

# The Christian's Basis of Belief

AS WE CONSIDER THE BASIS OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH, our attention often turns toward the Scriptures—and rightly so. However, in an age where many nonorthodox groups profane the content and value of Scripture, we can also find our foundations from the early church's formation of creeds. A creed is a short, formal statement of religious belief—a confession of Christian faith, a standard teaching for converts, and a “badge for distinguishing”<sup>1</sup> those who preach Christ according to apostolic authority.

Creeds may take various forms and cover a variety of ideas. The Apostles' Creed serves as a uniform benchmark for general instruction in the basics of our faith. It publicly affirms our commonality with other Christians. “In entering the doorway to religious belief, the inquirer must first listen emphatically to what the worshiping community says about the ground of its faith.”<sup>2</sup> As a result, this creed is often read or recited in unison at worship services to affirm the believer in the unified faith of the Church.

## THE DEVELOPMENT AND AUTHORITY OF THE APOSTLES' CREED

The Apostle's Creed is the most common and well-known of all the Christian creeds.<sup>3</sup> For the Western church, it is “the Creed of creeds.”<sup>4</sup> Although its name seems to reflect apostolic authorship, scholars have only been able to trace its earliest circulation to the fourth century.<sup>5</sup>

Of all the ways that creeds have developed, two main approaches emerge: 1) as a result of the natural development of doctrines already held in agreement, and 2) “from the general life of the church in a particular age without any individual authorship.”<sup>6</sup> Often times, such creeds or other statements have emerged from the general life of the Church to combat heresies.

One prevailing theory in the development of the Apostles' Creed reveals a progression of thought that began in the apostolic church and continued into the fourth century. The earliest form of confession or creed has been attributed to Peter in reply to Jesus' question about his identity: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”<sup>7</sup> In conformity with the Trinitarian baptismal formula,<sup>8</sup> this statement gradually was expanded to include the addition of other articles and rules of faith during the Church's development.<sup>9</sup> Eventually, it took on its formalized character as the Apostles' Creed and continues to be one of the prevailing creeds since the fourth century.

Though all creeds carry authority, they are strictly subordinate to the authority of the Scriptures. Creeds, rightly understood and formulated, emerge from and uphold the Scriptures. They are also subject to revision according to the understanding of the Church, under the direction of the Holy Spirit. Although subordinate to Scripture, the Apostles' Creed and other creeds

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1 Thomas Oden, *The Living God* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), 14.

2 Ibid.

3 Three creeds stand out as the most accepted creeds: The Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed.

4 Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1876), 14.

5 The creed first appeared in a letter from the synod of Milan (attributed to St. Ambrose) to Pope Siricius.

6 Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1876), 6.

7 Matthew 16:16

8 Matthew 28:19; the baptismal formula stated here has been considered a creed.

9 Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, vol 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1876), 16.

genuinely reflect our understanding of the nature of Christian faith and aid us in the instruction of the basics of the faith.

Let's examine the Apostles' Creed and the value of each of its components.

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## THE APOSTLES' CREED

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**I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.  
And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord;  
Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary,  
Suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried;  
He descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead;  
He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty;  
From hence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.  
I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic Church;  
The communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins;  
The resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.**

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## THE AFFIRMATION OF COMMONLY HELD TRUTHS

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**I believe...**

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The ancient creeds all begin with the phrase, I believe. This phrase reveals the core conceptions of the Christian faith, which give substance to our hopes and certainty to the realities we do not yet see.<sup>10</sup> By this personal affirmation we place ourselves in the company of Christians worldwide—throughout Church history and among the ones living today. In this way, our faith, while personal, is consistent with the faith expressed throughout the Body of Christ, his Church.

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**in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.**

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By stating that we believe in God, we affirm more than a belief in an impersonal force. By calling him Father, we affirm that God is a personal being. This declaration leads us to understand that we are God's children by faith<sup>11</sup> and consider the implications of such a conclusion.

In contrast to the ancient world of gods, God the Father is almighty. His strength was apparent not only within the borders of Israel but also in the lands of Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Babylon. His power has been evidenced in the formation and overthrow of many nations throughout history and today. His power is not the result of flimsy human idealism, nor is it weak in comparison to the powers of gods from other religions.<sup>12</sup> In fact, he is the supreme authority of the universe.

Yet in light of God's supremacy, we can trust him to fully accomplish what he has promised. He is not inconsistent in determining his causes like the ancient gods, nor is he insufficient to carry out his purposed plans. God is not simply a well-intentional Father—he is the One with the means to accomplish whatever he wills.

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10 Hebrews 11:1

11 1 John 3:1-3; Romans 8:15-17

12 Acts 17:24-31

The apostolic witnesses adopted the Old Testament Hebrew conception of God as the Creator. Almighty God had demonstrated his power in the universe by creating from nothing all that has been created.<sup>13</sup> Not only did this truth lead the Hebrew worshiper to a sense of awe,<sup>14</sup> but the early church also possessed the desire to honor him for his gift of creation.

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**And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord;**

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The Apostles' Creed focuses on the Incarnation, when Jesus the Son of God became human. Although we can never dismiss the fact of Christ's humanity, we could never make sense of the New Testament without the overarching concept of his own divine nature. "God's transcendent power is not so much displayed in the vastness of the heavens...as in his condescension to our weak nature. We marvel at the way the Godhead was entwined in human nature and, while becoming man, did not cease to be God."<sup>15</sup>

God convincingly showed himself to us by sending his only Son to earth. As God's unique Son, Jesus claimed to be "one with the Father." He also claimed that when we have seen him, we have seen the Father.<sup>16</sup>

This connection with divinity was spelled out when Paul made over 250 references to Jesus as Lord in his letters. To confess Jesus as Lord means that we are under his authority. With this claim upon our lives, he desires to be the undisputed leader for every person. We must realize that his Lordship must be understood personally—"my Lord"<sup>17</sup>—and corporately within the Church—"Our Lord."

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**Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary;**

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Because God chose to be knowable in human form, Jesus entered this world through supernatural conception and natural birth. "In this lowly birth, the Holy Spirit enabled the eternal Son to take on human nature without ceasing to be God."<sup>18</sup> To reject this special conception of Christ would be to lose a grasp on the significance of his incarnation, death, and resurrection. Even though Jesus did not have a human father, he nonetheless became human, fully entering and experiencing the human condition, yet without sin.<sup>19</sup>

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"We marvel at the way Godhead was entwined in human nature and, while becoming man, did not cease to be God."

Gregory of Nyssa



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13 Genesis 1:1-2; John 1:1-3

14 Deuteronomy 6:4-5

15 Gregory of Nyssa, *An Address on Religious Instruction in The Library of Christian Classics III*. ed. J. Baillie, J.T. McNeill, and H.P. Van Dusen (Philadelphia: Westminster), 301.

16 John 10:30; John 14:9

17 John 20:28

18 Thomas Oden, *The Word of Life* (New York: Harper Collins, 1989), 133.

19 Hebrews 4:14-15

Jesus endured hostile opposition—from Herod’s attempts to massacre the innocent in Bethlehem to his having nowhere to lay his head to his final struggle upon the cross.



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**Suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified,  
Dead and buried; he descended into hell;**

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The events surrounding Jesus’ death were not done in secret and are verified in sources other than the Bible. Throughout his life, Jesus endured hostile opposition—from Herod’s attempts to massacre the innocent in Bethlehem to his having nowhere to lay his head to his final struggle upon the cross.<sup>20</sup> Jesus suffered intensely from the time of his arrest until the time of his death. All of Jesus’ sufferings were considered a necessary and central part of his messianic ministry.

During the time of Christ’s crucifixion, Pontius Pilate served as a Roman governor in Israel. The Roman soldiers under his command were professional executioners who tortured Jesus, mocked him, struck him, and spat on him. In spite of these atrocities, the worst was yet to come—as crucifixion was one of the most physically torturous punishments ever utilized.<sup>21</sup>

In finality, Jesus cried out from the cross, “It is finished,” at which time his spirit departed the body. After a spear was thrust into his side to attest to his physical death, the body of Jesus was taken from the cross and placed in the borrowed tomb of Joseph of Arimathea—once again confirming his physical death.

The creed then moves Jesus from the abode of the living into the abode of the dead—Hades.<sup>22</sup> As the Scriptures attest: “He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built.”<sup>23</sup> The purpose of this descent was to announce victory to the depths of creation and that the powers of sin, death, and evil were ultimately defeated.

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**the third day he rose again from the dead;**

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Jesus rose from the dead! In just three days, what had looked like the collapse of God’s mission turned out to be the victory for all humanity. The resurrection altered everything that had preceded it. For in the resurrection, Christ’s teachings and promises about eternal life were secured for the believer—bearing the proof of eternal life. God clearly demonstrated this power by raising Jesus from the dead, and he will do so for us as well.<sup>24</sup>

By coming to life, the drama of Christ’s mission had reached its climax and salvation had reached its grand conclusion. By providing evidence for the resurrection, Jesus revealed the reality of eternal life for his followers. The Christian not only has the power to face death with hope but also the power to live a transformed life today. Without the hope of the resurrection, our faith would be futile, and we would be deserving of pity.<sup>25</sup>

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20 The intense suffering endured by Christ in the final week of his life is commonly called *the Passion*.

21 As has been noted in the movie *The Passion of Christ*, produced by Mel Gibson, Icon Productions, 20th Century Fox, 2004, DVD.

22 The Greek word *Hades* has often been translated into English as *Hell*. In this case, Hades means the abode of the dead, and the term Hell within the creed should be thought of as such within this statement.

23 1 Peter 3:18-20. Many other texts, including Ephesians 4:8-10, Romans 10:7, 1 Peter 4:4-6, and Acts 13:37, confirm this statement within the creed.

24 1 Corinthians 6:14

25 1 Corinthians 15:12-19

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**He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.**

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“From the finite world of space, time, and matter into the transcendent heavenly sphere the Son moved in the ascension.”<sup>26</sup> Paul wrote of this marvelous truth, “He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.”<sup>27</sup> Once in heaven, Jesus presented his glorious body as evidence of the atonement.<sup>28</sup> Now that the work of salvation had been accomplished, Jesus could assume the authority of kingdom rule.

From his Father’s side, Jesus will one day return to earth to judge humanity, both the living and the dead, who will be raised at that time. His judgment will be based on the response people have made to his offer of salvation through the forgiveness of sins. He will judge not as a disinterested observer, but as one who has been where we were, and experienced what we experienced, and as one who has been working on our behalf at the right hand of the Father.<sup>29</sup>

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**I believe in the Holy Ghost;**

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On the Day of Pentecost, Peter stated, “Exalted to the right hand of God, [Jesus] has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.”<sup>30</sup> The privilege of our faith is not only to believe that the Holy Spirit is the third Person of the Trinity but to receive him as our Guide, Counselor, and Advocate. The Holy Spirit was given by Christ to believers to guide them into the truth that Jesus taught and lived.<sup>31</sup>

The Spirit convicts us of sin and give us spiritual wisdom and power. He provides us with spiritual gifts to use in serving one another in and through the Church.<sup>32</sup> The evidence that the Spirit is working in our lives is demonstrated through love, joy, peace, and a host of other honorable qualities.<sup>33</sup> In essence, the Holy Spirit reveals God’s presence in our lives—helping us to become more like Christ.

