child of God: Exegetical, Theological, and Homiletical Reflections from the 119th Psalm* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005), 347.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 347,

the sum-total.”<sup>12</sup> All that to say, that the whole body of God’s revelation is truth. This second declaration of the Psalmist means that God’s Word never gets outdated, it never needs to be changed, nor does it need to be updated. No matter how much time passes, sin will always be sin, righteousness will always be righteousness. In this sense, the Scripture always remains contemporary. So whether viewed from its individual parts or as a whole, the Scripture proves itself to be both “dependable and imperishable.”<sup>13</sup> Also, in order for God’s righteous judgments to endure forever, it assumes that the Scripture itself will be preserved.

2. **1 Thessalonians 2:13.** And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.

The reason that the missionaries gave a continual thanksgiving to God was due to the Thessalonians’ proper attitude and acceptance of their message. Notice that when they **received** God’s word as spoken through Paul and his associates (Silvanus and Timothy), they recognized it for what it was: divine, rather than human in origin. The Thessalonians recognized very clearly that though the messages that they were hearing were being spoken through the missionaries, it ultimately did not originate from the men themselves.<sup>14</sup> They were simply spokesmen or mouthpieces of God, proclaiming a message whose ultimate source was God Himself.<sup>15</sup> And, if God is the source of the message, can it be anything less than trustworthy? **Titus 1:2** affirms that God “**never lies,**” and **Hebrews 6:18** goes a step further and says that it’s “**impossible for God to lie.**” The Thessalonians understood that what they were hearing was not the philosophical musings of itinerant preachers, phonies or charlatans, but rather messages from God Himself.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 5 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 747.

<sup>13</sup> Zemek, *The Word of God*, 348.

<sup>14</sup> D. Edmond Hiebert, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, Revised Edition. (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1996), 115; William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of I-II Thessalonians*, vol. 3, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 69; Gene L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans Pub.; Apollos, 2002), 140.

<sup>15</sup> Leon Morris, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*, The New International Commentary on the Old and New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991), 80.

<sup>16</sup> Robert L. Thomas, “**1 Thessalonians,**” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Ephesians through Philemon*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelain, vol. 11 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 257; Hiebert, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 115.

### C. Inspiration is by the Holy Spirit

**2 Peter 1:20–21** says, “knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. <sup>21</sup> For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

The origin of Scripture is clearly revealed in this passage. The Bible is not a collection of man’s wisdom, ranging from the theology of Paul to that of Peter, but it is in fact, the very word of God. Yes, God did use these men to write God’s word, but what they wrote did not originate with themselves. As is revealed in this passage, the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Trinity, is the one responsible for the inspiration of Scripture.

How did this come about? Peter tells us that the Holy Spirit “*carried along*” the Bible writers to write what they did. The word translated, “*carried along*” points to the Holy Spirit’s empowerment in the writing of Scripture. This word is used in Acts 27:15 to describe the wind’s carrying along a boat, by hitting its sails. Thus, in reference to Scripture this signifies that the writers were under the influence of the Spirit’s power and that what they wrote was ultimately from God, and not themselves. This doesn’t imply that their own personalities, vocabularies, or even literary styles were suppressed.<sup>17</sup> No, they consciously wrote what they intended to write and were never under a trance at any time. There is no concept of “mechanical writing” or “divine dictation”<sup>18</sup> so far as the concept of the inspiration of Scripture is concerned.

There is another important point in this passage that should not be missed. Take a look at verse 21: “**knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation.**” When Peter says that no prophecy contained in Scripture is “**from someone’s own interpretation,**” he refers to the fact that Scripture is not the product of the prophet’s own unique interpretation, or personal opinion. What the prophet wrote, did not originate with himself (Barnes, p. 232). Thus, you can have the assurance that when you read the Scripture, that you are not simply reading the viewpoint of one man who lived a long time ago, and what he thought about God. This passage makes it explicit that there is not a single passage of Scripture that falls into that category. Some have tried to deny portions of the Scripture because they believe it reflects human bias. For example, some Feminists have rejected the Bible’s teaching on the submissive role of women in the home and in the church, because they believe that Paul was a male chauvinist in

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<sup>17</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, vol. 37, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003), 324.

<sup>18</sup> Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, 161. This is basically the idea that the Bible writers received verbatim what God said and that they passively wrote it down. They were mere receivers then, and not actually authors in any real sense of the word. Although this view preserves the accuracy of the text itself, it has a difficult time explaining the differences in style and vocabulary that is evident in the various authors themselves throughout Scripture.

what he wrote on the subject, reverting back to his thinking as a pharisee.<sup>19</sup> That flies directly in the face of these verses. What Paul wrote was God's Word and not his **"own interpretation."**

This leads to another point and that's the fact that inspiration is equal throughout the whole Bible. There are those who think that the words of Jesus that are printed in red are more authoritative than other passages in the rest of the Bible. This is not true. Although Jesus was greater ontologically (in essence) than the human Bible writers, their words still hold equal value with His because their authority comes from God and not themselves.

## II. False Views of Inspiration

### A. The Liberal View

The liberal is one who has a low view of Scripture. He is one who feels that you can find errors in the Scripture, and thus it does not contain pure truth. Therefore, it is not the final authority in the believer's life. The refusal of absolute Biblical authority can be seen by the quote from S. T. David who said,

It is true that no Christian who believes that the Bible errs can hold that the Bible alone is his authority for faith and practice. He must hold to some other authority or criterion as well. That authority, I am not embarrassed to say, is his own mind, his own ability to reason...I am the final judge of what I will believe or not believe (emphasis mine).<sup>20</sup>

Similarly, pluralist John Hick made these comments concerning the authority of Scripture:

I do not think that it is possible to settle theological issues with "The Bible says..." The Bible is a collection of documents written during a period of about a thousand years by different people in different historical and cultural situations. The writings are of a variety of kinds, including court records, heavily edited and slanted history, prophetic utterances, hymns, letters, diary fragments, memories of the historical Jesus, faith-created pictures of his religious significance, apocalyptic visions, etc. The human authorship and historical setting must always be taken into account in using the Scriptures (emphasis mine).<sup>21</sup>

A person who believes he has the freedom to pick and choose what he wants to believe from Scripture, will end up with a version of Christianity of his own making,

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<sup>19</sup> See Paul Jewett, *Man as Male and Female* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975), 129-47.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted by Norman L. Geisler, *Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1980), 109.

<sup>21</sup> John Hick, "A Pluralist View" in *Four Views of Salvation in a Pluralistic World*, ed., Dennis L. Okholm and Timothy R. Philipps (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 33.

one made in his own image. Such a person has not humbled himself under God's authority but still lives an autonomous existence, deciding for himself what he will or will not believe.

## B. Neo-Orthodoxy

This is the view that God's Word is a fallible witness to God's Word, but not the Word of God itself.<sup>22</sup> It historically recorded man's encounter with God's Word but should not be confused with God's Word itself. Proponents believe that it *becomes* the Word of God when one encounters God through the text, due to the Spirit's illumination. Because this view doesn't believe that the very words of Scripture are God's word, it has no problem asserting that there are errors in the Scripture because errors don't interfere with its value. Professor Charles Davis explains:

What is true of Christian traditions generally is true of the Bible. The Bible is a unique and indispensable witness of God's revelation, which culminated in Christ. It is not, however, free from the limitations of its cultural context, or rather contexts, nor is it entirely without error. The limitations and errors do not destroy the unity and continuity of its teaching nor the fact that it embodies the absolute truth of God's Word. At the same time, it is a human and historical document, subject as such to inevitable imperfections and limitations.<sup>23</sup>

This is why for Neo-Orthodox advocates, it's not really important whether the Bible is factually true or historically accurate all the time. For example, Emil Brunner wrote, "God can speak to us His single, never contradictory word through...the contradictory accounts of Luke and Matthew."<sup>24</sup> Or as Karl Barth famously said, "The Bible is God's Word so far as God lets it be his Word."<sup>25</sup>

This view makes Scripture a *subjective* encounter rather than *objective* truth. The Scripture is the instrument we use in order to meet with God but should not be confused as the word of God in and of itself. For the Neo-Orthodox what's more important is the existential connection that is made with God through the Scripture, not the factuality of the Scripture itself.<sup>26</sup> As we will see, the Bible does not claim to *become* God's Word, it claims to *be* God's Word.

## C. Limited Inerrancy aka Infallibility

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<sup>22</sup> Karl Barth was a major proponent of this view.

<sup>23</sup> Geisler, *Inerrancy*, 232.

<sup>24</sup> Quoted in Michael J. Kruger, *Canon Revisited* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2012), 61.

<sup>25</sup> Walter A. Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology: Second Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 820.

<sup>26</sup> Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, 61.

This is the increasingly popular view that the Bible is accurate on issues that touch salvation, faith and practice, but not necessarily so when speaking on any other subject. Since God did not reveal science or history to the Bible writers, they were subject to the limitations of their time.<sup>27</sup> In other words, when the Scripture speaks on science, history, or any other discipline it may be in error, and is thus not necessary that we believe it.<sup>28</sup> Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, is an advocate of this view. In their doctrinal statement they confess under the heading, "The Language of 'Inerrancy' and it's Dangers"

We recognize the importance that the word "inerrancy" has attained in the thinking of many of our scholarly colleagues and the institutions which they serve. We appreciate the way in which most of them use the term to underscore the fact that Scripture is indeed God's trustworthy Word in all it affirms. Where inerrancy refers to what the Holy Spirit is saying to the churches through the biblical writers, we support its use. Where the focus switches to an undue emphasis on matters like chronological details, precise sequence of events, and numerical allusions, we would consider the term misleading and inappropriate.

Its dangers, when improperly defined, are

1. that it implies a precision alien to the minds of the Bible writers and their own use of the Scriptures;
2. that it diverts attention from the message of salvation and the instruction in righteousness which are the Bible's key themes;
3. that it may encourage glib and artificial harmonizations rather than serious wrestling with the implication of biblical statements which may seem to disagree;

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<sup>27</sup>Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1998), 248-249. "Limited inerrancy also regards the Bible as inerrant and infallible in its salvific doctrinal references. A sharp distinction is drawn, however, between nonempirical, revealed matters on the one hand, and empirical, natural references on the other. The Bible's scientific and historical references reflect the understanding current at the time it was written. The Bible writers were subject to the limitations of their time. Revelation and inspiration did not raise the writers above ordinary knowledge. God did not reveal science or history to them. Consequently, the Bible may well contain what we would term errors in these areas. This, however, is of no great consequence, since the Bible does not purport to teach science and history. For the purposes for which the Bible was given, it is fully truthful and inerrant."

<sup>28</sup>F. David Farnell, "Philosophical and Theological Bent of Historical Criticism" in *The Jesus Crisis* ed., Robert L. Thomas & F. David Farnell (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1998), 86-87. We have Francis Bacon to thank for "limited inerrancy." He was the one who advocated the separation of science from the Bible, believing that science and reason dealt with fact, while religion dealt with faith. He therefore believed that the Bible was only trustworthy in "spiritual matters."

4. that it leads those who think that there is one proven error in the Bible (however minor), to regard its whole teaching as subject to doubt;
5. that too often it has undermined our confidence in the Bible by a retreat for refuge to the original manuscripts (which we do not possess) whenever problems cannot otherwise be resolved;
6. that it prompts us to an inordinate defensiveness of Scripture which seems out of keeping with the bold confidence with which the prophets, the apostles, and our Lord proclaimed it.<sup>29</sup>

And thus the doctrinal statement concerning Scripture, from one of the most influential seminaries in the country.

### III. Biblical View of Inspiration

#### A. Full Inerrancy

Taking into account our previous discussion concerning what the Scripture teaches about itself, let's move towards a working definition. The Scripture claims to be inspired by God ("God-breathed") and therefore, inerrant. It used to be enough to say that we believe in the inspiration of Scripture or the infallibility of Scripture, but that simply isn't true anymore. Limited inerrantists are able to profess infallibility (only in reference to faith and practice) but not inerrancy, even though infallibility is an even stronger word ("incapable of error"). Now we have to affirm "full inerrancy" or "verbal plenary inspiration"<sup>30</sup> in order to accurately distinguish ourselves from compromised views of inspiration. So, what does full inerrancy entail? E. J. Young explained it this way,

The inerrancy of the Scriptures, then, implies their freedom from any error of doctrine, fact or ethic. To state the matter in a slightly different way, every assertion of the Bible is true, whether the Bible speaks of what to believe (doctrine), or how to live (ethics), or whether it recounts historical events. On whatever subject the Scripture speaks, it speaks the truth, and one believes its utterances.<sup>31</sup>

Paul Feinberg succinctly states it this way,

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<sup>29</sup> "What We Believe and Teach," <https://www.fuller.edu/about/mission-and-values/what-we-believe-and-teach/>

<sup>30</sup> This simply means that inspiration extends to both the individual words as well as the whole of Scripture.

<sup>31</sup> E. J. Young quoted in "The Revelation, Inspiration, and Inerrancy of the Bible" in The Fundamentals for the Twenty-First Century ed., Mal Couch (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2000), 97.

Inerrancy is the view that when all the facts become known, they will demonstrate that the Bible in its original autographs and correctly interpreted is entirely true and never false in all it affirms, whether that relates to doctrine or ethics or to the social, physical, or life sciences (emphasis mine).<sup>32</sup>

By the way, the fact that this view of Scripture is what the Bible actually teaches concerning itself and therefore held by the Church since its very inception is emphasized in this statement by Benjamin Warfield who wrote the most definitive work on the inspiration of Scripture:

[referring to Full inspiration/inerrancy] This is, of course, the judgment of all those who have adopted this doctrine as their own, because they apprehend it to be the biblical doctrine. It is also the judgment of all those who can bring themselves to refuse a doctrine which they yet perceive to be a biblical doctrine. Whether we appeal, among men of this class, to such students of a more evangelical tendency as Tholuck, Rothe, Farrar, Sandy, or to such extremer writers as Riehm, Reuss, Pfleiderer, Keunen, they will agree in telling us that the high doctrine of inspiration which we have called the church-doctrine was held by the writers of the New Testament. This is common ground between believing and unbelieving students of the Bible, and needs, therefore, no new demonstration in the forum of scholarship.<sup>33</sup>

Warfield saw it as a waste of time in his day to prove that full inspiration was the Bible's view of itself, because even those who rejected it, admitted that the Bible taught this very thing. That explains why this doctrine is reflected throughout the Church's history and is reflected in the ancient creeds (though the word *inerrancy* is not used).

## B. Arguments for Full Inerrancy

### 1. God does not breathe out mistakes.

As we've already discussed, the concept of Scripture being "God-breathed" means that the Scripture's origin is not man, but God Himself. This necessitates that everything in God's Word is true whether it touches doctrine or ethics, or to the social, physical, or life sciences. Those who advocate for "limited inerrancy," are arguing for a God who is powerful enough to preserve His truth intact regarding justification and sanctification, yet it may not be trustworthy in regards to other fields of discipline. This seems rather remarkable. Why would anybody trust what the Bible has to say concerning eternal life, forgiveness of sin, and a right

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<sup>32</sup> P. D. Feinberg, "Inerrancy and Infallibility of the Bible," in Walter A. Elwell, Evangelical Dictionary of Theology: Second Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 156.

<sup>33</sup> Benjamin B. Warfield, The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield: Revelation and Inspiration, vol. 1 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008), 61.

relationship with God, when it cannot even be trusted in regards to the creation of the world, science or history? In other words, if the Bible contains errors in lesser matters that we can check on (eg. Science), how do we know it is not in error in much more significant matters that we can't check on (eg. Resurrection, crucifixion, propitiation, etc.)? Either God spoke to the prophets and apostles, or He didn't. Otherwise, Scripture is a mixture of God's Word and man's word; how would anyone be able to discern which is which?

Also, limited inerrancy fails to take into account the fact that you cannot make a clean separation between what is doctrinal, and what is not. For example, what is the resurrection, doctrine or history? It's both. How about the virgin birth? Same answer. In both cases, its doctrine grounded in history. Also, many who adhere to limited inerrancy deny that their view undermines the authority of Scripture. Think of the absurdity of that assertion by use of an illustration:<sup>34</sup> Let's say you were traveling from Valencia to San Diego via bus. You arrive at the bus station and are handed a copy of the bus schedule and are told that it contains errors in it somewhere. Well, you have to transfer busses several times in order to arrive in San Diego so you really need to know where the errors are but are simply told, "the schedule has errors in it somewhere but its up to you to find out where they are." How would you reply? What do you think of the worth of this bus schedule now? Hasn't the authority of this document now been undermined? But you are further told, "Certainly not all of it is false, it is still mostly true, but it's up to you to figure out which parts are true and which parts are false." Does that give you any solace? Look, if the whole thing is not entirely true, it cannot be an absolute authority for your life. You become the authority, accepting what is true and what is not.

Think about how this view will affect your hermeneutics (principles of interpretation); As full inerrantists we have a two-step approach:

- (1) what does the text mean?
- (2) How do I apply it to my life?

Instead, with a limited inerrancy view you'll have to proceed like this:

- (1) what does the text mean?
- (2) Is it true?
- (3) We only apply it to our lives if we determine the text is true.

Is it the Scripture, or the reader, who's really the final authority now? The same can be said for textual criticism as it relates to this view. As Greg Bahnsen has noted, "To put matters another way, the difference between those who maintain original inerrancy and those who hold to limited inerrancy is indicated in the divergent outcomes of textual criticism for the two. When the proper text has

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<sup>34</sup> John Feinberg, "The Meaning of Inerrancy" in Geisler, *Inerrancy*.

been identified by someone holding to original inerrancy, he has an *incontestable truth*. However, someone holding to limited inerrancy who identifies the original text has simply found something that is only *possibly* true (and thus possibly false).<sup>35</sup> To doubt the reliability of any part of the Bible is simply to begin a journey of unbelief that will soon lead to a rejection of other major doctrines. As Millard Erickson has noted, “*There is evidence that where a theologian, a school, or a movement begins by regarding biblical inerrancy as a peripheral or optional matter and abandons this doctrine, it frequently then goes on to abandon or alter other doctrines which the church has ordinarily considered quite major, such as the deity of Christ or the Trinity.*”<sup>36</sup> Case in point: Dr. Jack Rogers, who taught at Fuller Seminary for many years and was one of the main advocates of Limited Inerrancy in the 70’s, has recently changed his view on homosexuality and now argues for the full inclusion of LGBTQ<sup>37</sup> people into the Church.

## 2. God’s Sovereignty Over the Finished Text

Though God used man to write the Scripture, every word that was written was what God wanted written, without error. This fact hinges upon two attributes of God:

- (1) the omniscience of God (Ps. 147:5)
- (2) the omnipotence of God (Ps. 135:5-6)

The first attribute of God declares that God knows all things. The second that God is all-powerful. If God knows all things, then He is able to tell us about all things, including the historical, geographical, or scientific fields. If God is all-powerful as He claims, then He is able to ensure that the Bible writers were able to record this truth, without injecting their own errors into the text. This answers the objection to those who claim that God gave the Scripture *perfectly*, but man recorded it *imperfectly*.

Some have objected to the authenticity of the Scripture as a revelation from God simply because it’s nothing more than a book. I remember working with a hardened skeptic who use to always say to me (his desk was next to mine at the LA Times), “If God were going to speak to us, he wouldn’t do it in a book.” Wayne Grudem has suggested three major benefits from the inscripturation of God’s word.<sup>38</sup> First, it assures a greater accuracy in preserving God’s word for future generations. What is more dependable, a written account of what God said or to

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<sup>35</sup> Greg Bahnsen, “The Inerrancy of the Autographa” in Geisler, *Inerrancy*, 184.

<sup>36</sup> Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 252.

<sup>37</sup> ie. Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgendered, Queer.

<sup>38</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, Second Edition. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 34.

rely upon oral tradition? Second, inscription affords the opportunity for every generation to study the text carefully, repeatedly, and interactively, which will lead to greater understanding and thus more complete obedience. Third, the inscription of God's word allows it to be far more accessible geographically as opposed to being preserved through people's memories or oral tradition. All this to say that God in His wisdom, chose the best medium in which to preserve His revelation to us.

### 3. Scripture's Self-Attestation

We have taken pains to show that the Bible claims inerrancy for itself and this is important because it becomes the basis for its authority. Obviously, a document that is unreliable as to the truth or falsity of its statements cannot be a reliable guide for faith and practice despite the pleadings from the Limited inerrantist camp. As we have shown, Scripture makes it clear that what it says, God says and vice versa. As Wayne Grudem has stated, "The authority of Scripture means that all the words in Scripture are God's words in such a way that to disbelieve or disobey any word of Scripture is to disbelieve or disobey God."<sup>39</sup>

Jesus said in **John 10:26-27**, "But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you. <sup>27</sup> My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me." What then, will be the response of believers to the Word of God? They will willingly place themselves under the authority of His Word. For anyone to claim to be a Christian and yet disregard the authority of Scripture, it is certainly doubtful that they know the Great Shepherd. True sheep will hear the Shepherd's voice in Scripture and follow but the goats will balk.

## IV. Canonicity

### A. Definition

What do we mean when we refer to the Canon of Scripture or canonicity? We are referring to the authoritative list of books that the Church accepts as authoritative Scripture. This is certainly worthy of much more space than we are able to commit here but we can make some brief comments as it regards this important topic.

### B. Misconceptions

A popular misconception is that there were hundreds of competing "scriptural" books floating around, and the ancient church decided hundreds of years later which books would be accepted. Some have erroneously pointed to the Council of Nicaea in 325AD, or even the Synod of Hippo in 393AD, as to when such decisions took place. So, the argument that is often

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 62.

made by skeptics is that the books we have in our Bible are somewhat arbitrary, the “winners” of the picking contest, so to speak.

Again, although this subject deserves much more space than we can allot here, there are a few helpful details worth mentioning. First, prophetic/apostolic authorship (or writings authored under the authority of a prophet/apostle) was the sole determination as to whether a writing was accepted as Scripture. In other words, if a writing was known to be from the pen of an apostle or prophet, and written to be received as authoritative, that settled the issue. Hundreds of years didn’t need to pass in order to make that determination, it was immediately recognized by the recipients as authoritative.

A brief perusal of New Testament passages bears this conclusion out. For example, **2 Peter 3:15–16** says, “And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother **Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him,** <sup>16</sup> as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, **which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.**” Notice that the apostle Peter says that false teachers were guilty of twisting what Paul had written just as they “**do the other Scriptures.**” Clearly, Peter recognized that what Paul wrote was already considered Scripture in their day. How much had Paul written up to this point? We don’t know for certain but it’s possible that the entire Pauline corpus was completed at this time.<sup>40</sup> If that’s true, then Peter has authenticated all of Paul’s epistles but even if not, it shows what Peter thought about Paul’s extant writings. But the point being made is that there was immediate recognition of apostolic writings as Scripture and not a passing of hundreds of years before men decided their fate.

A similar comment can be made in reference to **1 Timothy 5:18**, “For the Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,” and, “The laborer deserves his wages.” What makes this verse particularly interesting for our discussion is that it is a conflation of **Deuteronomy 25:4** and **Luke 10:7**, and yet Paul refers to both as *Scripture*. In **2 Peter 3:15-16** we saw Peter affirming Paul’s writings as Scripture and here we see Paul affirming Luke’s writings as Scripture. Once again, there was immediate

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<sup>40</sup> Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 4th rev. ed., The Master Reference Collection (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996), 651, 844. Guthrie dates 2 Peter between 60-68 A.D., and 2 Timothy at 64-67 A.D.

recognition of an apostolic<sup>41</sup> writing as Scripture, not a long period of time after it was written.

C. Early Historical Data<sup>42</sup>

1. I Clement [95 A. D.]

This early writing contains allusions to five of Paul's epistles (Romans, I Corinthians, Ephesians, I Timothy, Titus), James and Hebrews. He explicitly cites from I Corinthians and refers to it as Scripture. In fact, Clement recognized that the apostles spoke the word of God by the Holy Spirit and that what they were writing was parallel to the Old Testament.<sup>43</sup> This demonstrates that even before the end of the first century, it was already understood that what the apostles wrote was recognized as Scripture.

2. Ignatius (martyred during the reign of Trajan, before A.D. 117)

Ignatius, the bishop of Antioch, refers to the book of Ephesians by name but close scrutiny of his writings reveals that he is familiar with I Corinthians, Philippians, Romans, Colossians the gospels, and perhaps I Thessalonians, Philemon, 2 Corinthians, Galatians and the pastorals.<sup>44</sup> Ignatius himself makes a distinction between his own writings and that of the apostles: "I do not, as Peter and Paul, issue commandments unto you. They were apostles; I am but a condemned man."<sup>45</sup> Significant for our purposes is that he cites I Corinthians 2:9 as Scripture.

3. Polycarp (converted around A.D. 70 and was martyred in A.D. 155 or 156).

Polycarp was a disciple of the apostle John, who later became the bishop of Smyrna. His letter to the Philippians which was written around the time of Ignatius' martyrdom is quite telling as to what he thought of most of our New Testament. The very language that Polycarp uses in this epistle is seasoned with the New Testament Scriptures. In fact, a reading

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<sup>41</sup> Some would dispute this statement by pointing out that Luke was not an apostle. True, but writers from the early Church including Tertullian, and Clement of Alexandria affirm that Luke wrote under the supervision of the apostle Paul. See R. Laird Harris, *Inspiration and Canonicity of the Scriptures* (Greenville, SC: A Press, 1995), 259.

<sup>42</sup> This is not meant to be an exhaustive survey but contains key historical points.

<sup>43</sup> Harris, *Inspiration and Canonicity*, 210-11.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, 213.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, 215.

of the epistle itself shows allusions to Matthew, Acts, Romans, I & II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, I and II Thessalonians, I and II Timothy, I and II Peter, and I and II John,<sup>46</sup> and probably Philippians itself and maybe Hebrews. He specifically cites Ephesians 4:26 as Scripture.<sup>47</sup>

#### 4. The Muratorian Canon (c. 170)

This document dates back to about 170 A.D., or about 70 years after the death of the apostle John. The document itself is incomplete as both the beginning and the ending are missing. What makes it significant is that it lists the books that were accepted in the Church as canonical and also makes reference to spurious books (Gnostic gospels) that the Church rejected. It basically contains all the books that we currently possess as canonical except Hebrews, James, 1 and 2 Peter and III John.<sup>48</sup> Whether or not it originally bore witness to these books is unknown since the document has been damaged.

#### 5. Irenaeus (ca. 130-200)

Irenaeus, was the disciple of Polycarp, who himself was the disciple of the apostle John. He later became the bishop of Lyons in Gaul, best known for his irenic treatise against the gnostics known as, *Against Heresies*. Irenaeus' canon consisted of at least the four gospels, Acts, the Pauline epistles minus Philemon, Hebrews, James, I Peter, 1 and 2 John, and Revelation. This means that he affirmed 23 of the 27 books of the New Testament as Scripture and cites over 1,000 New Testament passages in his writings.<sup>49</sup>

#### 6. Councils of Hippo and Carthage

The Council of Hippo in 393 was the first Church Council that we know of to define the limits of the New Testament canon. Although we don't have the actual historical record of that council we do know its content since it

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 215-16.

<sup>47</sup> Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson and A. Cleveland Coxe, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers Vol. I : Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, The Apostolic Fathers With Justin Martyr and Irenaeus. (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997), 35.

<sup>48</sup> Harris, *Inspiration and Canonicity*, 229-30. There is also reference to the Shepherd of Hermas and the apocalypse of Peter, but the author seems to suggest that these are not canonical and were not to be read in the churches.

<sup>49</sup> Michael J. Kruger, *Christianity at the Crossroads* (Downer's Grove, IL: IVP, 2018), 211.

was reaffirmed as Canon 47 of the Third Council of Carthage in 397. Here's what that Council declared:<sup>50</sup>

And further it was resolved that nothing should be read in church under the name of the divine scriptures except the canonical writings. The canonical writings, then, are these:...

