

# **S**IMPLIFIED **R**EFORMED **T**HEOLOGY

*“... contend for the faith  
that was once for all  
entrusted to the saints.”*

*Jude 3b*

COMPILED BY:  
REV. ANUP ARUN HIWALE

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Simplified Reformed Theology

## SIMPLIFIED REFORMED THEOLOGY

*Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.*

*Jude 3-4*

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## **FOREWORD:**

There are those who might say that we have no need to study theology if we just study the Bible. And indeed, it is true that those things, which need to be known, believed, and observed for salvation are clear in the Bible. However, what is also true is that not everything in the Bible is clear. Perhaps this can be illustrated in the following way: To operate a television, it is clear that you must make sure an aerial is attached, press the power button, choose your channel, and set the volume. We can all work this out for ourselves. But to understand how the television works to broadcast images and sound, who invented it, its history, and how it is used today we will need to listen to teachers who have expert knowledge in these areas, and read technical manuals. And so, Christians, and particularly new Christians, are very much helped in their understanding of the Bible by making use of theology. And this is so because theological study helps us to see the riches in the Bible in a way that we could not without it. It also helps us to learn from the Bible students that have gone before us. And lastly, it helps us to recognize the errors that others have fallen into and, hopefully, to keep us from falling into them ourselves.

Another question that may fairly be asked, then, is why is a new book on theology needed? After all, there are many books already written that are a great help to believers. Well, to answer this question, it is my belief that Reverend Anupkumar Arun Hiwale has recognized the fact that many theologies are like a four course banquet when some Christians have a small stomach that is not yet ready to eat such an enormous feast. And so, as a result of his training, his awareness of the needs of those that the gospel is reaching, and his passion to serve the Lord and His people, Reverend Hiwale has performed a most valuable service to the church by writing his Simplified Reformed Theology. His desire that theology aim for head and heart is clear on every page. His love for the people of the Lord is obvious to anyone who has the privilege of knowing him. And His hunger to see people grow in Christ is clearly demonstrated in this book.

It is my prayer, then, that the Spirit of God may use it so that you “may become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:13).”

Rev. Andre Holtstag  
Reformed Church of Dovedale.  
Hornby, Christchurch NZ

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## **PREFACE:**

The Word of God itself is remarkable in its simplicity; God in his mercy has made abundantly clear each needful theological truth for His Church. The reformers of our times have proved themselves godly stewards of each biblical truth when they formulated the doctrines and the confessions. Many teachers and students of theology would agree that 'Theology' serves the Church but it also causes complications when it becomes merely academic documentation, then it kills joy of knowing and loving God.

Christians need simple reading material on the most beautiful subject called Systematic Theology. Therefore, the concept of the Systematic Theology Made Simple was born in my mind.

I would humbly express my thanks to Dr. Bill Berends (Reformed Theological Collage, Australia) for allowing me to use his booklet on Systematic Theology. I have used following material as well, Class-notes of Presbyterian Theological Seminary in India, Mid America Reformed Seminary in the USA along with "Reformed Dogmatics" Volumes One, Two, and Three" by Harman Bavinck; Audio lectures of Dr. Joel R. Beeke on the subject of Prolegomena; And "Lest Any Man Should boast: 'The Canons of Dort simply explained' By Arthur Van Delden. "Redemption accomplished and applied" By John Murray. I am thankful to my teachers as well namely, Dr. Venema and Dr. Beach at Mid America; Dr. Mohan Chacko and Rev. Fimthasang Infimate at PTS-India.

It was very helpful to use Mid-America library during summer of 2010 with permission of Rev. Alan Strange. Miss Barbara Haley (Evangelical Institute of Biblical Studies in Greenville, SC) was so gracious to me as she offered hospitality and permission to use EI facility with all needed peaceful caring and kind atmosphere to work on this book.

Very thankful to Mrs. Esther Kamp for her proofreading and Miss. Ritu Gospel for her helping in reconstructing sentences. It's my desire that this book will be a blessing to church-planters and church lay people as well as to the elders of our churches and all Christian brothers and sisters who wish to understand Systematic Theology. I believe reformed theological education can trigger concrete and true church growth in India and

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reading of this book would make understanding of subject of theology simpler and clearer.

Our family-devotions were greatly helpful to simplify theological concepts and I must give credit to Promila-my wife, our son Hanokh and daughter Harshmaria who asked me many questions. I am so thankful to all three of them, for their prayers as well.

Anupkumar Arun Hiwale

February 7, 2012

#### **FEW WORDS: REV. ALAN D. STRANGE**

Since the Enlightenment in the West, systematic theology has fallen on hard times. Many have dismissed systematic theology as an exercise in rationalism, arguing that one must simply study the Word without assuming, as does the systematic theologian, that it enjoys unity or coherency. While it is true that systematic theology can be dominated by philosophical rationalism to the detriment of the Word's concrete, historical meaning, it is also true, and we have seen it in recent centuries, that an atomistic approach to the Word can prevail. This atomistic approach is one that focuses on all the particulars of the Word but either misses or denies that the Word, though situated in time and place, does teach eternal truth. Historicism has replaced systematic theology so that we are left with a Bible that, according to such an approach, may have nothing very much to say to us living in the twenty-first century.

If the West has come to stress the many at the expense of the one, as it has in the attack on systematic theology, it has been characteristic of the East to stress the one at the expense of the many. We need a unified approach, such as we find in orthodox Christianity, which properly expresses the one and the many, an approach that recognizes the need for systematic theology, on the one hand, and for exegetical carefulness and fidelity, on the other. It is a false dichotomy to insist that either we have systematic theology at the expense of textual, exegetical, historical accuracy and faithfulness, or we have such textual precision at the expense of systematic theology. Frankly, as Warfield indicated long ago, we must

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have both: a careful, exegesis that yields a fruitful biblical and systematic theology. We must have both a careful treatment of the particulars and a skillful integration of them.

For all of these reasons, this introduction by Anup Hiwale is so needed. It is needed in the great land of India to give witness there to the integrity of the truth once for all delivered to the saints. It provides a framework of truth to those who may have many of its parts but not the whole. It allows for one to see not only the trees but the forest. And it serves as an entre for those who would go further into these matters, a gateway to vast and deep riches. Anup's deep love for the Savior and His people is evident here and we are glad to commend to the reading public this helpful work that we pray the Lord will use in many hearts and lives.

Rev. Alan D. Strange  
Mid-America Reformed Seminary. Dyer, IN 46311 USA  
March 7, 2011

#### **Prepare Heart To Study Reformed Theology:**

Knowing God and loving Him has become conditional; mainly when people in need, in sickness or while facing disasters think of God, hoping that they will be rescued from the situation(s) that are hurting them. Some in our culture even bargain to their “gods” saying they will do some good to their gods if the gods would be good to them. Most of the people fall into such situation some point of time in life. However, once we know God and understand how to love him the entire perspective changes and life and suffering truly becomes meaningful. Therefore, it is necessary to have simpler, clearer Biblical knowledge of God, which is possible with systematic study of the Bible.

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Two Greek words, theos (“God”) and logos (“word”) made a beautiful composition and form a word “theology.” The study of theology is more meaningful and true when is based in the Word of God - The Bible alone. It will be correct to say that meaningful relationship with God would depend on correct knowledge of Him.

### What is Reformed Theology?

Reformed theology seeks to summarize biblical teaching on specific topics. Postmodern religious mindset has been forcing people to think God is impersonal and we are part of that impersonal God as “an extension.” I am also surprised to note that some people think that it is possible to make this World a peaceful world by equal distribution of wealth, food supply. Another view that prevails around us is, this “extended World” is temporary, not real but an illusion and has no hope of carrying any eternal individual identity. Everything in the universe and universe itself is heading towards becoming one with the Impersonal Force – the whole big nothingness. Particularly talking about India, recent anti-corruption movement in India of Mr. Anna Hazare is another hope that our nation has seen that we can live in a nation that can be free of all corruption if some law enforcement is applied.

The issues of pain and suffering are another factors that people seek after theological understanding. Many see that great struggles of being trapped into the cycles of births is an escaping way from this huge illusion and perhaps that is salvation or in the modern Hindu core religious belief-system it is called Moksha. This is becoming a slow and steady worldview and therefore systematic theology must take speed and reach to everyone who reads beginning with Christians.

Explanation of how the universe and all that is within it came into being can be explained as some intelligent creator creating something out of nothing is more reliable truth than any possible scientific methods that can try to explain our existence. I believe that God creating Creation is the most accepted fact of all the religions in the World but they have a much-distorted view about certain concepts such as who God is. What is Creation? Who we can achieve Salvation? Are we in need of a Savior? Finally, Where is this whole world heading? Answers to these questions become mystic and confusions if they are drawn from the philosophies of mankind. But the Bible based explanation of all of the above queries

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brings clear light to our understanding, and the Systematic Theology answers all these questions with satisfactory and life changing answers.

In such a religious confusing atmosphere, it becomes very important for the church to get into people's hands something simple and yet profound truthful as an explanation of Christian statement of faith. And it is possible because God has revealed Himself as a person.

The entire life experience of common man constantly reveals that there are two realities one absolute God as the Creator & second His Creation that He created out of nothing. The Systematic Theology therefore remains pro-history and within context of the facts that are revealed generally in the nature and specifically in the incarnation of God according to the historical writings, solely the Word of God adequately testified as the sixty-six books of the Bible and God is its canon, the author.

Types of Theological Studies:

Theological studies have taken present shape with lot of work that was put together by the people of God and historically we can see four main divisions in the development of historical theology: (1) ancient theology (1st Century-A.D. 590); (2) medieval theology (A.D. 590–1517); (3) reformation theology (1517–1750); (4) modern theology (1750–present). The best and more biblical form of theology is in our hands now from the great scholars of reformed church in history. I want to express my concern when I say reformed; I do not mean any ethnic phenomena but rather about the faith statement that the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ should hold to.

In an encyclopedia - the all around education, theology must be understood as the exegetical process of knowing the Word of God under specific topics of major redemptive interests of mankind and the whole creation of God. It must involve appropriately collecting, synthesizing, and understanding all the relevant passages in the Bible on various topics, and then summarizing their teachings clearly so that God's people know what to believe and how to live.

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it is a large topic and has been studied for centuries in various types, one set of historical divisions are different that the actual topical view on the theology.

Exegetical Theology: the process of seeking to determine the correct meaning out of a particular passage of the Bible based in studies of the original languages.

Biblical Theology: In the biblical theology we learn truth as it is progressed in the times as the epochs and see the historical working of the Lord under themes and topics.

Systematic theology: Historically Systematic Theology deals with the logical arrangement of topic. And making it simple for common readers is what we are going to work on because among all the theological types it plays the most important role into the getting the gospel right in to human understanding

Historical Theology: The study of how believers in different eras of the history of the church have understood various theological topics.

Philosophical Theology: The study of theological topics primarily through the use of the tools and methods of philosophical reasoning and information gained from nature and reason (“general revelation”) apart from the Bible.

Practical Theology: The study of how to best apply theological truths to the life of the church and the world (including preaching, Christian education, counseling, evangelism, missions, church administration, worship, etc.). And,

Apologetics: The study of theology for the purpose of defending Christian teaching against criticism and distortion, and giving evidences of its credibility.

Simplified Reformed Theology is an effort to encourage readers to know all the loci. The word Loci is a Latin plural word for Locus; and it means ‘place.’ The systematic theology the topics are dealt with a great care and diligence. As well as a right place for each topic has been located in the Word of God. Reformed theologians use this word with this understanding; for the first time Philipp Melanchthon (February 16, 1497 – April 19, 1560), used this ideal word to talk about the topical place of theological subjects in the Bible. He was a German reformer, collaborator with Martin Luther. Therefore, I will use word ‘Loci’ with the same meaning.

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Teaching the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27) to the people is much productive if that can be done with simplicity and dense honesty. Jesus commissioned his church saying, “make disciples of all nations” by “teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19–20) the Great Commission means that the teachings of the Lord where profound, at times hard to understand therefore we need to teach since teaching is a God given gift to the church (Eph4: 11). Simplifying hard topics for people helps them to practice what they learn.

Dr. Bill Berends says, “You will note that Systematic Theology order tends to follow the Apostles’ Creed. It is also a systematic dealing with the teachings of Scripture in a systematic way makes them easier to remember. This can be easily demonstrated. If I were to ask you to remember the numbers 8, 3, 5, 6, 2, 1, 9, 4 & 7 I doubt many of you would remember them for long. But if I put these same numbers in their logical order: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, & 9, none of you would forget them. Studying doctrine in this systematic way is called Systematic Theology.” In addition to that, what I have done is to make sure that simple ways are applied with simple words and have given all needed confessional back up to each loci making it simple for every Christian.

#### **Present “Asian Threat” To The Reformed Theology:**

Asian Theological World deeply desires to formulate theology from their own religious sources and do not want to merge with so called Western Theological thoughts into an Asian cultural or economical and religious context. In last many centuries, many scholars have tried to put theology within an “Asian” context, though the origin of all the religious thinking is Asian, later more effectively European groups could study it well and have given great shape to the present theology. Many of my contemporary teachers and scholars have done some remarkable job of finding some hints of Christ, Salvation and God in the ancient scriptures of some Asian collections. Nevertheless, I am little hesitant to approve any of those materials because all of those writings are very complicated and make things very mystic and hard to understand as a result they stand contrary to their own logical thoughts.

The Holy Bible and the Confessions and Creeds are the sufficient sources to support the chapters on all the loci. It is needful to give room for contextualization of certain principles for the betterment of Asian Church growth but that should not undermine most important need of exegetical

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scholarship. The ability to discern the relative importance of theological beliefs is vital for effective Christian life and ministry, and I believe the lack of knowledge of how to use original languages certainly damages the final product of the written statements on the Word of God.

MPM has always made it possible for Church leaders to find the needful resources on reformed literature in the form of compiling the material and reproducing the best translations of the reformed material for India. The Reformed Theology in Asia is under pressure of some theologians who are interested in contextualization but do not want the labor of knowing the scripture as it is in the original languages. We through our publications make sure that no one degrades the historical confessions stating the need of some new “Asian.” Because it is false argument and causes pride in the minds of Asian theological world; this is a big subject in itself but I believe, only way to stop influence of such people is to bring the historical reformed faith closer to common Christians and present true and simple reformed theology in English and other local languages. That will make people understand true contextualization and will spare bad name that some give to the historical reformed confessions. In an Indo-Asian context this process can be well explained with a saying, “Pluck off grass from the floor before softening it with cow-dunk.”

In this book, we will go through all the loci in determining how important it is to first understand what the Word of God teaches and then we can work on the matter of contextualization.

## INTRODUCTION

In theology, we learn about God, and what his Word tells us about our salvation in His Son, Jesus Christ. Today the word theology is often used to mean the teaching of the Christian church, but in the Greek language, the word means the study of God. Greek was the language of the early church, and the apostles used this language when they wrote the New Testament. But the New Testament itself does not use the word theology. Instead the teaching of the Christian Church is called doctrine (teaching). Paul defines doctrine as “the trustworthy message as it has been taught” (Tit. 1:9).

Sometimes the word dogma is used, especially for official statements about Christian beliefs made by Church synods or councils. The word

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dogma comes from two Greek words meaning “it seems to me”, or “I have come to the conclusion.” This is what kings and emperors in the ancient world used to say when they made a new law or decision. The same words are used in the New Testament when the Church makes a decision about the inclusion of non-Jewish people in the Christian church. Some Jews wanted the Gentiles to be circumcised, like Jewish Christians. But at a special meeting the early Church leaders decided that “it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us” not to have Gentiles circumcised (Acts 15:28).

After the completion of the New Testament, the Church continued to deal with new questions about the Christian faith. Sometimes it took many years of discussion and study before the Church they could confidently say: “it seemed good to us and the Holy Spirit.” Many of the doctrines expressed in the Apostles Creed are examples of dogma produced by the Christian Church in those early years. Other doctrines were produced much later, at the time of the Reformation. Sadly, the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches were not agreed about these doctrines. The main reason for this is that they were not agreed about the proper source for Christian doctrine. Protestants believed sound doctrine must come from Scripture alone. But Roman Catholics believed that the Pope and the traditions of the church are further sources.

We cannot make doctrines or the principles to live life by simply following the traditions of culture or church. When the leaders of the New Testament Church formed that first “dogma” about circumcision they did not base their arguments on their Jewish traditions, but on a careful study of the Bible to see the significance and necessity of circumcision. We read in Acts 15:16 to 18 discussion of leaders of the church that gives the sole authority to the scriptures, it says,

“The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written: “After this I will return and rebuild David’s fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it, 17 that the remnant of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who bear my name, says the Lord, who does these things’ that have been known for ages.”