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**the holy catholic Church;**

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“If the church did not exist, then there would be no community in which to make this confession.”<sup>34</sup> As we alluded to earlier, when we affirm the creed, we take our place among other Christian believers. That group extends to people from all over the world and collectively that group is the holy catholic Church.<sup>35</sup> “The church is catholic because it is not bound to a particular place or time. The one church that lives in Christ has the characteristic of being one throughout the earth.”<sup>36</sup> Therefore we must not mistake the term *catholic* as a reference to one particular church group like the Roman Catholic Church. It contains the whole of those who profess Christ as Lord.

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26 Thomas Oden, *The Word of Life* (New York: Harper Collins, 1989), 502.

27 Ephesians 4:10

28 Hebrews 9:24-28

29 Hebrews 4:14-16

30 Acts 2:33

31 John 14:26

32 1 Corinthians 12:7-11

33 Galatians 5:22-23

34 Thomas Oden, *Life in the Spirit* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), 260.

35 The root meaning of catholic is “that which concerns the whole.”

36 Thomas Oden, *Life in the Spirit* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), 337.

Once in heaven, Jesus presented his glorious body as evidence of the atonement.



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“If the church did not exist, then there would be no community in which to make this confession.”

Thomas Oden



**“No one can simply become a Christian by oneself, or worship wholly by oneself, or be converted by oneself, or preach to oneself, or serve only oneself. That is not Christianity.”**  
Dietrich Bonhoeffer



**Forgiveness is a radical gift that is received from God—for we possessed nothing within our own character or strength to deserve it.**



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### **the communion of saints;**

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The Church, which we together with all other believers comprise, is holy because Christ—the Head of the Church—is holy.<sup>37</sup> In Christ, the Church has been set apart to conform to his likeness and accomplish the work to which he has called her—to serve and glorify him.<sup>38</sup> As a result, we become the body of Christ in the world.

The Church from the outset is defined as a single living organism, drawing its life from Christ and finding connection among its members.<sup>39</sup> Since we are members of this one body, we have the gift of fellowship with one another. We are created by God as interdependent beings, and as such, we need one another for support and encouragement.<sup>40</sup> “No one can simply become a Christian by oneself, or worship wholly by oneself, or be converted by oneself, or preach to oneself, or serve only oneself. That is not Christianity.”<sup>41</sup> Because of Jesus we have this connection or relationship with all Christian believers no matter where they are.

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### **the forgiveness of sins;**

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One of the hallmarks of Christian faith is proclaimed through Paul’s words: “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”<sup>42</sup> Jesus painted the picture of the extravagant mercy of a forgiving father who would respond to the return of his repentant son.<sup>43</sup> As can be seen from these examples, forgiveness is a radical gift that is received from God—for we possessed nothing within our own character or strength to deserve it. Forgiveness places us in the position to merely accept a restored relationship with the Father.

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### **the resurrection of the body;**

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Just as death is certain, so is the immortality of the soul. If death causes the separation of the soul from the body, then the resurrection is the reunion of the soul with the body for its eternal destination. As stated earlier, the resurrection of Jesus has provided the critical component of proof for us to affirm our own bodily resurrection one day.

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37 Ephesians 4:15-16; Colossians 1:15-20

38 Ephesians 3:14-21

39 John 15:5, 9-17

40 Hebrews 3:12-13, 10:24-25

41 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communia*, quoted in Avery Dulles, *A Church to Believe In*, (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 18.

42 Romans 8:1

43 Luke 15:11-24

Within this small phrase, we affirm the coupled reality of the final resurrection with Christ's second coming. Paul describes this climatic event, "In a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality."<sup>44</sup> Therefore, we will one day be raised in body and not exist in some kind of altered state of consciousness in which we may not be aware of our existence or lose our distinct identity.

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**and the life everlasting. Amen.**

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The ultimate conclusion is to enjoy a relationship with our God throughout eternity. Eternal life will consist of living in the presence of God forever. All that was hinted at and not fully understood will finally be made clear. The obstacles that hindered our relationship with him on earth will pass away. Our imaginations will be filled with the complete assurance of future blessing without interruption. Just as Christ's incarnation brought him into human existence, so the resurrection of the dead will enable us to live forever with God in our midst.<sup>45</sup>

This is our promise; this is our hope; this is our Amen.

**Just as Christ's incarnation brought him into human existence, so the resurrection of the dead will enable us to live forever with God in our midst.**



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44 1 Corinthians 15:52-53

45 Revelation 21:3-7

# The Articles of Faith

## 101-OF GOD

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**There is but one true and living God, an eternal Being, a Spirit without body, indivisible, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness: the Creator and Preserver of all things, visible and invisible. In this Godhead there is a Trinity of one substance and power, and co-eternal; namely the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.**

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As limited creatures, we are unable to fully comprehend the mystery of this unlimited Being.



IN A WORLD WHERE many people worship a variety of gods, it is important for us to remember that in reality only one God exists.<sup>1</sup> This one God has declared himself to be the only true and living God—"I am [YHWH],<sup>2</sup> and there is no other; apart from me there is no God."<sup>3</sup>

As limited creatures, we are unable to fully comprehend the mystery of this unlimited Being. Yet God has revealed himself to all people through creation and history, whereby we can know enough about him to appreciate who he is and what he has done.<sup>4</sup> More specifically God has spoken to us through the Scriptures, which describe his very nature and character, not only in the concepts of thought but within the events of world history. Ultimately, he has revealed himself to us through the Word of Life—Jesus Christ, the exact expression of God's own glorious existence.<sup>5</sup>

God's existence is solely dependent upon himself and nothing else.<sup>6</sup> God stands alone as unique—beyond limitation or measure in terms of his presence and existence,<sup>7</sup> unable to be divided into separable parts,<sup>8</sup> without beginning or end,<sup>9</sup> and constantly alive and active without decay or death.<sup>10</sup> Because God solely possesses such traits, he exists above all other things that we know within the created order. Simply understood, there are not restrictions to God's greatness.

Within this context of greatness, God is all powerful<sup>11</sup>—able to do all things that are in harmony with his perfect character. As such, he created everything, visible and invisible, and continues to care for his creation.<sup>12</sup> The Scriptures also speak of God as all knowing<sup>13</sup>—possessing complete knowledge of everything that is known within and beyond our human

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1 Deuteronomy 4:32-39; 6:4-5; Nehemiah 9:6; Isaiah 43:10-13

2 Exodus 3:14-16; 20:2; Yahweh (in German, Jehovah) comes from the Hebrew term YHWH, which is translated as God's name, "I AM."

3 Isaiah 45:5a

4 Job 12:22-25; Daniel 2:20-23; Romans 1:20

5 John 1:1, 14; Hebrews 1:1-3; 1 John 1:1-2

6 God is the underived source and end of all things (Psalm 90; Isaiah 40:28); see Thomas Oden, *The Living God* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), 54-56.

7 Isaiah 40:28. The medieval scholastics said that "God's center is everywhere, God's circumference nowhere" (cf. Bonaventure, *Soul's Journey into God II*, in *Classics of Western Spirituality*, pp.69ff).

8 The concept of indivisibility simply means that God is not composed of parts and that he is completely present in all of his activities; see Thomas Oden, *The Living God* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), 57-58.

9 Psalm 102:27; Isaiah 26:4; Revelation 1:8

10 Matthew 22:32

11 Jeremiah 32:17, Luke 1:37

12 Psalm 8; Colossians 1:16-1

13 Psalm 139:1-6; Matthew 6:31-33; Romans 11:33-34; Hebrews 4:13



existence.<sup>14</sup> Likewise, the Scriptures describe God as all present,<sup>15</sup> whereby he exists as spirit, without body, and has access at all times to any place in all of creation.

Although God is the Creator of all things and beyond measure in his existence, he must be understood in personal terms, possessing his own self-awareness, intelligence, and ability to relate with other beings. Within this divine awareness, God exists as Trinity<sup>16</sup>—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. These three distinct Persons exist as one essence, each being endless in nature and equal in power, while revealing themselves as unique expressions of God operating in the world.

From within this collective unity, the Godhead has always flourished in love. For out of this unceasing abundance of love, God created humans endowed with his image in order to extend loving interaction beyond his own existence within the Trinity. As a result, love exists as the foundation of God's relationship with his people.<sup>17</sup> When the Scriptures attest that God is love, they indicate more than God's possession of the quality of love, but rather, that at his very core, God has never ceased to be love.

Because God's unlimited nature is coupled with his unwavering love, he is always found to be dependable<sup>18</sup>—always doing what is right and never departing from his divine purposes. Ultimately, God maintains absolute rule over all of creation in order to accomplish his eternal divine purposes.<sup>19</sup>

## 102-OF JESUS CHRIST

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**The Lord Jesus Christ, who is the only begotten Son of God, was born of the Virgin Mary, grew into perfect manhood and became acquainted with all the infirmities, temptations, and sorrows of men. In him dwelt the fullness of the Godhead, so that, uniting Deity and humanity in one Christ, he is sole Mediator between God and man. He gave his life a ransom for all, and by his death on the cross made a full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world. He rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, wherein he abideth, our great High Priest and King, and must reign until all things are put in subjection under him.**

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14 Omniscience reveals that God has infinite knowledge of all external events and internal motives of people. He knows past, present, and future events. Although through divine foreknowledge God may know future acts of human freedom, he does not necessarily act in such a way as to cause them. For further understanding concerning divine foreknowledge, see Thomas Oden, *The Living God* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), 71-74.

15 Psalm 139:7-12; Jeremiah 23:23-24

16 The term *Trinity*, derived from tri-unity (3-in-1), is nowhere found within the Bible but is developed throughout the Bible, revealing two aspects concerning God: unity and distinction. Clear evidence for the Trinity is found in the baptism account of Jesus (Matthew 3:16-17), salutations and benedictions of letters (1 Peter 1:1-2; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Jude 20-21), and the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20).

17 Psalm 25:8-10; 31:21-24; 146:8-9; John 3:16; 1 John 4:9-10

18 Psalm 33:11; 102:25-27; Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8

19 For a complete analysis of the freedom of God, see Thomas Oden, *The Living God* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), 90-97.

As God, he is free from sin; as man, he represents humankind as no other person could, because all others stand separated from God by sin.