Of the New Testament:

The four books of the gospels,  
the one book of the Acts of the Apostles,  
the thirteen epistles of the apostle Paul,  
the one {epistle} to the Hebrews, by the same,  
two of the apostle Peter,  
three of John,  
one of James,  
one of Jude,  
John's Apocalypse – one book.

...Let it be permitted, however, that the passions of martyrs be read when their anniversaries are celebrated.

Some are inclined to believe that this might've been the occasion in which the canon of Scripture was formally decided upon. From all that we have seen from the Scripture itself and history thus far, that seems quite doubtful. The purpose of the Council was to set forth an official proclamation concerning what the Church had already believed, not to formulate a canon for the very first time. In fact as a general rule, Church councils were called in order to stamp out a particular heresy that was threatening the Church at that particular time and thereby codifying what they always believed (cf. Council of Nicea).

#### D. Conclusion

One of the best books written on the doctrine of inspiration and canonicity, is by Dr. R. Laird Harris, one of the founders of Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis, Mo. Here's an extended quotation that simply summarizes the process of canonization based on prophetic or apostolic authority:<sup>51</sup>

The teaching of an apostle was received, and was intended to be received, simply because he was an apostle commissioned by Christ. As in the case of the Old Testament prophet, what he wrote was naturally as authoritative as what he spoke, and, therefore, any production of an apostle, like that of an Old Testament prophet, would at once be accepted

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<sup>50</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* (Downer's Grove, IL: IVP, 1988), 232-33.

<sup>51</sup> Harris, *Inspiration and Canonicity*, 246.

as divine. It is this which the apostles in their writings command and expect. It is this which Jesus' commission to them would imply...It was not an intuition; it was simple obedience to the known commands of Christ and his apostles. This view would fully explain the sudden rise of the New Testament as an authoritative corpus of undoubted authority. As mentioned above, it was not a selection, but was a production. Undoubted letters and writings of the apostles were received, as far as we can tell, at once. Others were added to these books as it became known that they were in the same category of authorship...How long it took for all the inspired books to be circulated and established in any one church is difficult to say. By thirty years after the death of John virtually all of them were known and used in all the centers from which our evidence comes. Certain of the smaller books were still, in some quarters, questioned as to their authorship, and therefore as to their authority, for perhaps another fifty years.

Similarly, Dr. Milton Fisher wrote this:<sup>52</sup>

There is evidence that within thirty years of the apostle's death all the Gospels and Pauline letters were known and used in all those centers from which any evidence has come down to us. It is true that some of the smaller letters were being questioned as to their authority in some quarters for perhaps another fifty years, but this was due only to uncertainty about their authorship in those particular locales. This demonstrates that acceptance was not being imposed by the actions of councils but was rather happening spontaneously through a normal response on the part of those who had learned the facts about authorship. In those places where the churches were uncertain about the authorship or apostolic approval of certain books, acceptance was slower.

In other words, the only true criteria of whether a book was canonical or not was whether its author was an apostle or under the supervision of an apostle (eg. Mark, Luke, Acts). If a writing could be ascertained as truly coming from the pen of an apostle, it was immediately accepted as Scripture. This by the way, is the reason why certain books like 2 Peter or Revelation were disputed by some in the early churches. Because there were many spurious books floating around in those days (i.e. apocalypse of Peter), until a book could be proven that its author was really who it purported to be, it was disputed. But once authorship was determined, it was a closed case. This is akin to the Old Testament canon as well. Prophetic authorship was determinative for the Old Testament canon and apostolic authorship was determinative in the New. Early Church Father Irenaeus said this, "Is a writing apostolic?" If it is, it is

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<sup>52</sup> Milton Fisher, "The Canon of the New Testament" in *The Origin of the Bible*, Philip Wesley Comfort, editor (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1992), 70.

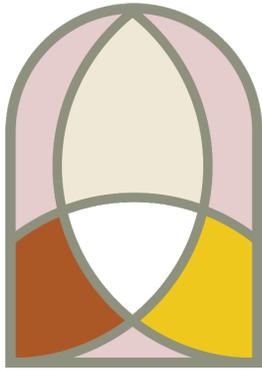
true and will agree with previous revelation, for it is spoken by the same Spirit and authorized by the same Christ.”<sup>53</sup>

#### V. Sola Scriptura

How does the doctrine of Scripture impact Immanuel Bible Church on a practical basis? Simply put, we operate on the principle of sola scriptura. Sola Scriptura is a latin phrase used by the reformers, which means, “scripture alone.” First, this is the idea that Scripture and Scripture alone is the sole source of authority for faith and practice. Both the Old and New Testament together comprises the sole source of divine revelation, and therefore functions as the sole authority for what the Church believes and practices. Church creeds, councils, and tradition, though important, do not carry an authority greater than the word of God but is subordinate to it. In other words, *sola scriptura* is essentially an argument for the sufficiency of Scripture because it recognizes it as the very words of God Himself. Therefore, Scripture is given the highest priority in determining God’s will, both for the individual believer and the body at Immanuel Bible Church.

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<sup>53</sup> Bruce, *Canon of Scripture.*, 258.



## CHAPTER 2

### THE DOCTRINE OF THE GODHEAD

Exodus 15:11. “Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?”

**W**hen we are talking about God, we immediately sense the limitation of our vocabulary to adequately describe Him. Often we resort to statements that describe what He isn't, rather than what He is. But God has not left us to our own distorted images and ideas of who He is since He revealed Himself to us in the Scriptures. Using the Scripture as our final source of authority to define God, will help prevent us from foisting a pre-conceived idea about who He is, and make the text of Scripture conform to it. Many are guilty of this very thing such as Unitarians,<sup>54</sup> who start with the presupposition that the belief in monotheism demands that only one Person, the Father, can rightly be called, “God.” This philosophical presupposition is then taken to the text of Scripture and as a result, the doctrine of the Trinity will never emerge but be explained away. Instead, we need to allow the Scriptures to reveal who God is, and let that information form our understanding about the Person of God.

#### I. The Trinity

The doctrine of the Trinity is an incomprehensible paradox. Recognizing that the human vocabulary cannot do justice in describing the Holy Trinity, we must apprehend the doctrine as it is clearly described in the Scriptures even though we do not fully comprehend it. This doctrine is not fabricated by men but clearly revealed in the Scriptures. The Scriptures teach that God is one and yet, at the same time, there are three persons who are clearly identified as God, and that these three are one.

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<sup>54</sup> i.e. those who believe that God is one in both nature and person and therefore deny the doctrine of the Trinity.

Let's extrapolate upon that definition a bit further so that we aren't confused. When we are referring to the fact that God is one, we are talking about the nature, essence or substance of God, ie. what makes God, God. When we say that God is revealed in three Persons, we are using the word "Persons" in the sense of identity. In other words, there are three distinct identities in the Godhead (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) and they all share the same divine essence. One of the early Church Fathers, Tertullian (ca. 155-230) explained it this way in his work, *Against Praxeas*:

Thus the connection of the Father in the Son, and of the Son in the Paraclete, produces three coherent Persons, who are yet distinct One from Another. These Three are one essence, not one Person, as it is said, "I and the Father are One," in respect of unity of substance, not singularity of number.<sup>55</sup>

Each member of the Trinity fully, perfectly, and eternally possesses the divine essence by nature.<sup>56</sup> As Dr. Bruce Ware explains, "The doctrine of the Trinity affirms that God's whole and undivided essence belongs equally, eternally, simultaneously, and fully to each of the three distinct Persons of the Godhead."<sup>57</sup> This means that there is no dividing up of divinity amongst the Godhead [they are not 1/3 each God]. In other words, each is fully God, and equally God simultaneously in every respect, while at the same time recognizing their unique identity as it relates to each other. All this to say, that the Scripture teaches that God is one in essence but three in Person. We only worship one God but that God has revealed Himself to be Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Nicene Creed,<sup>58</sup> which was formulated out of a response to Arius and other Christological errors is definitively Trinitarian:

I believe in one God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And I believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages, God of God, Light of Light, true God of true God; begotten, not made, of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made, who for us and for our salvation came down from heaven. And He became flesh by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary and was made man. He was also crucified for us, suffered under Pontius Pilate, and was buried. And on the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead. And of His kingdom there will be no end.

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<sup>55</sup> Quoted by Harold O.J. Brown, *Heresies*. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers Inc, 1998),145.

<sup>56</sup> Culver, *Systematic Theology*, 106.

<sup>57</sup> Bruce A. Ware, *Father, Son, & Holy Spirit* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2005), 41.

<sup>58</sup> It was adopted in 325, completed in 381 at the Second Ecumenical Council of Constantinople and approved at Chalcedon in 451.

And I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who together with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, and who spoke through the prophets, and one holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. I confess one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. And I await the resurrection of the dead. And the life of the world to come. Amen (emphasis mine).

These doctrinal formulations of the Trinity are ancient in their origin but we have never improved upon them. We are indebted to the great theologians of the early Church who helped codify what the Scripture clearly teaches and hold fast to its very wording so that we steer clear of false doctrine such as modalism<sup>59</sup> or adoptionism. But we don't just take these doctrinal formulations for granted; we must be positive that the Scripture bears them out. So we must next look at the Scripture itself to see whether these doctrinal formulations are correct.

#### A. The One-ness of God

##### 1. Select Monotheistic Statements of the Old Testament

- a) **Deuteronomy 4:35.** To you it was shown, that you might know that the Lord is God; there is no other besides him.

The historical setting for this book is the last weeks of Moses' life before the children of Israel entered the promised land. In this section, Moses had been reminding the Israelites about the uniqueness of the God they served and how no other god could match up to Him. He pointed out in the previous verse that no god was able to do what YHWH did in leading the people out of Egypt. Why was Israel shown great and mighty deeds such as these? It was for both pedagogical and salvific purposes.<sup>60</sup> It was to prove to His people that YHWH alone is God<sup>61</sup> and therefore His sovereignty is unchallengeable. The pagan nations may make a case for their gods, but none have a track record that matches Israel's God because they are false and He is true. Anyway, this verse makes it as clear as day that there are no other gods besides Israel's God, YHWH.

- b) **Deuteronomy 6:4** - "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD *is* one!"

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<sup>59</sup> The idea that God manifested Himself in history as the Father, Son, or the Holy Spirit, for a time, but not all at the same time.

<sup>60</sup> Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, vol. 4, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 131.

<sup>61</sup> cf. also v. 39, "know therefore today, and lay it to your heart, that the Lord is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other."

Known in Israel as “the Great Shema,” the importance of this truth was such that this confession was recited twice daily.<sup>62</sup> The emphasis in the passage is upon the Lord’s unique oneness, the fact that Israel’s God, Yahweh is the only God. Interestingly, the word for *one* that is used in this verse “stresses unity while recognizing diversity within that oneness.”<sup>63</sup> For example, Adam and Eve are described as “one flesh” in **Genesis 2:24**, which certainly implies more than just sexual unity. So, even though the Trinity is not explicitly taught in the Old Testament, the choice of this word is certainly consistent with or allows for the doctrine of the Trinity. How was this basic truth supposed to impact the Israelites? As the one and only God, YHWH is omnipotent.<sup>64</sup> This truth, is to serve, therefore, as the basis of Israel’s obedience to Him. The word *hear* in Hebrew doesn’t imply to just listen to something, but to act in obedience to what one hears.<sup>65</sup> What is to be obeyed on the basis of this confession? “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” (6:5). The most basic confession of the Law is the fact that there is one and only one God.

- c) **1 Kings 8:59–60.** Let these words of mine, with which I have pleaded before the Lord, be near to the Lord our God day and night, and may he maintain the cause of his servant and the cause of his people Israel, as each day requires, <sup>60</sup> that all the peoples of the earth may know that the Lord is God; there is no other.

The context of this passage is Solomon’s dedication of the new temple. The Ark of the covenant was brought from the tent of meeting in the first part of the chapter (vv. 1-13), God’s greatness is then proclaimed in the next section (vv. 14-21), and then Solomon offers up a series of seven petitions on behalf of himself and the people (vv. 22-53).<sup>66</sup> For our purposes, the main part of Solomon’s theological confession is found in verse 60, “that all the peoples of the earth may know that the LORD *is* God; *there is* no other.” Notice that Solomon prays for the Lord’s blessing in order that they might serve as a testimony to the other nations that YHWH alone is God. This will only come about through strict obedience to the Lord and His word.

- d) **Isaiah 43:10-11; 44:6, 8; 45:5-6; 45:14, 18, 21-22; 46:9; 48:12**

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<sup>62</sup> Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 163.

<sup>63</sup> Herbert Wolf, “**61** **יְהוָה**,” ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 30.

<sup>64</sup> Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976), 169.

<sup>65</sup> Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 162.

<sup>66</sup> Paul R. House, *1, 2 Kings*, vol. 8, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 135.

In this section Isaiah highlights God's sovereign majesty over any other of the pagan nations' supposed deities.<sup>67</sup> There really isn't anything new to add in this section other than to reinforce how fundamental monotheism was to Israel's faith.

## 2. Select Monotheistic Statements of the New Testament

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

Notice the significance of what Jesus says here: eternal life can be found in knowing the only true God and Jesus Christ. Who has the power to give eternal life? Only God can give eternal life and yet here, both the Father and the Son are said to be the source of eternal life. This seems to indicate that the Father and Son are equivalent but the conjunction *and*, makes it clear that they are distinct Persons. As the great reformer Martin Luther pointed out: "Since He [Jesus] bases eternal life upon the knowing of Himself with the Father, and says, that without the knowledge of Him no man can attain unto eternal life, and thus that it is one and the same knowledge by which He and the Father are known, He must perforce be of the same essence and nature with the Father: that is, He must be the selfsame true God, yet a Person distinguished from the Father."<sup>68</sup> This is just one of many passages that demonstrate that monotheism is compatible with Trinitarianism.

- b) **I Corinthians 8:6.** yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

This passage takes place in the context of Christian liberty, where there was a conflict between more mature believers, who were stumbling less mature believers, over the eating of meat offered to idols. We pick up Paul's response to the situation already in progress as he recognizes the principle behind the stronger believers' actions, that idols are not real to begin with. Notice the contrast presented here by Paul. Regardless of the number of "gods" that are worshipped, Christians know that in reality there is only one true God, who created all things through His one and only Son, Jesus Christ, through whom we have eternal life.<sup>69</sup> These are parallel statements that

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<sup>67</sup>Charles Dyer, Eugene Merrill, Charles R. Swindoll and Roy B. Zuck, *Nelson's Old Testament Survey : Discover the Background, Theology and Meaning of Every Book in the Old Testament* (Nashville: Word, 2001), 562.

<sup>68</sup> Luther, quoted by Hengstenberg, *Gospel of John*, 2: 314.

<sup>69</sup> Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1857), 144.

affirm the power of the Father and the Son as well as our relationship to both.

First of all, Paul states that *all things* are from God the Father, and “**for whom we exist.**” This is a basic truth that reverberates throughout the entire Bible concerning God’s creative power. *All things* refers to the universe, heaven, earth, and everything contained therein. Outside of God Himself, everything else has been created by Him. So what does Paul mean when he says “**and for whom we exist?**” The preposition *for* expresses goal or purpose. This means that we were created (along with everything else for that matter) solely for God’s purposes.<sup>70</sup> But Paul doesn’t end there. Furthermore he states that *all things* are through the one Lord Jesus Christ, “**and through whom we exist.**” This statement affirms Jesus Christ’s mediating role in creation: that everything came into existence through Him.<sup>71</sup> This obviously assumes Christ’s eternal preexistence, as He had to have existed before the creation He created.<sup>72</sup> Paul states the same thing in **Colossians 1:16**, “For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.” The last part of the statement, “**and through whom we exist**” refers to the redemption we have received through Christ. It is only because of Christ’s finished work for us and our union with Him that we can live.<sup>73</sup>

Does the wording of this verse sound familiar? It should remind the reader of the Great Shema: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD *is* one!” The two terms, **God** and **Lord** in that passage are ascribed to the Father and the Son respectively.<sup>74</sup> Notice how Paul is able to strongly emphasize monotheism and Trinitarianism without any hint of contradiction whatsoever?<sup>75</sup> Here and in verse 4 Paul emphatically affirms that there is

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<sup>70</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987), 375.

<sup>71</sup> David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 375; Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 375. Contra R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s First and Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1963), 341, who limits this statement to regeneration and spiritual life.

<sup>72</sup> Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, International Critical Commentary (New York: T&T Clark, 1911), 168; Lenski, *First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians*, 340.

<sup>73</sup> Simon J. Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, vol. 18, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 268.

<sup>74</sup> Garland, *I Corinthians*, 375.

<sup>75</sup> Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 375.

only one God, yet identifies the one God as being both the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Only God can create and yet both the Father and the Son are said to have created all things. The one God is identified as both the Father and Son and yet they are given distinct identities. Contrary to the protestations of Unitarians, the Bible argues for Trinitarian monotheism.

## B. The Three-ness of God

### 1. The Father is God (John 17:3).

This is undisputed so there is no need for an exposition.

### 2. The Son is God<sup>76</sup>

Here's an exposition of a couple of passages that unmistakably refer to the deity of Jesus Christ.

#### a) **John 1:1.** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God,

The Greek in this sentence is about as simple as any in the entire New Testament and yet it is filled with profound meaning. The first part of the verse stresses the pre-existence of the **Word**, the fact that He existed prior to the creation of the universe. Here's what this verse affirms: whenever the beginning of all things was, the Word was already there, in existence. Now that statement alone would lead us to believe that either the **Word** was God or that the **Word** was with God. The apostle John affirms that both are true.<sup>77</sup>

This is the logical conclusion since John substituted the word, **Word** for **God**. But notice that although the latter part of the verse identifies the divine nature of the Word, the first part of the verse shows that John is making a distinction between **God** and the **Word**. In fact, when John says "**the Word was with God**," it literally means he is "in front of" or "facing" God, which stresses the ideas of personal interaction, accompaniment and relationship.<sup>78</sup> However, this is not just mere co-existence that is being emphasized. A. T. Robertson was the greatest Greek scholar that this country ever produced, and he comments here that the preposition, **with** in the accusative case has the idea of "face to face" with God. He points out that it refers to the

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<sup>76</sup> See also Phil. 2:5-11; John 1:14; Heb. 1:1-3; Col. 1:15-17.

<sup>77</sup> Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 27.

<sup>78</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 67.

fellowship between the Word and God.<sup>79</sup> The point that John is making then, is that not only was the Word existent in eternity past, He existed in the closest and most intimate relationship possible with the Father.<sup>80</sup> Thankfully, we aren't left guessing as to the identity of the **Word** and probably every one of you who are listening already know the answer since its explicitly given thirteen verses later: **"the Word became flesh and dwelt among us"** (1:14).

So, in this very first statement of John's gospel, we see how the deity of Christ implies the doctrine of the Trinity. The first two Persons, the Father and the Son, are seen as distinct and yet as sharing the same nature. They are both eternally preexistent, they both share an intimate relationship with each other, and they are both called **God**. There is just no getting around the fact that the Bible teaches that there is a plurality of Persons that constitute the one true God.

- b) **John 8:58.** Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am."

This is probably the most explicitly statement that our Lord gave concerning His own deity. It is based on **Exodus 3:14**, wherein God identified His name to Moses as **"I AM WHO I AM."** When Jesus identifies Himself as the **"I AM"** of Exodus 3, the people to whom He was speaking picked up on it right away and tried to stone Him, believing He was guilty of blasphemy. There was no mistaking the meaning of Jesus' words.

### 3. The Holy Spirit is God<sup>81</sup>

- a) **Acts 5:3-4.** But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? <sup>4</sup>While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God."

In back to back verses we see clearly that to lie to the Holy Spirit is equivalent to lying to God.

- b) **Hebrews 9:14.** how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

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<sup>79</sup> A.T. Robertson, *Robertson's Word Pictures*, vol. 5; Merrill C. Tenney, "John," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: John and Acts*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 29, fn#1.

<sup>80</sup> Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 68.

<sup>81</sup> See also Acts 5:3, 5; 13:2; Eph. 4:30.

There is much we can say about this passage but for our purposes here, it is enough to point out that the Holy Spirit is described as *eternal*. If you notice just a few verses earlier, the writer says that Christ's death obtained eternal redemption (v. 12). So by highlighting the fact that Christ's death was offered up by means of the "**eternal Spirit**," he emphasizes the fact that there is an eternal aspect to Christ's saving work.<sup>82</sup> Obviously, eternity is an attribute of deity and so its significance for our study is further evidence of the Spirit's deity.

### C. Trinitarian Passages in the New Testament

1. **Matthew 28:19.** Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

Probably most, if not all of you are familiar with this passage, known popularly as the Great Commission. Notice that Jesus commands that all believers are to be baptized *in*<sup>83</sup> the *name* (singular) of God, and yet that *name* consists of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.<sup>84</sup> This suggests both unity as well as plurality in the Godhead.<sup>85</sup> This formulation teaches at least two important points for our purposes: (1) that these three Persons are on an equal level. If Jesus and the Holy Spirit were not an equal level with the Father, how could they be mentioned in the same breath as the Father? For example, think of the implications of this verse if what the Dynamic Monarchians (adoptionists)<sup>86</sup> taught was true: you'd be baptized in the name of almighty God (Father), a created deity (Jesus), and an impersonal force (the Holy Spirit). Or how about if what the Arians<sup>87</sup> said was true? You'd be baptized in the name of the almighty Father, His created Son, and the Father and Son's creation (Holy Spirit); (2) Obviously then, all three equally make up the *name* because all three equally constitute the Godhead. The

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<sup>82</sup> Leon Morris, "Hebrews," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Hebrews through Revelation*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 87.

<sup>83</sup> The preposition translated *in* (ἐἰς) "strongly suggests a coming-into-relationship-with or a coming-under-the-Lordship-of." D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 597.

<sup>84</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., *Matthew*, vol. 4, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), 344. This is not a baptismal formula but simply a theological statement of the new believer's union and submission to the Godhead.

<sup>85</sup> Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, vol. 22, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 432.

<sup>86</sup> ie. Those who believe that Jesus was a mere man who received either the Holy Spirit or the Christ in a special way at His baptism and was in effect, adopted as God's Son. See Brown, *Heresies*, 95-96.

<sup>87</sup> Arius taught that Jesus was the first and highest creation of God the Father.

singular *name* and yet the plurality of Persons mentioned, demonstrates that all three Persons mentioned are in some sense one.<sup>88</sup>

2. **2 Corinthians 13:14.** The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Notice that Paul's closing benediction is Trinitarian in nature: he prays that the Corinthians will experience all the benefits of redemption.<sup>89</sup> This includes the grace which originates in the Lord Jesus Christ, and is the sole means by which God the Father's love reaches the believer. In other words, no one experiences the Father's love until he is saved by the grace of Christ.<sup>90</sup> And for all those who have experienced the Father's love through the grace of Christ, they have also been in-dwelt by the Holy Spirit and thereby have fellowship with other believers in the body of Christ.<sup>91</sup> Once again we see how the three members of the Trinity are mentioned in the same breath, part of the same benediction.

3. **Hebrews 9:14.** how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

We've already looked at this verse in reference to the deity of the Holy Spirit, but now we want to focus more specifically on the fact that the Trinity worked together to accomplish redemption. Notice how Christ's death was offered unto God the Father through the Holy Spirit. The writer to the Hebrews contrasts old covenant rituals which were only useful for making one clean who was ceremonially unclean (v. 13). In other words, these rituals could only make one outwardly clean but could do nothing more. How different was Christ's death, which was able to cleanse the sinner's conscience in order to make him an obedient servant of God.<sup>92</sup> The Spirit empowered Christ throughout His earthly life and led Him in His obedience to God the Father that He might give His life on the cross. The Trinity worked together in bringing about our redemption.

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<sup>88</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 747-748; William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew*, vol. 9, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953-2001), 1000.

<sup>89</sup> Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*. (New York: A. C. Armstrong & Son, 1891), 313-314.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 313.

<sup>91</sup> Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Milton Keynes, UK: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.; Paternoster Press, 2005), 938.

<sup>92</sup> Simon J. Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, vol. 15, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953-2001), 251.

The following chart is taken from Edward Bickersteth (1786-1850) as he shows how each Person of the Trinity share the same attributes:<sup>93</sup>

1. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are eternal (Rom. 16:26; Rev. 1:17; Mic. 5:2; Heb. 9:14; Deut. 33:27).
2. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all said to have a hand in creation (Gen. 1; I Cor. 8:6; Ps. 100:3; Col. 1:16; Job 33:4; I Pet. 4:19).
3. They are each said to be omnipresent (Jer. 23:24; Matt. 28:20; Ps. 139:7; Acts 17:28-29).
4. The three are said to be omniscient (Matt. 11:27; Acts 15:18; John 21:17; Isa. 40:13; I Cor. 2:10; Heb. 4:13).
5. The three are each said to be true and good (John 7:28; 14:26; 17:17, 25; Ps. 34:8; 143:10; John 10:11; 14:6; Acts 3:14; I John 5:6; Rev. 15:4).
6. They each have a self-regulating will (Eph. 1:11; Matt. 11:27; John 17:24; I Cor. 12:11; Acts 21:14).
7. They are each the fountain of life (Ps. 36:9; Eph. 2:4-5; Jn. 3:8; 5:21; Deut. 30:20).
8. All three sanctify believers (Ps. 138:3; Isa. 66:13; Jude 1; Phil. 4:13; I Cor. 1:2; Eph. 3:16; Jn. 14:26; Rom. 15:6).
9. All three fill the believer's soul with divine love (I Jn. 5:1; 2:15; 2 Cor. 5:14; I Cor. 16:22; Rom. 15:30; Col. 1:8; Deut. 6:5).
10. All three give divine law (Ps. 19:7; Is. 11:8; Ezek. 2:4; Gal. 6:2; Col. 3:16; Rev. 2:18; Rom. 8:2; 2 Pet. 1:21; Acts 13:2; Jam. 4:12).
11. All three dwell in believers' hearts (I Cor. 14:25; Jn. 1:3; 14:17; Eph. 3:17; Col. 1:27; I Jn. 1:3; 2 Cor. 14:14; Is. 57:15).
12. Each of the three are YHWH and God (Ex. 20:2; Is. 4:3; Matt. 3:3; Luke 1:35; 1:76; Matt. 10:11; Ezek. 8:1, 3; Deut. 6:4).

## II. The Attributes of God

Let's make a few preliminary remarks before we dive into the topic of the Attributes of God. First of all, though we may study all our lives, we can never know all that there is

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<sup>93</sup> Culver, *Systematic Theology*, 108.

to know concerning God. That is, although we can know God in a very real way since He has revealed Himself to us, at the same time we can only know God inasmuch as He has revealed Himself to us. Therefore, a true knowledge of God is possible, but an exhaustive knowledge of God isn't. A true knowledge of God can be found in both general (i.e. creation) and special revelation (i.e. Scripture) but keep in mind, He hasn't revealed in either place everything there is to know about Himself – only what we need to know. These facts alone should cause us to humble ourselves before Him. Second, we must not allow knowledge about God to be confused with knowing God relationally. That being the case, we must never pursue intellectual knowledge about God as an end in itself, but rather seek to apply it. Otherwise, as J. I. Packer has famously observed:

If we pursue theological knowledge for its own sake, it is bound to go bad on us. It will make us proud and conceited. The very greatness of the subject matter will intoxicate us, and we shall come to think of ourselves as a cut above other Christians because of our interest in it and grasp of it...To be preoccupied with getting theological knowledge as an end in itself, to approach Bible study with no higher a motive than a desire to know all the answers, is the direct route to a state of self-satisfied, self-deception.<sup>94</sup>

Jonathan Edwards also spoke to this issue more than 200 years ago when he made this comment about one who truly desires to know God rather than just know about God:

The true saint, when under great spiritual affections, from the fullness of his heart, is ready to be speaking much of God and his glorious perfections and works...but hypocrites, in their high affections, talk more of the discovery, than they do of the thing discovered.<sup>95</sup>

Although many modern Christians today think that the study of theology or doctrine is reserved for the scholar or theologians, the fact is every believer is a theologian. The only question is what kind of theologian are you, a good one or bad one? Some of you may not think that the study of theology is all that practical but think about this: what can be more practical than getting to know more about the God that saved you from hell and gave you eternal life? The Puritans used to say that theology or the study of doctrine is highly practical and therefore they refused to teach it apart from showing its practical application. For example, how can you fully understand the command to "Be holy for I am holy,"<sup>96</sup> unless you already have a biblical understanding of God's holiness?