Guiding God’s people in doctrine is one of the main purposes of the Scripture. Paul writes Timothy: “All Scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching (doctrine)...” (2 Tim. 3:16). And to Titus he writes that a church leader “must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it

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has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it" (Tit. 1:9). Similarly Luke praises the Jews at Berea because they studied the Scripture to test the new teaching about Christ (Acts 17:11).

In these lessons we, too, will use the Scriptures to test the doctrine and dogma taught by the Church today. It is important that we continue to study Christian theology, because Paul warns us that "the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear" (2 Tim. 4:3). We see signs of this all around us, both in the many sects with their false teachings, as well as in some of the liberalism that can be found in many churches. Liberals, as their name suggests, want to be free (at liberty) from the teaching of the church to believe what they like. But the Bible gives us no such freedom. Every Christian, but especially those who want to teach in the Christian Church, should take careful note of Paul's word of caution to Titus, "You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine" (Tit. 2:1).

In our study of theology we will look at the dogma of the Christian Church in the light of what the Bible teaches. Our purpose here is to see for ourselves whether this teaching is "sound doctrine", in agreement with Scripture.

In Biblical Theology doctrines are studied not in a systematic order but are studied topically. This method is necessary to know the whole counsel of God in its true redemptive historical way. The topics like the Covenants, Angel of the Lord, the importance of the Temple and Sacrifices are studied as part of Old Testament Theology leading its student to see New Testament Theology and its content such as Kingdom of God and Body of Christ and the eternal bliss. It will be excellent if the Systematic Theology could be studied based on the way of studying doctrines with biblical theology in mind.

Theology can also be studied with a particular interest in mind but such interests do not lead one to the right views about the Counsel of God but rather pleases the motives of the heart of man. Thus Liberation Theology is interested in the plight of poor people. Feminist Theology deals with the place and role of women in church and society, and Black Theology was founded to combat racism. Indian Christian Theology takes more ancient religious view and tries to mingle ancient religious scripts into the

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theological points of the Bible causing false pride of developing something new distinguished as “better” than “Systematic Theology of West.” In each case some people have taken these theologies far further than what can be learned from the Bible. For example.

Another approach to theology is the contextual approach. This seeks to relate the Word of God to the issues of a particular country, region or cultural group. Thus we can speak of Asian theology as an approach that deals with Asian religious concepts and tried to relate to it or question it, such as creation as an extension of one impersonal god; here there are lot of questions that can be asked. Indians can talk about its ancient religious thirst of salvation (Moksha) where we can talk about how God gives salvation and man cannot reach the ultimate and true salvation.

In our introduction to theology we will be dealing with doctrines that are more common to the evangelical churches as a whole. While there is variation on some points of doctrine, Evangelical churches agree on the main doctrines i.e. The Bible, God, Man, Christ, Holy Spirit, Church and Future events. We will begin looking at these doctrines with their traditional titles topically:

- Bibliology: To see why it is important to base our teaching on Scripture.
- Theology Proper: Look at the person and work of God.
- Anthropology: Study of the doctrines of man, of Christ
- Christology: Study of the doctrines of Christ
- Pneumatology and Soteriology: Study of the Holy Spirit and Salvation
- Ecclesiology: Study the nature of the Church and finally
- Eschatology: The doctrine of the last things.

CHAPTER ONE  
**BIBLIOLOGY: KNOW THE WRITTEN WORD OF GOD**

“The testimony of the Spirit is more excellent than all reason. For as God alone is a fit witness of himself in his Word, so also the Word will not find acceptance in men’s hearts before it is sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit.”

Calvin-1.7.4

We being created by God, knowing Him depends solely on how much He has revealed of Himself to His creation. God is personal, which on the human level of understanding means, He has mind, will, emotions, relational ability, and self-consciousness. Therefore we can know Him as much as He has revealed Himself to us in Visible and Invisible creation around us and more clearly in the Word of God, the Holy Bible. So let us look at the creation as a whole and see the revelation of God in the general revelation.

General Revelation:

In general, visible & invisible creation reveals God. And this revelation of God has been given to all people at all times. Psalm 19:1 teaches us that, “the heavens declare the glory of God.” This revelation is found in the external creation.

In internal human experience we read in the book of Romans 1:19–20, “what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature have been clearly understood in a particular way, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.”

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Further general revelation shows attributes of God, such as, his existence, power, creativity, and wisdom; in addition, the testimony of human conscience also provides some evidence of God's moral standards to all human beings.

We read in the book of Romans 2:14–15 “For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them.”

This means that from general revelation all people irrespective of their religion, creeds, ethnicity have knowledge of higher moral being, some of this knowledge gives away glimpses of the characters of a god manifested in and through the overall behavior of people of God. This although does not result into the attitude of repentance before God but rather sin overcomes the conscience of human beings and people suppress the truth of moral requirements and feel guilty deep inside. Therefore we affirm, that the general revelation does not work in human hearts to enable man to understand the knowledge of salvation that the Lord God has accomplished and applied for his creation. Further, it also does not change human heart. On the one hand it gives understanding that God sustains life but It also does not enable man to realize God also loves each individual personally as the Father in heaven who establishes covenant with them.

It will be helpful then, if we understand the word revelation as equivalent to the words “disclosure” or “communication.” There are several avenues through which God has carried out revelatory activity to make available to every human being the knowledge about God. Since it is so widespread and accessible to all it is so it is general disclosure or revelation. It is more objective and yet limited in content and so lacks effectiveness as to change human heart. In other words I would say general revelation still remains creation and it cannot substitute God's power that truly gives salvation to mankind. Where as we will see that the Special revelation is God breathed and in due time comes to man through his chosen men, though influenced with human personalities in its cultural values but pure of divine purpose and much more stronger in changing human heart.

In other words though one may know about God through one's surroundings still it will not be helpful for him/her to be regenerated or to

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be born again. Romans 1:18–21 teaches us, “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. 19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. 21 For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

We read here that what can be known about God is plain to them, God has shown it to them and foolish human hearts are darkened. The darkened human heart is the biggest obstacle to follow God and keep his precepts. In its true sense man is totally corrupt-dead.

The Word of God gives us clear picture that God has revealed himself in the nature around us with the helpful information about God such as he is powerful, he has a purpose and he is creative. This is stressed in Isaiah. 40:26, where we are told that we can perceive His “great power and mighty strength” from the “starry host.”

Gospel according to Matthew 5:45 reminds us that God exercises continual care over humanity and indeed over all the universe. He allows and even supports life for those who are in rebellion against Him, as well as those who love Him. He tells us that He is long-suffering and loves His creation. Colossians 1:17 adds another detail, that the Lord Jesus Christ is holding the universe together. Of course, we cannot discern this from looking at the nature. But we should be able to sense that there is someone behind life who does good things for us, although, admittedly, we are still faced with the problem of evil and catastrophes in the nature.

We do not even need to go beyond ourselves to gain some information about God, for He has given us a certain measure of ability, which is conscience to discern right from wrong. We might not be able to identify this capacity specifically on our own but we read in the book of Romans 2:14–16 our consciences, implanted by God, give us some ability to differentiate among moral and spiritual alternatives.

Finally, it is important for us to realize that these disclosures are available to everyone and they have their limitations. Since, they can only perhaps tell that God exists, or about His personality in some limited ways, or power and purposefulness. But this general revelation does not disclose God's righteousness and His moral attributes. However, the general revelation does give us some encouragement and energy to look further to know more about God. And it certainly puts us in a position where we become responsible to know God. Even the knowledge gained from creation concerning God's power and deity are enough to obligate us to Him as a superior to us.

God did not keep man aloof when it came to revealing himself but rather he has made himself known to man as much as man needed to know Him in order to re-gain the status of man before God. And how that could be understood is the whole truth and should be seen as a special revelation.

#### Special Revelation:

The Bible is the special revelation through which man can see God. It is God-breathed and tells who He is and what He is doing for the redemption of His creation. The written Word is the redemptive historical truth and has the true hope. We need this divine revelation to break our subjective, culturally bound, fallen limitations to love one another and serve God. In place of God, we are not to worship something and someone else but the true and the one Triune God. The Word of God makes us understand how He has made His people righteous & it enables us to grow in His set holiness. It also ministers us effectively to live abundant lives as God intends for us through Christ Jesus.

Dr. Bill Berends says, "The only means by which we can know about God is by way of his revelation. This is because we cannot go to God and study him, the way we would study a human being, or animal, or some other part of God's creation. God is so infinitely far removed from us that we can only know God as he shows himself to us (Job 11:7, 8; 1 Corinthians 2:9, 10)."

Jesus Christ is the visible manifestation of the image of God and only through God's grace man is able to understand this manifestation. In other words, to meet our need of knowing how to get to our Creator, He has told us the way, the truth and the life in more direct way, through the

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medium of a person of Jesus Christ and this is written in the common languages of God's people. This kind of disclosure is special revelation.

It is special, or limited, in that it has taken place on specific occasions with certain people. It partakes of evident supernatural qualities, since it occurs as a kind of intervention into the natural course of things in human existence. It differs from general revelation in that it gives clear information to enable us to know our situation as sinners and effectual doing redemptive act of God for us. While disclosure in nature, conscience, and providence is addressed more to all of us as human beings specifying nothing of our sinful condition or saving grace of God.

Some Christians might criticize this division of revelation and its purpose into two segments. It is certainly true that the words general and special do not appear in the Bible in connection with God's disclosure of Himself. But they are helpful in describing the areas or channels through which God has chosen to reveal Himself. There is no break in the unity of God's revelation—whatever the source may be, the same God is behind it all. But the twofold division speaks of God's desire to communicate to us in diverse ways, an activity of God that should lead us to appreciate Him more, since due to our sinful condition He is under no obligation at all to tell us anything.

God's activity in special revelation has been more diverse, in the book of Hebrews 1:1 we read, "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways...." That shows that there were other channels beyond those of the prophets that God spoke with man. At times God communicated directly as we read in Genesis 17:1 in some kind of appearance John. 1:18 At other times only a voice could be perceived Exodus 3:2ff, where apparently only the burning bush was seen. Although every communication from God to man is a miracle though we would be inclined to view incidents such as the burning bush as more miraculous than God's speaking through Moses to Pharaoh, as described in Exodus 4:12.

The greatest revelation connected with a person is centered on the Lord Jesus Christ. Quite apart from anything He ever said, He Himself was a disclosure by God. Hebrews 1:2 says, "The very fact that God, in the Person of the divine-human being, walked among us, constitutes a giving of information about Him." In fact, John. 1:18 tells us that this revelation, the incarnation itself, is unique, since it somehow tells us more about

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God, and takes us closer into the divine presence than any other communication from God. The reason for this is given in Matthew 11:27: “No one knows the Son, except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father, except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.” Thus, although God Himself spoke to people previously, the constant presence of a divine being, who could be observed rigorously, was the greatest of all disclosures of God. Paul describes this in 1 Timothy 3:16 as “God manifest in the flesh.” Certainly Jesus disclosed God’s nature as a perfect being, since He Himself never sinned. The existence of God was clearly established. And the very obedience of our Lord Jesus Christ, apart from His Words, constituted a lesson concerning the existence of divine will for human beings.

Although the revelation taking us closest to God Himself occurred in the Person of Christ, the most valuable for later generations is the special revelation, which is the Scriptures, the Old and the New Testaments. For, although God spoke and appeared to many, we would have no record of any of it—no trustworthy record, that is—if it were not fixed in a lasting medium. We couldn’t know anything of the previous types of special revelation that we have mentioned if they hadn’t been preserved.

We should remember that the entire Holy Bible is really the revelation, even though some of the content was known previously. Historical and geographical records may have been generally accessible and may even be mentioned outside the Bible in other literatures but their arrangement and inclusion with material that no human being had access to such as the data concerning God and His will certainly amounts to a revelation.

There are some obvious advantages of Scripture over the other forms of specific revelations. To begin with, the written text preserved messages originally given orally or in writing; they could easily have been lost over the years during transmission. But God the Holy Spirit preserved the entire needful information over the period of long time and got it into the written form. Moses wasn’t present at the time of act of Creation, and yet was able to write the fact.

Written revelation also has the advantage of being transportable. In fact, God has made taking Scripture with us anywhere quite easy due to ready access to writing materials and the ability to translate, advancements that were both in place during and before Abraham’s time. Because the Bible can be brought to people who are in diverse locations and removed in

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time from those who experienced God directly as recorded in the Bible, individuals in every generation around the world become responsible to it. If we only heard about some message that God had given to people many years ago in a distant place, we might not feel it was worth investigating, and might not even be able to go and check on it even if we wanted to. But the grace of God has made the Bible accessible to many different language groups, societies, communities and generations. The fact that in any generation, including the present one, there are many around the world who do not have the Bible in their own languages should lead us to be more involved in translating and publishing this precious revelation.

God the Holy Spirit the Agent of Revelation:

The Bible is quite clear in teaching that the Holy Spirit of God is the agent of revelation, as described in Acts 1:16 “Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus.” David, who is listed as the human author of Psalms 69 and 109, could not have spoken about Judas ahead of time, since he could not have known about his life and existence at all. But God knew it perfectly, and revealed to David what he could not know himself. Whether or not David understood what the Spirit was leading him to write is another matter.

In 2 Peter 1:21 this work of the Spirit is described as “carrying along” the prophets of the Old Testament. That the human authors participated intelligently is clear from the many biblical indications of their emotions, desires, etc., indicated in their writings. But it is also quite clear that the Spirit of God used them as channels for the message exactly as He intended it to be given through them. To be sure, there are limits to special revelation (whether it is a dream or vision, or Scripture itself) as there are to general revelation.

Deuteronomy 29:29 reminds us that God has not told us everything that can be known about Himself, “The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children.” There are many things we would like to know, and probably many things we would not understand, that God in His wisdom has kept closed to us. But we are responsible for what we do have, for it is what we need for pleasing God. “All Scripture is Godbreathed and useful... so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work ” 2 Timothy 3:16–17. Although special revelation has been given in stages, so that each new

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disclosure adds more to the picture, we are obligated to attempt to get the most from the whole written message and obey what we find.

Comparison of General and Special Revelation:

<u>General Revelation:</u>	<u>Special Revelation:</u>
<p>General Revelation comes to man through His creation and in God's caring we see him as we read in the book of Acts. 14:17, "Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness." In the book of Romans 1:20 we read, "For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse."</p> <p>In General Revelation God makes man aware of His moral Law. Romans 2:14-15 says, "For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. 15 They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them" But this knowledge of the law leaves man still satisfied with his own morals.</p> <p>Further we read in Romans 1:32, "Though they know God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them."</p>	<p>Special Revelation comes to us primarily in the written Word of God. We have clearer picture of God and His act of salvation in the Scriptures. We read in Hebrews 1:1,2 "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, 2 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."</p> <p>In Christ we see exact representation of God, Hebrews 1:3a says, "He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature..." For us God has demonstrates His love in Christ, Romans 5:8 says, "but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." John 3:16 tells us, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."</p> <p>Through the Special Revelation God makes man aware that man falls short of God's glory but also reveals how man can live in the ways that please God. Paul says in Romans 7:7, "What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not</p>

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It also makes people long for God, Acts 17:27 says, “that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us.” But human sinfulness perverts this pull of nature towards God as we read in Romans 1:22-25 “Claiming to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. 24 Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, 25 because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.” Further we read in Ephesians 4:18, “They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.”

In sharing good-news with people God’s caring love for His creation can be seen as point of connecting to the people in the evangelical mission relationship. The Word of God gives us account of how Paul addressed people in Athens, “So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. 23 For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you” (Acts 17:22-23).

said, “You shall not covet.”

God’s children desire obedience when the special revelation is given Psalm 119:24 says, “Your testimonies are my delight; they are my counselors.” Further we find Paul talking in II Timothy 3:16 concerning the written word of God, he says, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.”

Special Revelation gives clear statement to us on the way of salvation through the cross of Christ we read that in II Timothy 3:15, “and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.”

### **The Special Revelation came to man in various ways:**

#### **Theophanies:**

This word, Theophany, comes from an ancient Greek word ‘theophaneia’ meaning "appearance of God." It refers to the appearance of a deity to a human, or to a divine disclosure. We read in the Bible God appeared to man as fire in Genesis 15:17 and in Exodus 3:2; as stormy winds in Job 38:1, Psalm 18:10-16 we see big list of things that God appeared through. Zephyr that is “sound of a low whisper” also seen in the book of I Kings 19:12 and as the Angel of the Lord in Exodus 23:20-23. The word angel means “messenger” and we believe this messenger was really the divine Word (John 1:1) who later came as Jesus Malachi 3:1 “Behold, I send my messenger and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts.” and in the Revelation 19:13 we read, “... and the name by which he is called is The Word of God.”