The Lord Jesus Christ is God the Son, the second person of the Trinity, and the promised Messiah.<sup>20</sup> His mother Mary was a virgin at his birth, as he was conceived in her by the power of the Holy Spirit. He was raised in the household of Joseph and Mary, and over time he “grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.”<sup>21</sup>

Jesus lived fully as a human being, and as such experienced human weaknesses, temptations, and emotions.<sup>22</sup> Even though he was fully human through his natural birth, he was fully divine through his conception by the Holy Spirit and experienced the fullness of the Godhead in bodily form. In other words, he was both God and man—both divine and human, all in one Person.<sup>23</sup> Thus, he has become the only suitable Mediator between God and humanity.<sup>24</sup> As God, he is free from sin; as man, he represents humankind as no other person could, because all others stand separated from God by sin.

By his death on the cross, Jesus Christ became the Redeemer for all people. The willing sacrifice of his life fully paid the penalty for the sins of all humanity. Although the disobedience of our forefather Adam introduced sin and death to the human race, Jesus Christ has made many righteous in God’s sight through his own obedience.<sup>25</sup>

After his death by crucifixion, Jesus rose from the dead on the third day and was seen by many witnesses. He then ascended into heaven, where he is seated in the place of power—at the right hand of God the Father, now to appear for us in God’s presence.<sup>26</sup> There he serves as the great High Priest before God, interceding on behalf of all the saints. As such, he is able to understand all human weakness and need, because he was tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.<sup>27</sup> From henceforth, he will rule as the King of a heavenly kingdom and will come to earth once again to establish this eternal kingdom, whereby he will rule over all things, even death.<sup>28</sup>

## 103-OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

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**The Holy Spirit, proceeding from the Father and the Son, and of the same eternal nature, power, and glory, is everywhere present with men to convict of sin, work newness of life in them that believe, and lead them into all truth.**

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The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. As such, he is fully God, yet he is distinct from the Father and the Son. Because of this, he should not be thought of as God’s spirit in the same manner that people possess a spirit but rather as an equal partner within the Godhead.

20 The term *Messiah* is Hebrew for the Greek term Christ.

21 Luke 2:52

22 Hebrews 4:15

23 Colossians 2:9

24 1 Timothy 2:5

25 1 Corinthians 15:22; Romans 4:14-19

26 Hebrews 9:24

27 Hebrews 4:15

28 1 Corinthians 15:24-26

As a unique member of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit has distinctive work to do in the world that complements the work of the Father and the Son. He does not communicate independently of the Father and Son but always speaks to facilitate the Son's mission—the reconciliation of humanity with God. Furthermore, he was active in the creation of the world, involved in the birth and life of Jesus Christ, and continues to participate in the redemptive work for humanity.

Essentially, the Bible describes the Holy Spirit as a Deity.<sup>29</sup> The Holy Spirit is eternal,<sup>30</sup> life-giving,<sup>31</sup> all-powerful,<sup>32</sup> and omnipresent.<sup>33</sup> Jesus remarked that to speak against the Holy Spirit was to blaspheme God.<sup>34</sup> Ultimately, the Holy Spirit is equal with relation to the Father and the Son expressed in the baptismal formula<sup>35</sup> and within various salutations and benedictions.<sup>36</sup> He is the Author of the Scriptures,<sup>37</sup> and the Revealer of Truth,<sup>38</sup> and our Provision of God's Grace.<sup>39</sup>

The night before he was betrayed, Jesus told his disciples that his departure would provide a blessing for them, because he would send them the Holy Spirit. Not only did Jesus say that the Holy Spirit would guide believers into all truth, but he would also expose the world's faulty view of sin and judgment and would help believers understand his own teachings.<sup>40</sup>

On the day of Pentecost, three thousand were present for the Spirit's initial infusion within the Church. With the advent of the Spirit, God's presence became a reality in his community.<sup>41</sup> The Church became the Temple of the Spirit—and essentially became the agency of his redeeming work.

As the Holy Spirit works Person to person, he initially convinces people of their wrong motives and actions and their need for salvation. He then helps believers fulfill God's purpose within their lives by granting them new life, assurance of salvation,<sup>42</sup> and power to live victoriously over sin.<sup>43</sup> In this relationship, he testifies to their adoption as God's children and presents them with spiritual gifts<sup>44</sup> that provide resultant fruit<sup>45</sup> as evidence of his work within their lives. In this way, the Holy Spirit unwraps the hypothetical terms of salvation and applies their reality within the life of each believer.

**The Church became the Temple of the Spirit—and Essentially became the agency of his redeeming work.**



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29 For a complete analysis of the deity of the Holy Spirit, see Thomas Oden, *Life in the Spirit* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), 15-18.

30 Hebrews 9:14

31 Romans 8:2

32 Romans 15:18-19

33 1 Corinthians 2:10-11

34 Mark 3:29

35 Matthew 28:19

36 1 Peter 1:1-2; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Jude 20-21

37 2 Peter 1:21

38 John 14:17

39 Hebrews 10:29

40 John 16:8-15

41 Ephesians 2:22

42 Romans 8:16

43 Romans 8:9

44 1 Corinthians 12:7

45 Galatians 5:22-23

## 104—OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

**By the Holy Scriptures we understand those canonical books of the Old and New Testaments, which the Church has at all times received as such...**

**These Scriptures, given by Divine inspiration, contain the will of God concerning us in all things necessary to our salvation; so that whatever is not contained therein nor can be proved thereby is not to be enjoined on any as an article of faith.**

Since the Bible contains numerous encounters of God with people, we can observe both the nature of God and humanity and the need for salvation for all people within its pages. The truths revealed there are fully reliable—recorded by men moved by God’s Spirit.

While people often regard the Bible as one book, it actually contains a collection of writings that are arranged in two major sections. The Old Testament includes the Law and the Prophets, as well as books of history, poetry, and wisdom literature. The New Testament includes the stories of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus (Gospels); the results of his life upon the Church (Acts); and letters describing his activity within the life of the Church both now and in the future (Epistles).

At the time Jesus lived, the Scriptures had come to mean an exclusive collection of divinely inspired writings. The early church leaders recognized thirty-nine ancient writings as canonical.<sup>46</sup> Today, these books are contained in the Old Testament of the Bible. At the same time, these same leaders rejected other writings, because the message in them was not a reliable source from God. These writings are regarded as apocryphal<sup>47</sup> books.

By the year 316 AD, twenty-seven more books had been selected out of many Christian writings and copies. These were regarded as the entire and complete revelation of the new covenant through Jesus Christ—the New Testament.

Since the Bible is inspired by the Holy Spirit,<sup>48</sup> it stands uniquely as God’s revelation—it is his personal message to all humanity. Through the Scriptures, we believe that God has undeniably spoken to us,<sup>49</sup> and that those human authors who penned the Scriptures were inspired by God.<sup>50</sup> The words they wrote conveyed to people then and now, the exact intention, meaning, and thought of God. Thus, the Scriptures as originally written are without error and totally reliable for guidance today.<sup>51</sup>

The Holy Bible contains everything that people need to know in order to receive eternal life,<sup>52</sup> as well as complete instructions for their moral behaviors,<sup>53</sup> along with the truth that

Since the Bible is inspired by the Holy Spirit, it stands uniquely as God’s revelation—it is his personal message to all humanity.



46 *Canonicity* means “to be measured by a standard.”

47 *Apocryphal* books are contained in Roman Catholic editions of the Bible.

48 2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20-21

49 Hebrews 1:1, 2

50 *Inspiration* is the influence of the Holy Spirit upon the biblical writers to produce a divinely authoritative Scripture. For further concerning the inspiration of the Scriptures, see David S. Dockery, *Christian Scripture*, 174-176.

51 *Inerrancy* means freedom from any kind of error, which asserts the reliability or infallibility of the Scriptures.

52 John 20:30, 31

53 2 Timothy 3:15-17

liberates them from sin’s power.<sup>54</sup> In order to live according to the Scriptures, we must apply ourselves to regular reading and study. As we continue to read, study, and meditate upon God’s Word, we will realize that “through them [we] may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.”<sup>55</sup>

## 105-OF HUMAN DEPRAVITY

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**All men have sinned, and they inherit a depravity of nature which is continually propagated in the entire race of Adam. This corruption of nature so far removes them from the original righteousness of man that of themselves they have no ability to recover from their fallen condition, but are continually inclined to that which is evil.**

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We read in Genesis that the original man and woman, Adam and Eve, were created by God in his image.<sup>56</sup> In this perfect state, they were pure, without sin, and able to commune with him in every respect. Consequently, following their creation, Genesis records that God “saw all that he had made, and it was very good.”<sup>57</sup>

Yet this state of perfection did not last. In Genesis chapter three, we read about the Fall of humanity.<sup>58</sup> Through this event, God’s original prohibition was violated by the disobedient act of the first humans against him. Through their disobedience, all people became depraved<sup>59</sup> and the image of God was corrupted in us. This means that every aspect of humanity—our intellect, emotion, and will—was negatively affected by the introduction of sin into the human race. Human sin was not the invention of God, who had created all things perfectly and for good purpose, but was the result of events caused by skewed human freedom.

Now God’s image within humans has been corrupted, but not fully destroyed or obliterated. Sin had corrupted human relationships with God and among one another. Although communication was still possible, it has been greatly hindered by the effects of the Fall. As a result, people continue to experience disharmony and distortion in the areas of moral awareness and responsible living.

Because of sin, all people have been alienated from God, who remains sinless. As a result, every human throughout history, with the exception of Jesus Christ, has inherited a sinful nature,<sup>60</sup> and a perpetual tendency toward sin—to do evil rather than good. The perfect fellowship that humans once held with God has been broken, because sin cannot exist in the presence of God.<sup>61</sup>

Human sin was not the invention of God, who had created all things perfectly and for good purpose, but was the result of events caused by skewed human freedom.



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54 Galatians 5:1

55 2 Peter 1:4

56 Genesis 1:26

57 Genesis 1:31

58 *The Fall* of humanity refers to the event when the first humans rebelled against God in the Garden by eating of the forbidden fruit, and as a result, all humans have experienced alienation from God and the corruption of all of nature and its processes.

59 Depravity causes all people to live under the powerful delusion that causes them to embrace deceptive lies.

60 Romans 3:23

61 Psalm 68:2

This corrupt nature is rooted so deeply in all people that they are completely unable to restore the original righteous image of God in themselves. Since God's image was freely given by grace at creation, the restoration of God's image in us can only be accomplished by the God of grace, who alone is the Giver of his image.

The wonderful message of salvation through Christ is that, since salvation does not depend on one's own ability, it is available to everyone—for it does not depend on anyone's good works.