Often when the Puritans commented on Scripture they broke it down into theology, doctrine, and practice. Remember we said that it's important not to confuse knowledge about God with knowing God, right? Yet at the same time don't forget that it's

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<sup>94</sup> J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downer's Grove, IL: IVP Press, 1993), 21-22.

<sup>95</sup> Ian H. Murray, *Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2003), 258, fn. 2.

<sup>96</sup> Leviticus 11:44-45.

impossible to truly know God without having true and accurate knowledge about Him. Otherwise, you're not truly worshipping the God of the Bible but a figment of your imagination or an idol. That's why Paul wrote this in **Colossians 1:9-10**, "And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,<sup>10</sup> so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and **increasing in the knowledge of God.**" We should have the same desire to study about our God as we do our favorite actor, singer or athlete.

#### A. Definition of an Attribute

First of all, when discussing the attributes of God, we need to be careful that we distinguish His attributes from His works. His works reveal what He has done, while His attributes describe who He is. Some theologians have made the common mistake of confusing God's attributes with His works. For example, Louis Berkhoff in his systematic theology defined an attribute as "the perfections which are predicated of the Divine Being in Scripture, or are visibly exercised by Him in His works of creation, providence, and redemption" (emphasis mine).<sup>97</sup> But as Millard Erickson has helpfully pointed out, "When we speak of the attributes of God, we are referring to those qualities of God which constitute what he is. They are the very characteristics of his nature. We are not referring here to the acts which he performs, such as creating, guiding, and preserving, nor to the corresponding roles he plays - Creator, Guide, Preserver" (emphasis mine).<sup>98</sup> Therefore, it's probably best to understand an attribute of God as the perfections of God which are revealed in Scripture, that describe the nature and being of God, and to keep in mind that "the attributes are inseparable from the being or essence of God"<sup>99</sup> since the absence of these characteristics would result in God's ceasing to be God.<sup>100</sup> All this to say that the attributes of God refer to those essential characteristics that make God who He is and consequently reveal who He is.<sup>101</sup>

Lastly, when viewing the many faceted attributes of God, it is important that we not "exalt one attribute over another because when that is done, it presents a caricature of God. It is all the attributes of God taken together that provide an understanding of the nature and Person of God."<sup>102</sup> Every attribute of God is essential to who He is

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<sup>97</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans publishing co., 1938), 52.

<sup>98</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1998), 291.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 292.

<sup>100</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 369.; G. R. Lewis, "Attributes of God," in Walter A. Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology: Second Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 492.

<sup>101</sup> Enns, *Moody Handbook of Theology*, 188.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

and therefore one is not less or more important than any of the others. This keeps us from an unbalanced view of God such as those who view God as nothing more than “love,” with the implication that it is inconsequential how we live or what we believe since a loving God would never really send someone to hell for an eternity, right? All the while they neglect the fact that God is also a holy, righteous and wrathful God and will punish all those who reject the gospel. At the same time if we stress the wrath of God to the exclusion of the grace or mercy of God, we paint a picture of God that is equally unbalanced: a God that vengefully sends people to hell without a second thought.

## B. Classification of the Attributes

There is no standard way of classifying the attributes of God, as you can clearly see by reading any standard systematic theology. For example, Henry Thiessen and Vernon Doerksen classify the attributes as Moral and Non-moral; Millard Erickson classifies them according to Greatness and Goodness; but most popularly, Charles Hodge, Louis Berkhoff, William Shedd, and Herman Bavinck classify the attributes of God as **Communicable** and **Incommunicable**. We will follow this latter classification, as well.

### 1. Incommunicable Attributes

An Incommunicable attribute of God is one that is true of God, found only in God, in which there can be nothing comparable found in man. In other words, these are perfections of God which man cannot know experientially, only conceptually. These attributes emphasize “God as the absolute Being,” which means that God is the first cause of all things (the uncaused cause), who is self-existing (Aseity), self-sufficient, and thus entirely independent of any other being, necessary for His existence (John 5:26). The following is a list of such attributes, with a brief description:

#### a) **Spirituality**<sup>103</sup>

God is spirit and therefore He has no physical form or material to speak of (invisible). As a result, no man can or ever will see God (I Tim. 6:16; Jn. 1:18). This is why Exodus 20:4 prohibits any attempt to confine Him to a likeness or man-made image. Furthermore it must be pointed out that as spirit, God is personal – not some impersonal force as will be revealed when we review some of His communicable attributes. cf. John 4:24; Luke 24:39.

#### b) **Eternity**<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 294.

<sup>104</sup> cf. Ps. 90:2, 102:12; Is. 44:6, 57:15; Rev. 1:8, 21:6; Prov. 15:3; Ps. 139:7-12; 2 Pet. 3:8; Jer. 10:10.

God's timelessness, the fact that He never had a beginning, and will never have an end, He is the only uncaused cause. He is an eternal being, not limited by time or space, self-existent (aseity) (John 5:26), totally independent of anyone or anything outside of Himself. In Exodus 3:14, God identified Himself as "I am who I am," which stresses His continual existence in Himself.<sup>105</sup> Omnipresence [God is present everywhere] would be a subcategory since He transcends all spatial limitations and there is nowhere you can go from His presence. Omniscience [God knows all things] is also a subcategory because knowledge is based upon one's being (i.e. our knowledge is limited because our being is limited). There is nothing in the universe that is outside of the knowledge of God. He knows the whole of human history past, present and future simultaneously [all is a present now], and though He exists outside of time, He can interject Himself in time and space at any time. He also knows every man's inward thoughts and outward acts and there is nothing that happens in the entire universe that is hidden from Him. The reason that God alone is the perfect judge is because He knows all the facts and He knows them perfectly.

c) **Infinity** (Omnipotence)<sup>106</sup>

The fact that God, unlike man, is free from any and all limitations in His Being.<sup>107</sup> In other words, God is inexhaustible, all-powerful and therefore does whatever He pleases. But in saying that God does whatever He pleases, this doesn't imply that God acts randomly or recklessly. God only acts in accordance with His nature and therefore will never do anything that is inconsistent with Himself. Therefore God cannot lie, sin or contradict His word. So God's will acts in accordance with His nature and never in contradiction to it.

d) **Immutability**<sup>108</sup>

The unchangeableness of God in His being, due to His perfection. Since change is always for the better or for worse, improvement or regression is impossible with God. There obviously can be no improvement in an already perfect God.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1: 385-90; Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 60; Enns, *Moody Handbook*, 193.

<sup>106</sup> cf. Ps. 147:5, 145:3, 115:3, 33:6, 89:6; Job: 9:19, 11:7-11; Gen. 18:10-14; Jer. 32:17; Hab. 3:4; Matt. 19:26; John 10:17-18; Rom. 4:17; Eph. 1:4-5, 19-20; Heb. 1:3; Is. 40:15-17, 44:24; Rev. 19:6.

<sup>107</sup> Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1: 380-85, 407; Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 59; Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 272-78.

<sup>108</sup> cf. Ps. 33:11, 102:26-28; Mal 3:6; Rom. 1:23; Heb. 1:11-12, 6:18, 13:8; James 1:17; Num. 23:10; Titus 1:2.

<sup>109</sup> Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1: 390-92; Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 58-59; Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 278-81.

## 2. Communicable Attributes

The communicable attributes on the other hand, are those which can in a lesser degree, be found in human beings. Whereas no trace of aseity, immutability, infinity, or eternity can be found in man, communicable attributes such as wisdom, benevolence, holiness, justice, compassion and truth, can. The following is a brief list of communicable attributes:

### a) **Holiness**<sup>110</sup>

The basic meaning of this word is “set apart,” and so Scripture emphasizes that God is infinitely distinct from, and above, any of His creation. This is the transcendent aspect of who God is. But, holiness also refers to the absolute absence of any evil whatsoever; infinite purity. Because of this, He cannot tolerate evil or any relationship to it. Sin therefore is an eternal offense to God’s holiness which results in His wrath. God’s wrath stems from His hatred of evil and His consequent love of righteousness. As one writer has pointed out, “Apart from understanding God’s wrath against evil, it is impossible to understand the extent of divine love in the incarnation, the extent of Christ’s suffering on the cross, the propitiatory nature of his sacrifice, the prophetic Scriptures speaking of the great day of God’s wrath, the great tribulation, or the book of revelation.”<sup>111</sup>

### b) **Truth**<sup>112</sup>

The whole of who God is consists in truth. Therefore, everything that He reveals about Himself, including His Being, His will and His works, is true. This notion of truthfulness is to be understood in its most comprehensive sense. That is, He is the source of all truth in every sphere of knowledge. This stresses the absolute reliability of God. Faithfulness is a subheading of this attribute since we know that everything He says in His word can be trusted. Furthermore it means that God is the only true God and that every other god is false.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> cf. I Sam. 2:2; Ex. 15:11; Is. 6:1-4, 43:3, 57:15; Ps. 99:3; Hab. 1:13; Lev. 11:44-45; Hos. 11:9; Rev. 15:4.

<sup>111</sup> Elwell, *EDOT (2nd edition)*, 497; Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1: 413-415; Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 73-74; Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 284-286; Enns, *Moody Handbook*, 192-93

<sup>112</sup> cf. (Metaphysical) I Jn. 5:20; John 14:6, 17:3; Jer. 10:10; I Thess. 1:9; (Ethical) Rom. 3:4; Deut. 32:4; Ps. 25:10; Is. 65:16; (stated negatively) Tit. 1:2; Heb. 6:18; Num. 23:19; I Sam. 15:29.

<sup>113</sup> Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 69-70; Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 289-291; Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1: 436-440; Enns, *Moody Handbook*, 192.

c) **Justice**<sup>114</sup>

The righteousness of God; however God acts or judges, He does so perfectly and justly, without partiality because it is according to truth. God never makes a rash or hasty judgment and therefore we never have cause to criticize His actions [as we do earthly judges].<sup>115</sup>

d) **Benevolence**<sup>116</sup>

The uninitiated, everlasting love of God demonstrated toward us, though we were undeserving of it. God's love is grounded in His truth and holiness, is rational as opposed to emotional, and is unconditional since He loves whether or not that love is reciprocated or not. Goodness, grace, mercy, and longsuffering would be appropriate subheadings here.<sup>117</sup>

e) **Wisdom**<sup>118</sup>

God's application of His knowledge in such a way that glorifies Himself most. God's wisdom in contradistinction to man's is infinite, comprehensive and unfailing.<sup>119</sup>

This is by no means meant to be an exhaustive list of God's attributes, but it does provide a start in systematically listing them.

## 3. The Immanence &amp; Transcendence of God

Immanence and Transcendence are two contrasting attributes, yet they are able to co-exist in God side by side. But, before we can see how this is demonstrated, we need to look at each attribute individually.

## a) The Immanence of God

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<sup>114</sup> cf. Ps. 7:11, 58:11, 73:17-20, 96:13, 97:2; Is. 33:22; Deut. 7:10, 32:4; Rom. 1:32, 2:5-9, 12:19; Gen. 18:25.

<sup>115</sup> Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 288-289; Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1: 416-426; Berkhof, pp. 74-76.

<sup>116</sup> cf. I John 4:8-10, 16; Rom. 5:8; Deut. 7:7-8; Jn. 3:16; Eph. 3:19; Jer. 31:3.

<sup>117</sup> A. W. Pink, *The Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1977), 77-81; Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1: 427-429; Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 71; Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 292-294; Enns, *Moody Handbook*, 192).

<sup>118</sup> cf. Ps. 104:4; Rom. 11:33-36; I Cor. 1:21, 2:7; I Tim. 1:17.

<sup>119</sup> Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 69; Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 401-402.

The Immanence of God can also be stated as “the knowability of God,”<sup>120</sup> and “the nearness of God,” as it emphasizes the fact that it is possible to come into relationship with God,<sup>121</sup> as well as the fact that God is present within the operation of the world.<sup>122</sup> This doctrine is in contrast to the Deists, who taught that God created the world and man, and then simply removed Himself from any involvement of either. They postulated a “watch-maker” type God, who wound up the clock, and then let it run. They believed that God is totally separate from this world, and never intervenes in it. But this is clearly not the God of the Scriptures. Christ not only created the world, it is through Him that the world “holds together” (Col. 1:17).

#### b) The Transcendence of God

Now, the doctrine of Immanence is balanced by the Transcendence of God. The Transcendence of God is the notion that God is separate from man, and above man, because He is absolutely holy and infinite, whereas man is sinful and finite. Thus, many theologians term God as being “wholly other” than man. That is, God is so far removed from us in the sense of His greatness, holiness, righteousness, and being, He must condescend Himself just to communicate to us. This is clearly demonstrated throughout the Scripture.<sup>123</sup>

However, the doctrine of Transcendence is not a contradiction of Immanence, but rather a compliment. We need to realize that though God has revealed Himself in a way that can be known, we still must have a reverent awe for Him, understanding that He is so far greater than we are, and ever will be. His ways are so far above our ways, that we cannot even begin to fathom the difference. He has revealed Himself to us truly, but not exhaustively. Now, if you stress the Immanence of God at the expense of the Transcendence of God, and vice versa, you will come out with an unbalanced view of God. For example, the Deists made this mistake because they emphasized the Transcendence of God, minus the Immanence of God, and thus came out with an impersonal God. On the other hand, those who have emphasized the Immanence of God at the expense of the Transcendence of God, have often led to pantheism. Once you start to correlate the idea that God is everywhere present in the universe, then nature and God soon become synonymous: God is nature, and nature is God.

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<sup>120</sup> Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 29-30.

<sup>121</sup> cf. Jn. 17:3; Acts 17:27-28; James 4:8; I Jn. 5:20; Jn. 14:7.

<sup>122</sup> Heb. 1:2-3; Col. 1:17; Jer. 23:24; Ps. 104:29-30.

<sup>123</sup> Is. 55:9-10; Deut. 29:29; Ps. 103:12-14, 19, 113:5-6, 123:1; Jn. 8:23.

Some in the Charismatic Movement have likewise made the same mistake. They have so overemphasized the immanence of God that it has led to strange behavior and excesses that are mistaken for the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit doesn't lead believers to bark like dogs or laugh uncontrollably and yet for some reason many in the Charismatic Movement are sure that He is the source of all that. The adjective *Holy* is the key to the Holy Spirit's ministry; His immanent ministry in the believer's life is to produce holiness in the life of the believer, not strange behavior.

Now, when you stay within the confines of Scripture, you will maintain the proper balance. Isaiah 57:15 says, "For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite."

"For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, With him who has a contrite and humble spirit, To revive the spirit of the humble, And to revive the heart of the contrite ones" (Is. 57:15).

#### 4. The Will of God

The holy God, whom we believe in, and serve, has not only revealed Himself through Scripture but also through His plan in the universe. Now, theologians have helped to facilitate the discussion of the "will of God" by clarifying two types of "will," which we find in Scripture: the decretive and preceptive.

##### a) The Decretive Will of God

Dr. Louis Berkhof defines it this way: "that will of God by which He purposes or decrees whatever shall come to pass, whether He wills to accomplish it effectively (causatively), or to permit it to occur through the unrestrained agency of His rational creatures."<sup>124</sup>

The decretive will of God refers to His ultimate and complete control over everything for His glory. God's decretive, or sovereign will, covers all aspects of creation and time because the will of the omnipotent God cannot be thwarted. Under this concept, even those things that are evil, like sin, are working together for the unfolding of God's perfect plan.<sup>125</sup> So, sin does not, nor cannot, deter God from accomplishing His sovereign purposes.

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<sup>124</sup> Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 77.

<sup>125</sup> cf. Isa. 14:24; Eph. 1:11b.

As stated earlier, Scripture reveals that God's sovereign will is the proclamation of His glory. In fact, this was the very purpose of our salvation. Observe **Romans 9:22-23**: "What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, <sup>23</sup> in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory."

He redeemed us from wrath according to His grace that His glory may be revealed.<sup>126</sup> So then, just as our salvation was for His glory, "all things were created through him and for him."<sup>127</sup> and that "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, <sup>11</sup> and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."<sup>128</sup>

#### b) The Preceptive Will of God

The preceptive will of God refers to God's commands given to human beings, which they will either obey or disobey (ie. God's commands in precepts). They are specific instructions for living a life pleasing to Him and they are duties, not suggestions from God. Whereas in the case of the **decretive** will of God, God's will is always accomplished, in the case of God's **preceptive** will, it is often disobeyed. It is God's preceptive will that will condemn the unbeliever for his rebellion and glorify the believer for his humble submission to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The following chart codifies the differences between the decretive will and the preceptive will of God:

Decretive will	Preceptive will
Cannot be resisted or thwarted.	Can be resisted or disobeyed.
Encompasses both good and evil.	Involves only that which is good, holy.
Comprehensive: controls all aspects of life, time, and history.	Specific: provides principles for living.
The believer is not commanded to know or discover what God has not revealed.	Believers are exhorted to know, understand, and obey all that God has revealed.

### III. Conclusion

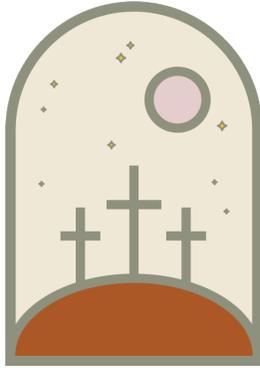
<sup>126</sup> See also Ephesians 1:4-6, 11-12, etc..

<sup>127</sup> Colossians 1:16.

<sup>128</sup> Philippians 2:10-11.

### A. Proper View of God

The God of the Scriptures reveals Himself as “high and lifted up” (Isa. 6:1). Therefore, we, being mere creatures, cannot have a view other than a high view of God. If we make God into our image or attribute qualities to God that are unbiblical, we commit the sin of blasphemy. We must approach the throne of Grace with reverence but, at the same time, understand that He is also “abba” Father who loves His children unceasingly. When you find yourself between the “fear” of God and “love” of God, you will have found a place of bliss and perfect satisfaction. May you find your heart content with knowing God.



## CHAPTER 3

### THE DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

Ephesians 2:8–9. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,<sup>9</sup> not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

**T**he doctrine of salvation is all about how a person goes from death to life, how he is rescued or saved from the eternal consequences of his sin. Let's start the discussion with an extended quote from Dr. Millard Erickson, who provides the proper framework for this discussion:

Our view of the nature of God influences our understanding of sin. If God is a very high, pure, and exacting being who expects all humans to be as he is, then the slightest deviation from his lofty standard is sin and the human condition is very serious. If, on the other hand, God is himself rather imperfect, or if he is an indulgent, grandfatherly type of being and perhaps a bit senile so that he is unaware of much that is going on, then the human condition is not so serious. Thus, in a real sense our doctrine of sin will reflect our doctrine of God.

Our understanding of humanity also bears on our understanding of sin. If intended to reflect the nature of God, a human is to be judged not by comparison with other humans, but by conformity to the divine standard. Any failure to meet that standard is sin. If humans are free beings, that is, not simply determined by forces of nature, then they are responsible for their actions, and their shortcomings will be graded more severely than if some determining force controls or severely limits the capability of choosing and doing.

Our doctrine of salvation will be strongly influenced by our understanding of sin. For if a human is basically good with intellectual and moral capabilities essentially intact, then any problems with respect to his or her standing before God will be relatively minor. Any difficulty may be merely a matter of ignorance, a lack of knowledge as to what to do or how to do it. In that event, education will solve the problem; a good model or example may be all that is needed. On the other hand, if humans are corrupt or rebellious, and thus either unable or unwilling to do what is right, a more radical

transformation of the person will be needed. Thus, the more severe our conception of sin, the more supernatural the salvation needed.<sup>129</sup>

In order for us to comprehend the great mystery behind God's love for the lost sinner, we need to study man and his condition prior to the fall, after the fall, and in the glorified state.

## I. The Problem of Sin

### A. Definition

*"Sin is any failure to conform to the moral law of God in act, attitude, or nature. Sin is here defined in relation to God and his moral law. Sin includes not only individual acts such as stealing or lying or committing murder, but also attitudes that are contrary to the attitudes God requires of us."*<sup>130</sup>

**I John 3:4.** Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness.

## II. Origin of Sin

### A. Fall of Man

1. **Genesis 2:15-17.** The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

In this portion of the narrative we find Adam and Eve living in the Garden of Eden, prior to the fall. Notice that God had given very specific commands to them, which would be a test of their obedience. Should they fail this test, the consequence was certain death.

2. **Genesis 3:1-7.** Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?'" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to

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<sup>129</sup> Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed, 580-581.

<sup>130</sup> Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House, 2004), p. 490.

make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

Satan appeared in the form of a serpent to Eve in the Garden and basically cast doubt and aspersion on what God had commanded them. His criticism centered on God's limitation rather than on the liberality He permitted them. So through the use of lies (3:4) and half-truths (3:5), he planted the seeds of doubt in Eve's mind and she gave in to the Devil's manipulation. Shortly thereafter following the lead of his wife rather than the other way around, Adam likewise ate of the fruit. It was on account of this singular act that the fall of man took place. His action carried the consequence of total depravity (see below) and hurled the entire human race into a state of sinfulness, with the final penalty being eternal judgment.

## B. Consequences of the Fall of Man

### 1. Original sin.

The sin of Adam resulted in a curse over the whole world, including mankind (Rom. 5:12). Therefore each and every person who enters the world does so as a sinner. Think of it like this: man is not a sinner because he sins, he sins because he's a sinner.

- a) **Romans 5:12-14** - Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned— for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.

Romans 5 s is a very important section of Scripture. In verses 1-11, Paul described the many blessings that result from justification by faith in Christ. Now, Paul will contrast the work of Christ and the blessings that follow against the transgression of Adam and the damnation that followed. Both of their actions will have a humanity-wide effect, one for good and the other for evil.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Colin G. Kruse, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, ed. D. A. Carson, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Cambridge, U.K.; Nottingham, England; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Apollos, 2012), 239. There is a close connection between the previous section (5:1-11) and this unit which we are now studying (5:12-21) (See William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 12-13, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953-2001), 176.). Christ's justifying death is the subject of both sections, with the emphasis here upon the triumph of Christ's death over the power of sin. Also in this section, Paul introduces an analogy between Christ and Adam.

- b) **1 Corinthians 15:21–22.** For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. <sup>22</sup> For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

In these two verses (vv. 21-22), Paul is specifically addressing the subject of the imputation, whereby the actions of one man results in the consequences of those actions to be applied to every person that is identified with him.<sup>132</sup> **“In Adam,”** refers to mankind’s union with Adam as a partaker of his nature and thereby destined for death.<sup>133</sup> On the one hand, Adam was mankind’s Federal Head or Representative, and all his actions would directly affect his descendants. Since he represented us in the Garden and sinned, his sin was *imputed* (passed on, charged to our account) to us. Thus when Adam sinned, he became a sinner and would therefore suffer the consequences of being a sinner: death. All of mankind has inherited this sin-nature/death from the first man, Adam and that’s why all men continue to die (cf. Rom. 5:12-14).

## 2. Total depravity.

The term “total depravity” refers to the universal and comprehensive effect that sin has on mankind. That is, sin affects the whole being of man including his thinking, his willing, his reasoning and his emotions. This refers to what theologians call the “noetic effects of sin,” the fact that sin affects the mind’s ability to think or reason. In every single person there is “a strong inclination toward evil,”<sup>134</sup> which leads him away from God rather than to Him. In this condition, man is totally incapable of delivering himself from this plight,<sup>135</sup> nor is he desirous to do so. In this unredeemed condition, sin has blinded his mind to the extent that he is incapable of believing and having a faith relationship with God (Rom. 3:23; 8:8), nor is he able to merit any favor before God or to earn a right standing before Him. As Princeton theologian Charles Hodge has explained,

There is common to all men a total alienation of the soul from God so that no unrenewed man either understands or seeks after God; no such man ever makes God his portion, or God’s glory the end of his being. The apostasy from God is total or complete. All men worship and serve the creature rather than, and more

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<sup>132</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., *1 Corinthians*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), 417.

<sup>133</sup> John Peter Lange et al., *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: 1 Corinthians* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008), 316.

<sup>134</sup> Erickson, *Christian Theology, 2nd ed.*, 644.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 647

than the Creator. They are all therefore declared in Scripture to be spiritually dead.<sup>136</sup>

- a) **Jeremiah 17:9.** The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

When used in the O. T., the heart often signifies the whole of the inner being, where thoughts and emotions take place (Feinberg, p. 486; Thompson, p. 421). What does the prophet say concerning the quality of man's heart? It is "**deceitful above all things and desperately sick.**" The word *deceitful* is from the same root as Jacob's name,<sup>137</sup> one who was known early on in his life for his ability to get what he wanted through trickery, dishonesty and deception. It is one of the characteristics of the Devil himself.<sup>138</sup> The word translated, *desperately sick* points to the corrupt or depraved nature of man, which has been wounded by sin.<sup>139</sup>

- b) **1 Corinthians 2:14.** The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

Who is this *natural person*? This refers to man in his "natural, physical existence,"<sup>140</sup> and represents the man whose motives and desires do not rise above the level of purely human needs and aspirations. That is, he is the unrenewed or unredeemed man, a man who is under the influence of human nature as distinct from one who is empowered by the Spirit.<sup>141</sup> He is the unbeliever who knows only the wisdom that belongs to this age (v. 6).<sup>142</sup> When Paul says that the natural man "**does not accept**" the things taught by

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<sup>136</sup> Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2: 234.

<sup>137</sup> Gen. 25:26; 27:36.

<sup>138</sup> Gen. 3:4-5; 2 Cor. 11:13-15.

<sup>139</sup> Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 8 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 176.

<sup>140</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987), 116.

<sup>141</sup> Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, International Critical Commentary (New York: T&T Clark, 1911), 49; C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*. Black's New Testament Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), 77; Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1857), 43.

<sup>142</sup> Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 116.

the Holy Spirit, he does not just mean that he is incapable of understanding but rather that he is willfully rejecting or refusing them.<sup>143</sup>

### 3. Hell, the punishment for sin.

The result of unbelief is eternal separation from God, viz. hell (Matt. 18:7-9; Rev. 20:11-15; Rev. 21:8). Hell does not imply an extermination of existence, as all people both saved and unsaved will live forever. But as Jesus Christ Himself pointed out, believers will experience the resurrection of life, whereas unbelievers will experience the resurrection of condemnation.<sup>144</sup>

- a) **Mark 9:47–48.** And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, <sup>48</sup> ‘where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.’

A quick discussion on the word, **hell**. This word refers to the valley of Hinnom, which was a place of horror. In Old Testament times, little children were sacrificed to the idol Molech, by being passed through the fire.<sup>145</sup> It was later abolished by the godly King Josiah.<sup>146</sup> Later however, it became the place where the city’s garbage was burned. Therefore, it became a place associated with death, garbage, destruction, and fire. In fact, there was always a stench that became associated with the Valley of Hinnom, whether it was the burning flesh of babies, or the burning smell of garbage.<sup>147</sup> It therefore became the perfect metaphor for hell.

Jesus makes two interesting statements here concerning those who will suffer in hell. He says first of all, that the fire “is not quenched.” This simply means that the fire associated with hell can never be extinguished, intimating that the punishment of the wicked is never-ending.<sup>148</sup> Obviously, it makes no sense to refer to an “unquenchable fire” in reference to a one-time, temporal

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<sup>143</sup> J. B. Lightfoot, *Notes on the Epistles of Paul* (London & New York: MacMillan & Co., 1895), 181; Simon J. Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, vol. 18, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 92; Robertson & Plummer, *Corinthians*, 49; Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 116.

<sup>144</sup> John 5:28-29.

<sup>145</sup> II Kings 16:3; 21:6; II Chron. 28:3; 33:6.