#### **Direct Communication:**

God also spoke with very clear audible voices, dreams, and visions as well as in the person of Jesus Christ. Take time to read following references: God spoke with Adam (Genesis 2:16), with Noah (Genesis 9:1), with Jacob (Genesis 32:26) and in Exodus 19:9, Numbers 27:18 with Moses. Also with people of through Samuel in I Samuel 10:22, God also commissioned Isaiah (21:6) and dreams and visions to Daniel (1:17) and finally we have Hebrews 1:2 that God in these lasts days speaks with us through his son, God declared the salvation to us says Hebrews 2:3.

#### **Miracles:**

God often revealed himself to Israel and the Church through miracles. The Bible uses three words to indicate miracles, usually translated as, sign, wonder and power. God said he gave signs to Israel in order that “they will know that I am the Lord and that they are my people” Exodus 6:6-7. Miracles were also done by the apostles to reveal God’s amazing power (John 2:11; 20:30-31; 2 Corinthians 12:12; Acts 15:12). Similarly the signs Jesus performed were proof of his divine appointment (Acts 2:22).

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#### Scripture:

For us today God's special revelation has been written up in the Bible. Here we have God's revelation to Israel and to the early Church recorded for all time. Not everything God and his Son have said and done is recorded in Scripture (John 20:30; 21:25). But as John tells us, what has been written is recorded in order that you might believe and "by believing you may have life in his name" (20:31). This clearly reveals the purpose of the God's written revelation; it is to bring the reader of God's Word to faith and eternal life.

There are aspects that we need to understand by which we know that the Holy Bible is the Word of God, namely Inspiration and inerrancy.

#### Inspiration:

The process by which God's special revelation was put in the Bible is known as *inscripturation*. When we speak of God's special revelation being *inscripturated* it means that the Bible itself is God's revelation. Although the Bible is a record of what the various Bible authors have heard and observed (Habakkuk 2:2; 1 John 1:1), these authors were themselves inspired in such a way that what they recorded became the Word of God. Paul writes to Timothy that "All Scripture is God-breathed" (or "inspired," 2 Timothy 3:16). Elsewhere Paul identifies his proclamation to the Corinthians as "words taught by the Spirit," and later he writes them, "Christ is speaking through me" (1 Corinthians 2:13; 2 Corinthians 13:3). Writing to the Thessalonians Paul commends them for accepting his words as "the word of God" (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

Inspiration was also the way by which God spoke through the Old Testament prophets, so that they could proclaim: "Thus says the LORD" and "The word of the LORD came to me" (e.g. Ezekiel 25:1, 3, 6, 8, 12, 13, 15). They also wrote at the direct command of God "The LORD said write..." (Exodus 17:14; Isaiah 8:1; Daniel 12:4). Christ and his apostles clearly regarded the writings of the prophets and other Old Testament authors as the Word of God (Matthew 15:4; Hebrews 3:7, 1 Peter 1:11, etc.). Peter characterizes all of Scripture when he writes, "For no

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prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit ” (2 Pet. 1:21).

The doctrine of inspiration does not mean that God used the Bible authors in much the same way that a modern author uses a typewriter or word processor. This view, called mechanical inspiration, regards the authors were mere passive instruments in the writing of their books. While this view recognizes the divine origin of God’s Word, it does not take into account the fact that all the Bible authors show abilities other than their writing skills. David was a poet, Solomon was a sage (philosopher), Luke a historian, and Paul a theologian. These abilities are clearly reflected in some of their books. Every author has his own style of writing, and often their very personalities are reflected in what they write.

A second view, called dynamic inspiration, holds that it was the authors, but not their books, that were inspired. This position makes them look at the Bible as a book containing errors and mistakes. Those who hold this view readily depart from the teaching of the Bible. Thus they may argue that today we need not agree with Paul’s condemnation of homosexuality (Romans 1:26, 27) because the book was written in a different time. They go on to argue that, since we live nearly 2000 years later, we know more about homosexuality than the Bible.

The position defended by most Evangelicals is that of organic inspiration. This view holds that each Bible book reflects the character, style, gifts and cultural context of its human author. At the same time it believes that every Bible book is fully inspired, in the sense that God’s Spirit led the human authors to write in such a way that the resulting text can be fully identified as the Word of God. It is God speaking to us in the words of men.

The fact that the Bible is inspired is also what makes the book authoritative. Like Christ, we must hold the Scriptures in high esteem. Christ repeatedly cites the Old Testament as stating God’s will for man. Christ tells us his own words are a fulfillment, and not a replacement of the Old Testament teachings (Matthew 5:17). He taught that not a “not an iota, not a dot,” (the smallest characters in Hebrew writings) would disappear from the law until all was fulfilled (Matthew 5:18). He also told us “Scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35).

When the Roman Church began to deny the authority of Scripture and replace it with the authority of the Pope and the Roman Church, the Reformers responded by formulating the doctrine of the perfections of Scripture. These perfections are the sufficiency, clarity and necessity of Scripture. By this they meant that the Scriptures are sufficient to lead us to Christ, that they are clear enough for everyone to understand the main teachings without the help of a priest, and that we need them to grow in faith. The Roman Catholic Church of those days denied all of these. They allowed only priests to read Bibles because they said the book would lead untrained people astray.

Today the doctrine of the necessity of Scripture is denied in some Pentecostal churches, which teach that people do not need the Bible when they are led by the Holy Spirit. We do indeed need to be led by the Spirit, but the work of the Spirit is to help us understand God's Word, not to replace it. This role of the Holy Spirit is called illumination (Psalm 143:10; Colossians 1:9; the word illumination means "to shine upon" or "to make clear"). The Holy Spirit does not add to the Words of Scripture, but explains them. He has been sent to point us to Christ of the Word of God, let us read John 1:1 "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." and 15:26 "But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me."

The doctrine of Holy Scripture is one of the key doctrines of the Bible. It governs the Christian's approach to all other doctrines. As we continue to study the doctrines of the Bible we will do so on the basis of the Evangelical view of Scripture defended in this chapter.

#### Inerrancy:

"Inerrancy" refers to a text that is considered accurate, truthful, and totally free of error. Any text that contains mistakes is errant. So the inerrancy of the Word of God, the Bible is an important matter. In 1977, the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy (ICBI) was established to "clarify and defend the doctrine of biblical inerrancy." Under its auspices, during 1978, over 300 evangelical scholars met and signed the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy. The Dallas Theological Seminary describes the statement as "... probably the first systematically comprehensive, broadly based, scholarly, creed-like statement on the inspiration and authority of Scripture in the history of the church." But I

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want to state what the Bible says about its own inerrancy. Let us read some scripture passages.

Psalm 12:6:

"The words of the Lord are pure words, like silver refined in a furnace on the ground, purified seven times."

Psalm 119:89:

"Forever, O Lord, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens."

Proverbs 30:5-6:

" Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. Do not add to his words,  
lest he rebuke you and you be found a liar."

Matthew 5:18:

"For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished."

An iota is the Greek letter "i" - the smallest letter in the alphabet; a dot is a small mark used to aid in reading ancient Hebrew. This statement would seem to imply that the Mosaic Law, given in the Hebrew Scriptures, was correct and valid during Jesus' ministry on earth. That is, the Law was inerrant; there was no justification for any deletions to the law. Further we read that speaking of the apostles was guided by the Spirit and God the Father spoke through them which tells us that those words later were written and were inerrant.

Matthew 10:19-20: "When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. 20 For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you." Also read Mark 13:11; Luke 12:11-12; Luke 21:14-15; John 16:13; Acts 1:8; and 1 Corinthians 2:12-13. In the book of Revelation 22:18 we read a warning, John talks about his writings but it also implies the whole of the Bible in its textual redemptive historical link. Let's read it, "I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, 19 and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book."

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CHAPTER TWO  
**PROPER THEOLOGY: KNOW GOD TO LOVE**

“Great is the LORD and most worthy of  
praise; his greatness no one can fathom.”

Psalm 145:3

It's not so hard outwardly to find religious people, they are all over. In many parts of the world people recognize a High God. Sometimes non-Christian ideas of that High God are so different compare to the Bible that those ideas cannot be identified with the God of the Scripture. But at other times one might notice in his/her local areas an idea of the High God is so close to the biblical picture of God that missionaries have simply used those local ideas or names for biblical God in their preachings.

It should not surprise us that people have ideas about God, because all nations are descended from Adam and Eve, to whom God first revealed himself (Acts 17:26). Moreover, as we have learned, all people can observe God in the General Revelation and in the providence (Romans 1:19-21; Acts 14:17). But knowing about God is not the same as what the Bible calls “knowing God”. Here knowing God points to a relationship. In the Old Testament the word know is used for intimate personal fellowship, for example between a man and his wife (Genesis 4:1, 17, 25, etc.). It is also used for a relationship with God (eg. Jeremiah 31:34; 2:8; 4:22). Such a relationship can only exist where God reveals his word. Thus we read of the boy Samuel, “Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD: The word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him” (1 Samuel 3:7).

God's special revelation is the only source for an accurate knowledge of him, and that makes it possible for man to have a personal relationship

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with God. In the New Testament we find the same truth brought out in the story where Philip asks Jesus to show them the Father. Jesus answers in John 14:9-11, “Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’ 10 Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. 11 Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.” Here Jesus firmly identifies “knowing” him, and “knowing” the Father, with believing in him. Without faith, in response to God’s special revelation, there can be no real “knowledge” of God (cf. John 10:14; Galatians 4:9; Hebrews 8:11).

In an earlier chapter we saw that God’s power and deity can also be seen in the works of creation and providence, or general revelation. But without the help of special revelation man tends to suppress the knowledge of God. While refusing to honor and give thanks to God they will turn to the created order and worship the things that God has made (Romans 1:20-25; Ephesians 4:18; cf. Psalms 53:1-6). This sinful tendency of man to suppress the truth about God has given rise to the following false beliefs:

**Atheism:** The belief that there is no God. Many think this is a modern viewpoint, but the Bible tells that it is very old human tendency, Psalms 14:1 says, “The fool says in his heart, “There is no God.”

**Agnosticism:** The belief that teaches existence of God cannot be known, because even if such a spiritual being existed we would have no way to prove it.

**Pantheism:** The belief that the entire universe is God, that God and creation are one. This is the position of most Eastern religions.

**Deism:** The view that teaches God created the world, but left it to its own built-in laws. This view was popular in the 18th century Europe. We find a similar position among those traditional religions that recognize the Creator God but think he is too far away to be worshipped. These religions usually hold to one of the two following positions:

**Polytheism:** The belief that there are many gods who deserve to be worshipped (cf. Judges 10:6; Acts 14:11-12). Polytheism is frequently associated with idolatry (cf. Acts 17:16).

Animism: The belief that a large part of this world is controlled by the spirits and these spirits must be consulted in everyday affairs rather than God.

These errors in man's interpretation of God's general revelation show the need for special revelation to teach us about the nature of God. The Bible reveals us many things about the nature of God, especially in the divine names.

Here we may note the following Old Testament names

El and Elohim, were the common words for God.

Shaddai, or El-Shaddai, used by the patriarchs, emphasized God's power to help in time of need.

Elyon and Adonai point to the majesty of God. The name Adonai is really a title, usually translated "Lord," it showed God is the ruler of all men.

Elyon is often translated as "the Most High God" (Genesis 14:19).

Yahweh was revealed to Moses as God's covenant name (Exodus 3:13, 14). It means "I am that I am", and showed that God is unchanging and reliable and forever true to his covenant. Later the Jews used the title Adonai instead of the name Yahweh, for fear of using God's name in vain and incorrectly.

The Greek word Kurios was the New Testament translation for the covenant name, Yahweh. Like the name Adonai it really means "Lord". Jesus was also called "Lord", which showed that Christians identified him with Yahweh God (cf. John 20:28; 1 Corinthians 12:3). Believers are also encouraged to call God Father. In a general sense is called the Father of all people, because he is their Creator (Deuteronomy 32:6; Ephesians 3:14). But in a special, covenant sense he was the Father of Israel (Isaiah 63:16; cf. 1:2), or in the New Testament, the Father of all believers (Matthew 6:1,9). After knowing all these names a thought comes to our mind "what is this God like?"

What is God like?

Besides what is revealed in the names the Bible also reveals other characteristics of God. These characteristics are usually called the divine

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attributes. Some of these attributes are found in a weaker form in human beings made in the likeness of God. Others belong to God alone.

Attributes that belong to God alone:

God is spirit, and has no physical body (John 4:24).

God is infinitely perfect. Some modern scholars picture God as less than perfect, in order to try and explain the presence of evil. But the Bible pictures God as unlimited in his perfections (e.g. Exodus 15:11, Psalms 96:4-6; Jeremiah 23:24).

God is Independent and self-existent. By this we mean that God does not depend on anything outside himself. This is clearly implied by the fact that all things depend only on him (Psalms 84:8ff.; Isaiah 40:18ff.; Acts 17:25; cf. 1 Corinthians 15:27-28).

God is immutable (unchangeable). This attribute emphasizes the fact that we can always depend on God, because he will also be true to himself and his promises (Psalms 102:27; Malachi 3:6; James 1:17).

God is eternal, he is without beginning and without end (Psalms 90:2; 1 Timothy 1:17).

God is immanent and transcendent, by which we mean he is in this world, but also exists outside of it. These two qualities are sometimes referred to as the immensity of God (1 Kings 8:27; Isaiah 66:1; Psalms 139:7-10; Acts 7:48-49). Another way of stating God's universal presence is to say he is omnipresent.

God is omniscient. God know everything, there is nothing he does not know (1 Kings 8:39; Psalms 139:1-16; Acts 15:18; John 21:17; Hebrews 4:13).

God is omnipotent. This means he is all-powerful. Nothing is impossible for God (cf. Genesis 18:14; Jeremiah 32:27; Matthew 3:9; 26:53).

God is sovereign. This means that nothing happens without the will of God (Job 42:2; Matthew 10:29; cf. Matthew 19:26). On the basis of Deuteronomy 29:29 a distinction is sometimes made between the secret and revealed will of God. The secret will of God refers to his plan or decrees, which will come to pass no matter what man does (cf. Psalms 115:3; Romans 9:18-19; Ephesians 1:5,9,11). The revealed will of God refers to his laws and rules for mankind, and requires the obedience of man (cf. Matthew 7:21; 12:15; Romans 12:2).

Attributes that are shared by man in a weaker form:

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God is personal, he is not a thing. Man's personality is a reflection of the divine personality (cf. Genesis 1:26-27).

God is wise. By the wisdom of God is meant that he can choose the best means to achieve his purpose (Romans 11:33; 14:7,8; Ephesians 1:11-12; Colossians 1:16).

God is good. In his goodness God deals generously and kindly with all creation (Psalms 36:6; 104:21; Matthew 5:45; 6:26; Acts 14:17).

God is love. While this attribute is similar to his goodness, it speaks especially of God's delight in himself and man, the creature made in his image. God's love is shown in his grace, his unmerited love shown towards sinners (Romans 5:8; Ephesians 2:4; 1:6-7; 2:7-9), his mercy, or tender compassion for those who are in distress (Luke 1:54, 72, 18; Romans 9:15; Ephesians 2:4), and his longsuffering (Romans 2:4; 9:22; 1 Peter 3:20; 2 Peter 3:15).

God is holy. By the holiness of God we mean that he is removed from all that is evil (Exodus 15:11; 1 Samuel 2:2; Job. 34:10; Isaiah 6:5; 57:15).

God is righteous. By his righteousness God maintains justice and protects himself against any violation of his holiness (Psalms 7:11; 119:137).

God is truth. God is true to himself and true to the promises made to his creatures. This is also called God's faithfulness (Numbers 23:19; 1 Corinthians 1:9; 2 Timothy 2:13; Hebrews 6:17).

### The Trinity

One of the mysteries about God is that He is One, but also Three: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Jews confessed "The Lord your God is one" (Deuteronomy 6:6). This can also be translated "the Lord your God is the only God" or "the Lord your God is a unity." Certainly, the Old Testament gives us many hints that God is more than a single personality. Already in the opening chapter we read of God's Spirit (Genesis 1:2), and God speaks of himself as "we" and "us" (Genesis 1:26).

It is difficult to give a good example of what the Trinity is like. Sometimes it is likened to the three dimensions (height width and depth) or the human family (father mother and child), or steam, water and ice, but such examples are at the same time misleading and open to misunderstandings. The doctrine of the Trinity can only be perceived by a careful reading of

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the Bible looking especially the New Testament and Old Testament in the sense of they explaining each other.

The Bible itself nowhere gives us a definition of the Trinity. It is widely agreed that 1 John 5:7, as found in the King James Version, is not found in any of the Greek Bibles as written by the apostles. At the same time mention of the three divine persons is found throughout the New Testament, and is clearly expressed in the baptismal formula taught by Christ and the apostolic benediction (Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14).