## 106—OF SALVATION THROUGH CHRIST

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**The love of God has made salvation possible to all through the mediation of Jesus Christ, whereby every man is graciously provided with freedom of will to accept or reject the offer of eternal life.**

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Since God created all people to live in loving relationships with him, he desires that none should perish in their sinful condition.<sup>62</sup> Because of God's vast, unconditional love for all people,<sup>63</sup> he did something about our helpless situation.<sup>64</sup> He provided a way for everyone to be saved. When Jesus died on the cross, he died for the sins of everyone, for all time.<sup>65</sup> Therefore, salvation is available to everyone who will call upon the name of Jesus Christ.<sup>66</sup>

God has created humans with freedom that grants them the ability to decide for themselves what to do and how to live. However, the first man, Adam, misused his freedom by resisting God's commands in the Garden. Since that time, every human has been under the influence of sin,<sup>67</sup> and as a result, justly receives the penalty for sin, which is eternal separation from God.<sup>68</sup> In this natural state of life, sin separates people from God and renders them powerless to rescue themselves from its influence or penalty.<sup>69</sup>

The wonderful message of salvation through Christ is that, since salvation does not depend on one's own ability, it is available to everyone<sup>70</sup>—for it does not depend on anyone's good works.<sup>71</sup> Since salvation has been accomplished by the finished work of Jesus Christ and is offered to all, even those who are guilty of the most detestable crimes can be saved.<sup>72</sup> Ultimately, nothing can prevent a person from receiving God's gift of salvation.

Salvation, however, does not happen automatically. Scripture clearly teaches that a person must receive the gift of salvation by faith.<sup>73</sup> Anyone who has not believed in Jesus for this

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62 2 Peter 3:9  
63 1 John 4:10  
64 Romans 5:6-10  
65 1 Peter 3:18  
66 Romans 10:13  
67 Romans 3:23  
68 Romans 6:23  
69 Romans 5:6  
70 Galatians 3:28  
71 Ephesians 2:8-9  
72 1 Timothy 1:15  
73 Ephesians 2:8

gift is without salvation. To do nothing about salvation is to stand condemned already.<sup>74</sup> Therefore, let everyone accept this opportunity, because “today is the day of salvation.”<sup>75</sup>

## 107—OF REPENTANCE

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**Repentance is sorrow for sin, wrought in the heart by the power of the Holy Spirit. The awakened sinner is thereby made to recognize the holiness of God, the righteousness of his law and the guilt and shame of his own perverse nature. Thus deeply humbled he turns unto God and forsakes his sins.**

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Repentance begins with the realization of sorrow for sin and finds its fullness in the changed behavior that leads us away from sinful practices.<sup>76</sup> The natural direction of human freedom points toward self-fulfillment, often at the expense and disregard of others. In this self-absorbed reality, people are unaware of God’s proper course for their human lives apart from sin. And until the Holy Spirit penetrates their dulled awareness, they never realize the need for change to occur within their lives.<sup>77</sup>

At its outset, repentance occurs when the awakened sinner realizes a profound sorrow in resisting God’s will and recognizes the spiritual distance between himself and God’s right standards.<sup>78</sup> This inward awareness produces a sense of guilt that our lives stand in jeopardy of eternal condemnation. Thus, this initial work of the Holy Spirit within our lives accuses us of our improper behaviors in order to bring our human spirits into agreement with God’s desired will.<sup>79</sup>

As penitent sinners come to despair over their tendency to sin, their minds, hearts, and wills turn toward a new and desirable direction with God. The Greek term translated as repentance in the New Testament literally means “to change one’s thinking.”<sup>80</sup> In order for repentance to occur, people must change their minds about the course of their actions that have taken them in a direction away from God. During this reversal, they also regret their wrong actions that have adversely affected others and the heavy feeling of condemnation that restricts their relationship with God.

Lastly, repentance requires a changed attitude that seeks a proper course of forgiveness and responsibility. This new determination pursues a habitual change of behavior that will penetrate the depths of our moral character through faith in Jesus Christ. When we as believers openly confess our sins before God, we then can find the forgiveness for our previous wrong actions. As we agree with God’s standards, we also realize the need to commit to a new pattern of behavior that pleases him.<sup>81</sup> During times of confession before God, we may also become aware of the need to confess to an offended party or to take action in order to restore a severed relationship.

As penitent sinners come to despair over their tendency to sin, their minds, hearts, and wills turn toward a new and desirable direction with God.



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74 John 3:18

75 2 Corinthians 6:2

76 2 Corinthians 7:10

77 Romans 7:14-25

78 Psalm 51:1-3

79 Romans 8:5

80 *Metanoeo* is the Greek term that means to change one’s thinking

81 Matthew 3:8

As we continually embrace a repentant spirit of humility, our lives take on renewed freedom from sin where we no longer live by the shame of our regrets but instead walk in the joy of living for God.<sup>82</sup>

## 108—OF JUSTIFICATION

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**Justification is that act of God by which, when we yield ourselves in full confidence to our Saviour, Jesus Christ, we are freely acquitted from the guilt of sin, and accounted righteous in this sight. We are accordingly justified, not by works which we perform, but by faith in him who died for us.**

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So when God looks at a record of the lives of those who are believers, all their sins have been removed so that only their good deeds remain.



Justification simply implies that believers now stand in a right relationship with God through the finished work of Christ. They are declared to be innocent of the guilt and punishment for past sins by God as a result of their faith in Jesus' death on the cross. In this state, God enables them to have fellowship with him, which leads to their increase in right living.

Because all people stood in a position of condemnation, Jesus died on the cross and took the sins of the world upon himself. Those sins were paid for by this blood and are no longer held against the repentant sinner. So when God looks at a record of the lives of those who are believers, all their sins have been removed so that only their good deeds remain. Thereby, God pronounces that they are without sin and qualified to receive eternal life.

Although our actions show that we are still sinners, God regards us without sin because he does not hold our sins against us. Therefore, justification is not earned by doing good deeds, nor does it come by any ceremony or words a person can perform. Justification is only accomplished by Jesus Christ's work on the cross and becomes operative in our lives when we accept Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord by faith.<sup>83</sup>

Justification allows us to have fellowship with God. Although sin had separated us from God, justification now gives us a right standing before God.<sup>84</sup> Therefore we can pray to him, give him praise, and receive his blessings. Justification is the important first step that allows sanctification to begin. By pronouncing believers sinless through justification, they receive the Holy Spirit who works in them to help them live beyond sin's control—sanctification.<sup>85</sup>

Therefore, justification means that we have received forgiveness of sin and have God's promise that he will not count our sins against us. "As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us"<sup>86</sup>—he remembers them no more. Because our sins are forgiven we should not allow guilt over them to keep us from living in harmony with God. We may still have to deal with the natural consequences resulting from our sins, but God does not require any payment for them other than the blood Jesus shed on the cross. And as a result, our debt of sin has been marked "paid in full."

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82 Psalm 51:10-12

83 Galatians 2:18

84 Romans 5:1

85 2 Thessalonians 2:13

86 Psalm 103:12



## 109—OF REGENERATION

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**Regeneration is that work of the Holy Spirit wrought in us whereby we are made partakers of the divine nature, and experience newness of life in Christ Jesus. By this new birth the believer becomes a child of God, receives the spirit of adoption, and is made an heir of the kingdom of heaven.**

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Although many analogies exist to describe the experience of regeneration, none is more significant than the new birth. Jesus told a very religious Jewish leader named Nicodemus that unless he was born again he could have no part of God's kingdom. We are born physically and are part of the physical world. In order to be part of God's spiritual kingdom, we must likewise be born spiritually.<sup>87</sup> This spiritual new birth is accomplished in us by the Holy Spirit as we respond in faith to the truth about Jesus Christ.<sup>88</sup>

Prior to conversion, nonbelievers experience the dark and corrupt effects of the world. Without proper external illumination, they are destined to live lives that are dead in trespasses and sins<sup>89</sup> because they are directed by a weak and self-deceiving nature.<sup>90</sup> Jesus not only recognized this need for transformation in people's lives, but he described its dramatic effect when he said, "[The believer] has crossed over from death to life."<sup>91</sup> From this analogy, believers can experience their own spiritual renewal represented in Christ's resurrection from the dead.

The Holy Spirit produces a new beginning within the life of each believer. Within this spiritual transformation, the believer's life is validated by a marked change from a former way of life to a renewed, spiritual focus.<sup>92</sup> Just as light floods the darkened recesses of a room, so regenerating grace illumines our personal darkness by empowering us to do good, taking away our love for sin, and providing hope to stand against sin's continual influence. As a result, the believer's life is transformed—the practices of the former way of life are replaced with new affections and upright moral practices.<sup>93</sup>

As such, the believer is adopted as a member of God's royal family,<sup>94</sup> becoming a child of God,<sup>95</sup> and an heir of all God has created.<sup>96</sup> Within this new relationship, believers share in Christ's sufferings and his glory.<sup>97</sup> We participate in God's divine life—sharing in his death, his resurrection, his power, his authority, his glory, and his eternal life. As a result, God restores his

Just as light floods the darkened recesses of a room, so regenerating grace illumines our personal darkness by empowering us to do good, taking away our love for sin, and providing hope to stand against sin's continual influence.



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87 John 3:1-9  
88 John 1:12-13  
89 Ephesians 2:1-5  
90 Romans 7:18-19  
91 John 5:24b  
92 2 Corinthians 5:17  
93 Colossians 3:12-17  
94 Romans 8:15  
95 1 John 3:1  
96 Galatians 4:4-7  
97 Romans 8:17

own image within our lives—we become new creations<sup>68</sup> and pattern our lives after Christ himself.<sup>99</sup>

## 110—OF THE WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT

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**The witness of the Spirit is an inward impression on the soul, whereby the Spirit of God, the heavenly comforter, immediately convinces the regenerate believer that he has passed from death unto life, that his sins are all forgiven, and that he is a child of God.**

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When people become believers, they may not actually realize the vast treasure within their grasp. Although justification and regeneration are applied to their lives, their relationship as children of God does not fully become known without the witness of the Spirit. This inward impression on the soul makes us aware that we have been included within the family of God as true sons and daughters. Because doubts will continually arise, the witness of the Spirit testifies with every believer's own spirit that he or she indeed is a child of God. This revelatory work of the Holy Spirit uniquely verifies the believer's salvation experience.<sup>100</sup>

When we accept Jesus Christ by faith, we are sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.<sup>101</sup> This presence of the Holy Spirit not only assures us that we have been included within the family of God, but his stamp of ownership assures us that God has invested in our lives as disciples of Jesus Christ. As we realize the work of the Holy Spirit convincing us that we are truly God's children, we also realize our sins have been forgiven and that we have received eternal life.<sup>102</sup> The Holy Spirit becomes a present proof that the promises God has given for us are not only true but also secure in Christ.<sup>103</sup>

This confidence that God no longer condemns the believer provides us with definite assurance that we have received a new life.<sup>104</sup> Because the believer has been infused with the presence of the Holy Spirit, we also experience sanctification—the continual transformation of peace that he or she will spend eternity with him.<sup>105</sup>

The Holy Spirit becomes a present proof that the promises God has given for us are not only true but also secure in Christ.