<sup>146</sup> II Kings 23:10.

<sup>147</sup> William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Mark*, vol. 10, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 365-66; Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Being Grimm’s Wilke’s Clavis Novi Testamenti* (New York: Harper & Brothers., 1889), 111.

<sup>148</sup> Hendriksen, *Mark*, 366.

usage. In other words, why does the fires burn forever, if their purpose comes to an end?<sup>149</sup>

Second, Jesus says **“Their worm does not die.”** The **worm** is a reference to the maggot that consumes the flesh of a corpse. The fact that this maggot does not die demonstrates its work is eternal, just as the fire is eternal.<sup>150</sup> Therefore the eternal torment that those in hell will experience is both internal (**“their worm”**), and external (**“the fire is not quenched”**). This is an awful and most vivid description of suffering to say the least. It certainly does not suggest termination of existence, as the Annihilationists would have us believe.<sup>151</sup>

- b) **John 5:28–29.** Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice <sup>29</sup> and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.

There is a big difference between the resurrection of believers and the resurrection of unbelievers. For believers, they will be rewarded for what they did for the Lord in this life and then will enjoy eternal life forever in a glorified state. They will never have to worry about judgment for their sin because it will have been taken care of by trusting in the propitiation of Christ’s sacrifice (John 3:15-17). When they stand before the Lord for final judgment, it will be with exceeding joy and gladness.

Unbelievers on the other hand, have rejected the sacrifice of Christ and therefore when they stand before the Lord Jesus Christ on Judgment Day, it will be a day of terror, sadness and fear. They will be accountable for every sin committed in their life and will therefore experience an eternity of suffering in hell. It is there that they will have to forever face the consequences of their sin, because they chose the love of it over the love of the Savior.

### III. God’s Plan of Salvation

#### A. Doctrine of Election

So, how does anyone ever come to faith in Christ if the doctrine of total depravity is true? The answer is, he won’t on his own accord; someone outside of himself must

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<sup>149</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism*, Fifteenth Edition. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 525.

<sup>150</sup> R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Mark’s Gospel* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), 408.

<sup>151</sup> cf. Matt. 18:8; 2 Thess. 1:7-9; Daniel 12:2.

make the first move. That's where the doctrine of election comes in. The doctrine of election is how God, in His grace, chose some out of all humanity to be His people, though they did nothing to deserve it. This people, known as the elect, are then granted the grace to believe as they are granted to a new nature. Dr. Bruce Ware explains:

“Unconditional election” refers to the claim that God’s selection of those whom he would save was not based upon (or, not “conditioned” on) some fact or feature of those individuals’ lives, in particular. That is, God’s election of those who would be saved was not conditioned on something they would do, some choice they would make, how good or bad they might be, or anything else specifically true about them in contrast to others also enslaved to sin and deserving God’s just condemnation. Rather, God elected some to be saved according to the good pleasure of his will without respect for their individual qualities, characters, actions, or choices. His election, then, was “unconditional” as it pertains to particulars of the elect persons themselves, while it is also clearly conditioned and dependent on God’s own good pleasure and will.<sup>152</sup>

1. **Ephesians 1:3-5.** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, **even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world**, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,

One of the classic passages on the doctrine of election. Notice, when God’s choice of His elect took place: **“before the foundation of the world,”** i.e. before God created the world. That’s the equivalent of saying, “in eternity past.” Where were you before God created the world? Could you have influenced His choice to select you? Obviously not. So, His choice of you had everything to do with His *love* (v. 4) and nothing to do with you influencing Him.

2. **John 6:44. No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.** And I will raise him up on the last day.

The word *draws* refers to a very powerful, or irresistible force.<sup>153</sup> Here it refers to God’s divine initiative, that He pulls men from the sin that they love to Himself. In other words even though man by nature suppresses the truth in

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<sup>152</sup> Bruce A. Ware, “Divine Election to Salvation: Unconditional, Individual, and Infralapsarian” in Jack W. Cottrell, Clark H. Pinnock, et al., *Perspectives on Election: Five Views*, ed. Chad Owen Brand (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 2.

<sup>153</sup> William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, vol. 1, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 238.

unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18), he cannot resist the drawing power of God.<sup>154</sup> Therefore no man in and of himself is able to come to a saving belief in Christ. Unless the Father sovereignly **draws** a person, he will not repent of his sins.

3. **Acts 13:48.** And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, **and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.**

The word **appointed** here “has uniformly the notion of an ordering, disposing, or arranging from without; that is, from some other source than the individual itself.”<sup>155</sup> Notice, that these Gentiles were **appointed** to eternal life by a power outside of themselves, and only those who were so elected, were able to believe. Believing therefore, is the consequence of election, and not the cause, as Arminians maintain.<sup>156</sup>

4. **John 1:12-13.** But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, **but of God.**

Here we see the free-will of man and the sovereignty of God side by side in the same passage. If we were to read verse 12 apart from verse 13, we would have an inaccurate picture. For all those who accepted Christ as their Lord and Savior, God gave them the authority to become “**children of God.**” But notice the balance in verse 13: they became God’s children, not because it originated from their own will, but from God’s. The expression “**nor of the will of man**” should be understood as “nor of any human volition whatever,”<sup>157</sup> to emphasize God’s sovereignty. All who have received Christ and believed on His name, do so ultimately because of God’s choice, not their own.

## B. God’s Grace in Christ

### 1. Christ’s Death for Sin

- a) **1 Peter 3:18.** For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit,

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<sup>154</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 328, fn#110.

<sup>155</sup> Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament: Acts*, ed. Robert Frew (London: Blackie & Son, 1884–1885), 215.

<sup>156</sup> Arminians deny the doctrine of unconditional election.

<sup>157</sup> Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 101.

Let's start the discussion here by looking at Christ's death for sin and what that entailed. First, notice the important adverb **once**, as it pertains to Christ's death for sin. Why is that important? Because Christ didn't need to suffer many times for the forgiveness of sins, He only needed to die once. This indicates that Christ's sacrifice for sin was sufficient and complete.<sup>158</sup> Christ's redemptive suffering is not nor cannot be repeated because it was fully accomplished on the Cross.<sup>159</sup>

Notice the substitutionary aspect of Christ's death is brought out by the preposition **for**, in the statement, "**the righteous for the unrighteous.**" It means "in the place of," or "instead of,"<sup>160</sup> and expresses the fact that Christ died in our place. More will be said about this later. Also, Christ was perfectly **righteous**, and therefore uniquely qualified to act on behalf of all those who could not conform to the divine standard of righteousness (ie. all men).<sup>161</sup> By taking away man's sin in himself, Christ removed the barrier that once separated man from God, thus effecting reconciliation between the two parties. The verb **bring** implies entrance into an intimate personal relationship.<sup>162</sup> In other words, because of the atoning death of Christ man can once again enjoy fellowship with God the Father.<sup>163</sup>

Christ's suffering and subsequent exaltation is described in the statement, "**being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the Spirit.**" The word **flesh** is being used to emphasize the human aspect of Christ's existence, which He assumed in His incarnation.<sup>164</sup> The expression "**put to death in the flesh**" then, emphasizes that Christ's death was that of a real human being. His body didn't just appear to be real, it was real. In order for Christ's death to have any substitutionary efficacy towards human beings, He had to also be a human being. He was certainly more than a mere human being but He had to be a human being in order to take our place.

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<sup>158</sup> J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter*, vol. 49, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1988), 202.

<sup>159</sup> D. Edmond Hiebert, *1 Peter* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1997), 236.

<sup>160</sup> William Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature : A Translation and Adaption of the Fourth Revised and Augmented Edition of Walter Bauer's Griechisch-Deutsches Worterbuch Zu Den Schrift En Des Neuen Testaments Und Der Ubrigen Urchristlichen Literatur* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 838; Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Being Grimm's Wilke's Clavis Novi Testamenti* (New York: Harper & Brothers., 1889), 639.

<sup>161</sup> Hiebert, *1 Peter*, 237.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 237.

<sup>163</sup> Michaels, *1 Peter*, 203; Hiebert, *1 Peter*, 237-38.

<sup>164</sup> Michaels, *1 Peter*, 204; Hiebert, *1 Peter*, 238-40.

As we know however, there is much more to the story. Christ died but He didn't remain dead. As Peter describes here, He was "**made alive in the Spirit.**" The word translated *made alive* is found in ten other places in the New Testament, referring either to the resurrection of the dead<sup>165</sup> or the granting of spiritual life.<sup>166</sup> Due to the context of the passage, it seems best to understand this as a reference to Christ's resurrection.<sup>167</sup> The fact that this took place "**in the Spirit**" emphasizes the Holy Spirit's role in the resurrection of Christ.<sup>168</sup> Jesus Christ was put to death in the realm of His earthly existence, but was made alive in the realm of the Holy Spirit's power, vindicating Him as God's Son.

- b) **Romans 3:25.** whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.

Although there is much to discuss in this passage, we want to zero in on the statement that God put Jesus "**forward as a propitiation by his blood.**" The word *propitiation* means, "the removal of wrath," or "the turning away of wrath," and was often used in Greek literature concerning the appeasement of pagan gods [albeit in a different sense altogether]. In Scripture it has to do with Christ's sacrifice on the Cross as the means of appeasing or satisfying God the Father's wrath.<sup>169</sup>

It's important to point out that this passage that we are studying falls under the larger context of the wrath of God against sinners (1:18-3:20). In fact, the wrath of God has been the overarching theme of the epistle up to this

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<sup>165</sup> Michaels, *I Peter*, 203; Hiebert, *I Peter*, 239. cf. John 5:21; Rom. 4:17; 8:11; I Cor. 15:22, 36, 45.

<sup>166</sup> John 6:63; I Cor. 15:36; 2 Cor. 3:6; Gal. 3:21.

<sup>167</sup> Michaels, *I Peter*, 203-04.

<sup>168</sup> Simon J. Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Epistles of Peter and the Epistle of Jude*, vol. 16, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953-2001), 140.

<sup>169</sup> Because this word is often used in the LXX to refer to the "mercy seat," many commentators believe that's what Paul's reference is here as well (So Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), 232-37; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, ed. Robert W. Yarbrough and Joshua W. Jipp, Second Edition., Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic: A Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2018), 202. The same word is used in the LXX for "mercy seat," but is almost always used with the definite article (except Exod 25:17), but always in a context where it is clear what the reference is. In this verse, there is no definite article and certainly no contextual reason to think that Paul is using the word in this Levitical sense (See C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, International Critical Commentary (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 1:214-15.; Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 181.

point.<sup>170</sup> This is why the concept of **propitiation** is needed at this point in the epistle, since the reader has been left with no solution to satisfying God's wrath. In other words, if this word doesn't mean "the removal of wrath," then all mankind are still under God's wrath.<sup>171</sup> Also, it has been proven beyond a reasonable doubt that this word, along with its cognates, when used in the LXX,<sup>172</sup> usually has the notion of God's wrath present. In fact, there may not be a single exception to this rule anywhere in Scripture.<sup>173</sup> Leon Morris' book, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* is definitive in this regard.

For the sake of clarification, God's wrath is not to be confused with the primal wrath of tribal deities. God's wrath is intrinsically tied to His absolute holiness. In other words, because God is totally holy and righteous, He cannot allow any sin to go unpunished. So, **propitiation** satisfies both the demands of God's holiness and His justice. On the Cross, Christ suffered the wrath of God that we ourselves deserved, in our place. On the Cross, Christ redirected the Father's wrath away from us and onto Himself. He satisfied the Father's wrath by paying the penalty that sin deserves. And since Jesus is the Son of God, His death has infinite worth and benefit for those who trust in it. Interestingly enough, this passage makes it clear that it was God the Father Himself who took the initiative to satisfy His own wrath by purposing His own Son to be the **propitiation** for our sins.<sup>174</sup>

**"By His blood,"** indicates that this propitiation is accomplished in connection with the blood of Jesus Christ. **Blood**, in atonement contexts such as this refers not to Christ's literal fluid but to the yielding up of His life in death.<sup>175</sup> Thus, Paul is indicating that Christ's death is the realm or the means in which God the Father's wrath is satisfied.<sup>176</sup> Although the NKJV and NASB has rearranged the word order so as not to mislead the reader, there is still a point of clarification that needs to be made. **"By faith"** modifies **propitiation**, and clarifies the means in which propitiation takes place. In

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<sup>170</sup> Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, 235.

<sup>171</sup> Morris, *Epistle to the Romans*, 180-81.

<sup>172</sup> The Greek translation of the Old Testament.

<sup>173</sup> Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 1: 216; Schreiner, *Romans*, 191.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Schreiner, *Romans* (2nd edition), 203.

<sup>176</sup> Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, 237.

other words, Christ's propitiation for our sins does not take place automatically (i.e. universalism) but is only appropriated through faith.<sup>177</sup>

## 2. Justification by Faith in Christ

- a) **Galatians 2:16.** yet we know that a person is **not justified by works** of the law but through **faith in Jesus Christ**, so we also have **believed in Christ Jesus**, in order to be **justified by faith in Christ** and **not by works** of the law, because **by works of the law no one will be justified**.

We discussed Christ's death as the basis for the forgiveness of sin and now we'll discuss how to enter into its benefits. The word *justified* is one of the most significant terms ever to appear in the Bible and the debate over its meaning is what separated the Reformers from the Roman Catholic Church. Therefore, we must make sure that we have a good handle on what it means because if we misunderstand this word, we will misunderstand the gospel itself. And, in the case of the Roman Catholic Church, this misunderstanding is spiritually fatal, and they are certainly not alone.

This word appears for the first time in this important epistle and means "to judge, declare, or pronounce righteous and therefore acceptable."<sup>178</sup> When used by Paul, it carries with it a moral-forensic element (ie. legal),<sup>179</sup> as that of "a judge's declaring an accused person not guilty and right before the law."<sup>180</sup> Thus, to be declared righteous before God is "to enjoy a status or standing of being in a right relationship with God, of being accepted by Him."<sup>181</sup> In other words, we are now judged righteous by God, and no longer accountable for the eternal consequences of our sins. Note, this term does not emphasize the moral change in behavior that takes places in a believer's life,<sup>182</sup> only his new righteous standing before God.<sup>183</sup> Therefore, when we use the term *justification* we are using it as synonymous with how

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<sup>177</sup> So Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 1: 210; Schreiner, *Romans* (2nd edition), 194; Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, 236; Morris, *Epistle to the Romans*, 182.

<sup>178</sup> Thayer, *GELNT*, 150.

<sup>179</sup> Ernest De Witt Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, International Critical Commentary (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1920), 473.

<sup>180</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., *Galatians*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), 56; cf. James Montgomery Boice, "Galatians," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Romans through Galatians*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 10 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 448.

<sup>181</sup> Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988), 113.

<sup>182</sup> That concept is emphasized in the doctrine of regeneration, or conversion.

<sup>183</sup> Boice, *Galatians*, 10: 448.

Christians often use the word *salvation*,<sup>184</sup> for when a person is justified he is saved. It is a doctrine that is not only central to the book of Galatians, but to Christianity in general.<sup>185</sup>

In the phrase **“by the works of the law,”** the preposition *by* denotes source or origin,<sup>186</sup> and thus derived meanings can include “resulting from,” “in consequence of,”<sup>187</sup> or even “because of.” In other words, Paul is saying that a man’s justification does not result from his ability to keep the Law. Or, to put it another way, law-keeping isn’t the source of a person’s justification. So what *law* is Paul referring to? The **“works of the law”** are “the actions prescribed by the [Old Testament] law,”<sup>188</sup> and is being used in a legalistic sense; that is, the reference is to the obtaining of divine favor from God based upon legalistic obedience to its statutes.<sup>189</sup> Could it be any clearer, then, that no human being can earn his justification, his right standing before the Father, through his obedience to the Law? No, Paul’s negative declaration denies any efficacy to human merit whatsoever, in reference to man’s salvation. Not even the strictest adherence to the Old Testament Law can justify a man before God. The main point: **you cannot earn a right standing before the Father.** That being the case, how can it be attained?

Paul answers, **“but through faith in Jesus Christ.”** This means, “but only,” or “except,”<sup>190</sup> making this a singular exception. This is an important qualification because it limits the way of salvation to only one. Paul says it is only through the means of faith in Christ that a person be justified. Thus, Paul states here positively what he had just finished saying negatively, that a

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<sup>184</sup> Biblically speaking, the concept of salvation is more broad, encompassing justification (past), sanctification (present), and glorification (future).

<sup>185</sup> Boice, *Galatians*, 10: 448.

<sup>186</sup> Burton, *Galatians*, 120.

<sup>187</sup> Charles John Ellicott, *Ellicott’s Commentaries, Critical and Grammatical, on the Epistles of St. Paul, with Revised Translations*, vol. 1. (Andover, MA: Warren F. Draper, 1890), 57.

<sup>188</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1982), 137.

<sup>189</sup> Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, vol. 41, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1990), 86; Burton, *Galatians*, 120; Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 137.

<sup>190</sup> Burton, *Galatians*, 121; Longenecker, *Galatians*, 83. See also Marvin Richardson Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, vol. 4 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1887), 104–105.

man is not **justified** as a result of any amount of obedience to the Law, but only through one means, faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>191</sup>

**“Faith in Jesus Christ...Believed in Christ Jesus.”** Let’s talk about what it means to have **faith** or to **believe** in Jesus (same root word). The word **believed** means “to be persuaded of,” and hence, “to place confidence in, to trust,” signifies, in this sense of the word, reliance upon, not mere credence.<sup>192</sup> In this context, “It signifies an acceptance of that which accredits itself as true [knowledge], and a corresponding *trust in a person* which dominates the life and conduct” (emphasis mine), and “expresses in its fullest and most definite form the act of Christian faith, the committal of one’s self to Christ on the basis of the acceptance of the message concerning Him.”<sup>193</sup> In other words, **faith** or **belief** implies commitment to a person and not mere assent.<sup>194</sup>

There has been quite a bit of confusion in Christianity as to what it means to believe in Jesus Christ, some saying that it involves mere assent, absent of any kind of repentance or willingness to submit to the Lordship of Christ (ie. “free grace movement”). Well, as can be seen from the definitions given above, to believe in Jesus Christ requires an entrusting of your life to Him. This is not the same as believing facts *about* Christ. You don’t believe in Christ in the same way that you used to believe in Santa Claus. A true belief in Christ is one that submits to Him, trusting in Him as your Lord and Savior, believing not only who He is, but also what He has done for you: substitutionary death and resurrection on the cross for sin. This is what is necessary for justification before God: relinquishing control of your life and subsequently entrusting it to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

**\*Clarification on the relationship between faith and repentance.** Sometimes passages stress faith or belief (Gal. 2:16), whereas other passages only mention repentance (Acts 2:38),<sup>195</sup> and this has led to some confusion. Here’s some clarification on the issue as a correct understanding of both terms will help alleviate the tension. There is a close relationship between

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<sup>191</sup> Longenecker, *Galatians*, 87-88 argues for a subjective genitive here (“the faithfulness of Jesus Christ”), and sees the contrast between righteousness that is based upon the works of the Law, and the righteousness that is based upon the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. This seems highly doubtful.

<sup>192</sup> W. E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, and William White Jr., Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson, 1996), 61.

<sup>193</sup> Burton, *Galatians*, 121, 123.

<sup>194</sup> Boice, *Galatians*, 10: 449.

<sup>195</sup> Other verses include Luke 13:3, 5; Acts 3:19; 17:30; 26:20.

the two as one always presupposes the other.<sup>196</sup> Faith or belief in Christ takes place at exactly the same time: you are repenting so that you can place your faith in Christ and the reason you place your faith in Christ is because you repented.

Let's briefly look at one verse where both words are used together to get a better sense.<sup>197</sup> Take a look at **Acts 20:21**, "testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." This verse very clearly expresses the relationship between repentance and belief. Repentance indicates a turning from sin, and a turning to God.<sup>198</sup> When a person genuinely turns *away* from his sin, there is only one place to turn *to*, and that's God. And when he turns from his sin to God, he does so in order to place his faith in Christ. Dr. Bruce Demarest explains this very well when he writes:

Conversion, however, is a single act that has two distinct but inseparable aspects. *Repentance*, the forsaking of sin and the cultivating of a new hope, and *faith*, turning to Christ in belief and trust, are related to one another as two sides of a coin. The two are *interdependent* responses, each incomplete without the other. Thus conversion involves both a believing repentance and a penitent faith. True repentance requires belief, and full-orbed faith requires a repentant spirit...Saving faith is permeated with repentance and repentance is permeated with faith.<sup>199</sup>

- b) **Romans 3:23-24.** for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,<sup>24</sup> and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,

Here, we see the clear connection of universal sin with the need for Christ's redemptive work.<sup>200</sup> As Paul stresses throughout his writings, this right standing before the Father cannot be earned but can only be accepted "**by his grace as a gift.**" The word, *gift* means that it is free, without payment needed,<sup>201</sup> emphasizing the unearned nature of justification.

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<sup>196</sup> See Culver, *Systematic Theology Biblical & Historical*, 706-713.

<sup>197</sup> Other verses where both terms are used include Matt. 21:32; Mark 1:15; Acts 20:21; Heb. 6:1.

<sup>198</sup> Vine, *Complete Expository Dictionary*, 2: 525.

<sup>199</sup> Bruce A. Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation: The Doctrine of Salvation*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1997), 263-264.

<sup>200</sup> Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 117.

<sup>201</sup> BAGD, 210.

**Grace** is a similar word that refers to God's undeserved merit or favor. BAGD describes it as "that which one grants to another, the action of one who volunteers to do something to which he is not bound."<sup>202</sup> God is not compelled to show favor to anyone but He does so because He chooses to do so. In other words, God is not constrained by anything outside of His own will.<sup>203</sup> All this to say that justification is not deserved nor can it be earned. We've already seen that humanly speaking, justification is attained through faith and here we see things from the divine side: that it's a free gift that originates out of God's grace.<sup>204</sup>

### 3. A New Principle of Life

- a) **2 Corinthians 5:17.** Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

The way this is worded in the Greek text is literally, "if anyone is in Christ, new creation."<sup>205</sup> What is this "**new creation**" that Paul is referring to? Prior to the new birth, everyone is a slave to sin, meaning that sin was the ruling desire of the person. However, when he is saved by Christ, Christ changes his very nature, giving him a new heart, new desires, and a new way of life. In other words, the emphasis is on the fact that being united to Christ by faith will now bring about a radical change in his life.<sup>206</sup> Albert Barnes describes it this way:

The idea evidently is, not that he ought to be a new creature, but that he is in fact; not that he ought to live as becomes a new creature - which is true enough - but that he will in fact live in that way, and manifest the characteristics of the new creation.<sup>207</sup>

The point is that when God saves you, He changes you. The old way of life, your old order of existence that controlled your life before, is a thing of the

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<sup>202</sup> Ibid., 877.

<sup>203</sup> Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, 228.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., 228.

<sup>205</sup> The personal pronoun, *he* is supplied by the translators and so it can refer to individual transformation, or it can refer to a new situation that has come about due to the new birth, "there is a new creation" (ie. The inauguration of the new age, the new heaven and earth). For an explanation of these two views, see David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, vol. 29, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 286-87. Under either view, personal transformation is included.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid., 286.

<sup>207</sup> Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament: II Corinthians & Galatians*, ed. Robert Frew (London: Blackie & Son, 1884-1885), 126.

past (“the old has passed away”).<sup>208</sup> Your conversion in Christ has changed everything about you. The moment that you become a Christian, God begins the process known as **sanctification**, in your life. This is the process that God uses to slowly but surely conform your life to Christ’s. In other words, this change doesn’t take place overnight but the process starts the moment you place your faith in Christ. Old habits begin to pass away through the sanctifying grace of God, replacing them with new ones that are pleasing to the Lord. This is what Paul means by **“behold, the new has come.”**

There is a transformation of life that takes place, where simultaneously your old sin and habits begin to lessen their hold upon you, and new fruits of holiness start to enter in.

- b) **1 John 3:9.** No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God.

In this verse, the apostle John reminds his readers that the true child of God is like his Father, opposed to sin.<sup>209</sup> It is very relevant for our discussion, as it points out the incompatibility of being born again (ie. a recipient of salvation), and yet living in a pattern of continual sin. The phrase **“born of God”** is found in the perfect tense, referring to past action with continuing results. John’s point is that if a person has been spiritually reborn in the past, then it will evidence itself positively in the present.<sup>210</sup> Children of God take on the attributes of their Father, and children of the Devil the same. “One does what one is.”<sup>211</sup>

**“A practice of sinning...cannot keep on sinning.”** The ESV correctly brings out the force of the present tense in translating these phrases. This demonstrates the nature of the change that takes place for one who has new life in Christ. Since the power of sin is broken in his life, he is no longer a practitioner of sin as he once was, sin is no longer his way of life. Why? Because unlike before, **“God’s seed abides in him,”** which is probably a reference to the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>212</sup>

- c) **Ephesians 2:8–10.** For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> not a result of works, so that no

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<sup>208</sup> Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 287.

<sup>209</sup> Stephen S. Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, vol. 51, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1984), 171.

<sup>210</sup> Simon J. Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, *Exposition of James and the Epistles of John*, vol. 14, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 303; Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 172.

<sup>211</sup> Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 171.

<sup>212</sup> Thayer, *GELNT*, 584.

one may boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Here, we see the clear connection between salvation by God's grace alone, apart from works, and the fact that His grace actually works in the life of the believer. Now, these "**good works**" that Paul mentions have been ruled out as the ground or basis for achieving salvation (vv. 8-9) but they are very clearly the fruit of salvation.<sup>213</sup> Also, the fact that God "**prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them,**" assures us that we will. This is a reference to God's election of believers before He created the world (Eph. 1:4), and the fact that this choosing is not just meant to rescue from hell as an end in itself, but also to conform the chosen one to the person of His Son. If God prepared beforehand that believers would walk in good works, you better believe that they will.

Notice the parallel between the "new creation" language that Paul uses in 2 Corinthians 5, and what he says here about believers being "**his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works.**" The word *workmanship* is used in the LXX to refer to God's work in creating.<sup>214</sup> Again, the emphasis is upon the nature of one's new life in Christ and how it changes one's nature from a slave to sin to a slave of righteousness.

- d) **Titus 2:11–12.** For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, <sup>12</sup> training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age,

What work does God's grace do in the life of every believer? This passage focuses on two aspects, one negative, the other positive:

1. (Negative) To deny ungodliness and worldly lusts;
2. (Positive) To live soberly, righteously and godly in the here and now.

Again, we see this principle at work, that the same grace of God that saves us, also changes us. Or, to put it more technically, God's grace justified us in the past, and is sanctifying us in the present.

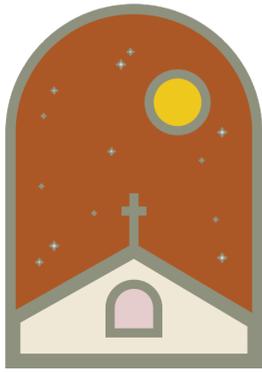
The Question before the house is this: do you see tangible evidence of God's grace working in your own life? Have you experienced this real life change in your heart that works itself out in your life? Do you find yourself desiring to "**renounce ungodliness and worldly passions,**" and a consequent desire to life a "**self-controlled, upright, and godly life**" in the here and now? Has

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<sup>213</sup> Peter Thomas O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 178.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., 178.

there been a noticeable change in your life since confessing Christ as Savior and Lord? Have old things passed away in your life, and been replaced with new things? If this is all foreign to you, there's a very good chance that you haven't yet experienced God's grace in your life. What is being described in these passages are not the experience of some, many, or most Christians, these are the experiences of ALL Christians.



## CHAPTER 4

### THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH

Ephesians 1:22–23. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, <sup>23</sup> which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

**W**hen we became Christians, we not only come into a personal faith-relationship with God the Father through the Lord Jesus Christ, we also become part of the His family, the church. Though this part of theology is often neglected, the New Testament is replete with doctrines and instructions concerning the Church. Scripture affirms, “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.”<sup>215</sup> Likewise, Christ pointed to His disciples and said, “Behold, My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother.”<sup>216</sup> Certainly, God does not call us to be “island Christians” (just me and God alone). Rather, he brings us into a family where we are indispensable sharers in the cosmic purpose of glorifying Him. Hence, as the people of God, there is a weighty responsibility to know and live this important aspect of the redeemed life.