All Christian churches that hold to the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds uphold the doctrine of the Trinity. The first simply mentions our faith in each of the three persons of the Trinity. The Nicene Creed says more, it states that each of the three persons are equal in their being, but have different tasks.

The doctrine of the Trinity holds that God is one being, but that in this being there are three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These three have their own personalities, which are in perfect fellowship with one another (John 17:21). Their fellowship can be seen in that they speak to, pray to, send, glorify and love one another (Luke 3:22; John 3:35; 16:14, 26; 17:1).

There are many passages where each of the three persons of the Trinity is mentioned (Matthew 3:16-17; Luke 3:22; John 1:32-34; 3:34-35; 14:16-17; Acts 1:4-5; 2:33; 10:38; Romans 1:3-4; 8:26-29; 1 Corinthians 12:3-6; 2 Corinthians 1:21-22; Galatians 4:4-6; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14; Titus 3:5-6; Hebrews 9:14; 1 Peter 1:2; 3:18; 1 John 5:5-6). One of the clearest is where the Spirit descends on Jesus at his baptism, while from the heavens the Father announces Jesus to be his beloved Son (Luke 3:22). The passages where two of the three persons of the Trinity are mentioned together are too numerous to list.

Within the Trinity each person also has his own role to play. The Father is usually presented as the Creator and Provider, as well as the author of the plan of salvation. (1 Corinthians 8:6; Ephesians 3:14-15; James 1:17). The Son is presented as the one who carries out the will of his Father, both in the works of creation and salvation (John 1:3, 10; Hebrews 1:2, 3; Ephesians 1:3-14). The Holy Spirit is presented as the one who gives

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physical as well as spiritual life (Genesis 6:3; cf. Genesis 2:7; John 3:5-8), and who continues to guide the Church in the absence of Christ (John 14:26; 16:13-14; 1 Corinthians 2:13; 1 Corinthians 3:16).

The doctrine of the Trinity has been denied by Jews, Muslims, Unitarians, many liberals, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Jesus Only movement, and various other sects.

In few words we can make the following statement on the doctrine of Trinity:

The Father is not the Son or the Holy Spirit – But the Father is God

The Son is not the Father or the Holy Spirit – But the Son is God

The Holy Spirit is not the Son or the Father – But the Holy Spirit is God

#### The Works of God

The works of God could be divided up into two parts, Creation and Providence. The first, Creation, is complete, while the second, Providence, is still going on today. Some people do not distinguish between these two. This is true for those who explain creation in terms of evolution. Since they see creation as something that is still in progress to be complete someday, it is hard for them to say where creation would end as well as no idea when the providence would began. Also this view does not believe there ever was a time when the world was “very good” and without sin. This implies that man was not created perfect, but that God created man as a sinner. It therefore is difficult for those who hold this view to explain why God should blame man for his sin, or why man should need salvation.

#### Creation

The Bible is clear that creation is something that happened “in the beginning” (Genesis 1:1). At that time God made the world out of nothing (Psalms 33:9; 148:5). This is something we can only accept in faith: “By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible” Hebrews 11:3. The formation of the world out of nothing is often called primary creation.

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Once the world was created God began to give shape to it. He divided the light from the darkness, the sky from the seas below, and the dry land from the water. He then made the light-bearers to give the light, the birds and the fish to inhabit the sky and sea, and animals and men to live on the dry land. This shaping of the world is often called secondary creation.

The purpose of creation is much debated. Those who hold to evolution often say it is a matter of chance. Many other religions see man himself as the final end of creation, and for this reason they feel free to spoil and abuse creation for their own selfish purpose. Others say creation is an end in itself, because creation is God (pantheism). People who hold this view are more careful with creation, but are often less caring for their fellow men. The Bible makes it clear that the purpose of creation is the glory of God, especially in the person of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:5-12; cf. Isaiah 43:7; Romans 11:36; 1 Corinthians 15:28; Colossians 1:16). Man can enjoy God's creation, and is given the task to look after it (Genesis 2:15).

The Bible teaches that God created the universe out of his own good pleasure (Revelation 4:11; Ephesians 1:4-12; 3:9-11). In these last passages, we observe that, from the beginning, God had a design whereby creation would lead to the gathering of a people in Christ. This design or eternal plan of God is called the divine decrees (cf. Psalms 33:9-11; Proverbs 19:21; Isaiah 14:26-27; Acts 2:23). Most of the contents of the divine decrees coincide with what we earlier identified as "the secret will" of God (Deuteronomy 29:29).

The creation story in Genesis is not a scientific account of the origin of the world, and there are many things it does not explain. It does not tell us, for example, when God created the angels, or when he put the laws of science into the world. It is not the purpose of the creation story to explain everything, but to let us know that everything was made by God, and that it was made "very good", without sin (Genesis 1:31). Close observation tells us that God did not give a comment saying "good" to the Second Day of creation but over all at the end he calls everything very good. The Septuagint, a Greek Translation of the Old Testament mentions words "God saw, it was good" but the Hebrew Bible –Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia does not use the words 'Ki Tob' "good" for second day. This can help us to speculate that God in His foreknowledge knew that the firmaments (heavenly realms, the expanse "Sky") will be

used by God to temporarily locate or store spiritual forces who are against Him there (Eph 6:12d).

#### Providence

The term providence refers both to God's care and to His rule over the entire universe. Many of the Psalms praise God's care for mankind as well as the animal and plant world (Psalms 104; 33:10-17; 47:8; 65:5-13; 103:5,19). Others sing over the nations of his rule in justice and righteousness (Psalms 2; 9:7; 47:8; 93:1).

Most traditional religions recognize God as the source of the blessings needed for daily life, even though they may pray to other, smaller so called gods. But during evangelism, it is usually possible to refer to God's providence in order to establish a point of contact, as Paul did (Acts 14:15-17; 17:24-28). We can talk about God's sovereign rule over creation knowing that there are people who do not accept such teaching since they may not have chance to listen to such a teaching. Some religions would rather stress man's freedom and ability to create blessing for himself.

The matter of man's freedom is dealt with in every religion. Some, such as Islam, recognize almost no freedom, and teach that everything is determined by God. This is called fatalism. Other religions stress man's free will, for example religions based on magic and witchcraft. The Bible stresses both, man's responsibility and divine sovereignty. One example is found in Genesis 50:20, where Joseph blames his brothers for their sin, but recognizes that it was nevertheless God's will that they sold him as a slave. A more important example is found in Acts 2:23 and 4:27,28, where we read that man was to be blamed for the crucifixion of Christ, but that it was also God's will that this should happen. Lets read Acts 4:27-28, "for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place." This doctrine of God's sovereignty is a great comfort to Christians, especially in times of distress and evangelism. It is because Paul believed that God was sovereign that he could write, "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose" Romans 8:28.

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In God's providence we are having our being, we read in Acts 17:26, 27,28, "And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for in him we live and move and have our being'."

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CHAPTER THREE  
**ANTHROPOLOGY: UNDERSTAND TRUE HUMANITY**

“One generation will commend your works to another; they will tell of your mighty acts.”

Psalm 145:4

“What is man, that you are mindful of him?” asks the psalmist in Psalms 8:4. What sets man apart as a creature is that he is created in the image of God. As God’s image bearer man is both a part of, and apart from the created order. Man is given the task to rule over his fellow creatures as the representative of God (Genesis 1:26,28), yet he shares his environment and nourishment with the birds and animals (Genesis 1:29-30).

There is some disagreement on exact meaning of the divine image. On the basis of Genesis 1:26, some believe God’s image is reflected in those natural characteristics of man that allows him to rule over the rest of creation, including man’s ability to reason. Others see the image reflected in man’s spiritual qualities. They point to passages like Ephesians 4:24 and Colossians 3:10, which speak of the renewal of the believer in the image of his Creator, in righteousness, holiness and knowledge. These three together are often called man’s original righteousness.

We must accept that the divine image expresses both natural and spiritual aspects. We call the first the image in the wider sense and the second the image in the narrower sense. The divine image in the wider sense refers to those natural qualities that made man superior to other creatures. These aspects of the divine image were not lost with Adam’s fall, but twisted and spoiled. For example, man still has intelligence, but makes many mistakes. In this wider sense man can still be called the image bearer of God (Read Genesis 9:6; James 3:9). The divine image in the narrower sense, man’s

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original righteousness, was totally lost through the fall. The full divine image in man can only be restored in Christ (Ephesians 4:24, Colossians 3:10).

However people understand the divine image, there is general agreement the divine image can be seen in three relationships.

Man's relationship to his Creator  
His relationship to his fellow man, and  
His relationship to the rest of creation.

Man's relationship to Creator God was broken by the fall into sin. Without righteousness and holiness man no longer had "knowledge of" (fellowship with) God. That is why we need Jesus Christ, who will give us new righteousness, holiness and knowledge (Ephesians 4:24, Colossians 3:10).

Man's relationship to his fellow man was not lost, but became twisted and distorted. We see that after their sin Adam and Eve became ashamed of their nakedness, and begin to blame one another (Genesis 3:7, 17). Some time later Cain murders his brother Abel (Genesis 4). We still see the results of Adam's sins today. We also see the results of sin in man's relationship to the rest of creation. Instead of ruling over God's creation to the glory of God (Genesis 1:26, 28), caring for it and guarding it (Genesis 2:15), man began to exploit nature for his own glory. During many years of abuse many animal species have been wiped out, and the riches of the earth have been harvested without any concern for the environment.

The divine image in man is also reflected in the way man is made. Man alone, of all the creatures, has his body and spirit directly from God (Genesis 2:7; 21-22; cf. 6:3). While God himself has no body, man's upright posture is symbolic of his status in the created order. Man's spirit, too, reflects the personality of God, so that he can mirror such divine attributes as wisdom, goodness, love and mercy.

The exact relationship between the body and spirit is another mystery that man cannot define. In Genesis 2:7 we see that God gives man both a

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body, and a spirit or soul (Matthew 10:28; 1 Corinthians 5:5). We do not understand how the spirit, or soul, is joined to the body. Nor do we understand when the two are joined. Some Christians believe that human souls develop in the womb along with the body, while others hold the view that some time after conception God directly implants a new spirit into each human baby (cf. Ecclesiastes 12:7; Isaiah 42:5; Zechariah 12:1). We must confess the Bible does not give a clear answer here, and it is possible that neither position gives an accurate picture of how God makes man. We must, however, reject the teaching of re-incarnation taught by Eastern religions. Re-incarnation is the view that a spirit will come back in a new animal or human body each time the old body dies. And the selection of body of animal or human depends on the good or bad works, and the cast someone comes from. But the Bible does not teach us that the spirits change into various bodies, rather the Bible teaches that there is one life and one death that leads on to eternal Life or eternal Death.

#### Man, the Slave of Sin.

The Bible does not explain the origin of evil; it only tells us how sin entered into the world through the disobedience of Adam. Today a popular theory with liberal scholars is that man's sinfulness has its origin in the evolution of man from animal forebears. This theory is difficult to square with the Bible's teaching that man was created good, and that man is himself responsible for his fall into sin (Genesis 1:31; Romans 5:12).

From the story of the fall we learn that evil was already present in the spirit world before Adam sinned. Satan, appearing in the form of a serpent, who persuaded Adam and Eve to disobey God's direct command that they should not eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil (Genesis 3:1-19). By taking the fruit Adam and Eve showed that they wanted to decide what was good and evil themselves, instead of leaving it up to God (cf. vv. 5, 22). By this one sinful act Adam and Eve lost their original innocence, and were no longer counted worthy to live in God's presence in paradise (v. 23).

Through that first sin of Adam man lost his original righteousness, holiness and knowledge of God (cf. Ephesians 4:24, Colossians 3:10 again). The relationship between God and man was broken, because God's holiness did not allow for a direct fellowship with man in his state of sin. Adam and Eve were instantly aware of their changed status before

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God, so that they hid themselves in fear and shame (Genesis 3:8,10). In God's sight man had become both guilty and polluted (Rom. 5:18-19).

The doctrine of original sin is a central biblical doctrine, but it has frequently been denied. Many prefer to believe in the basic goodness of man, and argued that there is no connection between the sin of Adam and that of his children. Some argue that Adam did no more than give a bad example to his children. Others say that man inherited only Adam's sinfulness, (pollution), but not his guilt. However, the Bible teaches that both Adam's pollution and his guilt are present with all mankind. Hence all people, even babies, suffer the punishment for sin, which is death (Genesis 2:17; Romans 6:23).

Three different explanations have been given to account for the connection between the sin of Adam and the sinfulness of his descendants. One explanation holds that all men were numerically present in Adam, meaning that they were present in his seed. However if this were so, we would be guilty of all the sins of all our forefathers, which is not the case. Another explanation holds that man inherits only the corruption, but not the guilt of Adam, and that man is guilty only on account of his own sinfulness. This may sound reasonable, but it would not explain why some babies die before they are old enough to sin.

The Bible gives another answer, which we call the theory of federal imputation. This answer recognizes that Adam was not only the father of the human race, but also its federal head or representative. Here we may use the example of a country's Head of State (a President or Prime Minister). Adam represented every human being on earth in much the same way that a Head of State represents every citizen of his country. When he borrows money for the country he does this on behalf of all its citizens, including those not yet born. All citizens are responsible for repaying this debt. In the same way when Adam sinned he incurred a moral debt (guilt) for all mankind, because he represented all mankind. One passage where this is clearly taught is Romans 5:12-19. Here we read that in the same way that Adam was the federal head of all those born of him, Christ is the federal head of all those who are born again.

Here we should also note that only the teaching of federal imputation explains how Jesus was born without the guilt and pollution of Adam. In the Bible a person's inheritance, including his family or national identity, is always traced through the father. Jesus inherited his righteousness from

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his heavenly father. This righteous Christ then became the representative of those who believe in him. When Jesus faced the Tempter in the wilderness he resisted the temptations on their behalf. And when Christ dies on the cross he suffered the punishment of sin on their behalf.

Two terms that are often used to describe man's state of sinfulness are total depravity and total inability. The doctrine of total depravity does not mean to say that man is as bad as he could possibly be. Rather it means that there is nothing good in man in God's sight. Here we may use the example of a glass of water that has been polluted with a powerful poison. It does not matter how much poison is added, because even a single drop of poison will make all of the water unfit to drink. In the same way even one sin makes man dirty before God (see James 2:10). This same example also explains the doctrine of total inability. Just as the poisoned water cannot be used to quench one's thirst, so man's polluted deeds are unable to please God. These doctrines are clearly taught in passages like John 8:34; 15:4,5; Romans 7:18-24; 8:6-8; Ephesians 2:1, 8-10; 4:18; Hebrews 11:6.

Apart from Jesus Christ, who inherited his Father's righteousness, there is no human being who escapes the pollution from sin. Man is sinful from birth (Psalms 51:5; Job 14:4; John 3:6), so that even infants can suffer the penalty of death (cf. Romans 5:12-14). All men are by nature slaves to sin (John 8:34). It is because of the universality of sin this that every man needs forgiveness in Christ (John 3:3, 5; Ephesians 2:3; 1 John 5:12).

CHAPTER FOUR  
**CHRISTOLOGY: KNOWING AND LOVING CHRIST**

“Had the very majesty of God not descended to us, since it was not in our power to ascend to him.”

Calvin-2.12.1

The Scriptures call Christ by many names. Included here are the names: Jesus (Matthew 1:21), Immanuel (Matthew 1:23), the Son of God (Luke 1:35), the Son of Man (Matthew 8:20), the Man of Sorrows (Isaiah 53:3), the Branch (Zechariah 3:8), the Messiah or Christ (John 1:41), and the Lord (Acts 2:36). Other titles could also be considered as names, such as servant, mediator, prophet, priest and king, and in some Bible versions these are printed as names, with an initial capital letter.

The name Jesus is the Greek form of the Hebrew Joshua, a word for “salvation” (cf. Matthew 1:21). We are reminded of the two Joshua(s) in the Old Testament, who are clearly types of Christ. A type foreshadows a greater one to come. When Joshua led God’s people into the Promised Land, he showed how Christ would lead his people to heaven (Joshua 1:1). And when later another Joshua, a High Priest, atoned for the sins of the returned exiles he showed how Christ would atone for the people who returned to God (Zechariah 3:1ff.). When Joseph is informed of Mary’s pregnancy he is told to name the baby Jesus. The birth is a fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy of a virgin birth (Isaiah 7:14). In this prophecy the child is also called Immanuel, meaning “God with us” (Matthew 1:21, 22).