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98 2 Corinthians 5:17

99 2 Peter 1:4

100 Romans 8:11

101 Sealing was the act of fastening royal documents that ensured that the contents were authentic.

102 Romans 8:16

103 Ephesians 1:13-14

104 1 John 5:10

105 1 John 5:13

## 111—OF SANCTIFICATION

**Entire sanctification, or Christian perfection, is a state of righteousness and true holiness, which every regenerate believer may attain. It consists in being cleansed from all sin, loving God with all the heart, soul, mind, and strength, and loving our neighbor as ourselves. This gracious state of perfect love is attainable in this life by faith, both gradually and instantaneously, and should be earnestly sought by every child of God. But it does not deliver us from the infirmities, ignorance and mistakes which are common to man.**

Because the power of regeneration brings freedom to new believers,<sup>106</sup> we are no longer totally controlled by our evil desires—we are now free to think and act in ways that agree with God’s will.<sup>107</sup> While we are still capable of sinning, we do not have to continue living under the complete influence of sin. We actively receive the grace of God at work in our lives, through which we can commit ourselves to God in total love and abandon the practice of sin.<sup>108</sup>

Since the new birth does not completely eliminate our former orientation toward evil desires, obedience to the Holy Spirit becomes necessary in our lives. The pull from these two opposing forces engages us in a constant inward struggle to do or resist what is pleasing to God.<sup>109</sup> Likewise, the continual awareness of this struggle causes us to grieve over our sinful condition and our own inability to completely withhold the effects of sin upon our lives. As a result, we become even more dependent upon God’s grace in order to reshape our lives.<sup>110</sup>

Within this process of growth, believers must continually surrender to the work of the Holy Spirit in order to pursue God’s righteous standards. We are called upon to daily confess, repent, and pray for forgiveness.<sup>111</sup> Without sanctification, we remain in a state of infancy and never mature to receive the benefits from the fullness of our relationship with Jesus Christ.<sup>112</sup> However, as we respond to this pursuit with our whole heart, mind, soul, and strength, we experience times of growth that may occur instantaneously or gradually.<sup>113</sup>

During these times,, our awareness of sin is heightened, and the experience of God’s love can be accelerated. In other words, our lives are being perfected within us, whereby we are

Within this process of growth, believers must continually surrender to the work of the Holy Spirit in order to pursue God’s righteous standards. We are called upon to daily confess, repent, and pray for forgiveness.



106 See Article of Faith 109—*Of Regeneration*, page 43

107 Romans 6:17-18; 8:1-11; 12:1-2; Ephesians 2:1-5; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-22; Titus 3:4-7; 1 Peter 1:22-23

108 Matthew 5:48; Romans 13:13-14; 2 Corinthians 7:1; Ephesians 5:17-20; Colossians 1:28; 3:1-3; 2 Timothy 2:21; Hebrews 10:22; 1 Peter 4:1-3. For further understanding concerning sanctification, see Thomas Oden, *Life in the Spirit* (New York: Harper Collins, 1994), 212-246.

109 Romans 7:7-25; 8:5-8; Galatians 5:17-18

110 2 Corinthians 3:4; 4:7; 10:3-6; Galatians 2:20; Philippians 3:12-16; Titus 2:11-14; 1 Peter 1:3-9, 13-16; 1 John 2:20, 27

111 Matthew 6:9-15; 2 Corinthians 7:10-11; 1 John 1:9

112 1 Corinthians 3:1-3; Hebrews 6:1; 1 Peter 2:2-3

113 “An instantaneous change has been wrought in some believers; no one can deny this. Since that change, they enjoy perfect love; they feel this and this alone; ‘they rejoice evermore, pray without ceasing, and in everything give thanks’... But in some this change was not instantaneous. They did not perceive the instant when it was wrought. It is often difficult to perceive the instant when a man dies; yet there is an instant when life ceases. And if even sin ceases, there must be a last moment of its existence, and a first moment of our deliverance from it.” John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, 1764.

cleansed from all sin and pursue God's love with all our thoughts, passion, will, and energy.<sup>114</sup> Obedience becomes the delight of our hearts, and God's commands are no longer a duty to keep.<sup>115</sup> We sense absolute freedom to operate under God's grace as believers who stand complete in all that God has to offer us.<sup>116</sup> We do not puff up with pride in this fortunate position, but humbly express gratitude for an awareness of this entire dependence upon God's grace.<sup>117</sup>

Within this state of perfect love, believers do not possess perfect Christian knowledge or perfect abilities in Christian practice.<sup>118</sup> However, as stated earlier, we do have an acute awareness that our sins are all forgiven and that our passion toward God is enlivened. Therefore, we will continue to make mistakes that may hurt others, or we may fail to do what is right in a given situation, even though our actions may be done out of good intentions and concern for others.<sup>119</sup>

## 112—OF GOOD WORKS

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**The Holy Spirit dwelling in man begets within him love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, temperance, and all other ennobling virtues, and these show themselves in numerous outward acts, which become so many evidences of a living faith. Although such good works cannot put away sin, they are ever well-pleasing and acceptable in the sight of God.**

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We are called upon to embrace the facts in ways that demonstrate that we trust them—requiring us to place our full weight upon them.



When believers rely wholeheartedly upon the work of Jesus Christ for salvation, faith is enlivened within their hearts. This living faith produces actions that give evidence that they are under the influence of God's calling and direction. Evidence for such a living faith is clearly seen through many visible, good activities.

When the apostle Paul states that the righteous shall live by faith,<sup>120</sup> he is speaking of more than simply agreeing to the facts reported in Scripture. We are called upon to embrace the facts in ways that demonstrate that we trust them—requiring us to place our full weight upon them.<sup>121</sup> Likewise, our decisions will also surrender to God's control and produce lasting results for his kingdom.

Just as a tree is known by its fruit, so faith is known by its many results.<sup>122</sup> When our faith is enlivened through the activity of the Holy Spirit, his work is unmistakably revealed through our lives—producing the kind of things that only God can perform. As a result, our lives show forth God's influence by exhibiting his love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control in the form of good works.<sup>123</sup> When people's lives

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114 Matthew 22:37-40; Luke 10:27; Romans 13:9-10

115 John 15:10-11; 2 Corinthians 5:9; Hebrews 8:10-12; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 5:3

116 1 Corinthians 1:8-9; 2 Corinthians 10:3-6; 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24; 2 Peter 1:3-4; 1 John 1:7

117 2 Corinthians 10:17-18; Philippians 3:12-16; Colossians 2:18-19; 1 John 1:8

118 Philippians 3:12

119 Psalm 19:12-14; 1 Peter 2:12

120 Romans 1:17; Habakkuk 2:4

121 James 2:17-19

122 Matthew 7:16-20

123 Galatians 5:22-23

demonstrate these results from God’s activity, others, especially outside the church, will be drawn to reflect upon God’s ability to assist in their lives as well.<sup>124</sup>

As believers, good works offer proof that God is active in transforming our lives. They demonstrate that our faith is useful, able to accomplish God’s will within us and through us.<sup>125</sup> The Holy Spirit enlivens our previous inability to produce lasting results for his kingdom. In so doing, we realize the presence of God’s love at work in our lives, and we come to realize the purpose for which we were called by God to serve him.<sup>126</sup>

When viewed in a proper context, believers do not obtain their salvation from the good deeds that they perform. Good works are simply the result of a believer’s faith in Jesus Christ “expressing itself through love.”<sup>127</sup> Salvation always precedes our ability to perform good works. In other words, people are not saved *by* their good works, but rather they are saved *to do* good works. Therefore, it is important for us to solely depend upon God rather than try to achieve our salvation through our own insufficient efforts.

## 113—OF APOSTASY

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**The gracious help of God is pledged to all those who continue steadfast in faith; but on account of man’s free will, which no power may coerce, apostasy from God is possible so long as we continue in the flesh. Wherefore, constant watchfulness, prayer and holy living are necessary on the part of man, lest he fall away from the grace of God, grieve and quench the Holy Spirit, and lose his soul at last.**

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When new believers are adopted into God’s family, they can be assured that God supports their lives through the activity of his grace. Likewise, all believers are guaranteed the promised Holy Spirit in order to help them experience transformed lives<sup>128</sup> as free men, women, and children.<sup>129</sup> Within this renewed life, God’s Spirit testifies to the human spirit concerning personal assurance.<sup>130</sup> By the Spirit’s continual activity within the lives of Christians, we realize our salvation over and over. In this way, every believer possesses the assurance of salvation and can experience true liberation and continual freedom in Christ.

Yet even with God’s willing involvement in every believer’s life, some may still choose to abandon the faith—to turn away from the will of God, his powerful Word, and, ultimately, his plan for their lives. The Scriptures warn that those who have been spiritually enlightened, having shared in the Holy Spirit and having tasted the goodness of the Word of God, can fall away.<sup>131</sup>

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124 1 Peter 2:12

125 James 2:19-20

126 Ephesians 2:8-10

127 Galatians 5:6

128 1 Thessalonians 4:3

129 Galatians 5:1

130 Romans 8:15-16; for a broader understanding of assurance of salvation, see Article of Faith *110-Of the Witness of the Spirit*, page 54.

131 Hebrews 6:4; the writer of Hebrews wrote to Hebrew Christians, who were considering abandoning the Christian faith to escape fierce persecution and return to the religious form of Judaism. Throughout the letter, the writer points out thoroughly the superiority of the Christian faith in comparison to Judaism. In the sixth chapter, he makes it clear that to abandon the Christian faith—having embraced it with full comprehension—made it impossible to fully and passionately embrace the Gospel again.

Therefore, every Christian is responsible to hold firmly to the Word preached, be on guard concerning error, and continue in the faith.<sup>132</sup>

The doctrine of apostasy has long been an area of great debate in the whole of Christian tradition. Some circles of the faith reject any possibility that true saints, who have once experienced the glory and majesty of God, can at some point reject that which they once treasured.<sup>133</sup> However, the Scriptures clearly warn believers to hold firmly to their faith so that they do not jeopardize the completion of their salvation.<sup>134</sup>

On the other hand, we must be careful about identifying people in different situations as apostate<sup>135</sup> and beyond all hope. Every church seems to have unregenerate people who profess Christianity but who lack any evidence of faith. These people may not be apostate because they have yet to come to faith in the first place despite their outward appearances. Yet other people have given evidence of faith but for an indefinite period of time have become backslidden.<sup>136</sup> Although these Christians may appear to be apostate, they are simply in the midst of personal struggles that have caused them to lose hope and stray from a consistent healthy relationship with God. They often do not possess assurance or any applied benefits from their relationship with Christ. Although these people maintain their salvation, they do so only by God's grace "as one(s) escaping through the flames."<sup>137</sup>

Likewise, we must be careful not to associate apostasy with a particular or abundance of sin in a person's life. The penitent person will always find God's gracious help offered toward the completion of his or her salvation.<sup>138</sup> No amount of sinful behaviors can undo what Christ has done on the cross. Yet in such cases, we must warn individuals to discontinue in unrestrained sinful behaviors because they will only lead to more sorrow in life and may cause them to eventually forsake the God who so earnestly desires to help them.