This chapter will briefly deal with the essential doctrines of the Church and their specific relevancy for Immanuel Bible Church.

#### I. What is the Church?

##### A. Definition

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<sup>215</sup> Ephesians 2:19

<sup>216</sup> Matthew 12:49-50

The English word **church** that we find throughout our New Testament translates a Greek word,<sup>217</sup> when literally translated means “called out.”<sup>218</sup> As we mentioned earlier, the word only appears in two verses in all the gospels (3 times total) but 111 times in the epistles.<sup>219</sup> Just to be clear, the word itself is most often used in the technical sense to refer to those who are saved by Christ and “associated into a unit of permanent fellowship in a given locality.”<sup>220</sup> Thus, the emphasis is not upon a building but upon those who constitute the redeemed people of God. In fact, there were no designated buildings of worship for the early church and so they met in people’s homes.<sup>221</sup> The church is found where the people assembling are found.<sup>222</sup>

Many in the reformed tradition are quick to point out that since passages such as this or even in the LXX,<sup>223</sup> used this word<sup>224</sup> to refer to Old Testament Israelites, that it indicates that the church existed in Old Testament times. This method of exegesis however, is guilty of importing a technical, later meaning back into the word. This would be no different than taking the popular definition of “church” that is used today to refer to the building itself, and import that idea back into the New Testament.<sup>225</sup> There simply isn’t a place in the LXX wherein the technical concept of “church” can be found. So, to be clear, this word is used generally in a non-technical sense to refer to people assembling but eventually develops a very particular technical sense to refer to the New Covenant people of God.<sup>226</sup>

## B. Local Church

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<sup>217</sup> ἐκκλησία

<sup>218</sup> Culver, *Systematic Theology*, 816.

<sup>219</sup> Enns, *Moody Handbook*, 347

<sup>220</sup> Culver, *Systematic Theology*, 818.

<sup>221</sup> Enns, *Moody Handbook*, 348. cf. Rom. 16:5; Philm. 2.

<sup>222</sup> That being said, that’s not the only way the word is used in the New Testament as the word itself predates it. The most basic meaning of the word is “assembly” (BAGD, 240) and thus can be used to refer to the congregating or assembling of people for whatever purpose is stated in the context. For example, it’s used of an angry mob in Acts 19:32 (“for the assembly was confused”), and of the Israelites in the wilderness in Acts 7:38 (“in the congregation in the wilderness”).

<sup>223</sup> ie. Greek translation of the Old Testament.

<sup>224</sup> ἐκκλησία

<sup>225</sup> It is true that very early on in church history, it does come to be used of buildings that are used for Christian worship (Culver, *Systematic Theology*, 815) but that doesn’t justify importing that meaning back to an earlier time.

<sup>226</sup> Robert L. Saucy, *The Church in God’s Program* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1972), 15.

There are two ways in which the word **church** is used throughout the New Testament, the most frequent being a reference to the local church. When speaking of the local church, we are referring to a localized group of believers in Christ who congregate, or assemble themselves together.<sup>227</sup> Since the early church had no designated buildings to meet in, they met in each other's homes.<sup>228</sup> There are about 90 references in the New Testament to the local church,<sup>229</sup> and this is the predominant way the word is used.<sup>230</sup>

1. **Romans 16:5.** Greet also the church in their house. Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in Asia.

In this last chapter of Romans, Paul sends out his greetings to all of his friends and associates. Two of those people were close friends, Priscilla and Aquila (v. 3). Notice, that Paul not only sends his greetings to them but also to the **“church in their house.”** This is a clear reference to a localized body of believers that were worshipping in one particular place, at Priscilla and Aquila's home. As we mentioned earlier, church buildings didn't exist as of yet, and that wouldn't become a reality until the third century.<sup>231</sup> Most likely, Priscilla and Aquila were wealthy and thus had a larger size home that was able to accommodate a large number of people.<sup>232</sup> Elsewhere in the NT we have reference to the **“church in Jerusalem”** (Acts 8:1), **“the church of God that is in Corinth”** (I Cor. 1:2), and **“the church of the Thessalonians”** (I Thess.1:1).

2. **Romans 16:16.** Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.

Notice the plural, **churches**, which communicates the fact that there were always more than one body of believers that congregated together for the purpose of worship. This is probably a specific reference to all the churches that Paul himself had jurisdiction over in the eastern part of the empire: Achaia, Macedonia, Asia, Galatia, and Syria.<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> Enns, *Moody Handbook*, 348.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, 348.

<sup>229</sup> Culver, *Systematic Theology*, 818.

<sup>230</sup> Saucy, *The Church in God's Program*, 16.

<sup>231</sup> Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 532.

<sup>232</sup> Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 920.

<sup>233</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 2nd edition, 772.

3. **1 Corinthians 16:19.** The churches of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Prisca, together with the church in their house, send you hearty greetings in the Lord.

Notice, Paul refers to the plural **churches** in the Asia Minor area and they are united in their greeting to the Corinthian church. Paul is writing this letter from Ephesus (the capital of Asia Minor) and so he mentions all the local churches surrounding that area. But, he also singles out one particular house church, the one that meets in Priscilla and Aquila's house. We ran into Priscilla and Aquila back in Romans 16 and we saw that Paul sent greetings to the church that met in their house (16:5). Here, Paul sends greeting from Priscilla and Aquila's house church that is located in Ephesus. Again, this probably points to the fact that they were wealthy as two different churches in two different places met in their houses.<sup>234</sup>

So, to sum it all up, the singular use of **church** is regularly used to refer to a particular local assembly of believers, whereas the plural **churches** usually refers to a group of churches in a region (i.e. "churches of Asia").<sup>235</sup> But, keep in mind any local church is the visible expression of the larger church (i.e. universal church) in any one specific geographical location.<sup>236</sup> Or, to put it another way, the local church is a microcosm of the universal church. So, wherever a legitimate church meets, there is *the* Church. This leads us into our discussion of the universal church.

### C. Universal Church

The second way in which the word **church** is used in the New Testament is in a more corporate, or all-inclusive fashion. In other words, looking at the Church from a more global perspective, taking every believer from every church in the world and then viewing them all together as a corporate whole. As Dr. Saucy explains, "In this usage the concept of a physical assembly gives way to the spiritual unity of all believers in Christ. *Ekklesia* in this sense is not the assembly itself but rather those constituting it; they are the church whether actually assembled or not."<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> They met Paul for the first time in Corinth after Aquila was expelled from Rome because he was a Jew (Acts 18:2-3). Aquila and Priscilla were of the same trade as Paul (either tentmakers or leather workers), who were very likely converted through his ministry. From there, they went with Paul to Ephesus (Acts 18:18) and it is there that we find them helping Apollos understand Scripture better so that his teaching ministry would be more accurate (Acts 18:26). From Ephesus, they accompanied Paul to Rome (Rom. 16:3) and eventually made their way back to Ephesus (2 Tim. 4:19). See Charles J. Ellicott, St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians: With a Critical and Grammatical Commentary (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1887), 341.

<sup>235</sup> Saucy, *Church in God's Program*, 16.

<sup>236</sup> Rolland McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity: The Doctrines of Salvation, the Church, and Last Things*, vol. 3 (Allen Park, MI: Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010), 199.

<sup>237</sup> Saucy, *Church in God's Program*, 17.

Although you sometimes hear in sermons, or read in books, that the local church is the visible church, whereas the universal is the invisible church, this is not biblical terminology. Why this terminology is usually employed is to convey the idea that we don't know the true or exact number of the elect in every church, but the fact of the matter remains that although this is true, the "invisible" membership is very visible in the church. Every true believer in every true church meets visibly in their respective local assemblies.<sup>238</sup>

1. **1 Corinthians 12:13.** For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

We briefly looked at this verse earlier so we don't need to reiterate all the details, only to point out that Paul is looking at the believer's entrance into the community of faith from a corporate perspective: whoever (i.e. Jews, Greeks, slaves, free) and wherever we find ourselves in the world, it is by one Holy Spirit that we are baptized into the *one* body of Christ. This is true whether you attend the "**church of God that is in Corinth**" (I Cor. 1:2), the "**churches of Galatia**" (Gal. 1:2), or "**all the churches of the Gentiles**" (Rom. 16:4). Though we may not know any of our brothers and sisters in Christ in places such as Uganda, or maybe even Uruguay, we are all part of the one body of Christ regardless of what church we attend.

2. **Ephesians 1:22–23.** And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, <sup>23</sup> which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Paul quotes from Psalm 8:6 and applies it to Jesus, emphasizing Christ's cosmic authority, that all things in the universe have been put under His feet, i.e. under His authority by the Father Himself.<sup>239</sup> There is an "already/not-yet" aspect to this statement however, as the complete and total fulfillment of these words will not be realized until sin and death are once and for all banished and the whole universe is in perfect submission to God.<sup>240</sup> Since God the Father put all things under His Son's feet, the result is that Jesus is "**head over all things.**" The term **head** is significant as it is used often in the LXX<sup>241</sup> to translate the Hebrew term "ruler" or "leader."<sup>242</sup> And notice, that this cosmic supremacy (Col. 2:10 extends this to the demonic powers) has particular relevance to the Church.

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<sup>238</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>239</sup> O' Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 144-45.

<sup>240</sup> I Cor. 15:27-28; Heb. 2:8.

<sup>241</sup> ie. Greek translation of the Old Testament.

<sup>242</sup> Deut. 28:13; Judg. 10:18, 11:11; 2 Sam. 22:44; Isa. 7:8-9.

So, the idea of Christ's headship for the Church is not derived from the **body** image mentioned in verse 23, but from the prior idea that all things have been subjected under His feet. Christ's headship extends over all creation and included in that statement is the fact that the Church is His **body**.<sup>243</sup> Now, for our purposes, the idea of Christ's cosmic headship or authority that extends to the Church, is surely a reference to the universal church and not limited to a local assembly of believers [i.e. "to the church of Ephesus"].<sup>244</sup> The all-encompassing nature of Christ's sovereignty would seem to indicate a more universal reference in scope: the whole church.

#### D. The Convergence of the Local and Universal Church

Let's look at one example where we see the relationship between the local church that you belong to, in relationship with the universal church that all Christians belong.

1. **1 Corinthians 1:2. To the church of God that is in Corinth**, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together **with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ**, both their Lord and ours:

Paul addresses this epistle to "**the church of God that is in Corinth**," obviously referring to the local congregation that assembled in that city. As will become apparent throughout this epistle there was a factious spirit present within the church and right here at the beginning of the letter, Paul emphasizes that their local church belongs to God.<sup>245</sup> But, their local church doesn't exist in a vacuum; no, there is a wider aspect to their calling. They also share a common brotherhood with all believers (both Jew and Gentile), and that brotherhood extends throughout the world ("**with all those who in every place call upon the name**," i.e. the Church Universal). This little reminder by Paul is meant to undermine the independent streak and egotism that had crept into some of these Corinthian believers.<sup>246</sup> It's a reminder for us too, to remember that our local church has a shared responsibility to live under the Lordship of Christ with every other Christian congregation throughout the world.

Which idea gave birth to the other? In the Greek speaking world, *ekklesia* (church) was always a reference to a local assembly, and similarly amongst the

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<sup>243</sup> O' Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 146.

<sup>244</sup> So Enns, *Moody Handbook*, 348; contra. O' Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 146-47.

<sup>245</sup> This is a genitive of possession, the "church which belongs to God." See Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, International Critical Commentary (New York: T&T Clark, 1911), 2; Garland, *I Corinthians*, 27; Hodge, *An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 3.

<sup>246</sup> Garland, *I Corinthians*, 29.

Jews where it was used almost synonymously with the synagogue. It seems fairly certain that the primary idea in *ekklesia* is to the local assembly of believers which then gave rise to an extension of meaning to the cumulative whole of these local assemblies.<sup>247</sup> In other words, the many churches were in fact really, one Church.

## II. Church Government

### A. The Plural-Elder-Ruled Church

The model of Church government that we prescribe to here at IBC is a *Plural-Elder-ruled* Church.<sup>248</sup> It agrees with both the Presbyterian and Congregational forms of government that there are only two offices in the church, that of elder and deacon. It agrees with the Presbyterian and Plural-elder congregational models that there are to be multiple elders in every church. It agrees with the Congregational churches that there is to be autonomy in the local church with no governing board above it. Having said that, this doesn't imply that independent, local churches ought not to fellowship or cooperate with like-minded churches in furthering the work of the gospel. No, there ought to be a healthy acknowledgement of other churches and not a tendency to isolate one's self from the Church's corporate testimony. With that said, IBC is a member of the Southern Baptist Convention.<sup>249</sup>

The elders who compose the plurality of church leadership make decisions and policy based on their understanding of Scripture. For sure, comments and questions from the congregation are welcomed, and the suggestions will be carefully evaluated. Ultimately, however, the final decision will be made upon the prayerful consideration and agreement of the pastors/elders, and not congregational vote. That said, IBC does voluntarily take congregational votes when they deem it necessary.

### B. Two Offices: Elders and Deacons

We would agree with both Presbyterians and Congregationalists that the Scripture only acknowledges two offices in Scripture, the elder and the deacon. Yes, there are other terms that Scripture uses to describe the office of elder but these are all synonymous and cannot be used to justify an episcopal structure wherein bishops function over elders. Each of these words simply emphasize a different aspect of the church elder but are used interchangeably throughout the New Testament. The elders are men who have been gifted by God to biblically instruct the congregation,

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<sup>247</sup> Culver, *Systematic Theology*, 818-19.

<sup>248</sup> For a defense of this model see James R. White, "The Plural-Elder-Led Church: Sufficient as Established - The Plurality of Elders as Christ's Ordained Means of Church Governance" in *Perspectives on Church Government*, ed. Chad Brand, Stan Norman (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2004), 235-284.

<sup>249</sup> <https://www.sbc.net/>.

fueled by a godly life that substantiates his teaching. So, before we take a look at some passages that demonstrate this, I think it'll be helpful to first define the meaning of the various terms that are used of the elder and then we'll be able to see the multi-faceted picture that the Scripture paints.

#### 1. Elder.<sup>250</sup>

This word doesn't so much emphasize the advanced nature of the man's age but rather the spiritual maturity possessed, that he's an elder so far as the faith is concerned. When I was first starting out in ministry, some of my contemporaries waited because they felt like they weren't old enough to be considered an elder. Although that's commendable, it's not necessarily biblical. But having said that, there is often a correlation between a man's age and his spiritual maturity. That is, the older a man gets, the more mature he ought to become as he walks faithfully with his Lord. As we all know however, this isn't always the case. But, let's remember that there isn't any age qualification given in Scripture as it relates to being an elder and that age itself is no guarantee that a man will be godly.

The word *shepherd*<sup>251</sup> describes the function of the elder. The main task of the shepherd is to lead, feed, and protect, feeding being the most important aspect. This means leading the flock as it pertains to the direction they should go, feeding them a healthy, well-balanced diet of God's word, and constantly protecting themselves from the false teachers. Let's take a look at some passages that show their synonymous nature.

The word *overseers*<sup>252</sup> is the one that is sometimes translated "bishop" in translations such as the NKJV. This word was used in the LXX<sup>253</sup> of one who was charged with the responsibility of supervising the work of others to make sure it was done correctly.<sup>254</sup> So, when used of the church elder, it stresses his

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<sup>250</sup> πρεσβύτερος.

<sup>251</sup> ποιμήν.

<sup>252</sup> ἐπισκοπέω.

<sup>253</sup> ie. Greek translation of the Old Testament.

<sup>254</sup> Neh. 11:9, 14, 22; 2 Ki. 11:15. See Thayer, *GELNT*, 243.

responsibility in having spiritual oversight, supervision, and protective care over those in his charge.<sup>255</sup>

#### a) Qualifications

There are two passages in the New Testament that provides the qualifications for elders, one in I Timothy 3:1-7 and the other in Titus 1:5-9. We will briefly compare and contrast the two passages and comment on some of the aspects of the elder's qualifications:

**1 Timothy 3:1-7** . The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. <sup>2</sup> Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, <sup>3</sup> not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. <sup>4</sup> He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, <sup>5</sup> for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? <sup>6</sup> He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. <sup>7</sup> Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

**Titus 1:5-9**. This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you— <sup>6</sup> if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. <sup>7</sup> For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, <sup>8</sup> but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. <sup>9</sup> He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

#### (1) Elders are limited to males.

Both qualification lists are clear, that the qualified elder can only be a man. In both lists, Paul clearly uses the indefinite masculine pronoun, **any man**.<sup>256</sup> This is further indicated by the first characteristic of the

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<sup>255</sup> Peter Thomas O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 47; J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter*, vol. 49, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1988), 283; D. Edmond Hiebert, *1 Peter* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1997), 303; Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 178.

<sup>256</sup> τῷς.

blameless man, that he's **"the husband of one wife."**<sup>257</sup> Obviously, in order for him to be the husband of one wife, he must be a man and not a woman.<sup>258</sup>

Within the last couple of decades, some churches and denominations have ordained women as pastors. This, of course, has heightened people's interest in the issue of the women's role in the church. However, the Scriptures clearly teach that women are ineligible for the office of elder. The primary text for this teaching is **1 Timothy 2:12**: "I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet." As the text clearly instructs, it is not permitted for women to perform the duties of an elder, viz. teaching and ruling.<sup>259</sup> Their ineligibility to perform the elderly duties, namely, teaching and ruling, precludes women from becoming elders. Many evangelical feminists<sup>260</sup> have attempted to remove this restriction today, arguing that it was a cultural designation for that day only. The problem with such a view is that it ignores the Scripture itself. The very next verse says, **"For Adam was formed first, then Eve."** In other words, Paul roots the command in verse 12 to creation, not culture. As long as Adam was formed first, the command is still in effect. Furthermore, there is absolutely no precedent for women elders in Scripture, whereas there is for women deacons.<sup>261</sup>

Lastly, any church that can take Paul's prohibition of **"I do not permit"** to mean **"I do permit"** is not a reliable source for interpreting Scripture. Thus, in alignment with this and other Scriptural commands, Immanuel Bible Church does not practice or recognize ordination of women for the

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<sup>257</sup> William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, vol. 46, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2000), 168.

<sup>258</sup> Unfortunately, this isn't so obvious in our present culture, anymore.

<sup>259</sup> Some have argued that Paul's statement "I do not allow" is a disclaimer, arguing that this statement was only Paul's opinion, hence, not from the Lord. However, his usage of the same syntactic-grammatical construction in v. 8 of the same chapter debunks that argument. Since there, he is giving a command that all men worship the Lord in a worthy manner. Paul states, "Therefore I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension. Likewise, *I want* women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments; but rather by means of good works, as befits women making a claim to godliness" (1 Timothy 2:8-9). Certainly, he was not sharing an opinionated suggestion, rather, an authoritative command from the Lord, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

<sup>260</sup> ie. Those who believe the Bible doesn't forbid women to hold the office of pastor/elder.

<sup>261</sup> cf. 1 Timothy 3:11, Romans 16:1

position of the pastor, whether it be the head, associate, youth, or children's pastor.<sup>262</sup>

- (2) **Elders are to be blameless but not perfect.** I think this is important to point out because sometimes believers have unrealistic expectations on what an elder's life should be. They think that elders should never sin, never struggle in their faith, never have a bad day, never give bad advice, never argue with their wife, never admit to weakness, never exercise liberties that "I" would disagree with, never have a child that misbehaves, and of course, elders should never let me down. I don't think such a person actually exists. No, elders are to be blameless but that doesn't mean they are to be sinless.<sup>263</sup> The word *blameless*<sup>264</sup> is the key term in the list as it is further defined by the other terms that follow and thus can be viewed as something of a summary, or head term of the list.<sup>265</sup> In other words, all the virtues that follow can be comprehended in this one word.<sup>266</sup> The word means "without reproach," "one who gives no ground for accusation,"<sup>267</sup> meaning that in terms of his lifestyle there is nothing that a person can legitimately grab hold of and accuse him.<sup>268</sup>

Now, don't misunderstand: this doesn't imply that such a man won't be accused of anything (Jesus, Daniel, and Paul were all accused of something); no, but regardless of the accusations that are brought against a man such as this, they are found to be empty when properly

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<sup>262</sup> There are those who like to say that it is okay for women to function in the role of a children's pastor, since they are not teaching men. The point they miss is that Scripture limits the office of elder to men, regardless of who it is they teach. That is, even if they were to teach only women, it is improper for a woman to function as a pastor/elder.

<sup>263</sup> "It cannot mean that an overseer must be free from any sin, internal or visible, but the emphasis here is on the type of external personal reputation that would be a credit to the church." Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 170.

<sup>264</sup> ἀνεπίληπτον.

<sup>265</sup> Andreas Köstenberger, "1 Timothy," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Ephesians-Philemon (Revised Edition)*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 524; I. Howard Marshall and Philip H. Towner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, International Critical Commentary (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 477; Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 170.

<sup>266</sup> Kostenberger, quoting Jerome, *1 Timothy*, 607.

<sup>267</sup> Marvin Richardson Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, vol. 4 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1887), 228.

<sup>268</sup> R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon* (Columbus, OH: Lutheran Book Concern, 1937), 579.

investigated.<sup>269</sup> It's also important to point out here that every item in this list except “**able to teach,**” and “**not be a recent convert,**” are required of all Christians and not just the elders. This again demonstrates that there is only *one* standard of morality for both the clergy and laity and not two.<sup>270</sup> All Christians are called to live a blameless life and so we need to remember that the clergy is merely a model for the rest of the congregation and not meant to represent a standard that no one else is able to follow. What does Paul say consists of this blameless lifestyle? It is found in the eleven characteristics found in the following verses 2-3, all of which are dependent upon the word, ***must be.***<sup>271</sup>

### (3) Elders are to be a one-woman man.

There is no consensus amongst commentators both ancient and modern, as to the interpretation of this expression. There are essentially four views that interpreters argue for as it relates to this qualification: (1) an elder must be married; (2) an elder is not to have more than one wife; (3) an elder must be faithful to his wife; (4) an elder cannot be remarried or divorced.<sup>272</sup> We believe (3) to be the correct view.<sup>273</sup>

This view understands this as an idiomatic expression for marital faithfulness, a man who is a one wife type of husband.<sup>274</sup> So, fidelity in his marriage, monogamous, and free from any expression of sexual immorality.<sup>275</sup> So, to sum it all up, this would seem to describe a faithful husband.<sup>276</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Pastoral Epistles*, vol. 4, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 120.

<sup>270</sup> Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon*, 579.

<sup>271</sup> Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 169-70.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*, 170-74.

<sup>273</sup> So George W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1992), 159; Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006), 251; Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 388; Kostenberger, *I Timothy*, 525; Marshall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, 478.

<sup>274</sup> Andreas Kostenberger with David Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 262.

<sup>275</sup> Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 250-51.

<sup>276</sup> Kostenberger, *I Timothy*, 525.

(4) **Elders must have faithful children.**

Before we discuss this aspect of the elder's home life, it's important to point out that Paul is limiting his discussion to children who are still under the father's authority in the home. This is the significance of the participle translated, *are*, better translated, *having* (NKJV) which has the connotation that the children in question are still in the possession of the father.<sup>277</sup> Again, this is not a requirement that the elder have children, only that if they are to have children that they would be faithful.<sup>278</sup>

In Titus 1:6, the NKJV translates the passage, "if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination." The ESV on the other hand translates the passage, "if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination." The issue here relates to how we translate the Greek word in question.<sup>279</sup> Sometimes it means "faithful, dependable, trustworthy,"<sup>280</sup> or it can take on a more technical sense of "believing, full of faith."<sup>281</sup>

We would opt for translating the verse as in the NKJV, "having faithful children," emphasizing the child's behavior, rather than spiritual condition. This is indicated by the qualifying statement, "**and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination,**" which focuses on the behavior of the children,<sup>282</sup> not their spiritual condition. *Debauchery* is closely related to the sin of drunkenness and the sensuality that often accompanies it.<sup>283</sup> Other sins such as reckless spending, gluttony, and fornication can also be included. It is essentially "a general lack of self-control and moderation" that is indicated by this word.<sup>284</sup> *Insubordination*, on the other hand, refers to a person who is "undisciplined, disobedient, and rebellious" (I Tim. 1:9).<sup>285</sup> The implied

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<sup>277</sup> Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 289.

<sup>278</sup> Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 388.

<sup>279</sup> ΠΙΣΤΑΪ

<sup>280</sup> BAGD, 664.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid., 665.

<sup>282</sup> Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 389, understands this as qualifying the elders' behavior and not the children.

<sup>283</sup> Eph. 5:18; I Pet. 4:4

<sup>284</sup> Marshall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, 158.

<sup>285</sup> Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 290.

object is the parents but usually such behavior has wider implications.<sup>286</sup> Once again, the emphasis is upon the child's behavior, not his spiritual condition.

Contextually, this qualifying statement seems to define what it means for a child to be *faithful*.<sup>287</sup> This is all the more likely when comparing Titus 1:6 with the parallel passage in I Timothy 3:4-5. That passage says, "**He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive.**" That certainly seems to be talking about the same thing as Titus 1:6.<sup>288</sup> This being the case, a *faithful* child would be defined as a submissive, obedient child,<sup>289</sup> one who's conduct reflects a healthy relationship with one's parents. If the child/children are undisciplined, rebellious, and disrespectful towards the authority in the home, whether or not they are believers, would disqualify an elder. Most likely, this would not be a reference to occasional disobedience and rebelliousness but to chronic or persistent rebelliousness against parental authority.<sup>290</sup>

Saying that an elder must have children who believe is fraught with difficulties on both a biblical and practical level. First, if an elder must have children who are believers, then we must conclude that every elder who currently has either newborns, infants or small children, are actually disqualified until they become qualified. In other words, until an elder's children make a profession of faith (how do we know if it's even legitimate?), they cannot be biblically qualified as an elder. Isn't that a bit odd? So, from the time a child is born, the clock is ticking on the elder's future. Furthermore, what age does the child have to become a believer before the man becomes disqualified? How would we be able to biblically determine that criteria?

Second, to make believing children a requirement for eldership is inconsistent with the doctrine of election.<sup>291</sup> If we hold to "unconditional

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<sup>286</sup> Marshall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, 158.

<sup>287</sup> So Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 289.

<sup>288</sup> George Knight, *ibid.*, 290, would concur with this assessment: "In both cases the overseer is evaluated on the basis of his control of his children and their conduct. It is likely, therefore, that τέκνα ἔχων πιστά ["having faithful children"] here is virtually equivalent to τέκνα ἔχοντα ἐν ὑποταγῇ ["having his children in submission"] in 1 Tim. 3:4."

<sup>289</sup> So Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 388; Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 290; Kostenberger, *I Timothy*, 607.

<sup>290</sup> Kostenberger, *I Timothy*, 607.

<sup>291</sup> *Ibid.*, 607.

election”<sup>292</sup> as a biblical doctrine, then how can we say with John MacArthur that whether our children come to faith or not, is an indication of “successful spiritual leadership of their own families?”<sup>293</sup> I don’t think you can have it both ways. If the salvation of my children is dependent upon my “successful spiritual leadership,” then don’t we have to say that ultimately, I had a hand in it? Doesn’t this suggest that there is a perfect formula for parenting and that if I just fulfill it, my child *will* for sure become a believer? Isn’t that an argument against unconditional election? Otherwise, why would I be penalized for not doing what only God can do? As Dr. Mounce points out, “This would be a requirement for eldership that stands outside of the father’s direct control.”<sup>294</sup> Making a child’s salvation dependent upon a person’s spiritual qualifications is a theologically aberrant idea. And, although this isn’t a direct parallel, it is a parallel nonetheless: Jesus had twelve disciples but as we all know, Judas wasn’t a true believer. What should we think of Jesus’ spiritual leadership when He couldn’t lead all twelve of them to salvation? Something tells me if the Lord Himself could disciple a person for 3 years and he doesn’t come to faith, there isn’t a guarantee for any elder that all of his children are going to come to faith, no matter what he does. All that to say, what speaks more objectively to an elder’s qualifications as a leader is whether his children are in submission to his authority and that their behavior is under control, whether or not they are a believer in Christ.