The names Son of God and Son of Man point to the divine and human nature of Christ. The demons of those who were possessed were the first to publicly identify Christ as the Son of God (Matthew 8:29; cf. 4:3). The name Son of God points both to Christ’s divine origin, and to his position in the divine Trinity (Luke 1:35; John 1:34). The name Son of Man was

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what Christ mostly called himself (at least 40 times). Because this name is found in a dream recorded in the book of Daniel 7:13, the Jews had begun to use this name for the Messiah (see the Jewish books Enoch 46, 62 and 2 Esdras 13). Christ used this name in order to show he was the Messiah.

The names Man of Sorrows and the Branch and Messiah were also revealed by the Old Testament prophets. In the name “Man of Sorrows” we have a reference to Christ’s suffering on behalf of his people (Isaiah 53:3). The name “Branch” points to Christ’s descent from the “stump” of the royal line of King David (Isaiah 4:2, Jeremiah 23:5). But it is Daniel’s prophecy concerning “the Anointed One” that gave rise to the most common name or title used for God’s Son (Daniel 9:25). This is the name Messiah, translated in the New Testament as Christ (John 1:41).

The name Lord is used in different ways with reference to Christ. Sometimes it means no more than a polite form of address, much like the English word “sir” (e.g. Matthew 8:2; 20:33). At other times it is in recognition of Jesus authority, especially in spiritual matters (e.g. Matthew 21:3; 21:42). But in many passages the name Lord is clearly points to the title Adonai, which the Jews used of God instead of the divine name, Yahweh. In these passages Jesus is called “Lord” to show he was(is) divine, the Son of God (John 20:28; Acts 2:36; 1 Corinthians 12:3).

In the early history of the Church both the divinity and the humanity of Christ came under frequent attack. Many of the early church councils (synods) dealt with the defense of the doctrine of the human and divine natures of Christ. The divine nature of Christ was often attacked by those of Jewish background, because they found it difficult to believe that Christ was one with Jehovah God. The human nature of Jesus was mostly attacked by those who were influenced by Greek thought. Greeks believed that man’s body was evil while his spirit was good. They therefore found it difficult to think of Jesus as being a man with a physical body.

Many compromise answers were given. For example, Arius suggested Jesus was a demi-god (half-god), greater than a man, but less than God. But the church rejected it, recognizing that the Bible teaches that Jesus is both fully human and fully divine. We know he was fully human because he calls himself a man (Jn. 8:40). A number of passages also mention Jesus coming “in the flesh” (John 1:14; 1 Timothy 3:16, 1 John 4:2). And we

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know he is God because his divine nature is foretold in a number of Old Testament prophecies (e.g. Isaiah 9:6; Jeremiah 23:6; Daniel 7:13, Micah 5:2; Zechariah 13:7; Malachi 3:1). In the New Testament that we find Christ's divinity defended by all, but especially by his disciple John in his Gospel 1:1-3, 14, 18, 25-27; 11:41-44; and 20:28.

The doctrine of the two natures of Christ is important to the Christian faith, because it explains the nature of Christ's work of atonement. Only as one who was fully man could Christ represent his people (Roman 5:12ff.; Hebrews 2:14-17). Only as a human mediator could Christ fully sympathize with his people in their trials and temptations (Hebrews 2:18; 4:15-5:2). And only as a man could Christ serve other men as an example in obedience and holiness (John 13:14, 15; Philippians 2:5-8; Hebrews 2:10; 12:2-4; 1 Peter 2:21). Yet if Jesus had been no more than a mere man his life could not have atoned for all his people (Hebrews 7:26-28). It was Christ's identity as God, which allowed him to make a sacrifice of infinite value, sufficient to pay for all (Hebrews 9:12, 14, 23-26; 10:10; 1 Peter 1:19; cf. Psalm 47:7-10).

#### The States of Christ

The doctrine of the two natures of Christ did raise questions about the extent of Christ's divinity when on earth. While Christ did great miracles, and knew what was in man's hearts, it nevertheless appears that he was not all knowing before his resurrection (Matthew 24:36). This can be explained by the fact that Christ "emptied himself" of divine qualities in order to take up his life as a servant among men (Philippians 2:6-11). We refer to this stage of Christ's life on earth as his humiliation. As a reward for his obedience Christ was exalted by the Father.

Christ's state of humiliation began when Jesus voluntarily laid aside his right to exercise his divine attributes and took on his human nature. This does not mean that Jesus ceased to be the Son of God. In Christ's ministry demons fell down before him proclaiming him to be the Son of God (Mark 3:11; cf. 1:23-24). Christ's authority was clear for everyone to see (Matthew 7:28-29; 21:23). He claimed authority to judge men and to forgive their sins (John 5:27; Matthew 9:6; Luke 5:24). But it was a part of Christ's humiliation that his divine authority should be questioned by those who opposed him (Matthew 4:3, 6; 26:63-65; Luke 5:21).

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The steps of Christ's humiliation are recorded in the words of the Apostles' Creed: "born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried, he descended into hell." The circumstances of Christ's birth show the depth of his humiliation. He is not born in a palace, or even a house, but in a stable (Luke 2:7). Born under the law (Galatians 3:13; 4:4), Christ submits to the demands of the law (Luke 2:21-22; Matthew 3:15). Even his virgin birth, proof of his glorious origins, is held against him as people contemptuously refer to him as the (illegitimate) son of Mary (Mark 6:3).

Those who have more regard for the laws of nature than the power of God have frequently denied the virgin birth of Christ. Some liberal theologians claim that this was a legend developed by the Christian community in order to explain Christ's divine status. However, the Christ's miraculous conception is recorded both by Matthew 1:20 and Luke 1:34-35). The virgin birth of Immanuel was in fact foretold in a sign of God's promise to the house of David in Isaiah 7:14-17.

The humiliation of Christ can also be seen in his sufferings. While the Apostles' Creed makes mention only of Christ's sufferings under Pontius Pilate, it must be remembered that throughout his life Christ suffered pain, grief, as well as temptations (Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 22:28; John 11:35; 12:27). His sufferings came to a climax on the cross. Here, forsaken by God and man, Jesus suffered the pangs of hell when all the forces of evil unleashed their fury upon him (Matthew 27:46; Isaiah 53). (NOTE, when the Apostles' Creed confesses, "he descended into hell" many Christians interpret this as a reference to the depth of Christ's sufferings on the cross).

Pontius Pilate pronounced the death sentence of Christ. His Roman court dispensed justice in God's name. Christ was sentenced on account of the sins of the world that had been laid upon him (Isaiah 52; 2 Corinthians 5:21). The punishment was death by crucifixion, an accursed death for those who rebelled against authority (Deuteronomy 21:23; Galatians 3:13). The cross lifted Jesus halfway between heaven and earth, and thus symbolized Christ's rejection by God and man. The burial of Christ marked the end of Christ's state of humiliation.

Christ's resurrection marks the beginning of his exaltation. God showed that He has accepted Jesus' sacrifice by resurrecting him from the dead (Romans 4:25; 5:10; Ephesians 1:20, Philippians 3:10; 1 Peter 1:3). Christ's

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death and resurrection symbolizes what happens in the spiritual life of the believer. Joined to Christ the believer dies to sin and is born to a new life in Christ. Jesus is called the “firstborn from the dead” and “the first fruits of them that slept” (1 Corinthians 15:20; Colossians 1:18). As the first to rise from the dead, Christ is the sign and guarantee of the believer’s own future resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:20-23; 2 Timothy 2:11).

Through the resurrection Christ received a new body, identified as a “spiritual body” or “imperishable body” (1 Corinthians 15:42, 44). This body was not bound by the laws of nature, but could appear and disappear, and enter into a locked room at will (Luke 24:31, 36; John 20:19). Such a resurrection body is also promised to the believer, because flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 15:47-50).

The resurrection has often been denied by those who have not personally experienced the power of God. The Pharisees were the first to deny the miracle. Although they saw the empty grave, they bribed the guards to say that the disciples had stolen Jesus’ body (Matthew 28:11-15). Unbelievers of later days have come with all kinds of explanations, such as that Jesus had only fainted, and revived again in the grave. Others say that in their grief the disciples were confused, and only thought they saw Jesus alive. But the resurrected Christ was seen by far too many on numerous occasions to explain it away (see 1 Corinthians 15:3-8).

Only Luke gives us an account of Christ’s ascension, he describes the event both at the end of his Gospel and at the beginning of the book of Acts (Luke 24:50-53; Acts 1:6-11). But John tells us that Christ predicted his ascension, stating it would be:

A final proof of his divine origin (John 6:62; cf. 16:28)

Necessary for the coming of the Holy Spirit (16:5-11)

Necessary in order that he may prepare for the coming of the saints (John 14:2-3). To this we can add a 4th reason given by Paul and the author of Hebrews, that Christ ascended.

To be a High Priest at the right hand of God (Ephesians 1:20; 4:8-10; 1 Timothy 3:16; Hebrews 1:3; 4:14; 9:24).

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Christ's second coming, to judge the living and the dead will mark the peak of his exaltation. Christ will return to judge (Acts 10:42; 17:31; Romans 2:16; James 5:9; etc.). The eternal kingdom will be ushered in, and Christ's people will receive their reward of everlasting bliss. But the wicked will be sentenced to eternal punishment (Matthew 13:40-43).

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SOTERIOLOGY: GOOD NEWS ACCOMPLISHED AND APPLIED

“For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.”

Ephesians 1:4

Our salvation was paid for by Christ, but is brought to us by the Holy Spirit. We will look these two things separately, beginning with the work of Christ. As the Messiah, Jesus was the Anointed One of God. Anointing with oil symbolized the presence of God's Spirit upon those called to be prophets, priests and kings (Exodus 28:41; 1 Kings 19:15-16; Isaiah 61:1; cf. Zechariah 4). We shall see that Jesus was anointed to all three of these offices. The historical occasion of Christ's anointing is his baptism in the Jordan River, where the Holy Spirit came down on him in the form of a dove (Luke 3:22). Following his baptism Jesus proclaimed: The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor (Luke 4:18).

Christ as Prophet.

In one sense Christ's prophetic role began long before his birth on earth. In the opening verses of the Gospel of John the pre-incarnate Christ is identified as the Word (John 1:3, Psalms 33:6). He was the Word revealed to the Old Testament prophets (1 Peter 1:11). He was the Word which came and spoke to men as the Angel of the Lord, (Genesis 16:7ff.; 22:11ff.; Exodus 3:2ff.; Malachi 3:1). The author of Hebrews writes: “In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe” (Hebrews 1:1-2).

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A prophet did not speak his own words, but acted as a mouth piece of God (Exodus 7:1). The Old Testament prophets spoke by the Spirit of Christ. They were also types of Christ, especially Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15ff.; Matthew 23:37; Acts 3:22). To “prophesy” sometimes simply means to “speak forth” God’s message, guiding those who sought to do God’s will and warning those who went astray. Often this included the “fore-telling” of future events, or revelation of hidden things, and it was for this reason that early in Israel’s history prophets were called seers (1 Samuel 9:9). The divine calling of prophets was to be judged by the truth of their predictions (Deuteronomy 18:21-22; Matthew 7:15-20).

In Christ’s ministry we clearly see him act as a prophet when he gives words of guidance to the disciples and when he warns the unbelieving authorities (e.g. Matthew 5-7). His prophecies also foretell the future, especially concerning his suffering and death, the judgment of Israel, and the future of his Church (e.g. Matthew 16:18-19, 21-28; 20:17-19; 24:1-31). Christ’s prophetic role was widely recognized by those who heard him (Matthew 21:11; John 4:19). Even many unbelieving Jews were prepared to accept Jesus as a prophet (Matthew 16:14; Luke 7:16; John 7:40). Muslims, likewise, have recognized Jesus as one of God’s great prophets.

Christ as Priest.

Whereas the prophet was God’s representative before the people, the priest was the people’s representative before God. As a representative of the people Christ had to be human, like them (Hebrews 2:11, 14-17; 5:1-10; cf. Romans 5:12-21). As a man Christ experienced all the sufferings and temptations common to mankind. For this reason he is able to sympathize with his fellow men and plead their case before God (Hebrews 4:15).

A large part of the book of Hebrews is devoted to an explanation of Christ’s priestly role (Hebrews 4:14-5:10; 7:1-10:18). Here the author explains that Christ was a high priest after the order of Melchizedek (5:1ff.), an order superior to the Levitical priesthood (7:1-28). The author then goes on to compare the old and new covenants, showing that the new covenant was greatly superior to the old in that its ceremonies had a permanent effect (8:1ff.). In the sacrifice of his own precious body Christ “offered for all time one sacrifice for sins.” (Hebrews 10:12). The author concludes that Christ continues to mediate for his people at the right hand of God, and that all believers may approach God’s throne in

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confidence, knowing that their sins are covered by the blood of Christ (10:12-22).

As our High Priest Christ sacrificed himself to atone for the sins of his people. He was “the lamb of God” and “our Passover”, who came as the fulfillment of the atonement sacrifices commanded in O.T. (Isaiah 53:6; John 1:29; 1 Corinthians 5:7, cf. Mark 10:45; Romans 3:24-25; Colossians 2:17; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 3:13; 1 John 1:7). From the book of Hebrews we learn that the Old Testament sacrifices in themselves had no effect. They served the people as a reminder of their sins, and in this way they pointed them to their need for Christ (Hebrews 10:1-4).

The teaching that Christ died on behalf of his people is known as the doctrine of vicarious atonement. It is one of the most central beliefs of the Christian faith. Christ came as our vicar, our substitute, to die the death that we deserved to die (Isaiah 53:6; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 3:13; Hebrews 9:28; 1 Peter 2:24). He paid the penalty for our sin, and removed God’s curse from us (Romans 4:25; 1 Peter 3:18; 1 John 2:2).

Sometimes theologians distinguish between Christ’s active obedience, whereby, as the second Adam, he kept God’s law on our behalf (Romans 5:18-19; 8:3-4; 10:4; Galatians 4:4-5), and Christ’s passive obedience, whereby he paid for our sin by dying the death we deserved to die (Isaiah 53:6; Romans 4:25; 1 Peter 3:18; 1 John 2:2).

Christ as King.

Christ is King on two accounts; firstly, because as the Son of God he is heir to God’s creation (cf. Matthew 21:38), secondly, because as the promised descendant of David, Christ inherited the throne of Israel, and the promise of an eternal reign (Luke 1:32-33; cf. Isaiah 9:6-7). To become our King, Christ had to overthrow the forces of Satan, who through his rebellion had become the “rulers of the world” (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 2:2). The victory was won through the ministry and death of Christ (Luke 10:18; Matthew 28:18; Philippians 2:9-10; 1 Peter 3:22).

The nature of Christ’s Kingdom is not easily defined. On the one hand Christ taught that it was not a Kingdom, “of this world” (John 18:36), on

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the other hand he said his kingdom was already present “among” men (Luke 17:21). Passages which speak of the Kingdom as present in the ministry of Christ include Matthew 12:28; Luke 17:21; Colossians 1:13, those which speak of its coming at the end of time include Matthew 7:21; Luke 22:29; 1Corinthians 6:9; 15:50; 2 Timothy 4:18. The answer to this mystery lies in the fact that the Kingdom is already present among those who recognize Christ as their King, but that the final fulfillment of the Kingdom awaits Christ’s return to earth at the end of time, when all principalities and powers will be subjected to Christ (1Corinthians 15:24-28; Philippians 2:9-11; Revelation 21:1ff.).

The recognition of the concepts of “already” and “not yet” of the Kingdom has important implications. The knowledge that Christ reigns and has all authority in heaven and earth urges us to the task of Christian missions (Matthew 28:18-20). At the same time the knowledge that the Kingdom is yet to come in its fullest sense guards the Christian against triumphalism (living as though the victory was already complete), and stirs him up to work for the establishment of the kingdom (John 9:4). The knowledge that Christ reigns gives the Christian the assurance that all things will happen according to His will, while the promise of the kingdom to come provides him with comfort in times of travail and suffering (Revelation 21:4).

CHAPTER SIX  
**PNEUMATOLOGY: UNDERSTAND HOLY SPIRIT AND LOVE**

“If you love me, you will obey what I command and I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth.”

John 14:15-16a

While the doctrine of Christ was much talked about by the early ecumenical synods, which drew up the creeds, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit received little attention. The Apostles' and Athanasian Creeds recognized the Holy Spirit as the Third Person of the Trinity, but said nothing about his task. The Nicene Creed recognizes the Spirit as the Lord and giver of life and the author of the inspiration of the prophets.

The doctrines of the Holy Spirit date largely from the time of the Reformation. It was recognized that the Spirit is the one who gives us the new birth (regeneration) and helps us to overcome sin and live for God (sanctification). Some followers of John Wesley claimed that he taught that it is possible for the Christian to become completely sanctified in this life. This doctrine is called entire sanctification. This doctrine gave rise to the nineteenth century holiness movement.