Finally, we should never apply apostasy repeatedly—as if people can move-in and out of salvation based on their own indecision concerning the work of Christ. Apostasy is the final personal act of rejecting God's grace that had once been applied to a person's life through faith. When some take a final step to end their relationship with Christ, they abandon the faith with the same freedom by which they entered it. Hymenaeus and Alexander,<sup>139</sup> some of the persecuted Hebrew believers, John's heretical opponents,<sup>140</sup> and others provide examples of people who had once been counted among the faithful but have, for one reason or another, abandoned the faith.

**Apostasy is the final personal act of rejecting God's grace that had once been applied to a person's life through faith.**



132 1 Corinthians 15:2; 2 Peter 3:17; Colossians 1:22-23

133 The Classic theological view (or Reformed theology) holds the position that once a person comes to Christ he cannot lose his salvation—once saved, always saved. This position is formally called the perseverance of the saints.

134 1 Corinthians 10:12; 1 Timothy 1:19; 1 Timothy 4:1; John 15:6; Galatians 5:4; 2 Peter 2:20-21

135 *Apostate* is the condition of having committed apostasy.

136 *Backsliding* is a term used to describe believers who have relapsed in their growth and progression in the Christian faith, reverting back to a former way of life not under the control of the Holy Spirit.

137 1 Corinthians 3:12-15

138 Philippians 1:6

139 1 Timothy 1:20

140 1 John 2:19

Therefore, the doctrine of apostasy, appropriately taught and understood, gives every hearer a clear warning regarding the dangers of living apart from God. Therefore, believers must take heed to this warning and live as true believers of the living God. Every Christian can do so confidently, knowing that the work of salvation was begun by Christ and will be completed by Christ himself.<sup>141</sup>

## 114—OF IMMORTALITY

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**The soul of man is immortal, and, on its separation from the body at death, continues in a conscious state of existence in the world of spirits. It there enters into bliss or undergoes torment, according to its character as formed and fixed in the present life.**

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“Altogether, Adam lived 930 years, and then he died.”<sup>142</sup>

Adam’s demise was the first natural death recorded in Scripture. The successive record of deaths in Adam’s line of descendants features a consistent limitation to life. With this observation is a troublesome question that has plagued mankind since that first death—what happens after the body ceases to live?<sup>143</sup> Many people avoid a healthy discussion about death, fearing the unknown, the unexplored, and the unfamiliar. For believers, however, a certain hope emerges when they realize the eternal purposes of God for humanity.

The Bible clearly acknowledges that life continues after the physical body does.<sup>144</sup> The doctrine of immortality conclusively reveals that human purpose does not end upon death. Because God possesses absolute immortality, he was able to create our human spirits as eternal. Therefore, when God created humans, he created them in his image as spiritual beings with eternal qualities and longings.

Although the human body is mortal, the vital center of human identity is still destined for an eternal existence. Paul wrote to the Corinthian church concerning the return of death’s conqueror;

*I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”<sup>145</sup>*

When God created humans, he created them in his image as spiritual beings with eternal qualities and longings.



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141 Philippians 1:4-6; Hebrews 6:9-11

142 Genesis 5:5

143 Job 14:14

144 Daniel 12:2; 2 Timothy 1:10; 1 Peter 1:3-5

145 1 Corinthians 15:50-54

For humanity, death is not the end of existence but rather the conduit into another dimension of existence—eternity. At the end of our earthly lives, the soul of every person that has ever lived will be conveyed into a permanent eternal existence that is determined by his or her personal choices made on earth.<sup>146</sup> As a result, the spirit will either live on in eternal bliss with God or experience eternal condemnation and separation from God. This means that we should never view death as extinction, but rather that even though we may die in body, we shall still live eternally—and those who believe in Christ Jesus will live with him forever.

## 115—OF THE RESURRECTION

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**Christ did truly rise from the dead, and took again his own body, and ascended into heaven. Likewise all the dead shall be raised up by the power of God through Christ, both the just and the unjust; but those who have done good shall come forth unto an eternal life of glory, and those who have wrought wickedness shall be adjudged to Everlasting punishment.**

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While we may  
mourn their loss,  
we have an  
absolute  
hope that  
believers still are  
very much alive in  
the presence of  
Christ.



The physical resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is a historical event. All four Gospel writers provide the account of his resurrection.<sup>147</sup> The Scriptures also speak of the many witnesses who were with Jesus on numerous occasions after his crucifixion.<sup>148</sup> The book of Acts makes it clear that the resurrection of Jesus Christ was the central theme of the apostles' preaching.<sup>149</sup> As a result, the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ exists as one of the central truths upon which the Church stands.

The resurrection of Jesus demands careful consideration and carries significance for several reasons. By rising from the dead, Jesus gave authenticity to the claims of his teaching, especially concerning his ability to provide eternal life for others.<sup>150</sup> The greatest result affected by the resurrection of Jesus is that, in rising from the dead, he himself conquered death for all humanity.<sup>151</sup> He was able to return to heaven and has been exalted to the right hand of God the Father, thus showing himself to be God.<sup>152</sup> He now rules his kingdom from this position of highest authority where he intercedes on behalf of his people.<sup>153</sup> As a result, death no longer has any terror, and the grave has no lasting victory.<sup>154</sup>

Therefore, when believers die, we need not grieve as if there is no hope for them. Instead, while we may mourn their loss, we have an absolute hope that believers still are very much alive in the presence of Christ. In addition, we can also have the certainty that we as believers will be united without loved ones yet again because of Christ's victory over death.<sup>155</sup>

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146 See Article of Faith 116-Of Final Judgment, page 61.

147 Matthew 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; and John 20-21

148 1 Corinthians 15:4-8

149 Acts 2:24-32; 3:15-26; 4:10; 5:30; 10:41; 13:30

150 John 2:19

151 1 Corinthians 15:4

152 Philippians 2:9; Acts 1:9-11

153 Acts 2:33; Romans 8:34; Hebrews 4:14

154 1 Corinthians 15:55-56

155 1 Corinthians 15:55



In light of his resurrection, the human body receives great honor in Christianity—for not only does Christ take on human form, but he receives back his body from the grave in physical form. Similarly, God seeks to redeem the bodies of all humans. Because the spirit of every person lives after death, the final resurrection accomplishes the restoration of the whole person with a glorified body.<sup>156</sup> This glorified body is not a different body but a different form of the same body that is fit for eternity and beyond corruption.

In the final resurrection, “a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.”<sup>157</sup> Those who do not believe in Jesus will not enjoy eternal life with him; instead, everlasting punishment awaits them.<sup>158</sup> However, because of Jesus’ victory over death, all who belong to Christ will have their bodies resurrected into an eternal life of glory and will live with him forever.<sup>159</sup>

## 116—OF FINAL JUDGMENT

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**God has appointed a day in which he will judge all men by Jesus Christ, to whom is committed the judgment of this world. We must all, accordingly, appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, who will judge in righteousness in accordance with the Gospel and our response thereto.**

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“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.”<sup>160</sup> As Jesus himself states in this verse, the final judgment will occur on the last day immediately following the resurrection of the dead when he will pronounce sentence upon each person and separate the righteous from the unrighteous.

Since the human spirit is immortal and will last forever, a decision must be made as to where each spirit will consciously live for eternity. The Scriptures reveal that this verdict belongs ultimately to the Triune God<sup>161</sup> but will be administered by Christ who, having lived in human flesh, understands fully the human condition and has given his life sacrificially for the sins of all humanity. As a result, he will sit on the judgment seat and judge every person that has ever lived.<sup>162</sup>

This final judgment is based solely on the earthly life of each individual person. Every person will be responsible for his or her own choices regarding the gospel of Christ. Meanwhile, God provides ample time for repentance and grieving over sin to occur in the hearts of people in order for them to alter their course and embrace God’s correction before the end of their lives.

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155 1 Corinthians 15:55

156 1 Corinthians 15:35-44

157 John 5:28-29

158 Matthew 25:46

159 John 6:54; 8:51

160 Matthew 25:31-32

161 John 8:50; Acts 17:31; 1 Peter 2:23; John 16:8; Matthew 25:31-32; Acts 10:42; Philippians 2:10

162 Matthew 25:32; Acts 17:31; Romans 2:5; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Hebrews 9:27; 2 Peter 3:7; Revelation 20:11-15

God provides ample time for repentance and grieving over sin to occur in the hearts of people in order for them to alter their course and embrace God's correction before the end of their lives.



Since each person's conscience is called into account for his or her own thoughts, words, and actions, he or she must personally accept the Gospel as the only permanent solution to this continual recurrence of sin.

Final judgment reveals the important of our actions in light of our understanding of the Gospel message—“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.”<sup>163</sup> We are judged “according to our works” because works are the evidence of faith, not a substitute for it. Grace alone saves us, not good works. But where saving faith is present it will “prove itself” through a life characterized by loving deeds. The absence of godly living brings a person's mere verbal claims to “believe” into question, and subject to God's judgment.

## 117—OF HEAVEN

**Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ has provided for those who are redeemed by his grace a heavenly and eternal rest, into which he purposes ultimately to gather them and dwell with them in unspeakable glory. There shall be no more sorrow, pain or death, and the glorified saints shall see God and walk in his light forever.**

The Scriptures teach that heaven is the dwelling place of God Almighty—the Father's throne is shared by the resurrected Jesus, who intercedes as our high priest from heaven,<sup>164</sup> and the Holy Spirit continues to operate as the divine voice of God.<sup>165</sup> Not only is heaven the home of God, but it is also the home of those who serve him—including angels, the four living creatures, and the twenty-four elders.<sup>166</sup> But of special significance is that heaven is a place prepared for God's people.<sup>167</sup>

Indeed, Jesus is now preparing a place for all who trust in him.<sup>168</sup> Heaven is the realm where all believers will be united with Jesus Christ to behold him face to face.<sup>169</sup> All the saints throughout the ages will be gathered together, and God will dwell in their midst. “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.”<sup>170</sup>

The glory of the Lord fills heaven with his light and provides such illumination that the glory of kings and nations are engulfed by its brilliance. As a result, the need for faith will be transformed into perfect knowledge, and the revelation of God and his purposes will be fully understood. We will experience total restoration from the effects of the Fall—no more evil, nor sorrow, nor pain, nor sickness, nor weakness, nor death, nor parting from loved ones.<sup>171</sup> Freedom will no longer be made vulnerable to temptation or the anxiety or guilt of sin. The redeemed will experience rest from the struggles of mortal life that our human weaknesses have wrestled against.

All the saints throughout the ages will be gathered together, and God will dwell in their midst.