Third, if you want to argue that every called elder is going to have believing children, then don’t you have to say that it’s akin to a promise from God? It would function something like a covenant promise only we wouldn’t know if we were recipients of the promise until *after* the promise is fulfilled. If this were really the case, shouldn’t churches wait until *after* a man’s children all become believers before ordaining him as an elder?

Fourth, the interpretation of “believing children” also has to answer the question why Paul laid down two different sets of criteria for elders in I Timothy and Titus? If IBC’s interpretation is correct, you have essentially the same list of qualifications in both books for both locales. This is far more likely. Below is a comparison of the two lists:

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<sup>292</sup> i.e. the idea that there’s nothing any one can do to influence God’s decision to choose a person for salvation.

<sup>293</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., *Titus*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1996), 30.

<sup>294</sup> Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 389.

1 Timothy 3:1-7	Titus 1:6-9
One-woman man	One-woman man
Sober-minded	Not quick-tempered
Self-controlled	Sensible
Respectable (i.e., well behaved, befitting)	Loving what is good, just, devout (holy or pious)
Hospitable	Hospitable
Able to teach	Holding fast the faithful word
Not a drunkard	Not a drunkard
Not violent	Not violent
Gentle	
Not quarrelsome	
Free from the love of money	Not fond of sordid gain
Keeping his children submissive	Having faithful children, not accused of debauchery or insubordination.
Not a new convert	Not arrogant
Good reputation with unbelievers	Children not accused of debauchery, or insubordination

### C. Function

#### 1. Authority and Oversight

- a) **Hebrews 13:17. Obey your leaders and submit to them**, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

There is a double imperative here that is important for our purposes: **obey** and **submit** to your leaders. Both imperatives are in the present tense yielding the sense, “keep on obeying,” and “keep on being submissive” (Allen, p. 624).<sup>295</sup> The second of the two imperatives is the stronger of the two

<sup>295</sup> David L. Allen, *Hebrews*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2010), 624.

synonyms, meaning to yield or submit to one's authority,<sup>296</sup> even in the case when a leader's rule is at odds with your own.<sup>297</sup> The reason for the obedience is clearly specified: **"for they are keeping watch over your souls."** Although it's difficult to see this in the English text, the emphasis is upon the **they**, "they themselves alone" are given the responsibility to keep watch over your souls, i.e. your spiritual well-being. In other words, this emphasizes the authority of the leaders and the responsibility they are given to shepherd the flock (Allen, pp. 624-25).<sup>298</sup>

- b) **1 Thessalonians 5:12.** We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you,

The first part of the exhortation is **"to respect those who labor among you."** The word **respect** in this context means "to have regard for," or "cherish,"<sup>299</sup> and it carries with it the idea of appreciating the full worth or value of someone.<sup>300</sup> It may imply that there were those present in the Thessalonian congregation who did not possess the proper respect for their leaders.<sup>301</sup> But as is clear from the tone of the whole epistle, this surely was not the predominant attitude. The word **labor** draws attention to the work of the pastors/leaders. It refers to "labor with wearisome effort,"<sup>302</sup> and it emphasizes working to the point of exhaustion. Paul often used this word when he wanted to emphasize strenuous effort that resulted in weariness.<sup>303</sup> Pastors are called to serve the Church by working hard on its behalf.<sup>304</sup>

Secondly, the Thessalonians are to remember that their leaders are **"over you in the Lord."** This word translated **"over you"** indicates a ruling

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<sup>296</sup> BAGD, 838.

<sup>297</sup> Allen, *Hebrews*, 624.

<sup>298</sup> *Ibid.*, 624-25.

<sup>299</sup> Thayer, *GELNT*, 174.

<sup>300</sup> Lightfoot, *Epistles of Paul*, 79.

<sup>301</sup> Leon Morris, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*, The New International Commentary on the Old and New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991), 165; D. Edmond Hiebert, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, Revised Edition. (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1996), 247.

<sup>302</sup> Thayer, *GELNT*, 355.

<sup>303</sup> William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of I-II Thessalonians*, vol. 3, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953-2001), 134.

<sup>304</sup> F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, vol. 45, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1982), 119.

function but with tender care.<sup>305</sup> This word “combines the concepts of leading, protecting, and caring for.”<sup>306</sup> Although this word can be used in a general sense, it seems to be used here of the officers of the church (i.e. elders).<sup>307</sup> Christian ruling in contradistinction to secular ruling, should involve the warm and sincere interest in the well being of those who are being ruled over.<sup>308</sup> Leadership should not involve lordship, but a genuine humble care for the people. The fact that this leadership is “in the Lord” signifies its spiritual nature.<sup>309</sup>

- c) **1 Timothy 3:4–5.** He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, <sup>5</sup> for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church?

These verses appear in the listing of the qualifications of elders. This passage is significant as it relates to the ruling function of an elder because a parallel is given between how the elder functions in his home, and in the church. The word translated *manage* that appears in both verses is the same word that we discussed in **I Thessalonians 5:12** and as we mentioned there, a clear idea of authority is inherent in the word.<sup>310</sup>

Look at the logic of the passage: the elder must be someone who governs his own house *well*, meaning his leadership is appropriate and fitting,<sup>311</sup> not heavy-handed or oppressive.<sup>312</sup> Why? Because it mirrors the same role he will have in the church. If he can’t do the one, what makes anyone think he can do the other? Also, notice how the one clause, “**one who manages his own house well,**” is informed by the other, “**care for God’s church**”; the office of elder is an authoritative one but one that is meant to be carried out with tender care.<sup>313</sup>

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<sup>305</sup> Thayer, *GELNT*, 539.

<sup>306</sup> Hiebert, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 249.

<sup>307</sup> Morris, *Epistles to the Thessalonians*, 166.

<sup>308</sup> Robert L. Thomas, “1 Thessalonians,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Ephesians through Philemon*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 11 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 288; Morris, *Epistles to the Thessalonians*, 166.

<sup>309</sup> Hiebert, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 249.

<sup>310</sup> John A. Kitchen, *The Pastoral Epistles for Pastors* (The Woodlands, TX: Kress Christian Publications, 2009), 130.

<sup>311</sup> BAGD, 401.

<sup>312</sup> Kitchen, *Pastoral Epistles for Pastors*, 130.

<sup>313</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

## 2. Deacons

**I Timothy 3:8-13.** Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. <sup>9</sup> They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. <sup>10</sup> And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. <sup>11</sup> Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. <sup>12</sup> Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. <sup>13</sup> For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

A few preliminary comments are in order before we address some of the differences between elders and deacons, as well as some of the issues that arise in the text. First, there are nine qualities that Paul lists for the deacon, six of which are directly parallel to that of the elder: reverent, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, blameless, faithful spouses, and good managers of their household. These nine requirements suggest that deacons would have substantial contact with other people and the “**not greedy for dishonest gain**”<sup>314</sup> would seem to suggest that handling money would be part of their duties.<sup>315</sup> The term *deacon* literally means a “servant,”<sup>316</sup> and it’s most common meaning was “to wait tables,”<sup>317</sup> and then more generally, to refer to service of any kind. Both usages are found in the NT. This leads to a third usage in the epistles, service within the Christian community.<sup>318</sup>

Although the office of elder has some precedent within Judaism, nothing approximating the office of deacon can be found. The idea of doing a servant’s work was considered menial and really below the dignity of a free, Jewish person.<sup>319</sup> This ethic really gets redeemed however, with Jesus’ example<sup>320</sup> and thus the church begins to view servanthood in a positive light. The office of deacon essentially formalizes a person’s service to the church in an official capacity, allowing him/her to function as a servant-leader that represents the church. This is how we would distinguish a faithful believer who serves as a deacon in the church from one who may also serve faithfully in the church but

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<sup>314</sup> I Timothy 3:8.

<sup>315</sup> Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 194-95.

<sup>316</sup> BAGD, 184.

<sup>317</sup> John 2:5, 9.

<sup>318</sup> Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 198.

<sup>319</sup> cf. Lk. 7:44-45.

<sup>320</sup> John 13; Phil. 2:1-11.

not formally as a deacon: his/her service takes on a more visible, corporate example to the rest of the body. His/her service is leadership in nature and functions to galvanize others in the body of Christ to serve. Here are some brief comments pertaining to the office of deacon:

a) **Elders and deacons are similar in character but distinct in function.**<sup>321</sup>

A comparison between the list of qualifications between the elders and deacons reveals that the ability to teach is not a requirement for deacons. He is to “hold the mystery of faith with a pure conscience” (v. 9), but this doesn’t imply that he must be able to teach it to others. This assumes that this will not be a main emphasis of the deacon’s ministry.<sup>322</sup> It doesn’t mean that the deacon has no ability in this area whatsoever (it would be unusual if he didn’t), only that it’s meant to be a service-oriented office as opposed to an official teaching role.<sup>323</sup>

So, the main functions of the elders: teaching, leading, protecting, and governing (i.e. ruling) are not mentioned in conjunction with the office of deacon. As Dr. Gregg Allison explains, “If the office of elder is dedicated to the work of teaching, leading, praying, and shepherding, then the diaconate is devoted to *servicing in all other areas of the church*.”<sup>324</sup> Probably a good rule of thumb to follow is for the elders to commit their time to those areas of service that are uniquely their responsibility, and then to let the deacons attend to all the other areas of service in the church.

b) **A deacon is to be tested first, and then is allowed to serve.**

**Verse 10** states, “And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless.” The word **tested** has the idea of putting something to the test to see if it’s true or genuine, like in the case of metals, the implication being in this context that such a one will pass the test.<sup>325</sup> This passage states that there ought to be an examination period before a deacon is appointed. If the examination demonstrates that they are above reproach, then they can be admitted into their office. What should the examination consist of? Probably a formal probe into the candidate’s life,

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<sup>321</sup> Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 196.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid., 243.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid., 200.

<sup>324</sup> Gregg R. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church*, ed. John Feinberg (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2012), 241.

<sup>325</sup> Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 202; BAGD, 202.

background, reputation, and understanding/obedience to the gospel.<sup>326</sup> How long this examination was, is anyone's guess, but probably long enough to where the church body would be able to confidently affirm the candidate's qualifications.

There are at least two things that IBC does as a leadership to help honor this command. First, elders are regularly discussing amongst themselves potential deacon candidates. By the time a person goes from being discussed to being nominated, much thought has gone into him/her, and usually a period where elders will observe them more closely than usual. This watching/discussing period can last anywhere from 6 months to a couple of years, especially in cases where the person might be new to the church. IBC usually errs on the side of caution when it comes to newer members and so that's why elders rarely nominate someone to be a deacon until they've been in the membership awhile, regardless of how involved they might be. There simply isn't a substitute for time and that's usually what's needed to make sure that a person's character is thoroughly scrutinized.

Second, after the elders decide to nominate a candidate and the candidate accepts, the elders will formally interview him to make sure that nothing was missed and that all the proper questions are asked. Elders will ask them about their own self-evaluation in light of I Timothy 3:8-13, and if their spouse is on board with their nomination, as well. Supposing that the interview goes well, elders will then submit the candidate to the congregation for examination. If there's anyone who has an objection against the candidate, they are encouraged to come forward and address it with the elders and/or the candidate, depending on what the issue is. After about a month, the elders will close the process and then proceed to a member's vote at the next member's assembly.

c) **Does I Timothy 3:11 refer to wives of deacons, or deaconesses?**

I Timothy 3:11 in the ESV reads, Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things." The NASB reads, "Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things." The reason for this difference in translation is because the Greek word can legitimately be translated either **wives** or **women**.<sup>327</sup> Usually the context is clear enough that you can decipher how to translate it but a good case can be made for either one here. This is probably the most controversial of all the topics as it relates to deacons because how you decide this issue will determine whether your church will have all male deacons or a mixture of both male and female deacons.

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<sup>326</sup> Ibid., 200-01.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid., 202.

Although we recognize the legitimacy of the arguments that are used by those who believe this refers to the wives of the deacons,<sup>328</sup> IBC believes this refers to deaconesses.<sup>329</sup>

(1) Grammatically, this view seems more likely. In 3:2, Paul writes, “**an overseer must be above reproach,**” and verse 8 is grammatically dependent upon it: “**Deacons likewise must be dignified,**” which then introduces a new category. The repetition of *likewise* in verse 11, “**Their wives [or women] likewise must be dignified,**” certainly seems to introduce another new category, i.e. deaconesses.

(2) I think the strongest argument against the view that this is a reference to wives and not deaconesses, is the fact that there is no similar requirement for the elder’s wife. Why would there be a more stringent requirement for those who’s ministry is in the realm of servant-leadership as opposed to those who have a more active role in governing the church body?<sup>330</sup>

(3) There was no word in Greek for *deaconess* at the time that Paul wrote this epistle. The feminine form of this word did not yet exist and the earliest occurrence of *deaconess* doesn’t appear until the fourth century in canon 19 of the Council of Nicea.<sup>331</sup>

(4) **Romans 16:1** says, “I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchrææ.” The greek word for *servant* is the masculine form of

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<sup>328</sup> So Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 202-03; Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 171; Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, Second Edition. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 1130–1131; Jerome, Calvin, Bengel, and Warfield also held to this view). (1) Probably the strongest argument for this position is the criticism that if this is a reference to deaconesses rather than wives, then verses 8-10 discusses male deacons and then switches to female deacons in verse 11, and then back to male deacons in verse 12, without a clear clue in the text that such a switch has been made; (2) If you take verses 11-12 together as a unit, then the deacon’s family is seen as a whole: his wife is blameless, he is faithful in his marriage, and his children are under his control; (3) If verse 11 are qualifications for a woman deacon, then it appears that their qualifications are lighter than those for the male deacon. After all, there is no marital qualification for the woman in verse 11, i.e. “one-man woman.” This tension is alleviated if this is a reference to them as wives; (4) We should understand this as the deacon’s wife because in the very next verse, the word is used that way of the male deacon (“husbands of one wife”); (5) If Paul wanted to refer to women deacons in verse 11, then why didn’t he use an unambiguous word that would clearly convey as much?

<sup>329</sup> So Kostenberger, *I Timothy*, 529-30; John A. Kitchen, *The Pastoral Epistles for Pastors* (The Woodlands, TX: Kress Christian Publications, 2009), 145. Chrysostom, Hort, Sqiq, and Fee, also hold to this view.

<sup>330</sup> Warfield believed that this was due to the fact that women couldn’t participate in their husband’s teaching/ruling ministry, whereas they would have a more active role if their husband was a deacon. This isn’t so persuasive considering the fact that being *hospitable* is one of the qualifications for an elder but not a deacon (I Tim. 3:2), which presupposes some amount of involvement in his ministry.

<sup>331</sup> i.e. διακόνισσα. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 202.

the word, *deacon*. If this is a reference to the office of deacon, then it is a clear biblical indication that women functioned in this office.

(5) Early Church Fathers affirm the existence of deaconesses. For example, Clement of Alexandria (AD 150-220) refers to women deacons, ministering women, and fellow deacons, who accompanied the apostles “not as wives but as sisters.” Likewise, Origen (AD 185-254) specifically comments on both **I Timothy 3:11** and **Romans 16:1** and says that both passages confirm women deacons and that Phoebe functioned as such.<sup>332</sup>

These arguments have led the leadership of IBC to conclude that I Timothy 3:11 refers to women deaconesses and not to the wives of deacons.

### III. Commitment to the Church

- A. **Hebrews 10:24-25**. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, <sup>25</sup> not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

The writer to the Hebrews wants his readers to focus their full attention on activities that provoke each other to love that is expressed in good deeds (O’ Brien, p. 370). In order to do this, it takes intention and effort and the writer emphasizes as much. The verb translated, ***let us consider***, means something like “directing your minds towards something and reflecting on it.”<sup>333</sup> So, think about it: the exhortation is to be thoughtful, strategic in focusing both our minds and our efforts towards the needs of fellow members in the church in order to ***stir up*** love expressed in good deeds. This word is a strong one, which can also be translated “provoking.”<sup>334</sup> We often think of provoking in a negative sense (and the word is used that way in other places) but here it means to positively stimulate or motivate another person.<sup>335</sup> Now, what is necessary in order to accomplish such a purpose? As Dr. O’ Brien, points out, “For believers to fulfill this responsibility presupposes that they possess a care and practical concern for one another.”<sup>336</sup> Or, to put it another way, they have to be committed in their love, care, and concern for each other.

So, that being said, what is the means by which this mutual love, care and concern will be carried out and sustained? Only, through a commitment to regularly meet together wherein they will hear the word preached, and they can fellowship

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<sup>332</sup> Ibid., 211.

<sup>333</sup> Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 369.

<sup>334</sup> BAGD, 629.

<sup>335</sup> O’ Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 370.

<sup>336</sup> Ibid., 370.

together and encourage one another.<sup>337</sup> So, part and parcel of provoking one another to love expressed in good deeds is to encourage church attendance and participation. We need to urge each other to be committed to corporate worship and fellowship. On the flip side of that, is it any wonder that when we neglect this corporate aspect of worship, all of these important elements (love, care, concern) will be compromised or missing? The text doesn't reveal why but it's rather clear that there were those who were taking their church attendance lightly and had forsaken their responsibility to the rest of the church. Obviously, you cannot fulfill your responsibility to love, care, and show concern for others if you are regularly missing. A big part of your ministry to others is just being present at church. Since we're to think of ourselves as both a giver and a receiver, we must not get into the bad habit of thinking, "well, I'm not going to get anything out of this, so I'm just not going to come." Yes, it's good to receive but it's also our responsibility to give.

- B. **1 John 4:19-21.** We love because he first loved us. <sup>20</sup> If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. <sup>21</sup> And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

Loving God and hating one's brother is incompatible for Christians. The apostle John says that such a person who can talk out of both sides of his mouth is actually a liar as it pertains to his claim that he loves God. Any true Christian understands that there is a built in responsibility to love his fellow brothers and sisters in Christ because that is an outgrowth or result of his love for God. A love for God that does not include a love for others really isn't a love for God at all.<sup>338</sup> Instead, a true love for God carries with it the responsibility to love other believers. These two loves are inseparable as far as the Bible is concerned. If we love God, we will obey Him and His command is clear: love Him and love others.<sup>339</sup> This being the case, what does it say about our intentionality to serve others in the church and to seek out opportunities for ministry? The context for these kinds of relationships are certainly broader than the church but it must at least start and thrive there, first.

- C. **Ephesians 2:19-22.** So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, <sup>20</sup> built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, **Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,** <sup>21</sup> in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. <sup>22</sup> In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

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<sup>337</sup> Ibid., 370.

<sup>338</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978), 226.

<sup>339</sup> Stephen S. Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, vol. 51, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1984), 265.

Notice the emphasis on Gentiles being **“fellow citizens”** and **“members of the household of God.”** The obvious truth that Paul is emphasizing in this passage is on the equality that now exists between Jew and Gentile in Christ. In order to do so, he uses both a political and a familial metaphor: he describes Jews and Gentiles as now being fellow citizens of God’s kingdom and as members of the same family. Now, although Paul’s purpose in stating these truths has mainly to do with emphasizing the unity that now exists between Jew and Gentile in Christ, we mustn’t overlook the implication of the metaphors: do citizens of a kingdom have duties and responsibilities to both the king and their fellow citizens? Do family members have duties and responsibilities to other members of the family? The obvious answer in both cases, is “yes.”

- D. **Ephesians 4:11-12, 16.** And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, <sup>12</sup> **to equip the saints for the work of ministry**, for building up the body of Christ...<sup>16</sup> from whom **the whole body, joined and held together by every joint** with which it is equipped, **when each part is working properly**, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Paul highlights the commitment necessary for the church to operate in a healthy, efficient manner. Notice, that this commitment needs to be on the part of both the leadership and the lay alike. God gave gifted men to the church for the purpose of equipping the saints so that they will be capable of doing the work of ministry, which will then result in the building up of the body of Christ. So, there is a responsibility on the part of the elders of the church to properly train up and equip the congregation, spiritually speaking. What is the means by which this is accomplished? By clearly explaining the truths found in God’s word and exhorting the flock to live it out. To neglect this vital responsibility, will result in the failure of properly equipping God’s people for ministry. So, this commitment on the part of the elders necessitates a prior commitment, that they spend adequate time in the study of God’s word in order to properly carry out this most important function. Pastors who spend little time in their study will find that reflected in the lack of maturity in their people.

Once the responsibility on the part of the elders is carried out in equipping, it’s up to the members of the church to respond rightly in action. In other words, equipping must translate into service so that the body itself can be edified, i.e. spiritually strengthened, or built up. **Think about it like this:** edification results when you are spiritually strengthened by someone else’s ministry to you. But, if church members refuse to take their responsibility seriously, and instead are waiting for the clergy to do it all (isn’t that why they get paid?), the whole process is seriously compromised. Notice, that this passage presupposes that there is going to be a significant commitment on the part of the leaders and the lay, in order for the church to function properly. The **“whole body”** and **“every joint”** needs to be fully participant for the church to grow.

#### IV. Ordinances of the Church

### A. Definition

An ordinance is defined simply as “an outward rite prescribed by Christ to be performed by His church.”<sup>340</sup> This is in contradistinction to the Roman Catholic/Covenant Reformed notion of **sacrament**, which is considered a visible form of God’s invisible grace (Augustine). The idea of **sacrament** conveys the notion that grace is being administered through the particular activity. The idea is that these visible signs seal and confirm the covenant promises of God.<sup>341</sup> We don’t believe that there is any biblical warrant for such an understanding, and thus we prefer the term, **ordinance**. IBC observes the two biblical ordinances of **baptism** and **communion**.<sup>342</sup> **Baptism** and **communion** are the acted word, symbolizing and communicating the living word of God.

### B. Communion (the Lord’s Supper)

Jesus, on the night He was betrayed, had what we know as the Lord’s supper with His disciples. He wanted the people of God to remember Him and His new covenant through celebration of the Lord’s supper (1 Cor. 11:23-33). In communion, we have two elements that represent Jesus Christ. The bread represents the body of Christ; the wine, the blood of Christ. The three important aspects in the celebration of the Lord’s supper are (1) the remembrance of Christ’s death and resurrection, (2) the presence of Christ in the act of worship, and (3) the eschatological hope of Christ’s return. The Scriptures cautions us in how to participate in communion; the most important warning is that communion is only for born-again believers. The participants must do this in a worthy manner. In fact, partaking in an “unworthy manner” can result in God’s judgment upon such a person (1 Cor. 11:27).

### C. Baptism

Baptism signifies God’s work of forgiveness and regeneration, provides entrance into the community of God’s people and gives evidence of repentance, faith, and discipleship. Jesus himself was baptized as an example to the people of God, gave baptism and commanded the disciples to baptize. Baptism *symbolizes* the washing away of sin (Acts 22:16), the death of the old life (Rom. 6:3), arising to new life (John 4:10), the ministry of the Holy Spirit (John 3:5-8), and the nature of the Christian life (Col. 3:5-10). Baptism is simply an external testimony to the internal reality of the Spirit’s conversion. It must never be understood as efficacious in and of itself.

IBC baptizes converts by immersion because we believe this was the mode used in the Scriptures (Acts 8:38-39). Furthermore, IBC does not practice nor endorse

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<sup>340</sup> Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, 359.

<sup>341</sup> R.C. Sproul, *Essential truths of the Christian faith* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers. Inc., 1992)

<sup>342</sup> Matt. 28:19-20 and I Corinthians 11:23-26 respectively.

infant baptism since the infant is incapable of exercising faith and because there is no scriptural justification for it whatsoever.<sup>343</sup>

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<sup>343</sup> There is no command for parents to baptize their babies, for babies to be baptized, or any example in Scripture of a baby being baptized. Thus, it's safe to conclude that paedo-baptism is not a biblical doctrine.



## CHAPTER 5

### CORPORATE WORSHIP AND BODY LIFE

Psalms 95:1–3. Oh come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! <sup>2</sup> Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise! <sup>3</sup> For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods.

Romans 12:4–6. For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, <sup>5</sup> so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. <sup>6</sup> Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith;

**W**hat does it mean to worship God? Although there is no place in the Bible that actually defines what the word, **worship** means, when the biblical terms that are used are examined,<sup>344</sup> we can safely conclude that the main concepts include homage [i.e. respect], service, and reverence.<sup>345</sup> It is to praise and adore God both in public and in private. **Worship** basically amounts to honoring someone who is greater than yourself and is therefore to be directed towards God alone.<sup>346</sup> Let's briefly survey aspects of corporate worship as we see it in Scripture.

#### I. Definition of Corporate Worship

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<sup>344</sup> There are essentially five major words that are used in the New Testament to describe worship:

<sup>345</sup> D. G. Peterson, "Worship," ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner, *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 855–856.

<sup>346</sup> John M. Frame, *Worship in Spirit and Truth* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1996), 2.

When we refer to corporate worship, we are specifically referring to the public gathering of each member of the church in order to worship God together as one voice with one spirit. Let's survey some of the key aspects of corporate worship:

#### A. The Lord's Day

1. **Revelation 1:10.** I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet.

For our purposes the main takeaway from this passage is to point out that the Lord's day is a reference to Sunday. We know this because the same terminology is used in a number of contemporary Christian writings that come from the same general area of Asia Minor, shortly after this book was written. So, by the end of the second century, "the Lord's day" was the customary way of referring to Sunday and it was termed as such because it was the day that the Lord Jesus Christ rose from the dead.<sup>347</sup>

2. **Acts 20:7.** On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech until midnight.

Here we have one of the earliest references anywhere to attest to the fact that the early Church met on Sunday.<sup>348</sup> This is made fairly certain by the fact that they were "**breaking bread**," which is probably a reference to the fellowship meal which preceded the taking of the Lord's Supper, and Paul's preaching of the word which unusually lasted until midnight.<sup>349</sup>

So, our main takeaway as it relates to this first point is rather simple: From the very beginning of the Church's existence, Christians regularly gathered together on Sunday to corporately worship the Lord.

#### B. Public Reading of Scripture

1. **1 Timothy 4:13.** Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.

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<sup>347</sup> Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1-7: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1992), 91.

<sup>348</sup> John B. Polhill, *Acts*, vol. 26, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 418; F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988), 384.

<sup>349</sup> Polhill, *Acts*, 418.

Here, we can see a peak into Paul's instructions to Timothy regarding the church until his eventual arrival. Notice, that the corporate reading of Scripture is urged by Paul and you can imagine just how important this particular facet was. Remember, people in those days didn't own personal bibles in their homes and not everyone was literate in any case [around 80-90% of the people were illiterate].<sup>350</sup> So, where would they be exposed to the Word of God? At church, where the Scripture would be publicly read.<sup>351</sup> The early second century apologist, Justin Martyr records what the early church did:<sup>352</sup>

And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things.

### C. Corporate Prayers

1. **Acts 2:42.** And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

This verse relates to the infancy of the early Church and as you can see, all of these activities are corporate in nature. As it relates to "**the prayers**," notice both the definite article and the plural form, which probably refers to the various types of prayers that were used (i.e. worship, thanksgiving, petition, etc.) in a corporate context.<sup>353</sup>

### D. Corporate Praise

1. **Hebrews 13:15.** Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. -

Because of the death of Christ and the inauguration of the New Covenant, the sacrificial system has been made obsolete and instead a different kind of sacrifice is to be offered up by the Christian, "**a sacrifice of praise to God.**" This isn't an entirely new concept however, as David talks about a "sacrifice of

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<sup>350</sup> Todd D. Still, "Colossians," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Ephesians-Philemon (Revised Edition)*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 357.

<sup>351</sup> Andreas Köstenberger, "1 Timothy," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Ephesians-Philemon (Revised Edition)*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 537.