In the holiness movement the experience of entire sanctification was termed “baptism in the Holy Spirit” or “fullness of the Spirit.” Early this century both these terms were taken over by the Pentecostals to describe the experience they termed the “second blessing.” By this they meant a filling with the Holy Spirit some time after conversion, accompanied by speaking in tongues. The Pentecostal movement did influence the wider Christian community to re-examine the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. One of the results is the charismatic movement, which has influenced even the Roman Catholic Church.

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Some people think the Holy Spirit is only a force (an “it”), but the Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit is a person, a “he” (John 16:14). As a person the Holy Spirit can be grieved, sinned against, blasphemed, lied to, tested and resisted (Isaiah 63:10; Ephesians 4:30; Matthew 12:31-32; Acts 5:3; 7:51). The Spirit’s own activities are also those, which can only be done by a person. These include searching, teaching, comforting, convincing, speaking, sending, etc. (Genesis 1:2; Luke 12:12; John 15:26; 16:8; Acts 8:29; 10:19-20).

Others have denied that the Holy Spirit is divine, but in the Bible he is clearly spoken of as God (Acts 5:3-4; 1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19; 12:4-6). As God he has all the divine attributes, such as omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence and eternity (Luke 1:35; John 14:26; Psalms 139:7-10; Hebrews 9:14). The Spirit is one with God, so that words of God spoken in the Old Testament are identified as words of the Spirit (Acts 28:25-27; Hebrews 3:7-9; 10:15-17). The Holy Spirit is therefore the third person of the Trinity (Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14).

In the Old Testament a number of works are attributed to the Spirit of God. Together with God the Father and God the Son, God the Holy Spirit was active in the work of creation of the world. In the creation of man the Spirit is mentioned as the one who bestows man with life (Genesis 2:7; Job 33:4; also Genesis 6:3). God’s Spirit was also helping those who were chosen for special service, the anointed prophets, priests and kings (Leviticus 8:12; 1 Samuel 15:1,17; 1 Kings 19:16). Such anointing did not always mean that the person was a child of God, because even unbelievers could be anointed in order to fulfill a special task (1 Kings 19:15-16; 2 Kings 8:12 & 10:31; Isaiah 45:1).

In the Old Testament the presence of the Holy Spirit was not a permanent indwelling, but was a temporary quickening that prepared the recipients for office and enabled them to do mighty things for God. This quickening of the Spirit is often described as “the Spirit came upon” or “the Spirit came mightily upon” (Judges 6:33; 14:6; 1 Samuel 10:10; 16:13). While spiritual giants like Moses, David and Elijah appear to have been almost constantly led by God’s Spirit, others, like Samson and Saul, had Him only some of the times (Judges 16:20; 1 Samuel 10:10-13).

In the New Testament there are many references to the role of God the Spirit regarding bringing God’s word. The prophets were moved by the Spirit (2 Peter 1:21), who revealed the coming of the Messiah to them

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(1Peter 1:11) The message of the prophets was “Godbreathed” (2 Timothy 3:16). In 1Corinthians 2:10 we read. “These things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.” We call this work of the Spirit inspiration. The same Spirit also helps in understanding those who read God’s Word. This work of the Spirit is called illumination (1 Corinthians 2:10-13; cf. John 16:14).

During Christ’s time on earth the Holy Spirit came upon John the Baptist, both his parents, and the aged Simeon (Luke 1:15-17, 41, 67; 2:25). He was also given to the Apostles (John 20:22), in order to prepare them for their ministry (v. 21). But none of these represented the baptism of the Holy Spirit that had been prophesied by John the Baptizer (John 1:31-33; Acts 1:4-5). The baptism of the Holy Spirit could not take place until Jesus had returned to be with his Father (John 7:39; 15:26; 16:7).

The historical occasion on which the Spirit came to the Church was Pente-cost, the feast of the covenant, or feast of the first fruits (Leviticus 23:9ff.). The coming of the Spirit was a gift to the church as the body of Christ. One becomes a member of the church by the baptism with water and the Spirit (Acts 2:1-4, 38; 5:32; 8:12-17; 10:44-48; 19:5-6; cf. 1 Corinthians 12:13, Ephesians 4:5). For this reason the New Testament holds it for granted that every Christian has the Holy Spirit, and not only those with spectacular gifts (1 Corinthians 3:16; 12:3-7; Romans 8:9). They have the same Spirit, but different gifts (1 Corinthians 12 to14).

CHAPTER SEVEN  
**ECCLESIOLOGY: THE BODY OF CHRIST**

“Peacemakers who saw in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.”

James 3:18

The Church of God began in Old Testament times. The Old Testament word for the “church” is usually translated into English as the “assembly” (Deuteronomy 9:10; Psalms 7:7). But in the Greek this word is translated as ekklesia, the New Testament word for “church” (ekklesia is used for the assembly in Acts 7:38). Both the Old Testament and New Testament words mean “those who are called,” because the church of God consists of those who have been called to salvation (Jude 1; 1Corinthians 1:2). In the Old Testament almost all those who were called were children of Abraham, but in the New Testament it includes believers from every tribe and nation.

Although in one sense God’s church goes back to the time of Adam, the Old Testament church really began on the day God made a covenant with Israel at Mt. Sinai. This day became known as “the day of the assembly” (Deuteronomy 9:10; 10:4; 18:16), and was remembered in Israel with the feast of Pentecost (Leviticus 23:15-21; Numbers 28:26-31; Deuteronomy 16:9-12), when they celebrated the first fruits. It was fitting that the first fruits of the N.T. church should be gathered on Pentecost (Acts 2:41; James 1:18). The New Testament church was founded on the new covenant that had long been promised by the prophets (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:26f.; 1 Corinthians 11:25; Hebrews 10:15f.).

In the New Testament the word ekklesia is sometimes used for local meetings of the church (Acts 11:26; Romans 16:4; 1 Corinthians 16:1; Galatians 1:2; 1 Thessalonians 2:14). At other times is used for the worldwide fellowship of believers united to Christ by baptism into his body (Ephesians 1:22; 3:10, 21; 5:23-32; Colossians 1:18, 24; cf. 1

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Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:27). In this sense the church is also called “the body of Christ” (1 Corinthians 12:13), “the temple of the Holy Spirit” (1Corinthians 3:16), “the Jerusalem that is above” (Galatians 4:26), “the heavenly Jerusalem” (Hebrews 12:22), “the New Jerusalem” (Revelation 21:2) and “the pillar and foundation of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15).

Before the Reformation people identified the church with all those who were baptized by the leaders, the priests and bishops. But Protestants looked at the church as a spiritual reality, made up of the people who belonged to Christ. They realized that not everyone who was baptized was a true Christian. They therefore distinguished between the visible church, made up of all those who were members through baptism, and the invisible church, made up of the true Christians. It was recognized that many who belong to the visible church may only be nominal Christians, who do not really belong to the body of Christ (cf. 1John 2:19). The visible church is also divided into denominations, but the invisible church includes people from many denominations, and is one in Christ.

Another useful distinction is that between the church militant and the church triumphant. The church militant is made up of all those who are on earth, and who are still fighting the forces of evil (cf. Ephesians 6:11ff.; 1 Timothy 6:12). But the church triumphant is made up of all those who have fought the good fight, and are now enjoying their reward in the presence of Christ Revelation 6:9f.).

The Apostle’s Creed lists three attributes of the church: Unity, Catholicity, and Holiness (“I believe in one, holy, catholic church”). Roman Catholics claim these characteristics belong only to their church. But Protestants recognize that these characteristics speak of the invisible church, which include people from many different denominational groups.

Because after the Reformation Protestants divided into different linguistic, national, cultural churches they did not identify any one Church with the true Church. Instead they gave guidelines or marks of the church, by which the true church may be known. These are:

The true preaching of the Word (Galatians 1:6-8; 1 Timothy 6:3,4; Titus 1:10,11)

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The proper administration of the sacraments (Acts 8:37; 1 Corinthians 11:17-34)

The faithful exercise of discipline (1 Corinthians 5:13; Revelation 2:14 to 16, and 20ff; 1 Timothy 1:3). No doubt we could add other marks as well, such as the presence of Christian love and good works (Revelation 2:4; 3:2).

#### The Government of the Church

There are three main structures for church government, the hierarchical, the federal and the congregational structures.

In the hierarchical structure all authority comes from the top. The archbishop rules over the bishops, the bishops over the priests, and so on. One is appointed to one's office by those who rule, and not by election. The number of offices varies, but the bishop is seen as the main stay of the church. Because the Greek word for bishop is episkopos, the system is known as the episcopal system.

Episcopal churches usually place a heavy emphasis on the need for an unbroken line of ordained church leaders going back to the apostles, a doctrine known as apostolic succession. However, there is no Scriptural support for such a doctrine. Examples of episcopal systems of government are found in the Roman Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, as well as some Methodist and Reformed churches.

In the federal form of government it is usually the elders who are the recognized pillars. Since the Greek word for elder is presbuteros, the federal system of church government is often called Presbyterian. Most Presbyterians hold to three offices: pastors, elders and deacons. But the pastor is seen as a teaching elder, whereas the others are ruling elders (1 Tim 5:17). The deacon usually looks after the physical and social welfare of the members of the congregation and community. Leaders are chosen to office by election.

In the Presbyterian structure decisions affecting the whole church are made by a council of elected officers, known as a synod or general

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assembly. Smaller councils, called presbyteries or classes deal with regional matters. Churches choose their own pastors from those who have been approved by the denomination. Examples of churches with a presbyterian structure include the Presbyterian churches, most Reformed churches, and various Methodist churches.

Those who hold to the congregational form of church government also choose their own leaders. The highest office is that of the pastor, followed by elders and deacons. The main difference with the presbyterian form of church government is that the congregational system does not have any ruling council higher than that of the local congregation. All other councils are only advisory, and congregations are free to ignore the advice given or even to withdraw from the denomination. Examples of churches with this system of church government include the Congregational Churches, the Baptists, the Evangelical Free Church, and many Pentecostal groups.

The fact that the Bible nowhere lays down a precise pattern for church government suggests that some freedom of interpretation is allowed. Within this freedom there is also room for different cultural patterns and changing conditions. At the same time there are definite limits to this freedom, and the information the Bible does give us cannot be ignored. Thus a system led by a pope must be rejected because the Bible recognizes only one head of the church, Jesus Christ himself (Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:18).

As the head of his church Christ rules by means of his Word (see Acts 15:15, 22; 17:2, 11). Led by the Spirit of Christ, the apostles and prophets (other New Testament writers), laid the foundation of the church (Ephesians 2:19-20; Matthew 16:18-19; 18:18; John 14:26). Their task was finished with the completion of the Scriptures, for which reason we have no apostles or prophets today. The church must be built on this foundation, as no other foundation may be laid (1 Corinthians 3:11).

The apostles did not appoint new apostles to take their place, but elders, also called bishops, who led the churches (Acts 14:23; Tit. 1:5), and deacons who were involved in works of mercy (Acts 6:1-6). Other workers are mentioned, such as evangelists (Ephesians 4:11), but their work was not with a specific congregation. From Philippians 1:1 it would appear that the local church consisted of the saints ... together with the overseers [elders] and deacons. When Paul writes Timothy he gives

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instructions about the kind of people who should hold these two offices (1 Timothy 3:1-13). He also distinguishes a special class of elders “whose work is preaching and teaching,” and who may be paid for their services to the church (1 Timothy 5:17-18). In time these were called pastors or ministers, or sometimes bishops.

The church leaders are given their authority through the “laying on” of hands, which has replaced the Old Testament anointing with oil as a sign of appointment to office (Acts 13:3; 1 Timothy 4:14; 5:22). The elders are in charge of the spiritual oversight and feeding of Christ’s flock (1 Timothy 3:5; 5:17; 1Peter 5:2-3), and congregation are expected to respect and submit to them (Hebrews 13:17). Episcopalian churches sometimes teach apostolic succession, requiring an unbroken line of laying-on-of-hands going back to the apostles. But there is no biblical support for such a doctrine.

#### The Sacraments.

Jesus gave his church two sacraments to strengthen his people in their Christian life: baptism and the Lord’s Supper. The word sacrament can mean “a pledge,” but also “mystery.” Both meanings apply to the two sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. The sacraments are a pledge or seal of God’s covenant of grace (Matthew 26:28-29; Luke 22:16-20; 2 Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:13; Revelation 7:3; cf. Romans 4:11). They testify to the mystery of our union with Christ (Romans 6:3; 1 Corinthians 11:24; 12:13; Galatians 3:27).

Some Christians believe the sacraments are effective in themselves, that the sacrament of baptism makes one a Christian and that the Lord’s Supper brings forgiveness. In the Roman Catholic Church they teach that the elements used in the sacraments have a supernatural quality. They teach that water used for baptism is “holy water,” and that the bread and the wine turn into the actual flesh and blood of Christ.

Most Protestant churches agree that effectiveness of the sacraments lies in the spiritual truths they stand for. Baptism does not make the person clean, but it is a sign of the new Christian’s spiritual cleansing and union with Christ. Similarly the Lord’s Supper reminds us that we are one with Christ who died for us. Where this spiritual reality is lacking the sacraments become empty rituals. A person cannot presume that his

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baptism and participation in the Lord's Supper automatically make him a Christian. Paul clearly shows this is not the case (1 Corinthians 10:1-5).

The New Testament sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper replace the Old Testament sacraments of circumcision and the Passover. Both of these Old Testament sacraments point to the blood of Jesus Christ, which covers the sins of his people. It is so clear that the blood that flows in the circumcision is replaced by the water that is used in the baptism and the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper replaces the flesh and blood of the Passover sacrifices. (Colossians 2:11-12; Matthew 26:17-29). Like the Sacraments of the Old Testament, those of the New Testament are the signs of God's covenant, the covenant of grace (cf. Hebrews 8-10).

### Baptism

Baptism as a religious ceremony was practiced long before the Christian church could use it as a sacrament. The Jews baptized the families of non-Jews who wanted to serve God. By this ceremony they showed their need for cleansing from sin and their commitment to the worship of Jehovah. John the Baptist used baptism as a sign of Israel's own need for cleansing and rededication (Luke 3:3ff.). But John bore witness to one who was to baptize with the Holy Spirit (John 1:33). This is the Christ, who gave his church the commandment to make disciples of all nations and baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). The baptism instituted by Christ was a sign of cleansing, but it also showed that the person was now included in the body of Christ, the Church.

Christians are not in agreement about who should be baptized or how it should be done. Some baptize only adults who have made a profession of their faith in Jesus Christ as their personal Savior, others also include children of the believing parents, while others, again, baptize everyone who was willing to be baptized. On the question of how baptism should be done, some believe that immersion is the only proper way, while others say sprinkling is also acceptable.

Those who do not agree to the baptism of infants argue that baptism is for believers only. They say that the Bible links baptism to repentance and faith, and that children who are too young to repent and believe should

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not be baptized. Indeed Peter tells people to “repent and be baptized” (Acts 2:38), but then he continues saying, “The promise is to you and your children, and for all who are far off” (Acts 2:39). For this reason others do baptize children as well as new converts.

Historically there is a strong case for the view that children were included in the sacrament of baptism. From the beginning we are told that whole households believed and were baptized (Acts 10:48; 11:14; 16:15, 33; 18:8; 1 Corinthians 1:16; cf. Luke 19:9; John 4:53; Acts 16:31). We should not be surprised that no infants are named, since generally only people well-known in the church were identified by name. Early writers who mention the subject all agree that the baptism of infants dates from apostolic times. Even Tertullian, who wanted the church to change to believers’ baptism, agreed that the apostles themselves baptized infants. This is also the view of Origen, as well as the Council of Carthage (253 AD). Somewhat later Augustine gave the first theological defense of infant baptism.

Theologically the rightness of the baptism of infants belonging to believing parents is shown by the fact that baptism replaces circumcision as the sacrament sealing the covenant. Both baptism and circumcision signify the death of the old man and the putting on of the new (Colossians 2:11-12). But in the New Testament the blood of circumcision has been replaced by the water of baptism. This was prophesied long ago by Ezekiel, when God promised an outpouring of his Spirit under a new covenant:

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws (Ezekiel 36:25-27; see also Jeremiah 31:31-33).

The new covenant came with the outpouring of God’s Spirit at Pentecost. At the time God made his covenant at Mt Sinai the people were sprinkled with blood, but now they were sprinkled with the water of baptism (Exodus 24: 8; Acts 2:41). At Mt. Sinai God made his covenant with the Israelites and their children, but at Pentecost the promise of the covenant is offered not only to the Jews and their children, but also to “all who are far off”, meaning the non-Jewish people (Acts 2:38-39).