163 2 Corinthians 5:10

164 Hebrews 8:1

165 Revelation 14:13

166 Revelation 4:1-11

167 John 14:2

168 John 14:3

169 1 John 3:2

170 Revelation 21:3

171 Revelation 21:4

sorrow, nor pain, nor sickness, nor weakness, nor death, nor parting from loved ones.<sup>171</sup> Freedom will no longer be made vulnerable to temptation or the anxiety or guilt of sin. The redeemed will experience rest from the struggles of mortal life that our human weaknesses have wrestled against.

Consequently, the primary activity of heaven will be the ceaseless worship of God.<sup>172</sup> The full exercise of human free will lost in the Fall will spring forth to celebrate and reflect God's greatness endlessly. The location of a temple will be unnecessary, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb will be the temple. Additionally, fullness of life and glory will be a never ending experience of blessedness as we live with Christ.<sup>173</sup>

As believers of the Lord Jesus Christ, our citizenship currently resides in heaven.<sup>174</sup> Even now, we should be living like the transformed people that we are. In so doing, we are being prepared for the marriage feast of the Lamb<sup>175</sup> when Christ will return to earth from heaven to take his bride—the Church—to her eternal home.<sup>176</sup> In the end, Christ will rule with his Church from heaven in all the fullness of his power and glory forever.<sup>177</sup>

## 118—OF HELL

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**The incorrigible sinner, having rejected Christ and all the offers and opportunities of grace, is without God, and without hope in the world, and makes himself a child of Satan. When he dies his soul awakes in the torment of hell, from which there is no promise or hope of deliverance, but the sentence of everlasting punishment prepared for the devil and his angels.**

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Every person has the opportunity in this life to know God as a loving Father and has no excuse for rejecting him.<sup>178</sup> Furthermore, when people learn of God's love through Jesus Christ and the forgiveness of their sins, they are faced with the choice to further embrace the revealed God of Creation and receive eternal life from him.<sup>179</sup> However, a continual rejection of Jesus Christ disables the opportunity to escape the condemnation that already shapes their eternal destination.<sup>180</sup> As a result, people who die without having received Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior stand in condemnation and have no hope of eternal life in heaven.

God detests injustice and evil. Since these people persistently continue in sinful behavior and repeatedly refuse to accept Jesus Christ, they are regarded as children of Satan.<sup>181</sup> Consequently, they adopt the same eternal punishment that has been prepared for the devil and his angels.<sup>182</sup> Because they have excluded God from their consciences throughout their earthly lives,

Because they have excluded God from their consciences throughout their earthly lives, they have excluded themselves from God's eternal presence and will live in the place of the excluded, losing touch with God's influence forever.



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172 Revelation 4:8-11  
173 Revelation 22:1-5  
174 Philippians 3:20  
175 Revelation 19:7-9  
176 1 Thessalonians 4:16  
177 Revelation 5:13  
178 Romans 1:18-20  
179 John 3:16-17  
180 John 3:18-21  
181 1 John 3:8-10  
182 Matthew 25:41

they have excluded themselves from God's eternal presence and will live in the place of the excluded, losing touch with God's influence forever.<sup>183</sup>

Hell is a place of eternal punishment, likened to eternal fire.<sup>184</sup> This everlasting fire described in the Scriptures brings to mind the most intense kind of pain a person can experience. Coupled with this gruesome image of suffering, the sinner also is gripped with the dreadful reality of irreversible destruction and total loss.<sup>185</sup>

Perhaps the most descriptive expression of hell was Jesus' use of the place Gehenna. Located in the desolate valley of Hinnom, Gehenna was associated with idolatrous rituals such as passing children through the fires of Molech.<sup>186</sup> In Jesus' day, perpetual fires kept burning in this valley and were used for consuming the dead bodies of criminals, animals, and debris from the city. These descriptions of Gehenna provide a graphic picture of hell's reality.

The Scriptures do not speak of a second chance for sinners after death—they only speak of judgment.<sup>187</sup> The good news is that while all people deserve the punishment of hell, God does not want anyone to perish.<sup>188</sup> Therefore, he has provided a divine rescue by sending Jesus Christ to this world so that people would not perish but would have eternal life with him in heaven forever.<sup>189</sup>

## 119—OF THE CHURCH

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**The Holy General Church consists of the great body of believers who confess the Lord Jesus Christ and have life in him. The individual church is a congregation or society of Christian believers, in which the pure worship of God is maintained, his Holy Word is preached, and his commandments and ordinances are sacredly observed.**

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The Holy General Church refers to the whole body of believers from every nation, tribe, people, and language throughout history.<sup>190</sup> This universal Church is in turn made up of different groupings of congregations or churches. Each congregation is made up of individual believers yet exists collectively as part of one body.

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183 Matthew 8:12; Matthew 22:13; Luke 13:28; "A damned soul is nearly nothing, it is shrunk, shut up in itself. Good beats upon the damned incessantly as sound waves beat on the ears of the deaf, but they cannot receive it. Their fists are clenched, their teeth are clenched, their eyes fast shut. First they will not, in the end they cannot, open their hands for gifts, or their mouths for food, or their eyes to see." C.S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (New York: Harper Collins, 1973), 123.

184 Mark 9:48; Luke 16:24; Jude 7

185 Just like smoke on the horizon signified the fiery destruction of a city from invading marauders, hell reveals a totality of destruction—nothing of value is rescued or able to be made useful again. Hell is total loss.

186 Jeremiah 7:31; 32:35

187 Hebrews 9:27; see Article of Faith 116—*Of Final Judgment*, page 61

188 2 Peter 3:9

189 John 1:14

190 Revelation 7:9

By definition, the Church is a gathering of those called together by God and not by human invention or circumstantial accident. “Those who respond to the good news of his coming are called out of the world on behalf of the world to attest to his divine love.”<sup>191</sup> For that reason, this community becomes the Church by the repetitive appeal of the gospel and its call to assemble the faithful to praise God. The Augsburg Confession states, “The church is the congregation of saints in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the sacraments are rightly administered.”<sup>192</sup> As such, the Church exists as the guardian of truth—for no apostolic teaching is floating around abstractly or historically disconnected from the Church.

From the very beginning, believers gathered together locally to learn the Word of God, pray, connect, and help one another.<sup>193</sup> As the Word of God spread, congregations were established in different cities throughout the Roman Empire. Early church leaders trained and appointed other leaders in these congregations to make certain they were truly honoring God.<sup>194</sup> Letters of instruction were also written to help these congregations clearly understand the truth about Jesus Christ and how that truth should affect the way they live and worship together.<sup>195</sup> As a result, the early churches prayed for one another and sent financial aid to the churches with greater need. They seriously considered themselves partners in building the kingdom of God.

The Church is the community through which the Holy Spirit brings restoration and the gifts through which God makes his reconciling work in Christ known as humanity. Everyone who is a believer has been called to participate in the life of God’s community or people—the body of Christ.<sup>196</sup> Within his Church, the Holy Spirit has equipped and gifted all individuals so that they can achieve their God-given potential for effective ministry within and beyond the life of the congregation.<sup>197</sup>

Christianity is not merely a set of buildings or documents, but living people spanning nations, cultures, and vast periods of history. These lives reveal a living connection with God through the Church apart from a merely mechanical or routine experience. Our apostolic tradition has not only been formed by many historical writings, but by people in whom an active faith has provided testimony of God’s abundant activity.<sup>198</sup> In this way, the Church can be likened to a living vine sending forth shoots, pulsating with life as each branch shares in the transforming power of Christ.<sup>199</sup>

The Church is the community through which the Holy Spirit brings restoration and the gifts through which God makes his reconciling work in Christ known to humanity.



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191 Calvin, *Institutes* 4.1ff

192 Augsburg Confession, Article VII

193 Acts 2:42, 56

194 Acts 14:23

195 Many New Testament books were letters of instruction written by the apostles to various churches and leaders for instruction in Christian conduct and church governance.

196 Ephesians 5:23, 4:4-6

197 Ephesians 4:11-16

198 2 Corinthians 3:2-3

199 John 15:1-11

## 120—OF THE MINISTRY

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**The ministry of the Gospel is a sacred office and calling, ordained by Christ for the proclamation of his truth in all the world, and for the orderly administration of the sacraments, the worship and the discipline of the Church. No man may assume this office without the conviction of a divine call thereto and the recognition and ratification of that call by the Church.**

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The success of the next generation will depend heavily on the faithfulness, accountability, and testimony of this generation of church leaders in connection with the calling and awakening ministry of the Holy Spirit.



All believers, regardless of their careers, are called to bear witness to the gospel of Christ by sharing what Christ has done in their lives. In this sense, all believers are ministers with unique ministries within the church.<sup>200</sup> However, the Holy Spirit has called and gifted certain individuals specifically to positions of pastoral leadership.<sup>201</sup> As such, a pastor is one who is called by God to oversee the life of the church.

“Answering the call of the Creator is ‘the ultimate why’ for living, the highest source of purpose in human existence... Calling is the truth that God calls us to himself so decisively that everything we are, everything we do, and everything we have is invested with a special devotion and dynamism lived out as a response to his summons and service.”<sup>202</sup> When a person senses God’s call inwardly, he must personally examine his life in light of God’s revelation. Likewise, he must seek the objective counsel of trusted Christians who can observe the evidence of God’s grace at work in his life. Finally, he must receive the endorsement of his local congregation as confirmation of the Spirit’s influence upon his life.

Historically, the apostles passed along their ministry to the next generation of church leaders. Eventually this succession of leaders will extend to the end of the age.<sup>203</sup> Today we find ourselves in the midst of the sequence of this historical witness. The success of the next generation will depend heavily on the faithfulness, accountability, and testimony of this generation of church leaders in connection with the calling and awakening ministry of the Holy Spirit. As a result, the transmission of this sacred responsibility, passed along by the laying on of hands at ordination,<sup>204</sup> continues to relay the apostles’ teaching, as taught by those who originally walked with Jesus Christ, onto reliable men.<sup>205</sup>

The Scriptures help us to understand both the character and the responsibilities of those whom God calls for pastoral ministry. In light of these Scriptures, a pastor must be an example of godly living to the people he serves. Even how he lives at home and how his family reacts to his leadership are important to how he leads the church.<sup>206</sup> He is to care for, encourage, and comfort God’s people.<sup>207</sup> He must also be able to handle God’s Word accurately<sup>208</sup> and present relevant

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200 1 Peter 2:9

201 Acts 13:2; Ephesians 4:11-13

202 Os Guinness, *The Call: Finding and Fulfilling the Central Purpose of Your Life* (Nashville: Nelson, 2003), 4.

203 Matthew 28:20

204 At the ordination of clergy, the bishop and other church elders lay their hands on the approved pastor in a public worship service.

205 Ephesians 2:19-20; 2 Timothy 2:2

206 1 Timothy 3:1-7

207 1 Peter 5:2

208 2 Timothy 2:15; 4:2

messages, while being devoted to the ministry of prayer.<sup>209</sup> He is likewise responsible for the proper administration of the sacraments<sup>210</sup> of the church.