<sup>352</sup> Justin Martyr, "The First Apology of Justin," in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 1, The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 186.

<sup>353</sup> Darrell L. Bock, Acts, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 151.

thanksgiving” (Ps. 50:14, 23) being the kind of sacrifice that God desires as opposed to animal sacrifices that are given ritualistically. The “**sacrifice of praise**” to God is to be given *continually*, i.e. constantly, much like in the case of animal sacrifices in the Old Testament economy. So, all that to say, whereas animal sacrifices are no longer required of the New Covenant believer, the sacrifice of praise which was meant to accompany every sacrifice, is.<sup>354</sup>

There is a translation issue at the end of the verse that I think needs correction. The ESV has “**the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name,**” but it should more accurately be translated, “the fruit of lips *praising* his name.”<sup>355</sup> This means that the equivalence of the “sacrifice of Praise to God” is “praising his name.”<sup>356</sup> Singing corporate praises to God’s name is certainly not a new concept as it was part and parcel of the Old Testament worship as well:

**Psalm 95:1–2.** Oh come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!

**Psalm 105:1–3.** Oh give thanks to the Lord; call upon his name; make known his deeds among the peoples! <sup>2</sup> Sing to him, sing praises to him; tell of all his wondrous works! <sup>3</sup> Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice!

#### E. Preaching the Word

1. **2 Timothy 4:1–5.** I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: <sup>2</sup> preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. <sup>3</sup> For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, <sup>4</sup> and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. <sup>5</sup> As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

“**Preach the word**” is the first of five imperatives in the verse, and it occupies the dominant position in the passage.<sup>357</sup> The word *preach* in this context has the connotation of “*the divinely authorized proclamation of the message of God to*

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<sup>354</sup> R. T. France, “Hebrews,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Hebrews–Revelation (Revised Edition)*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, vol. 13 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 189; David L. Allen, *Hebrews*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2010), 622.

<sup>355</sup> So France, *Hebrews*, 190; Allen, *Hebrews*, 622-23; BAGD, 568.

<sup>356</sup> France, *Hebrews*, 190.

<sup>357</sup> Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 453.

*men.*<sup>358</sup> The **word** has reference to God’s messages or His teachings,<sup>359</sup> and we can think of it as essentially a synonym for the Scripture itself (cf. 2:15). Notice the centrality given to the Scriptures. What should the church be focusing its attention on? Funny stories, interesting anecdotes, opinions of the preacher himself, practical how to advice? No, the content ought to start and finish with what God has said and what it actually means.<sup>360</sup> This is true whether it’s “**in season**” or “**out of season,**” i.e. whether it’s accepted or rejected.

#### F. Giving (Offering)

1. **1 Corinthians 16:1–2.** Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. <sup>2</sup> On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come.

Let’s focus on what Paul says in verse 2, “**each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper...**” The participle translated *store it up*, means to “store up, gather, save,”<sup>361</sup> and is used elsewhere in reference to accumulating riches (Jam. 5:3) or God’s wrath due to unrepentance (Rom. 2:4). In this passage it doesn’t refer to a personal piggy bank or one’s own treasure chest at home, but rather the corporate accumulation of funds. In other words, Paul is instructing each person to lay aside money each week in order to present it at the corporate worship service every Sunday: just as we do today.<sup>362</sup> That this is to be the regular practice of every believer is indicated by the present tense of the participle.<sup>363</sup>

But notice that Paul does not give a specified amount, only a principle: “**as he may prosper.**” Each person has differing means as God prospers each person differently. So Paul says that according to the prosperity one enjoys from the

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<sup>358</sup> William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Pastoral Epistles*, vol. 4, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 309.

<sup>359</sup> Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 453.

<sup>360</sup> cf. 2 Tim. 2:9, 15; I Cor. 15:2; Rom. 10:8, 14–15.

<sup>361</sup> BAGD, 361.

<sup>362</sup> Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1857), 364; John F. MacArthur Jr., *1 Corinthians*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), 453.

<sup>363</sup> Simon J. Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, vol. 18, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 595.

Lord, you should give on that basis.<sup>364</sup> If the Lord blesses you with extra on a given week, then you should give extra that week. Biblically speaking, there is no such thing as a required amount for each member to give, such as a tenth of his total income or any other such formula. A tithe may be no sacrifice for some but near impossible for others. Unfortunately, this requirement in many churches is due to a misunderstanding of the Old Testament principle of the tithe, which was essentially tied to the fact that the Israelites lived in a theocracy. In other words, it was essentially a tax that the people paid and it was not just 10 percent it was actually about 23 percent.<sup>365</sup> All that Paul required of the Corinthians was that they were to set aside money each week for the purpose of contributing to the Jerusalem offering. If this principle is carried out faithfully by the Corinthians, then the next time that Paul comes to visit the Corinthians he will be able to take their cumulative offering to Jerusalem without delay.<sup>366</sup>

**F**ellowship is one of those words that we often use in our Christian vernacular but seldom define. Maybe you grew up in the church thinking it was synonymous with eating, laughing, or just hanging out with other believers at church. And, as Dr. Don Whitney pointed out during the IBC Family camp back in 2017, fellowship is not the same thing as socializing, ie. talking about news, weather, sports, current events, etc. Socializing is good but it's not fellowship, and fellowship is needed more today than ever before because our culture is making it very difficult to experience. But, guess what? You can't get to fellowship without socializing. Of course, none of those conceptions are necessarily wrong, only they are incomplete. The biblical concept of fellowship may include any or all of those things, but they don't represent the heart of what defines it. Let's start this chapter by taking some time to develop the biblical concept of fellowship.

## II. What is Fellowship?

### A. Demonstrated in the Early Church

1. **Acts 2:42–47.** And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and **the fellowship**, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. <sup>43</sup> And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. <sup>44</sup> And all who believed were together and had all things in common. <sup>45</sup> And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. <sup>46</sup> And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous

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<sup>364</sup> Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, International Critical Commentary (New York: T&T Clark, 1911), 385; Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987), 814; Kistemaker, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 595.

<sup>365</sup> MacArthur, *I Corinthians*, 455.

<sup>366</sup> Hodge, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 364; MacArthur, *I Corinthians*, 453.

hearts, <sup>47</sup> praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

In this short passage, just after its birth on the day of Pentecost, we are able to see what the church looked like and what it was committed to. Notice, that **fellowship** is one of the foundational aspects of the early church, mentioned in the same breath as the **“apostles’ teaching,”** and **“the breaking of the bread and the prayers.”** The word translated **fellowship** can refer to “association, communion, close relationship.”<sup>367</sup> This is the only place in the book of Acts that this word occurs and it speaks of the close knit relationship that those in the early Church enjoyed. We really don’t have to look any further than the rest of this passage to see how this was true. They seemingly did everything together and they were so unselfish that they treated their own personal possessions as common property (vv. 44-45). And, they were also eating, praying, and worshipping together.

#### B. Fellowship with God and Each Other

1. **1 John 1:6–7.** If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. <sup>7</sup> But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

Notice the contrast that the apostle John presents here: verse 6 scrutinizes those who say that they have fellowship with God and yet, their lifestyle denies their profession of faith. John calls all those who claim to have a relationship with God but live in the realm of moral darkness, liars. Verse 7, on the other hand, looks at those who really do have fellowship with God and they are characterized as those who **“walk in the light, as he is in the light,”** but notice the implication of this relationship in the next statement: **“we have fellowship with one another.”** At first glance, you might think this is a reference to the believer’s fellowship with God as if to say, “But if we walk in the light, as God is in the light, then us and God will have fellowship with one another,” but that’s not what this verse is saying. Instead, the statement has a corporate dimension to it: if we will continuously walk in fellowship with God,<sup>368</sup> we as Christians will continue to

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<sup>367</sup> BAGD, 438.

<sup>368</sup> When John says that “God is in the light,” he means the same thing as when he says “God is light,” for that which is the nature of God is also the realm of His being. See Joh. Ed. Huther, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the General Epistles of James and John*, trans. Paton J. Gloag and Clarke H. Irwin, Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1882), 287.

have fellowship with one another.<sup>369</sup> So, this is a non-negotiable starting point for our discussion of fellowship: the basis for true fellowship in the Church is obeying and following Jesus Christ.<sup>370</sup>

Flip this statement around and you can see the corollary truth: what are the circumstances that will either prevent or challenge fellowship in the church? Either a mixture of people from verses 6 and 7 in the same church, or the fact that some are walking in the light and others are not, and this will result in a compromised fellowship.

### C. Fellowship is a Distinctly Christian idea.

Let me clarify the believer's proper relationship to both Christians and the world. The biblical concept of "fellowship" can only exist between fellow believers. It is a sharing in common, or a close relationship that exists due to a shared interest. That shared interest is Jesus Christ, and a commitment to His Lordship. This is the basis for our relationship to one another. Therefore we can encourage one another, bear one another's burdens, pray for one another, admonish one another, and love one another. So, to make a long story short, fellowship is a distinctly Christian concept. It is based in our mutual love for Christ and what He has done for us and that's what makes it different than any of our secular relationships. We do not seek fellowship with the world, instead we seek their salvation. That is, the goal of all our relationships to non-believers is to win them to Christ by being salt and light. Think of it like this: with our Christian brothers and sisters, fellowship; with our non-Christian friends and family, missions. Whenever you confuse these two distinct relationships, there will *always* be trouble in your life. For example, if you forget that the goal of your relationship to a particular non-believer is salvation, then you are seeking something from that relationship that falls into the fellowship category. And when you seek fellowship with an unbeliever, then obviously worldliness is the goal of that relationship since that person has no godly input into the relationship. If you have a friendship or a relationship to an unbeliever that does not have salvation as its goal, you are in it because of your love for the world. Be on your guard that you never allow yourself to get too close to the world. You can get sucked in very easily, and very subtly. Be on your guard against blurring the lines between fellowship and mission.

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<sup>369</sup> Many of the older commentators saw this as a reference of fellowship between God and men: Calvin, Augustine, Beza, Socinus, Lange, Ewald. Most modern commentators today understand this corporately (So (Huther, *General Epistles of James and John*, 287-88; I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978), 111; Stephen S. Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, vol. 51, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1984), 23.).

<sup>370</sup> R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John and St. Jude* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1966), 388.

In Christian fellowship there is a spirit of bearing one another's burdens<sup>371</sup>, sharing needs, and teaching. As we've already seen, the first century Christians enjoyed a fellowship of material resources (money, food, houses) as well as their spiritual resources (prayer, love, spiritual blessing, teaching).<sup>372</sup> In the Christian life no one is on an island; no one is excluded from fellowship. We see this in the example of Jesus before His arrest, bringing Peter, James, and John with him to watch and pray.<sup>373</sup> We also see Paul's longing for fellowship, urging Timothy to come and see him.<sup>374</sup> The very command that the writer of Hebrews gives to believers is to not give up meeting together. "And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, <sup>25</sup> not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near" (Heb. 10:24,25).

In true fellowship, Christians don't judge one another nor do they bite and devour each other, provoke, envy, lie to one another, speak evil, or grumble about one another. Since true fellowship builds up, Christians receive one another, are kind and tenderhearted to one another, forbear and forgive one another, serve one another, practice hospitality ungrudgingly to one another, admonish, instruct, submit to one another, and comfort one another. That is the true fellowship of the body: it is life touching life to bring blessing and spiritual growth.<sup>375</sup>

### III. What is Love?

#### A. The Command and Definition

1. **1 John 4:7-8.** Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. <sup>8</sup> Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

Just as we saw in regards to fellowship, this command for reciprocal love is directed to Christians as it relates to other Christians (i.e. **Beloved**). Also, the verb is found in the present tense, indicating a continual or habitual practice.<sup>376</sup> But, before we can begin to speak about *love*, what exactly is it from a biblical perspective?

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<sup>371</sup> Galatians 6:2.

<sup>372</sup> Rom. 1:11,12; Gal. 6:2.

<sup>373</sup> Mark 14:33-34.

<sup>374</sup> 2 Tim. 4:21; Phil. 4:1; 1 Thess. 2:17.

<sup>375</sup> John MacArthur, Jr. *Body Dynamics* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1982), 134-35.

<sup>376</sup> D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Epistles of John: An Expository Commentary* (Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 1991), 70; Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 236-37.

There are basically two major words which are used in the New Testament for love,<sup>377</sup> These words (*agape* and *phileo*) are synonyms but there is a distinction in meaning between them. It must be kept in mind however, that the distinction between synonyms are most pronounced when the words appear side by side in the same context. When they appear isolated from each other in differing contexts, the distinction may or may not be there. You must examine each context separately in order to make this determination.

With *phileo* love, the emphasis is more on the emotions, or feelings. It means to love in the sense of being friendly to, to long for, or to take pleasure in doing something.

*Agape*, on the other hand, is the type of love that is not based upon emotions but rather on admiration, or deep respect. Emotions are not entirely devoid but the emphasis appears to be on the commitment, action, or obedience side of love. It is a sacrificial, self-giving love, with no strings attached, and which is more concerned for others. This love is commanded in the Bible and it is the word which is used here, in this passage. This type of love is a choice.<sup>378</sup>

What is the impetus or the motivation for believers to exercise love towards their fellow brothers and sisters in Christ? John gives two reasons, the first being that **“love is from God.”** This means that it’s source is found in God alone.<sup>379</sup> Think about the implications of this statement: unbelievers can love each other but they cannot love each other in the specifically Christian way that John refers to, here. Human love, terminates either on itself or someone else but never has God as its motivation or its ultimate goal. Therefore, the ability to love as is commanded here, is not a human virtue that we are either born with or can learn on our own.<sup>380</sup> Instead, it can only be attained when a person becomes a Christian, and God gives to him the ability to exercise this special love towards his fellow brothers and sisters.<sup>381</sup>

The second reason for believers to exercise love towards their brothers and sisters in Christ, is **“whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.”** Both *loves* and *knows* are in the present tense: “continues to love and know God.” The present tense stresses the daily progress and growth in getting to

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<sup>377</sup> ἀγαπάω and φιλέω. There is also a third word that was used in Greek, but it never appears in the New Testament.

<sup>378</sup> Thayer, *GELNT*, 653; Vine, 2: 382; Abbott-Smith, 3.

<sup>379</sup> i.e. a genitive of source (Glenn W. Barker, “1 John,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Hebrews through Revelation*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 342; Smalley, 1, 2, 3 *John*, 237).

<sup>380</sup> Barker, *1 John*, 342.

<sup>381</sup> cf. I Pet. 1:22.

know God better.<sup>382</sup> So, two things are true of *all* those who love in the manner previously mentioned<sup>383</sup> - (1) they are spiritually born of God (cf. 2:29; 3:9; 5:1, 4, 18); (2) they know God (cf. 2:3-4, 13-14; 3:1, 6; 4:6). So the point is that the constancy of love is evidence that one has been born of God and knows God. All this to say, there is no excuse for true believers not to pursue or exercise love for other believers because they have been given the means and the resources to do so.

#### IV. The Picture of Loving Fellowship

##### A. A Fresh Commandment

1. **John 13:34–35.** A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.<sup>35</sup> By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Why does Jesus say that He gives His disciples a “**new commandment,**” when “love your neighbor as yourself” was already part of the Mosaic Law (Lev. 19:18)? Its *new*, not in the sense of its formal content but in its new context, to love in the same way that Christ demonstrated His love for them. In other words, there is greater depth to the command in its new covenant context because Christ Himself has set the example as to *how* we should be showing love to each other.<sup>384</sup> Also, as you can see from the context, this love command is not general (i.e. love for all people indiscriminately) but to believers specifically.<sup>385</sup>

What is the corollary effect of believers loving each other in the same way that Christ loved them? It points to Christ’s lordship over us and provides a tangible, evangelistic witness to an unbelieving world. So, whatever else can be said about the health of the church (i.e doctrinal soundness, sermons, services), if Christ-like love isn’t present and active amongst the membership, it’s not a healthy church.

So, how can we love each other in the same way that Christ has loved us? Examples abound throughout the gospels and a succinct summary is found in **Philippians 2:1–8:**

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, <sup>2</sup> complete my joy by

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<sup>382</sup> Hiebert, *The Epistles of John*, 72.

<sup>383</sup> The use of  $\pi\alpha\upsilon\varsigma$  emphasizes that love is to characterize all believers (cf. Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 237-38).

<sup>384</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 562.

<sup>385</sup> *Ibid.*, 562.

being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. <sup>3</sup> Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. <sup>4</sup> Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. <sup>5</sup> Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup> but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup> And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Also, **I John 3:16:**

By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.

#### B. Commitment to One-Another

Since we've established that all of us have a God-given commitment to each other, then every one of us needs to think of ourselves as both a giver and a receiver.

1. **Romans 12:9-21.** Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. <sup>10</sup> Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. <sup>11</sup> Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. <sup>13</sup> Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. <sup>14</sup> Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. <sup>15</sup> Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. <sup>16</sup> Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. <sup>17</sup> Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. <sup>18</sup> If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. <sup>19</sup> Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." <sup>20</sup> To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." <sup>21</sup> Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

This passage highlights just how significant the commitment to love and serve each other in the body of Christ truly is. We obviously can't look at every detail in this passage but let's take a look at some of the commands that concern our commitment to one another. First, our love for each other is to be ***genuine***. This means that our love for our fellow church members is to be pure and real, not fake or phony, consisting of empty words.<sup>386</sup> We shouldn't pretend to love others

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<sup>386</sup> Cranfield, *Romans*, 2: 630; Hodge, *Romans*, 395.

when in fact we are merely just going through the motions. We need to be the real deal, not hypocrites.

Second, that same genuine love for each other should express itself in an intimate, familial way. Our love for one another should be characterized by **brotherly affection**. The language here is rather significant as far as it's implications are concerned. The word translated **love** is not the regular word but one that is used of the kind of mutual love that exists between family members, parents/children, husband/wife, and brothers/sisters.<sup>387</sup> Similarly, **brotherly affection** emphasizes that we all belong to the same family, that God is our Father and that we are all brothers and sisters. Christians are part of a spiritual family, a family that transcends even our earthly family (should they not be believers).<sup>388</sup> This really defines for us the kind of commitment we are to have towards each other in the church! Using your own earthly family dynamic as a baseline will help you to understand more fully how deep our commitment to each other in the church is supposed to be.

Third, **“Outdo one another in showing honor.”** Although this is a legitimate way to translate the verse, it is probably better to translate it, “in honor giving preference to one another” (NKJV).<sup>389</sup> The main idea is that believers are not to seek opportunities to honor themselves but for fellow brothers and sisters.<sup>390</sup> So, there is a call to exercise humility in the body of Christ and that is a necessary ingredient if there is ultimately going to be unity. Similar commands are found later in the passage, “Do not be haughty” (v. 16), and “Never be wise in your own sight” (v. 16).

Fourth, **“Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.”** This really says the same thing from the vantage point of both negative and positive. The word **slothful** carries with it the idea of laziness, the type of attitude that seeks to do as little as possible in order to just get by.<sup>391</sup> That's looking at the command from the negative side of things, whereas “be fervent in spirit,” looks at the command from the positive side. The word **fervent** means “to boil with heat,” and thus can be

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<sup>387</sup> Ceslas Spicq and James D. Ernest, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 462; Thayer, *GELNT*, 655; Cranfield, *Romans*, 2: 632; Hodge, *Romans*, 396; Morris, *Epistle to the Romans*, 445; Schreiner, *Romans* (second edition), 645.

<sup>388</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, vol. 6, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 664.

<sup>389</sup> So Schreiner, *Romans* (Second edition), 645; contra. Hodge, *Romans*, 396.

<sup>390</sup> Morris, *Epistle to the Romans*, 445; Cranfield, *Romans*, 2: 632-33.

<sup>391</sup> Morris, *Epistle to the Romans*, 446; Cranfield, *Romans*, 2: 633; Schreiner, *Romans* (second edition), 645.

used metaphorically of a “boiling anger, love, zeal for what is good or bad.”<sup>392</sup> Obviously, a passion for what is good is the meaning here.

So, taken together we get a full picture of what we’re being commanded to do in reference to our service to the Lord: don’t be lazy but be enthusiastic about your opportunities to serve the Lord. We should be excited about these opportunities, understanding what a privilege it is to do the Lord’s work on His behalf. Look, there won’t always be these opportunities available and time is quickly passing. If your zeal and passion for serving the Lord is embarrassingly low, ask yourself why and what has filled the void in its place. Once you’ve identified that, you know what you’re up against, the idolatries that need to be repented of, and the changes that need to be made.

Fifth, **“Contribute to the needs of the saints.”** This refers to every believer’s responsibility in coming to the aid of their fellow brothers and sisters. Notice that Paul refers specifically to *needs*, which refers to necessities, those things that are necessary in order to survive in this life.<sup>393</sup> If you are in a position wherein God has blessed you with much and you find your brother or sister in need, God expects you to help meet that need. Remember, our possessions are a stewardship from God and we need to use what God has given to meet the needs of others.<sup>394</sup>

Sixth, **“seek to show hospitality.”** This means “to pursue hospitality.” Literally, “the love of strangers.” Again, our commitment to fellow brothers and sisters is highlighted in this command as it shows that this is not just a duty to be fulfilled but also a ministry that is to be sought out.<sup>395</sup> In those days, it was a necessity to be able to stay at another believer’s house when you were traveling so that you didn’t have to stay at the local inn, which was basically risking your life. Since the church viewed itself as one big family under God as we already discussed, they were willing to open up their homes to strangers in the Lord, exercising hospitality (cf. 3 John 5). In our context, this would have particular application to having new visitors in our home.

Seventh, **“Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.”** A very important attribute that believers must learn to develop is sympathy. It is the exact opposite of a selfish attitude since it is concerned with interests other than its own.<sup>396</sup> Christians should not be indifferent towards the joys or sorrows of his

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<sup>392</sup> Thayer, *GELNT*, 271,

<sup>393</sup> *Ibid.*, 671.

<sup>394</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., *Romans*, vol. 2, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 193.

<sup>395</sup> Cranfield, *Romans*, 2: 639-40; MacArthur, *Romans*, 2: 194; Vincent, *Word Studies*, 3: 160.

<sup>396</sup> Hodge, *Romans*, 398.

fellow brothers and sisters.<sup>397</sup> In fact, he should possess a genuine empathy for those he encounters in his daily life. Sometimes that will mean rejoicing together with a brother or sister's good fortune, while other times it means sharing in their sorrows.

## V. Church Discipline

### A. Definition

Simply put, church discipline deals with the God ordained way of dealing with unrepentant sin amongst the membership. As Dr. Wayne Grudem explains: "Sin hinders fellowship among believers and with God. In order for reconciliation to occur, the sin must be dealt with. Therefore, the primary purpose of church discipline is to pursue the twofold goal of *restoration* (of the offender to right behavior) and *reconciliation* (between believers, and with God). Just as wise parents discipline their children (Prov. 13:24: "He who loves [his son] is diligent to discipline him"), and just as God our Father disciplines those whom he loves (Heb. 12:6; Rev. 3:19), so the church in its discipline is acting in love to bring back a brother or sister who has gone astray, reestablishing that person in right fellowship and rescuing him or her from destructive patterns of life."<sup>398</sup>

Let's briefly lay out the biblical steps of Church Discipline, based on Jesus' instructions in Matthew:

**Matthew 18:15-20.** "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. <sup>16</sup> But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. <sup>17</sup> If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. <sup>18</sup> Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. <sup>19</sup> Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. <sup>20</sup> For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them."

Four steps are clearly delineated in this passage:

#### 1. Step one: Private Confrontation

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<sup>397</sup> There are those who see this as a primary reference towards unbelievers (cf. Cranfield, *Romans*, 2: 641-42), but it is most likely directed towards other believers (cf. Morris, *Epistle to the Romans*, 450, fn#83).

<sup>398</sup> Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 894.

The first step in church discipline: ““f your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.” The verb translated **tell him his fault** has to do with objectively convicting the brother of his sin.<sup>399</sup> Obviously, this can only be established through the word of God so that it is clear that the sin in question is actually **sin**. We cannot proceed with church discipline in cases where people violate what you consider to be sin, or your own personal convictions or preferences. No, in order to qualify for church discipline, there needs to be chapter and verse or there is no need for the confrontation. Furthermore, although this is counter-intuitive, when your brother sins against you, don’t advertise it to anyone and everyone who will listen. Instead, go to that sinning brother, advise him of his offense, correct him, and if he should repent, you’ve “**gained your brother**,” i.e. the situation is reconciled and no one ever has to know what has happened.

**Galatians 6:1** helps us to see the attitude we should have in confronting a sinning believer: “Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.” The reason you are to be humble is because at any time you could find yourself in the exact same circumstance, and fallen to the exact same sin that you corrected your brother for. Any Christian can fall for any sin, given the right set of circumstances. Remember, you are made of the same stuff as the sinning one, whom you are confronting. Don’t ever think that you are so strong in your Christian walk that a certain sin “can never happen to me.” Whenever you have that arrogant attitude, you take your eyes off the Lord, trusting in yourself rather than in the Spirit (I Corinthians 10:12). So, go in humility, realizing that it could have been you who was tempted. Verse 2 says, “**Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.**” And what is the law of Christ? It’s the royal law (James 2:8), the law of liberty (James 1:25), the law of love (John 15:12). So you go with a love that wants to help him carry the burden, and you go in meekness. You don’t go in a pontificating, pious, and self-righteous manner to make yourself look good and him look bad. You go in loving, humble concern to restore him. Here are some suggestions to consider before confronting another believer:

- a) Pray for yourself and the offender. Yourself, that your motives will be pure and free from pride and self-seeking. For the offender, that he will receive it with humility and repentance.
- b) Double-check that this is really a biblical issue and not a personal preference.
- c) When you do confront, make sure that it is done with humility, gentleness, and motivated by love, remembering that the goal is restoration and not retribution.

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<sup>399</sup> D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew–Mark (Revised Edition)*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 456.

## 2. Step Two: Bring in Witnesses

It would be great if every situation ended with an acknowledgement of sin and repentance. Unfortunately, that is not always the case and that requires additional measures to be taken. Jesus details the second step of discipline: “But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses..” This is based on Deuteronomy 19:15, which regulated evidence in a court of law.<sup>400</sup> The point in bringing two or three witnesses into the situation is not to provide additional testimony or evidence to convict, but more likely to provide witnesses to the Church Discipline process should the case have to be presented to the corporate body,<sup>401</sup> that they were also involved to help move the offender to repentance.<sup>402</sup> The witnesses need to confirm whether there is a heart of repentance or one of indifference or rejection. Such a report provides the basis for further action because the situation has been verified beyond the report of one individual. Should the offender repent at this point, once again the process stops and reconciliation can take place. Now, the only ones who know what happened are the four or five people that were involved and the rest of the congregation are spared the details.

Hopefully the person confronted will respond positively to this second step. After taking the witnesses to confirm the story, what happens if the one who has been confronted still refuses to repent?

## 3. Step Three: Bringing in the Church

What happens if that second appeal is rejected? Jesus goes on to say, “**If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church.**” This is the point where the private appeal becomes public, where the issue escalates so that the corporate body is notified. If we ever have a situation at IBC where this becomes necessary, we will call a special member’s assembly in order to inform the membership. **We will never do this with non-members or unbelievers present.** Here we can see the purpose of church discipline: restoration. We have tried to privately win this brother back to repentance and have not had success, so we escalate the matter by telling the church with the hope that all of us together can win this person back to repentance and consequently, restoration.

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<sup>400</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 467.

<sup>401</sup> Carson, *Matthew (updated)*, 456.

<sup>402</sup> J. Knox Chamblin, *Matthew: A Mentor Commentary*, Mentor Commentaries (Ross-shire, Great Britain: Mentor, 2010), 893.

How long should the church keep encouraging someone to repent? Basically, a good rule of thumb is to give a sufficient amount of time for the church to confront him. After all of that, if there is still no indication that the person is willing to repent, it's probably best to move to the final step. IBC has adopted the approach that it's better to go slower than faster when it comes to each step, although this may not be possible if the circumstances warrant decisive action (e.g. adultery, desertion, domestic violence, criminal behavior). That being said, every possible action should be exhausted before finally moving to the last step.