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The essential symbolism of baptism is cleansing (Acts 2:38; 22:16; 1 Corinthians 6:11; Titus 3:5; Hebrews 10:22; 1Peter 3:21), and this symbolism does not require a total immersion (cf. John 13:3-10). Sprinkling with blood or water was a common Old Testament symbol of cleansing from sin (Exodus 24:8; 29:21; Numbers 8:7; 19:8; Ezekiel 36:25; Hebrews 10:22; 1Peter 1:2). Around the eighth century baptism by total immersion became popular in some countries, but most of those baptized this way were infants. Today this custom is still followed in the Greek Orthodox Church.

Those who baptize only adults by immersion are often called Baptists, while those who baptize believers and their children by sprinkling are sometimes called Paedobaptists. They accept each other as brothers and sisters in Christ, knowing that the manner of baptism is not as important as the spiritual cleansing that baptism stands for. All agree that baptism is no guarantee to salvation.

#### The Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper, or Eucharist, was instituted by Christ on the night he was betrayed. There are four accounts of the event (Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:19-20; and 1 Corinthians 11:23-25). The institution of the Supper took place at the celebration of the Jewish Passover (Matthew 26:17). The bread and wine taken with the Passover sacrifice became symbolic of the body and blood of Jesus' sacrifice of himself. Christ himself is identified as "our paschal lamb" (1 Corinthians 5:7).

The Lord's Supper was instituted to remind us of what Christ has done. Two times Christ says "do this in remembrance of me" (1Corinthians 11:24, 25). In the Lord's Supper believers proclaim the Lord's death as a reminder to believers and a witness to the world (1Corinthians 11:26). The Supper symbolizes the believer's redemption from sin, even as the Passover symbolized the redemption of the Israelites from Egypt. By partaking in the bread and the wine believers symbolize that they are one with the crucified Christ (Galatians 2:20). The supper is also a symbol of the unity of believers, who together make up the mystical body of Christ.

For believers taking part in the Supper is a source of great comfort and strength. The sacrament is a guarantee to believers that Christ sacrificed

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his body for their salvation. The sacrament comes with the promise of Christ that he will not feast again until all believers are with him in his Kingdom (Luke 22:16, 18). Christians are not agreed about how the words “this is my body” and “this is my blood” should be interpreted. Roman Catholics have taken it to mean that the bread and wine change into the actual body and blood of Christ during the preparations of the mass. This doctrine is known as transubstantiation. Most Protestants believe that the bread and wine are merely meant to be symbolic of the body and blood of Christ.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### **ESCHATOLOGY: COMING AND OVERLAPPING KINGDOM OF GOD**

“Test everything. Hold on to the good”

I Thessalonians 5:21

The doctrine of the last things is also called eschatology, this word comes from a Greek word “eschaton” meaning “the end.” Two related topics are discussed under this heading:

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- The end of the individual, called individual eschatology, and
- The end of the universe, called general eschatology.

#### Death: The end of the individual, called individual eschatology

The Bible speaks of death as the separation of body and soul (Ecclesiastes 12:7; James 2:26), or simply as the end of life (Luke 6:9; John 12:25). In a more gentle way it is also spoken of as “sleep” (1 Corinthians 15:6; 1 Thessalonians 4:13). The death of the body is not the same as the death of the soul (Matthew 10:28; Luke 12:4), the destruction of the soul in everlasting punishment. Sometimes the death of the soul is called the second death (Revelation 2:11; 20:14; 21:8).

Many modern people believe that man is created mortal. This contradicts the biblical teaching that death is not natural, but a punishment for sin (Genesis 2:17; 3:19; Romans 5:17; 6:23; 1 Corinthians 15:21; James 1:15). Death is an expression of God’s anger, it is spoken of as a judgment, a condemnation and a curse (Psalms 90:7, 11; Romans 1:32; Galatians 3:13). As a punishment for Adam’s sin, he and all creation became subject to corruption and death.

Jesus Christ conquered death, and for this reason believers need not fear this experience (Romans 5:17; 1 Corinthians 15:45; 2 Timothy 1:10). For believers death is not a punishment, but the completion of their life of sanctification. While the approach of death may bring pain and suffering, death itself marks a release from the body of corruption (cf. Romans 7:24).

#### The After-life

Upon death the souls of the believers will immediately go to heaven, there to enjoy the joy of being in Christ’s presence (Luke 16:19-31; 23:43; Acts 7:59; 2 Corinthians 5:8; Philippians 1:23; Revelation 6:9; 7:9; 20:4). Here these souls will await the day of resurrection, in order that it may be joined to a resurrection body similar to Christ’s, one that can never die again (1 Corinthians 15:42-50; Philippians 3:21; 1 John 3:2).

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The Bible speaks of hell as the final place for the wicked (Psalms 9:17; Proverbs 5:5; 7:27; 9:18; 15:24; 23:14). It is a place of punishment, where God's anger burns (Deuteronomy 32:22; Matthew 5:22, 29; 18:9). Almost all of our knowledge of hell comes from warnings of Jesus himself.

There is not lack of wrong teachings about the life hereafter. Roman Catholicism teaches there are other places for the dead besides heaven and hell. They teach that those who are baptized but who have unforgiven sins will go to a place called purgatory, where they have to suffer for a while to pay their sins. They also teach that there is a special place for unbaptised babies, called limbus infantum, where there is neither suffering nor bliss. The patriarchs were in a similar place called the limbus partum. But according to Rome, they were allowed to enter heaven after Christ's victory over Satan. These teachings do not have any scriptural support.

Certain sects, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses teach that after death man ceases to exist until the day of resurrection. The Seventh Day Adventists believe all souls go to sleep from the time of death to the resurrection. Some Christians teach that only the righteous ones survive after death, and that the wicked cease to exist. Others teach that after death the wicked are presented with a second opportunity to turn to Christ for salvation. And all these ideas are not biblical, the Word of God does not teach that.

All of these teachings ignore the Bible's own teaching that after death the righteous will be with Christ, and the wicked will go straight to hell (Luke 16:19-31; John 8:21, 24; 2 Peter 2:4, 9; Jude 7,13).

The End Times: The end of the universe, called general eschatology

Before Christ's victory on the cross even he did not know the time of his return to earth (Matthew 24:36, some Bible versions only). But many people since then have claimed to know the time, claiming that the secret can be found in various prophesies in the Bible. Sects such as the Adventists, Jehovah Witnesses, the movement in the United States, and others, have set the date for Christ's return for many a times, only to be disappointed when he did not come. We must reject all claims to knowledge of the time of Christ's return, because Christ clearly taught

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that people would be taken by surprise (Matthew 24:37-44; 25:1-12; Mark 13:33-37; cf. 1Thessalonians 5:2-3; Revelation 3:3; 16:15).

Even so Christ has taught us to look for certain signs which will herald his return at the end of time. These signs include:

1) The calling of the gentiles – the gospel of the Kingdom must be preached to all nations before Christ returns (Matthew 24:14; Mark 13:10; Romans 11:25). This sign is nearly fulfilled. Even the people in countries closed to missionaries hear the Gospel on Christian radio, T.V. and on Internet.

2) The conversion of Israel – The future conversion of Israel is frequently mentioned in both the Old and New Testaments (Zechariah 12:10; 13:1; 2Corinthians 3:15,16). Paul discusses the topic in his epistle to the Romans, where he appears to link the conversion of the Jews with the end of time (Romans 11:25-29). However, it is not clear whether Paul is speaking of the spiritual children of Abraham, or the Jews themselves.

The Church, as the spiritual Israel sure inherits the promises made to Israel (Luke 3:8; John 8:39; Romans 9:7-8, 25; Galatians 3:7-9; 1Peter 2:9). Jesus speaks of the “children of the Kingdom”, the Jews, as having been cast out (Matthew 8:11-12, cf. 21:43). For this reason many believe that the salvation of “all Israel” mentioned by Paul must be interpreted as referring to the true believers, and not the Jews. Isaiah, quoted by Paul, says that only a remnant of Israel will be saved (Romans 9:27; cf. 11:5).

Yet the whole of Paul’s discussion is centered on the hope of the salvation of the physical Israel, and in this context he strongly appeals to the immeasurable mercy of God (Romans 11:12, 29-32). For this reason we too can hope and pray for a conversion of the Jews.

3. The coming of the Antichrist – in one way all false teachers have the spirit of Antichrist (1John 4:3), but one day there will be a particularly powerful false prophet who will be THE Antichrist (Matthew 24:24; 1John 2:18; 2:22; 2 John 7). Paul calls the Antichrist “the man of lawlessness,” and adds that the “mystery of lawlessness” is already at work (2 Thessalonians 2:3, 7, 8).

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Throughout the history of the church the spirit of Antichrist has been observed in many evil world leaders, and people have identified the Antichrist with some of the medieval popes, Napoleon, Hitler, Stalin, etc. From the accounts of Paul and John, it appears that this spirit of the Antichrist will come in one person just before the return of Christ. He will be opposed and defeated by Christ himself (1 Thessalonians 2:8; 1 John 2:18-22).

4. Signs and Wonders -Various upheavals in nature and society will herald and accompany the coming of Christ. These include wars, famines and earthquakes, the tribulation of the righteous, false prophecy, deceptions and delusions culminating in the Antichrist, and fearful portents in the heavens (Matthew 24:29-30; Mark 13:24-25; Luke. 21:25-26).

Despite the signs, the suddenness of the second coming itself will catch many by surprise (Mt. 24:37-44; 25:1-12, Mark 13:33-37; 1 Thessalonians 5:2-3; Revelation 3:3; 16:15). Yet, there will be no doubt about what is happening, because the return of Christ will be witnessed by the whole world (Revelation 1:7). Christ will come in his glorified body, and descend from the clouds in the same way that he went up. He will come with innumerable angels and all the saints who have gone to heaven (Matthew 24:30; Acts 1:11, 3:20-21; Colossians 3:4; 1 Thessalonians 4:16; 2 Thessalonians 1:7; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 9:25; Revelation 1:7).

#### The second coming

At the second coming of Christ there will be a general resurrection from the dead, involving both the just and the unjust (Daniel 12:2; John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15). Some early Christians denied the doctrine of a physical resurrection, but Paul defends this doctrine in 1 Corinthians 15. Here he writes that every believer will receive a body free from sickness and decay when Christ returns (1 Corinthians 15:42-50; Philippians 3:21).

Both, the just and the unjust will be resurrected (Daniel 12:2; John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15). The just will be resurrected so they may live forever on the new earth, with Christ. But the wicked will only be resurrected to judgment and condemnation (Psalms 96:13; Ecclesiastes 3:17; 12:14; Matthew 25:31-46; Acts 17:31). They will be punished according to the evil they have done, with greater punishment for those who have rejected

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Christ (Luke 10:12). The righteous will also be judged, but they will not be condemned.

For the righteous there is the promise of eternal life in God's new creation. The old heaven and earth will pass away (Hebrews 12:27; 2Peter 3:13). This does not mean that there will be nothing left, rather they will be "regenerated" or "renewed," they will be set free from sin and decay (Matthew 19:28; Acts 3:21; Romans 8:21; Hebrews 12:26-28). The new heaven and the new earth will serve as the dwelling of the redeemed, prepared for them by their Lord Jesus Christ (John 14:2; Matthew 5:5; Revelation 21:1-3). In heaven, too, there will be degrees of reward commensurate with the service performed on earth (Daniel 12:3; 2 Corinthians 9:6).

Some Christians believe there will be a millennium, or one thousand years of peace before the end of the world. They base this on Revelation 20, where it says Satan will be bound for one thousand years. But a more careful reading shows Satan is bound so he can deceive the nations no more (20:3). He was bound so Christ could "rob his house" (Matthew 12:29). This means that Christ can now take those who are followers of Satan and set them free from their bondage to sin. The result of the binding of Satan can be seen in the fact that people all over the world are turning to Christ. This was not possible before Christ's victory over Satan.

But we are also told that before Christ's return Satan will be freed for a little while (Revelation 20:7). This will be the time of the Antichrist. Thank God that this time will be very short, because at this time Christ will return and slay Satan once and for all (Revelation 20:9-11; 2 Thessalonians 2:8). We look forwards to that time, praying, "Maranatha. Come Lord Jesus".

## CHAPTER NINE

### INTRODUCTION TO THE CREED AND CONFESSIONS

“Me My Bible and My God, Stop this tendency..!”

Anup Arun Hiwale

#### Importance of Historical Creeds and Confessions:

The church is reforming and church leadership need to be careful in what way they are contributing toward the reformation continued. Do we need to write new contextualized creeds and catechisms for Asia? My clear answer is to the whole of this kind of movement is ‘no’ with all the respect for my continent and to the Asian Reformed Church.

We do not need to write catechisms for Asia rather we as the Asian Reformed Church should come together to learn the historical faith and must work on the Asian Confession for the Reformed and Presbyterian Church. Asian leadership must go through careful education of learning the historical reformed confessions and catechisms. The urgent need of Asian Church is to make a statement of faith in the form of Confession of Asian Church and not to spend time and energy on writing new catechisms till the church has earned the historical faith. That will save church from error and pride.

Let us understand the creeds and confessions in brief and understand their value in the Church. The creeds and confessions are blessing to the church.

#### The Apostles' Creed:

This creed arose out of the early Western church and should be thought of as a summary of the Apostles' teaching rather than directly attributable to them. Originally it was essentially a baptismal confession and had several variations. The form in use today dates from the eighth century.

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The Apostles' Creed: I believe in God, the Father Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord: Who was conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He arose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, whence He shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic [1] church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.

The Nicene Creed:

This creed was first formulated at the First Ecumenical Council, held at Nicea, located in what is now Turkey, in 325, as a response to the Arian heresy, which denied the divinity of Christ. It was revised at the Second Ecumenical Council, held at Constantinople in 381 as a response to the Macedonian or Pneumatomachian heresy, which denied the divinity of the Holy Spirit. The Western church later made a few additional changes which were not accepted in the Eastern church. The Western version is given here, but the differences between the versions are not shown. It states the doctrine of the Trinity.

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible; And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of his Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made; who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; he suffered and was buried; and the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father; and he shall come again, with glory, to judge both the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end. And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord, and Giver of Life, who proceedeth from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spake by the Prophets. And I believe one holy Catholic and Apostolic Church; I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

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### The Athanasian Creed:

This creed is attributed to Athanasius, the fourth century bishop of Alexandria who was the strongest defender at that time of the doctrines of the Trinity and the divinity of Christ. However, It seems to have come from the Western church and to have been an anonymous work with its present form dating no earlier than the ninth century. It defines the doctrines of the Trinity and the nature of Christ in very concise language.

Whoever wills to be in a state of salvation, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic [universe] faith, which except everyone shall have kept whole and undefiled without doubt he will perish eternally. Now the catholic faith is that we worship One God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity, neither confounding the Persons nor dividing the substance. For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, another of the Holy Spirit. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, is One, the Glory equal, the Majesty coeternal. Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Spirit; the Father uncreated, the Son uncreated, and the Holy Spirit uncreated; the Father infinite, the Son infinite, and the Holy Spirit infinite; the Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Spirit eternal. And yet not three eternals but one eternal, as also not three infinites, nor three uncreated, but one uncreated, and one infinite. So, likewise, the Father is almighty, the Son almighty, and the Holy Spirit almighty; and yet not three almighty but one almighty. So the Father is God, the Son God, and the Holy Spirit God; and yet not three Gods but one God. So the Father is Lord, the Son Lord, and the Holy Spirit Lord; and yet not three Lords but one Lord. For like as we are compelled by Christian truth to acknowledge every Person by Himself to be both God and Lord; so are we forbidden by the catholic religion to say, there be three Gods or three Lords. The Father is made of none, neither created nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone, not made nor created but begotten. The Holy Spirit is of the Father and the Son, not made nor created nor begotten but proceeding. So there is one Father not three Fathers, one Son not three Sons, and one Holy Spirit not three Holy Spirits. And in this Trinity there is nothing before or after, nothing greater or less, but the whole three Persons are coeternal together and coequal. So that in all things, as is aforesaid, the Trinity in Unity and the Unity in Trinity is to be worshipped. He therefore who wills to be in a state of salvation, let him think thus of the Trinity.

But it is necessary to eternal salvation that he also believe faithfully the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. The right faith therefore is that we

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believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man. He is God of the substance of the Father begotten before the worlds, and He is man of the substance of His mother born in the world; perfect God, perfect man subsisting of a reasoning soul and human flesh; equal to the Father as touching His Godhead, inferior to the Father as touching His Manhood. Who although He be God and Man yet He is not two but one Christ; one however not by conversion of the Godhead in the flesh, but by taking of the Manhood in God; one altogether not by confusion of substance but by unity of Person. For as the reasoning soul and flesh is one man, so God and Man is one Christ. Who suffered for our salvation, descended into hell, rose again from the dead, ascended into heaven, sits at the right hand of the Father, from whence He shall come to judge the living and the dead. At whose coming all men shall rise again with their bodies and shall give account for their own works. And they that have done good shall go into life eternal, and they who indeed have done evil into eternal fire.