#### 4. Step Four: Excommunicate

Sadly, this last step is necessary should the previous calls to repentance be ignored. Jesus says, "If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector" (Matt. 18:17). In those days, **Gentile** referred to those who weren't Jewish, and a **tax collector** was a Jewish person who had sold out to the Roman government to exact exorbitant taxes from his own people. Jesus' use of those terms doesn't mean that we should treat these people badly. The gospels show us clearly that He loved both Gentiles and tax collectors. It simply means that when a professing brother (or sister) refuses to repent, we are to treat him as if he were outside our fellowship. We are not to let him associate and participate in the blessings and the benefits of the Christian assembly. The **you** in verse 17 is singular which suggests that each individual member needs to respect the corporate judgment of the church and abide by the decision.<sup>403</sup>

Sometimes the gravity of one's sin is not sufficiently felt until this last, drastic step is made. You would think that after being confronted on three separate occasions, that would be enough to drive a person to repentance but oftentimes that simply isn't the case. It isn't until a person is publicly and officially excommunicated from the church, that he comes back to his senses. "What in the world am I doing?" And, remember, since restoration is always one of the primary goals of church discipline, the sinning member can always repent and be welcomed back into the body of Christ. A pastor friend told us the story about a couple in their church who were divorcing without biblical grounds. They went through the first three steps of church discipline with them, all to no avail, as this couple stubbornly refused to repent. Finally, they went to the fourth step and were put out of the church and it wasn't but a month or two later, that they both repented and reconciled in their marriage. They both came back to the church and were consequently restored.

Sadly, that isn't always the case. There are also times when a person continues on in their sin and seemingly never repents, and is never restored to the church. We have several cases like this in our own church. Here, it is likely that these were professing believers who in reality, were never believers to begin with.

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<sup>403</sup> Carson, *Matthew (updated)*, 457.

1 Corinthians 5 discusses an issue of church discipline. In the Corinthian church there was an unrepentant man who was having an incestuous relationship with his father's wife, either his mother or step-mother. Paul instructed the Corinthians this way: "When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, <sup>5</sup> you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord" (I Cor. 5:4-5).

Professing Christians who refuses to repent need to be put out of the church and turned over to the Satan-controlled worldly system so that their fleshly desire to sin may be destroyed. They may have to go down to the very depths of sin before they repent. But it is something that must be done because, as verses 6 and 7 say, "Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? <sup>7</sup> **Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump**, as you really are unleavened." The unrepentant believer must be put out of the assembly to protect its purity.

People will ask things such as, "My brother is a Christian, but he divorced his wife and has been living in adultery. Is it OK if I see him?" A proper reply is, "it's fine for you to see him as long as you make sure you admonish him, encouraging him to get his life right by confessing and repenting of his sin." Any contact with a sinning brother or sister that doesn't have this admonishing aspect to it, is improper. You put such a person out for the purity of the church, but you must keep calling him back as well.

#### B. The Power of Discipline<sup>404</sup>

Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (v. 18). The terminology of **binding** and **loosing** are rabbinical terms that would've been familiar to our Lord's Jewish audience: bound or loosed from your sin. Let's say you have been living in sin and another believer confronts you and you don't repent, and then two or three more come to you and you don't repent; and then the whole church is pursuing you and you don't repent, we can say that your sins are bound on you, ie. "**Bound in heaven.**" On the other hand, if you are repentant, we can say that your sins are loosed, ie. "**loosed in heaven,**" and it is on this basis that we are able to welcome you into the fullness of the fellowship. We are confirming on earth what has already been confirmed in heaven.

In verse 19 Jesus says, "Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven." The **two** here refers specifically to two witnesses in a case of church discipline regarding a sinning

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<sup>404</sup> This section has been adapted from John F. MacArthur Jr., *The Master's Plan for the Church* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 245-48.

member, and the desire for him to repent. As Dr. Turner has pointed out: “During the discipline process, the church may be assured that their deliberations on earth will be confirmed by their Father in heaven and that Jesus is present with them throughout the difficulties.”<sup>405</sup>

It’s vital to remember that the goal of church discipline is to restore the sinning brother or sister. German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer provides these insights:

Sin demands to have man by himself. It withdraws him from the community. The more isolated a person is, the more destructive will be the power of sin over him, and the more deeply he becomes involved in it, the more disastrous his isolation. Sin wants to remain unknown. It shuns the light. In the darkness of the unexpressed it poisons the whole being of a person. This can happen even in the midst of a pious community. In confession the light of the gospel breaks into the darkness and seclusion of the heart. The sin must be brought into the light. The unexpressed must be openly spoken and acknowledged. All that is secret and hidden is made manifest. It is a hard struggle until the sin is openly admitted, but God breaks gates of brass and bars of iron (Ps. 107:16).

Since the confession of sin is made in the presence of a Christian brother, the last stronghold of self-justification is abandoned. The sinner surrenders; he gives up all his evil. He gives his heart to God, and he finds the forgiveness of all his sin in the fellowship of Jesus Christ and his brother. The expressed, acknowledged sin has lost all its power. It has been revealed and judged as sin. It can no longer tear the fellowship asunder. Now the fellowship bears the sin of the brother. He is no longer alone with his evil for he has cast off his sin in confession and handed it over to God. It has been taken away from him. Now he stands in the fellowship of sinners who live by the grace of God and the cross of Jesus Christ. . . . The sin concealed separated him from the fellowship, made all his apparent fellowship a sham; the sin confessed has helped him define true fellowship with the brethren in Jesus Christ.”

### C. Summary of Church Discipline<sup>406</sup>

1. It is for the benefit of the person being disciplined.

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<sup>405</sup> David Turner and Darrell L. Bock, *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary, Vol 11: Matthew and Mark* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2005), 240.

<sup>406</sup> Taken from Capital Hills Core Seminars, *Living as a Church Class 9: Church Discipline: Preserving God-Glorifying Unity* (handout).

2. It is for the benefit of other believers in the church.
3. It benefits the church's health.
4. It benefits the corporate witness of the church.
5. It upholds Christ's reputation.

## Appendix 1: Cessationism

**D**octrinally speaking, IBC is cessationist, by conviction. What does this mean? A cessationist holds “that there are no miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit today. Gifts such as prophecy, tongues, and healing were confined to the first century, and were used at the time the apostles were establishing the churches and the New Testament was not yet complete” (emphasis mine).<sup>407</sup> The main argument that you need to understand is that the sign gifts that were given to the apostles and prophets in the first century church are no longer operational today, but that doesn’t preclude God working supernaturally in our world today. God can, and does, still work that way according to His will. But, does anyone today have the gift of miracles, signs, and wonders, as the apostles did, to do those things at will? A cessationist would answer, “no.”

### I. Cessationist Verses

IBC believes that signs and wonders are uniquely tied to the apostles and prophets in the New Testament. Their primary purpose (not sole purpose) is to authenticate them as God’s revelatory messengers. But after the book of Revelation was penned by the apostle John in the late 90’s of the first century, the canon came to a close and the last apostle died shortly thereafter. Shouldn’t we expect then, that if the apostles are gone so should revelation and the signs and wonders as well? Are there verses in the New Testament that either explicitly or implicitly teach this very thing? Here are a few of the ones that IBC would point to:

1. **Hebrews 1:1-2.** Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

What we’re about to see in this passage is a comparison between God’s past revelation to the OT ancestors, and His final and definitive revelation through His Son. He will present this comparison as it relates to four areas:<sup>408</sup>

1. Eras: Long ago VS last days.
2. Recipients: fathers VS us
3. Agents: prophets VS his Son
4. Communication: many times/many ways VS one way

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<sup>407</sup> Wayne Grudem, “Preface” in *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? 4 Views*, Zondervan Counterpoints Collection (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 10.

<sup>408</sup> Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 44, 47.

When the author states that God spoke through the Old Testament prophets in the past,<sup>409</sup> He did so **“at many times and in many ways.”** This refers to both the fragmentary (incomplete) or piecemeal character of the Old Testament revelation,<sup>410</sup> as well as to the variety of modes in which it was given.<sup>411</sup> Now, to make this statement doesn't imply that the O. T. revelation was either defective or untrue, only that it was incomplete. God's revelation to man was progressive, meaning that He didn't choose to reveal everything all at once but rather gave it bit by bit, piece by piece. However, as Bruce has pointed out, the progress of revelation is “not from the less true to the more true, from the less worthy to the more worthy, or from the less mature to the more mature,” but rather one of “promise to fulfillment.”<sup>412</sup> This is the difference between two stages of revelation, the Old and New covenants.<sup>413</sup>

Notice the contrast introduced in verse 2 between how God spoke through the prophets *long ago* and how He has spoken in these **“last days”** through His Son. **“Last days”** is a septuagintalism,<sup>414</sup> used to denote the period of time when the words of the prophets will be fulfilled and is essentially an eschatological time marker.<sup>415</sup> We entered into these last days at Christ's first coming and we are experiencing the fulfillment of God's promises in a partial, preliminary fashion (eg. New Covenant, Davidic Covenant), which will eventually culminate in Jesus' Second Coming, at which time the fulness of those promises will be realized.

The **“last days”** then, are days of fulfillment when promises would stop and fulfillment would begin.<sup>416</sup> The advent of Christ is what inaugurated the arrival of

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<sup>409</sup> πάλαι is “designating a point of time in the past, long ago, formerly” (BAGD, 604), referring specifically to the Old Testament era. God used the prophets in the Old Testament era to make known His Word to the people. See Simon J. Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, vol. 15, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 26.

<sup>410</sup> O' Brien, *Letter to the Hebrews*, 49.

<sup>411</sup> For example, He spoke directly to Moses in a voice, through the midst of a fire (Ex. 19:19; Deut. 5:22) and in a burning bush (Ex. 3:2); but He also communicated by way of vision to Daniel (8:1ff) and Joseph (Gen. 37:5-11). There was not one set mode of communication, in which God communicated His will to man. See Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament: Hebrews*, ed. Robert Frew (London: Blackie & Son, 1884–1885), 20.

<sup>412</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Rev. ed., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 45.

<sup>413</sup> O' Brien, *Letter to the Hebrews*, 47-48.

<sup>414</sup> This means it is a word or phrase that is used in the Septuagint (The Greek translation of the Old Testament), that has a specific or technical meaning.

<sup>415</sup> Bruce, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 46; O' Brien, *Letter to the Hebrews*, 50. cf. Gen. 49:1; Num. 24:14; Deut. 4:30; 31:29; Isa. 2:2; Jer. 23:20; 30:24; 48:27; 49:39; Ezek. 38:16; Dan. 10:14; Hos. 3:5; Mic. 4:1.

<sup>416</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., *Hebrews*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), 10.

the end time and the beginning of fulfillment.<sup>417</sup> The point being made is that the incomplete nature of revelation given in the OT era, had now come to a climax in the Person of Jesus Christ (“**spoken to us by his Son**”). So, whereas God’s previous spokesmen were but mere men (prophets), the culmination of revelation is now given in the person of God’s Divine Son, Jesus Christ.<sup>418</sup> Therefore this final revelation is now found in its uniqueness, fullness, and completeness.<sup>419</sup> As William Lane explains, “The force of the expression in Hebrews is to characterize the Son as the one through Whom God spoke His final and decisive word.”<sup>420</sup>

So, think about the significance of the argument being made here: There is no further need for revelation, because God’s continuing disclosure of Himself found its ultimate expression in His Son.<sup>421</sup> In the progress of revelation, God gave His word in bits and pieces, pointing to the Messiah, who would one day fulfill all the prophecies made concerning Him. When Jesus Christ came, all that was ever said or needed to be said concerning His redemptive work was now fulfilled. The One to Whom the whole OT pointed, was now revealed. God no longer needed to speak anymore, since all that needed to be said, was said in the person and work of Jesus Christ. To say anything more would be anti-climactic.

Notice the astute observation by F. F. Bruce concerning this manner:

Priest and prophet, sage and singer were in their several ways His spokesmen; yet all the successive acts and varying modes of revelation in the ages before Christ came did not add up to the fullness of what God had to say. His word was not completely uttered until Christ came; but when Christ came, the word spoken in Him was indeed God’s final word. In Him all the promises of God meet with the answering “Yes!” which seals their fulfillment to his people and evokes from them an answering “Amen!”<sup>422</sup>

This point is so strong that even non-cessationists such as Wayne Grudem, recognize that there is a cessation of some kind of revelation according to this passage. Listen to what Grudem says in reference to Hebrews 1:1-2 and you’ll be surprised to find that there isn’t a lot of difference between what he would say and what I would say:

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<sup>417</sup> O’ Brien, *Letter to the Hebrews*, 50.

<sup>418</sup> Bruce, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 46.

<sup>419</sup> Kistemaker, *Exposition of Hebrews*, 27.

<sup>420</sup> William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, vol. 47A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1991), 11.

<sup>421</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>422</sup> Bruce, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 46.

The contrast between the former speaking “of old” by the prophets and the recent speaking “in these last days” **suggests that God’s speech to us by his Son is the culmination of his speaking to mankind and is his greatest and final revelation to mankind in this period of redemptive history** (emphasis mine). The exceptional greatness of the revelation that comes through the Son, far exceeding any revelation in the old covenant, is emphasized again and again throughout chapters 1 and 2 of Hebrews. **These facts all indicate that there is a finality to the revelation of God in Christ and that once this revelation has been completed, no more is to be expected** (emphasis mine).

We would give a hearty amen to just about all of what Dr. Grudem wrote in these paragraphs concerning the finality of God’s revelation in Christ. And yet if God’s final revelation came through the Son and interpreted to us through the apostolic writings and thus no more revelation is to be expected, how can he then argue as a non-cessationist, that prophetic revelation (albeit fallible) is still ongoing today? The way Dr. Grudem does it, is by arguing for a fallible form of NT prophecy that is by nature inferior to canonical Scripture. So, in Dr. Grudem’s view, there can’t be anymore Scripture but there can be legitimate NT prophetic utterances.

Why would we limit this statement in Hebrews to canonical revelation (scripture) and not revelation in general? It seems that if you’re going to argue that God spoke once and for all in His Son, you can’t argue that prophecy is ongoing today and be consistent. The logic of the passage seems to be arguing that God finished saying all that He wanted to say in the Person of His Son.

So, where do we learn about this revelation through Christ? The New Testament writings contain the final, authoritative, and sufficient interpretation of Christ’s life and work of redemption. The apostles and their close companions report Christ’s words and deeds and interpret them with absolute divine authority. When they have finished their writing, there is no more to be added with the same absolute divine authority. Thus, once the writings of the New Testament apostles and their authorized companions are completed, we have in written form the final record of everything that God wants us to know about the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, and its meaning for the lives of believers for all time. Since this is God’s greatest revelation for mankind, no more is to be expected once the New Testament is complete. We can conclude at least this much if not more, that prophecy in general is now complete as well.

2. **Ephesians 2:20.** built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,

In verse 19, Paul introduced the concept of their being part of God’s household. Now the idea of a household leads Paul into a building metaphor as he describes the Church in terms of a large building. He pictures each believer (including Gentile believers) as a living stone that God uses in building up the building.

They were included in the building when they placed their faith in Christ.<sup>423</sup> In the next couple of verses to follow, Paul will discuss the foundation of the building, its structure, its growth, and its present function. But in this passage, he describes the **foundation** of the building which consists of the “**apostles and prophets.**”<sup>424</sup>

Before we continue, let me point out that although prophets and apostles belong under the same heading there were some distinctions between these two offices. We’ve already discussed the ministry of the apostles in some detail but let’s review for the sake of our discussion here. The **apostles** refer to the twelve men who were originally called by Christ in His earthly ministry, who had not only seen the Lord in His earthly ministry (I Cor. 9:1), but were also eyewitnesses to His resurrection (Acts 1:22). These men were chosen by God to be His instruments of revelation, responsible for authoring our New Testament. They were also given the unique ability to perform signs and wonders, in order to authenticate their ministry (2 Cor. 12:12). Although Paul was not one of the original apostles<sup>425</sup> he was called specially by the Lord to be one (Gal. 1:1) and actually became the most prominent, authoring at least 13 books of the New Testament.<sup>426</sup> Through eyewitness accounts and supernatural revelation (i.e., through the Holy Spirit) of the apostles, the permanent revelation, the New Testament Scriptures, were written.

But in addition to the apostles, there were also **prophets** given to the Church. The **prophets** referred to here are not the Old Testament prophets (contra Chrysostom), but New Testament ones that ministered alongside the apostles (Acts 13:1; 15:32; 21:9).<sup>427</sup> Those who had the gift of prophecy were also instruments of divine revelation, able to predict events (Acts 11:28; 21:10), but

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<sup>423</sup> Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, vol. 42, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1990), 152.

<sup>424</sup> This understands τῷ θεμελίῳ τῶν ἀποστόλων καὶ προφητῶν as a genitive of apposition, “the foundation which consists of the apostles and prophets” (cf. O’ Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 213; Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* 304; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 152-53). Others who view this as a genitive of source, “the foundation which the apostles and prophets laid” doesn’t fit the context. For one thing, the gospel is never referred to as the foundation nor does it make sense in comparison to Christ being the cornerstone. In other words, why would Paul say that the apostles and prophets’ teaching about Christ is the foundation but Christ Himself is the cornerstone ?

<sup>425</sup> James the Lord’s brother also falls into this category, as he was not one of the original twelve but is named an apostle post-resurrection (cf. Gal. 1:19).

<sup>426</sup> Fourteen, if you count Hebrews.

<sup>427</sup> This is certainly borne out by the fact that “his holy apostles and prophets” are mentioned later in 3:5, and it refers to the mysteries of the gospel which have *now* been revealed. cf. Peter Thomas O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 214, fn#244; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1984), 304; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 153.

mainly to proclaim the truth.<sup>428</sup> And it was through the prophets that God temporarily provided revelation to the Church before the completion of Scripture. For this reason, they are also included as part of the foundation of the Church. To summarize then, the prophets functioned as temporary channels of revelation while the apostles served as instruments in producing the permanent revelation of Scripture. All believers both Jews and Gentiles, rest upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets who were “the first authoritative recipients and proclaimers of God’s revelation in Christ.”<sup>429</sup> So it is in this sense that the apostles and prophets can be considered the first stones to be laid in the building.<sup>430</sup>

Now, lest anyone should think that the prominent place in the building is occupied by the apostles and prophets, Paul adds the important qualifier that it is Christ *Himself* who possesses this standing as “**the cornerstone**.”<sup>431</sup> With this comment Paul is setting Christ apart from the apostles and prophets as well as the living stones, giving Him the preeminent place in the building.<sup>432</sup> Basically, the *cornerstone* refers to the large stone that is placed upon the foundation of the building at one of the four corners.<sup>433</sup> It functioned to hold together both the walls and the foundation.<sup>434</sup> Archaeology has unearthed one

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<sup>428</sup> S. D. F. Salmond, “The Epistle to the Ephesians” in *The Expositor’s Greek Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988 reprint), ed., W. Robertson Nicoll. 5 vols. 3:329-30. Charles Hodge, *Ephesians* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1991 reprint), 159. Hodge suggests that they differed from the New Testament apostles in that their inspiration was only occasional, and therefore they were subordinate to apostles in authority. Although this is possible, it is not clearly spelled out in the Scripture.

<sup>429</sup> O’ Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 216; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 153.

<sup>430</sup> Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* 304.

<sup>431</sup> O’ Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 216.

<sup>432</sup> Having said that however, there has been some disagreement as to the exact meaning of the metaphor. This is due to the fact that the word translated *cornerstone* can be used in two different ways. Some argue that the meaning of the word is not *cornerstone* but *capstone*. If this is correct, it refers to the crowning stone that is placed at the top of the structure. This would emphasize Christ’s exalted position, and thus His unique place in the building (cf. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 154-56). Although that idea is certainly not inconsistent within the context of Ephesians (cf. 1:23), the usual translation of the word as *cornerstone* seems to fit the context of this passage better (O’ Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 216-17), as well as the parallel passage in I Peter 2:8. Also, another important fact worth mentioning is that this verse is probably based upon Isaiah 28:16, “Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: “Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, A tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation; Whoever believes will not act hastily.” In the LXX translation of this passage the same Greek words translated *cornerstone* and *foundation* are used in juxtaposition, and both the Jews and rabbis understood this to refer to the base of the building rather than the crowning stone at the top (O’ Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 217; Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* 305). This last fact seems to be the determining factor in making an exegetical decision.

<sup>433</sup> D. Edmond Hiebert, *1 Peter* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1997), 136.

<sup>434</sup> T. K. Abbott, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians and to the Colossians*, International Critical Commentary (London: T&T Clark International, 1969), 71.

such stone which is measured sixty-nine feet by twelve feet by thirteen feet. Once this large stone was put in place, the rest of the building could be completed.<sup>435</sup> Obviously, this designation emphasizes Christ's importance in relation to the rest of the building. Jesus Christ is the most important part of the building because it is He on whom the whole structure is built. The foundation of the other stones as well as their position is determined by Him,<sup>436</sup> and not the other way around.

Now, let's think through the implication of the passage as it relates to our topic. How many times do you lay the foundation of a building? Once. Jesus Christ is the cornerstone of the building because He died once for sin for all time and rose from the dead once and for all, as the Lord of all. As Dr. Richard Gaffin explains, "All that he now is for and in the church depends on and derives from his being the crucified and glorified Christ. He is the foundation of the church because of his *finished* work."<sup>437</sup> The apostles and prophets are also part of the foundation of the church because they were the men chosen by God to give His authoritative revelation once and for all. The New Testament Scriptures are the product of the apostles and what they wrote will continue to have authority over the church until Christ returns. Most Charismatics concede that the canon of Scripture is closed, which is recognition of the unique ministry of these men. So if the ministry of the apostles and prophets are foundational to the church, how can we argue in any sense that there are apostles or prophets around today?

3. **2 Corinthians 12:11-12.** I have been a fool! You forced me to it, for I ought to have been commended by you. For I was not at all inferior to these super-apostles, even though I am nothing. <sup>12</sup> The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works.

Here Paul reprimands the Corinthians for their failure to stick up for him against the false accusations of the false teachers.<sup>438</sup> In so doing, he re-establishes his apostolic authority. For Paul, defending his apostleship was nothing new. Notice however that in his defense, Paul sets out to prove his apostleship by appealing to "**the signs of a true apostle.**" The expression "**signs of a true apostle**" is a genitive of possession: "signs that belong to an apostle." These *signs* were

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<sup>435</sup> Edwin A. Blum, "1 Peter," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Hebrews through Revelation*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 230.

<sup>436</sup> O' Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 217.

<sup>437</sup> B. Richard Gaffin, "A Cessationist View," in *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today?: 4 Views*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry and Wayne A. Grudem, Zondervan Counterpoints Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 43.

<sup>438</sup> Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, *The New International Commentary on the Old and New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1962), 455; Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, vol. 40, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1986), 432.

marks of confirmation pointing to the authenticity or validation of their ministry as we've already pointed out in various passages (cf. also Rom. 15:18-20).<sup>439</sup> The end of Mark's gospel says as much, "And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with **them** and confirming the word through the accompanying signs" (Mark 16:20).<sup>440</sup>

Notice that Paul appeals to the **signs, wonders** and **mighty works** that he did as constituting these signs.<sup>441</sup> In other words, the ability to perform miracles, signs, and wonders, were the unique possession of the apostles. If everyone were able to perform signs and wonders in the early Church, this would be an illogical way for Paul to prove his apostleship. Paul says he performed these apostolic signs while enduring the highest degree of hardship and trials in his gospel ministry.<sup>442</sup>

Dr. Tim Dane, concurs with this conclusion in his dissertation on cessationism:

Luke emphasizes that the miraculous signs were taking place primarily through the apostles to attest God's messengers (Acts 2:43; 4:33; 5:12; 14:3; 19:11). It appears that miraculous gifts were given to God's apostles and prophets, and that not everyone possessed such powers (cf. I Cor. 12:29-30). In 2 Corinthians 12:12 Paul defends his apostleship on the basis of the fact that God had given him the ability to perform miracles (cf. Rom 15:19). Miracles were God's way of attesting His apostles and prophets (cf. Heb 2:3-4).<sup>443</sup>

Here's confirmation from NT commentator, Dr. Paul Barnett:

The carefully chosen words "**the signs of the apostle**" suggest that there was a class of persons known as "**apostles**" who were demonstrated to be

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<sup>439</sup> So George H. Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, ed. Robert W. Yarbrough and Robert H. Stein, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), 604; Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Milton Keynes, UK: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.; Paternoster Press, 2005), 876; Simon J. Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, vol. 19, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 425; Hughes, *Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 456.

<sup>440</sup> This is a disputed passage that most textual critics don't accept as genuine.

<sup>441</sup> The aorist passive verb *κατεργάσθη* demonstrates Paul's awareness that he had no unique power inherent within himself, but that the miracles were accomplished through him (Hughes, *Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians* 458; Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* 426).

<sup>442</sup> Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 581; Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 605.

<sup>443</sup> Timothy L. Dane, *The Cessation of the Prophetic Gifts*, 406-07.

such by **“the signs.”** Thus **“the signs”** accredit Paul as truly **“an apostle,”** one of the apostles, that unique body from the era closest to Christ, who, along with the prophets, were the foundation of the new covenant people of God (Eph 2:20). **“The signs,”** which are miracles pointing to God as their author, are the demonstration that Paul was precisely that, one of the select group of the apostles (emphasis mine).<sup>444</sup>

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<sup>444</sup> Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 579-80.

# Immanuel Bible Church

## Membership Application

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Staff Attending Interview

Pastor: \_\_\_\_\_

Other Staff: \_\_\_\_\_

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### Applicant Information

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ BirthDate: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone: (     ) \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ Cell Phone: (     ) \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

Work Phone: (     ) \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Married:     \_\_\_\_\_ Yes     \_\_\_\_\_ No     Wedding Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Divorced:    \_\_\_\_\_ Yes     Transgendered: \_\_\_\_\_

### Children

Name 1: \_\_\_\_\_ Birth Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name 2: \_\_\_\_\_ Birth Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name 3: \_\_\_\_\_ Birth Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name 4: \_\_\_\_\_ Birth Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name 5: \_\_\_\_\_ Birth Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name 6: \_\_\_\_\_ Birth Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Previous Church Membership: \_\_\_\_\_

Baptized (date/location): \_\_\_\_\_

How introduced to IBC? \_\_\_\_\_ Began Attending \_\_\_\_\_

Membership Class (Date): \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Christianity</b>
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1. Fully explain what the gospel of Jesus Christ is.

2. When were you saved, and how do you know that you are saved?





8. What area of ministry at IBC would you like to be involved in?

Pastoral Comments:

**IMMANUEL BIBLE CHURCH  
CHURCH COVENANT**

Since we have been brought by God's grace to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and to give ourselves up to Him, and since we have been baptized upon our profession of faith in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, we do now, while relying on His gracious aid, solemnly and joyfully renew our covenant with each other.

We will work and pray for the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

We will walk together in brotherly love, as is appropriate for the members of a Christian Church; exercise an affectionate care and watchfulness over each other and faithfully admonish and exhort one another as occasion may require.

We will not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, nor neglect to pray for ourselves and others.

We will endeavor to bring up such as may at any time be under our care, in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and by a pure and loving example to seek the salvation of our family and friends.

We will rejoice at each other's happiness and endeavor with tenderness and sympathy to bear each other's burdens and sorrows.

We will seek, by God's enabling grace, to live carefully in the world, denying ungodliness and worldly lust, and remembering that because we have been crucified with Christ and raised to newness of life in Him, there is now upon us a special responsibility to lead a new and holy life.

We will work together for the continuance of a faithful evangelical ministry in the church, as we sustain its worship, ordinances, discipline, and doctrines. We will contribute cheerfully and regularly to the support of the ministry, the expenses of the church, the relief of the poor, and the spread of the Gospel through all nations.

We will, if we should leave this church, as soon as possible, unite with some other church where we can carry out the spirit of this covenant and the principles of God's Word.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.