This is the catholic faith, which except a man shall have believed faithfully and firmly he cannot be in a state of salvation.

The Chalcedonian Creed:

This creed was adopted at the Fourth Ecumenical Council, held at Chalcedon, located in what is now Turkey, in 451, as a response to certain heretical views concerning the nature of Christ. It established the orthodox view that Christ has two natures (human and divine) that are unified in one person.

Therefore, following the holy fathers, we all with one accord teach men to acknowledge one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man, consisting also of a reasonable soul and body; of one substance with the Father as regards his Godhead, and at the same time of one substance with us as regards his manhood; like us in all respects, apart from sin; as regards his Godhead, begotten of the Father before the ages, but yet as regards his manhood begotten, for us men and for our salvation, of Mary the Virgin, the God-bearer; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, recognized in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person and subsistence,

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not as parted or separated into two persons, but one and the same Son and Only-begotten God the Word, Lord Jesus Christ; even as the prophets from earliest times spoke of him, and our Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us, and the creed of the fathers has handed down to us.

The Heidelberg Catechism:

This catechism was written by Zacharias Ursinus (1534-1583) and Caspar Olevianus (1536-1584) in Heidelberg, Germany and published in 1563 in German. It was endorsed by the Synod of Dort and embraced by Reformed Churches in many different countries. It is the custom of many churches that use it to explain it from the pulpit every Sunday afternoon, so it is divided into fifty-two sections with 129 questions and answers with the Bible References.

The Belgic Confession of Faith:

This Reformed confession was prepared in 1561 by Guy de Bres (c.1523-1567), who was later martyred, and others, and then slightly revised by Francis Junius (1545-1602) of Bourges. First written in French, it was soon translated into Dutch and Latin. The Synod of Dort (1618-1619) made a revision but did not change the doctrine. It covers the spectrum of theological topics in its 37 Articles.

The Canons of Dort:

These were produced by the Synod of Dort (1618-1619) as a response to Arminianism. (Dort is in Holland.) The Five Points of Calvinism produced here were in response to five points presented by the Arminians. The Synod was an international body and so made the Canons of Dort the most international of the Reformed documents. Has five main points, third and fourth are combined so are four points.

The Westminster Confession of Faith:

This confession was produced by the Westminster Assembly of Divines, which had been created by the English Parliament in 1643 to settle various theological and ecclesiastical issues in the British Isles. It was presented to Parliament in 1646 and with scripture proofs in 1647. It was

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essentially an English Puritan document that didn't take hold in England but was embraced enthusiastically in Presbyterian Scotland and so later the English-speaking Presbyterian world as well. It covers the spectrum of theological topics and is similar to the Belgic Confession.

The Larger Catechism:

This was also a product of the Westminster Assembly and was presented to Parliament in 1647 and with scripture proofs in 1648. It was designed to be used in the pulpit and is very detailed. It has strong similarities to the Heidelberg Catechism.

The Shorter Catechism:

This was also a product of the Westminster Assembly and was presented to Parliament in 1647 and with scripture proofs in 1648. It was designed for the instruction of children. Less detailed than the Larger Catechism, it has strong similarities to the Heidelberg Catechism.

In the reformed church and seminary education these basic creeds confessions must be taught and learned. Once the leadership and congregation understands them, it will be almost difficult to stop people from loving them. God bless.

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## CHAPTER TEN

### IMPORTANT ISSUES IN THEOLOGY

In this lesson we want to look at the Christian life from where it begins to where the Christian goes to be with Christ. We study God's call, the new birth, conversion, including faith and repentance, justification, sanctification and glorification.

Calling:

The Bible uses the word calling differently in different contexts. In one sense it is used for the invitation to receive salvation in Christ (Matthew 22:2-14; Luke 14:15-24). Such calling can be accepted in faith or rejected in unbelief (John 3:36; 5:40; Acts 13:46; 2 Thessalonians 1:8). But in another sense the word is used to refer only to those who obey the Gospel call, so that Christians are identified as "those who are called" (1 Corinthians 1:2; 24; Jude1). The very word *ekklesia*, or "church," means "those who are called out." In order to distinguish the two ways in which the word is used the first is named external calling and the second internal calling.

The external call comes from the Triune God, but God usually gives this call through human messengers (Romans 10:14-17; Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 5:20). In the external call the Gospel facts are presented and people are urged to accept Christ in faith and repentance (Acts 2:14-40; 3:12-26; 8:35; 2 Corinthians 5:11, 20). The external call is directed to all of mankind, without concern for their piety, nationality or race (Psalms 86:5; Isaiah 45:22; 55:1, 6-7; Joel 2:32; Matthew 11:28; Acts 10:34; Romans 2:9-11; 10:13; Revelation 3:20; 22:17). This call is offered to all men and seriously meant to bring them to repentance (Ezekiel 18:23; 32; 33:11; Matthew 21:37). It should be the burden of every Christian to see that all people should hear the external call and have the opportunity to respond to the gospel (Romans 10:14-17).

The internal call is the work of God (Acts 16:14; 1 Corinthians 1:9), especially God the Holy Spirit (John 16:8; Romans 15:18-19; 1 Corinthians 2:4,12-13). When God opens peoples' hearts to heed the Gospel this always has the effect of leading them to salvation (Romans 8:28-30; Acts

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13:48). For this reason the internal call is sometimes named effectual calling.

By way of the internal call God not only calls people to salvation, but also to service (1 Peter 2:9), to fellowship in Christ (1 Corinthians 1:9), to liberty (Galatians 5:13), to peace (1 Corinthians 7:15), to holiness (1 Thessalonians 4:7), to one hope (Ephesians 4:4); to eternal life (1 Timothy 6:12), and to an inheritance of God's Kingdom (1 Peter 3:9; 1 Thessalonians 2:12).

Regeneration:

Regeneration, the term for being born again, is another term that is used in more than one way. In a wide sense it is sometimes used to refer to everything involved in becoming a Christian, including conversion and sanctification. It is clear that regeneration understood in this way is not just the work of God's Spirit, but also the work of man. The Bible tends to use the word in a stricter sense, using it only for the work of God's Spirit (Ezek. 11:19; Jn. 1:13; Acts 16:14; Rom. 9:16; Phil. 2:13). This stricter sense of the term regeneration is also suggested by the picture of childbirth, which suggests that regeneration is something that happens to a person rather than something he does, the same as birth is something that happens to a baby, and not something the baby does.

Regeneration is an instantaneous work of God, which affects the whole man. It affects the mind, the will, and the emotions (1 Corinthians 2:14, 15; Colossians 3:10; Philippians 2:13; 2 Thessalonians 3:5; Hebrews 13:21). Through regeneration man is made alive to God, so that once again he is able to do deeds pleasing to God (Ephesians 2:1, 10). Regeneration is therefore the first thing that has to happen. Only a regenerated person can turn from their sin and turn to God in faith. Jesus puts it this way, only a regenerated person can enter the Kingdom of God (John 3:3).

People are born again through the Word of God (James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:23). While God calls people through the word that is preached (Luke 8:11), regeneration must not be seen as a human response to God's Word. James 1:18 makes it clear that it is not man's response, but God's will that brings about regeneration. We must therefore interpret the role of God's word in much the same way that God's word was active in creation. God

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commanded, and it came to be (Psalms 33:6, 9; John 1:1-3; 2Corinthians 4:6). This helps explain why infants, too, can be citizens of the Kingdom (Mt. 19:13-15; Luke 18:15-17). Although they are too young to understand the word when it is preached, God can give them the new birth to enter God's Kingdom (John 3:3).

Regeneration is a creative work of God, so that James speaks of those who are born again as the first fruits of the new creation (James 1:18; cf. 2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15; Ephesians 2:15). As the first fruits of the New Creation, Christians represent the Kingdom. But at the end of time all of creation will be "born again" and belong to the Kingdom of God (Matthew 19:28, the word "renewal" here translates the Greek word palingenesis, which means "new birth; see also Romans 8:21).

Some Christians like to ask when you are born again. Since regeneration is a mysterious work of God's Spirit, it is not always easy to identify the moment of the new birth (John 3:8). Many Christians cannot remember their regeneration any more than they can remember their birth. They have known God as their Father for as long as they can remember. Others only came to know God as their Father at the times of their conversion. But from this we cannot conclude this was also the time they were born again. Often new converts will tell you that God has long been working in their lives. It is not important to know WHEN you were born again, rather it is important to know THAT you are born again. You can know you that are born again if you are converted.

Conversion:

The word conversion means "a turning about." In the Bible the word is sometimes used of a temporary change, where people turn to God only to fall back into a life of sin. Such was the case with the city of Nineveh (Jonah), Simon the magician (Acts 8:9, 13; 18ff), Hymenaeus and Alexander (1 Timothy 1:19-20), and others who left the faith (Hebrews 6:4-5). In the parable of the sower they are likened to seed which falls on the path, on rocky ground, or among the thorns (Matthew 13:18-23). But usually the word conversion is used for the permanent change from a life of bondage to sin to a new life in Christ. In this sense the word is used of Naaman, Manasseh, Zaccheus, the Eunuch, Cornelius, Paul and Lydia, to name just a few (2 Kings 5:15; 2 Chronicles 33:12-13; Luke 19:8-9; Acts 8:30ff; 9:5ff.; 10:44ff; 16:14).

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Conversion includes both a turning from and a turning to. The first, turning from sin, is called repentance. The second, turning to God, is called faith. While in one sense it is God who turns us (Acts 11:18; 2 Timothy 2:25), it is something we are commanded to do. Man is told to forsake his wicked ways and turn to God (Isaiah 55:7; Jeremiah 18:11; Ezekiel 18:23, 32; Acts 2:38).

#### Repentance:

True repentance is also something that involves three of our things; our mind, emotions and will. First our mind, because repentance requires man to recognize his own helplessness in dealing with his own sins, his guilt and total of his defilement (Romans 3:20). Second our emotions, because repentance calls for a heartfelt sorrow for the injustices done to God according to 2Corinthians 7:9-10. And third our will, because repentance requires a change in purpose, the will to turn from sin to obedience to God (Acts 2:38; Romans 2:4).

Repentance is required whenever a Christian fails to live as required by God. While true conversion itself is a onetime experience, yet Christians must turn to God for forgiveness each time they fall into sin (Luke 22:32; Revelation 2:5, 16; 21, 22; 3:3; 19).

#### Faith

Having faith in God means to believe, trust and have confidence in him. True saving faith also involves the mind, emotions and the will. That is, it requires knowledge of what God has done for us in Christ, joyous acceptance of salvation, and commitment to trust God in everything that happens (Matthew 22:37; John 3:15-18; Acts 2:37; 2 Timothy 1:12).

Full trust in Christ includes the assurance that he will complete his work of salvation in us, and one day we will live with him in glory (John 6:39; 10:28-29; 17:11-12; Romans 8:30, 38-39; Philippians 1:6; 2 Timothy 2:13; 4:18; 1John 5:13). Assurance is included in the well known biblical definition of faith: Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see (Hebrews 11:1).

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#### Justification:

Justification means to declare someone “not guilty”. The word justification therefore has the opposite meaning to the word condemnation (Deuteronomy 25:1; Proverbs 17:15; Isaiah 5:23; Romans 8:33-34). To be justified is to be declared righteous (John 3:18; 5:24; Romans 4:6-7; 2 Corinthians 5:19). For sinners to be declared righteous does not mean that God is ignoring their sins, but it means that they are given the righteousness of Christ (Romans 3:20-28; 4:5-7; 5:1; Galatians 2:16; 3:11 and 5:4).

Since “to justify” means “to declare righteous” it is clearly an act of God who judges us. It does not involve any cooperation from the sinner. Justification is a legal act of God whereby he declares the sinner righteous on the basis of the righteousness of Christ alone. Justification happens instantly, and covers all of the believer’s past, present and future sins (Romans 8:1; 32-34; also Hebrews 10:14, where the word “sanctification” stands for the covering of sin by Christ’s blood, and therefore must be understood in the sense of “justification”).

The doctrine of justification was one of the central issues at the time of the Reformation. The Roman Catholic Church taught a false doctrine of salvation by works, of which the worst example was found in the indulgences sold to fund the building of St. Peter’s cathedral in Rome. The indulgences promised the buyer immediate entrance into heaven. Over against this teaching the Reformers taught that justification was based solely on the righteousness of Christ, and could only be received through faith alone (Romans 3:24; 4:5; 5:9, 19; 8:1; 10:4; 1 Corinthians 1:30; 6:11; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 2:16; 3:11; Philippians 3:9).

#### Adoption:

Another legal act is the believers’ adoption as children of God, so that they can call God “Father” (Galatians 4:4-6; John 1:12-13). As fellow heirs with Christ believers inherit eternal life and all the blessings of the Kingdom (Romans 8:16-17). While many blessings of this inheritance can already be enjoyed in this life, the full richness of our inheritance will come to us in the future Kingdom of God (1Peter 1:4).

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### Sanctification:

The word sanctification literally means “a setting apart.” Sometimes the word is used in Scripture to mean almost the same as justification (e.g. in 1 Corinthians 6:11; Hebrews 10:14). But usually the word refers to the work of God’s Spirit by which he leads and strengthens the Christian to lead a holy life. Unlike justification, which is takes place in an instant, sanctification is something that takes place throughout the whole of the Christian’s life of faith. Sanctification also differs from justification in that it requires the active co-operation of man (2 Corinthians 7:1; Colossians 3:5-14; 1 Peter 1:22), who is encouraged to holiness by God’s Spirit (John 17:17; 1 Thessalonians 5:23).

The holy God requires holiness of the creature made in his image (Leviticus 11:44; 1 Peter 1:15-16). Through the fall man lost his holiness, but through the new birth the divine image is renewed, and in Christ man can again reflect “God in true righteousness and holiness” (Ephesians 4:24). Thus God’s people are called “a holy nation” (1 Peter 2:9), they are “called to be saints” (1 Corinthians 1:2), and told to be “holy” and “perfect” (1 Peter 1:16; James 1:4).

All this does not mean that a Christian is perfect when he is born again, or even that he can become perfect in this life. Some Christians claim they are perfect, appealing to passages like the first epistle of John (1 John 3:6,8,9; 5:18). However, these passages simply mean that the Christian does not “dwell in sin” (this is clear in the Greek text). John is well aware of the Christian’s continuing struggle with sin (1 John 1:8-10; 2:1; 5:16-17).

Believers have to contend with sin as long as they live (1 Kings 8:46; Proverbs 20:9; Ecclesiastes 7:20; James 3:2; 1 John 1:8). Even the greatest among God’s saints are pictured struggling with sin (Job 3:1, 1:8; Romans 7:7-26; Galatians 2:20; 5:17; Philippians 3:12-14). For this reason Christians are encouraged constantly to confess their sin and pray for forgiveness (Matthew 6:12; James 5:16; 1 John 1:9).

But sanctification means more than fighting sin. Christians are encouraged to live a life worthy of the Lord and [to] please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God (Colossians 1:10). Bearing fruit, by doing good works, is also part of sanctification. Sanctification therefore has two aspects, the dying of the old man of sin,

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and the making alive (quickening) of the new man in Christ. The old man is circumcised, crucified and buried with Christ, all of which are symbolic of the putting off of the flesh. The new man is made alive in Christ's victory over death and raised with him to lead a new life unto God (Romans 6:4-6; Galatians 2:19; 5:24; Colossians 2:11-12; 3:1-2).

Glorification:

The last step in our Christian life is glorification. Paul writes:

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. (Romans 8:29-30). In this passage Paul tells us that Christians can have assurance about their salvation, because God is not going to leave his work half done. Other verses which teach this include Romans 11:29; Philippians 1:6; 2 Thessalonians 3:3; 2 Timothy 1:12 and 4:18. The presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives is our guarantee that God will one day glorify us.

## CONCLUSION

The whole purpose of this book is to put in simple words the entire reformed confessional faith – the reformed theology, before common Christians so that the wavy teachings of our times may not shake the understanding of common Christian believers. I hope young people, older people and the families will enjoy reading and studying this book in their personal devotions, family prayer times and Church Bible Study groups. I am also sure that this book will be useful for the church-planters and lay people who have no access to the seminary libraries. This book is nothing but the compiled notes of reformed biblical faith. I thank God for all God's people for the spiritual wisdom that they have put together on paper to make this book what it is, a simplified reformed theology.

I would pray may the Lord make use of this book for His glory and extension of His kingdom. All glory be to God alone! Amen.

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