It is essential that pastors receive fundamental training for leading the church. The apostle Paul reveals the importance of this special preparation by focusing on the seriousness of the pastor's responsibilities— "to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."<sup>211</sup> There are a number of responsibilities for the pastor, but suffice it to say that pastors serve under the guidance of the Great Shepherd,<sup>212</sup> and as such they should teach, train, and care for those in their flocks as Christ would himself.

## 121—OF BAPTISM

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**The sacrament of baptism is the formal application of water to an infant, or to an adult believer, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, as a visible sign and seal that the person so consecrated stands in a holy covenant relation to God and his people.**

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The foundational principle for initiation into the church was given by Christ prior to his ascension: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. . ." <sup>213</sup> Since this time, the public ceremony of baptism has identified those who are followers of Christ from among the world's people. Just as the Hebrew male had been previously set apart as a member of God's people through circumcision, baptism identifies Christian believers with God's church throughout the world.<sup>214</sup>

Jesus himself, set this precedent by identifying with humanity when baptized by John the Baptist.<sup>215</sup> Although John's baptism represented a baptism of repentance, Jesus did not need to repent but rather was baptized to identify himself with the consequences of sin upon human history.<sup>216</sup> When Christ's followers are baptized with water, they identify with his death and resurrection—the victory over the consequences of sin upon humanity.

This water does not literally wash away sin but rather signifies a new beginning of purity. Symbolically, baptism reveals the convert's entrance into the new covenant as being cleansed from sin through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. In this way, baptism itself does not become a means of regeneration, but rather it characterizes the representative act made by believers in response to the salvation they have already found in Christ.<sup>217</sup>

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209 Acts 6:4

210 See Articles of Faith 121—*Of Baptism*, page 67, and 122—*Of the Lord's Supper*, page 68.

211 Ephesians 4:12-13

212 Hebrews 13:20

213 Matthew 28:19

214 Colossians 2:11-12

215 Matthew 3:13

216 Isaiah 53:11

217 Acts 2:38-41; 8:12-13; 16:31-33; Romans 6:4

Through adult baptism believers identify with the death and resurrection of Jesus,<sup>218</sup> where they publicly acknowledge their need to die daily,<sup>219</sup> share in the mission of Christ, and willingly live as his followers in order to share in his resurrection.<sup>220</sup> This baptism suggests the reality of dying to the corrupt nature and starting anew with a transformed nature. Through the experience of baptism, believers identify themselves as part of the unified Church— “one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”<sup>221</sup>

The E.C. Church also recognizes that children are included within the covenant community of the Church. Therefore, children of believing parents are candidates for baptism through a covenant relationship with God in Christ. Just as Jesus specifically embraced the children of his time and honored their innocence in light of human faith, so parents presenting their children for baptism show concern for their children’s spiritual well-being and seek this declaration of God’s favor.

In this way, infant baptism relies on the covenant partnership between the parents, the local congregation, and God himself. Within the sacrament, the church and parents declare their desire for the child to be nurtured with Christian values and eternal truths and that this process would eventually result in each child’s own pursuit of God and profession of faith in Jesus Christ. Similarly, God, in his providence, empowers parents and church to surround the child with wisdom and power, love and compassion, and tenderness and firmness to fulfill his purposes.<sup>222</sup>

## 122—OF THE LORD’S SUPPER

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**The Lord’s Supper is not merely a token of love and union that Christians ought to have among themselves, but it is a sacrament instituted in memory of the sufferings and death of Christ whereby those who rightly, and worthily, receive the same, partake in the body and blood of Christ by faith, not in a bodily, but in a spiritual manner, in eating the broken bread and drinking the blessed cup. We thereby also continually show forth our Christian faith and hope.**

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Although the Lord’s Supper was introduced by Jesus in the New Testament, the featured elements of the bread and the cup were part of a sacred observance found in the Old Testament. As Peter and John were instructed to arrange for the Passover meal, they prepared to celebrate a memorialized event that had brought God’s nation, Israel, into existence through a mighty act of deliverance from Egypt.<sup>223</sup> The purpose of this observance was to recall the significance of that historic event through the reading of the Passover story and the eating of the Passover meal together.

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218 Romans 6:3-4

219 To *die daily* is a reference described in Luke 9:23-27 to refer to a wholehearted submission to Christ and implies sharing in this death; 2 Corinthians 5:15; Philippians 3:10

220 Philippians 3:8-11

221 Ephesians 4:5-6

222 *Discipline*; Part Two: The Ritual; Section I: The Sacraments, Baptism of Infants

223 Exodus 12:1-14; Luke 22:8



At the same time that paschal lambs<sup>224</sup> were being sacrificed throughout Israel, Jesus revealed how God’s dramatic rescue of Israel would be translated to extend this reality to his followers through his own sacrificial death on a cross. On this night of sobering reminders of God’s deliverance of Israel, two elements were adapted by Jesus for his disciples to recall. The bread would now serve to remind believers of his broken body that would be tortured and hung to die on a cross;<sup>225</sup> the cup would be used to remind believers of his blood that would be spilled for the forgiveness of their sins.<sup>226</sup> As Jesus shared with his disciples, “This is my body given for you, do this in remembrance of me, [and] this cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.”<sup>227</sup>

Today by participating in the Lord’s Supper we identify ourselves with Jesus’ living presence and lordship. By partaking, eating, and drinking of him who was made known to the Emmaus disciples in the breaking of the bread, we too grow in this mysterious union with Christ.<sup>228</sup> Corporately, we not only realize our connection with Christ but our united fellowship within his body—the Church. “Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.”<sup>229</sup>

As participants at the Table of Christ, believers are reminded of the celebration yet to come. “For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”<sup>230</sup> In thoughts of anticipation, believers experience the depths of God’s love for them—awaiting the time of full disclosure.<sup>231</sup> “Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully know.”<sup>232</sup>

At the same time that paschal lambs were being sacrificed throughout Israel, Jesus revealed how God’s dramatic rescue of Israel would be translated to extend this reality to his followers through his own sacrificial death on a cross.



## 123—OF CHURCH POLITY

**The Lord Jesus Christ ordained no particular form of government for his church, so that whatever polity, rules, regulations, rites, and ceremonies are adopted and approved by common authority, and are not repugnant to the word of God, may be acknowledged as sufficient to constitute a true church of the living God. Such polity, rules, rites, and ceremonies may be lawfully changed from time to time, as the needs of men and the diversity of nations, countries, and manners may require.**

The Church was essentially born at Pentecost as a newborn body indwelt by the Spirit.

*Jesus must have known that the continuing body of witness and worship that would follow him would need some organization, leadership, polity, historical identity, and sociological structure. He did not, however, try to shape that structure in detail, but left much to his apostles to make judgments as the Spirit would lead them, taking times and*

224 Luke 22:7; Paschal lambs were one-year-old male lambs without blemish that were sacrificed the night prior to the Israelites’ exodus from Egypt and later in annual Passover celebrations.

225 Matthew 27:27-31

226 Hebrews 9:22

227 Luke 22:19-20; John 14:21

228 Luke 22:28-32

229 1 Corinthians 10:17

230 1 Corinthians 11:26

231 1 John 3:1-3

232 1 Corinthians 13:12

The gospel message shed its cultural shell, took root in fertile soil, and sprang to life to adapt within its new host culture.



*circumstances into account. The earliest forms of Christian community and worship and proclamation shaped by the apostles are important guidelines even today. Yet they need not in their culture-specific details be regarded as woodenly binding on every period of the church's life.*<sup>233</sup>

As the Church expanded its realm of influence beyond the borders of Israel, the gospel encountered cultures that were nothing like its host culture of Judaism. Critical points of difference caused the early apostles to struggle with the practical application of the gospel to cultural life in the Roman world.<sup>234</sup> As a result, the gospel message shed its cultural shell, took root in fertile soil, and sprang to life to adapt within its new host culture.<sup>235</sup>

Just as this early church wrestled with the adjustments brought on by its cultural surroundings, the Church has been historically called to be adaptable to specific cultural differences. Meanwhile, the gospel has remained resilient to the negative influences of each culture to change its message. Therefore, the Church permanently stands in contrast and connection with each different human culture its encounters. From this unique position, the Church effectively judges and serves each distinctive human culture.

In like manner, church structures should enable each congregation to accomplish God's will for their ministry setting in a way that effectively pleases God. The Scriptures present the helpful image of Christ as the Head of the Church—his body. In this way, Christ imparts to the Church all that it needs to live and grow in each historical and cultural setting, while the Spirit enlivens and unifies the body within each new circumstance. Where new patterns for ministry are to be sought, human organizational approaches must be rooted in the concept of doing all things decently and in order, while maintaining the organic integrity of the ministry.

## 124—OF CIVIL GOVERNMENT

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**Civil government is an ordinance of God, grounded in the necessities of human nature, and essential to the maintenance of public order, the security of personal rights, and the punishment of evil-doers. It is the duty of all men to be subject to the supreme authority of the country in which they reside and to respect and honor the civil magistrates.**

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As believers, we possess a heavenly citizenship to which we offer total allegiance.<sup>236</sup> Scripture drives home this truth when it teaches that we are to view ourselves as soldiers stationed in a foreign country and, thus, are not to let ourselves get overly tangled in civilian affairs. Our primary identity in this world is to serve as ambassadors of reconciliation by which Christ makes his appeal to the peoples of the world to be reconciled to God.<sup>237</sup>

As agents of God's grace, Christians are eternally minded while being earthly beneficial. Jesus modeled this healthy balance throughout his life and ministry. When he was asked

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233 Thirty-nine Articles, XXIV, *Creeks of the Church*, 277; Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*

234 Acts 15:22-29; 1 Corinthians 8:1-9; Galatians 5:2-4; Ephesians 2:19-22

235 1 Corinthians 9:19-21

236 Philippians 3:20

237 2 Corinthians 5:17-20

about paying taxes, he simply said to give to Caesar (or the Roman government) what is Caesar's and to God what it God's.<sup>238</sup> While standing on trial before Pilate, Jesus explained the nature of his kingdom: "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place."<sup>239</sup>

Although inferior to God's heavenly kingdom, earthly governments are necessary to restrain and punish evil, preserve public order, and establish justice throughout the world. In this realm, earthly governments demonstrate the providential care that God intends for humanity—to protect all people's God given rights to life, worship, truth, and property.<sup>240</sup>

Scripture reveals that God rules as the supreme agent in causing kingdoms to rise and fall.<sup>241</sup> As such, civil governments serve as the agent of God's purposes throughout the world. Since civil government is a divine ordinance, the duty of believers is to be subject to the government, to obey the laws of the country in all matters that do not conflict with the supreme commands of God, and to respect the persons chosen to carry out these laws.

The apostle Paul reminds us that:

*Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you.*<sup>242</sup>

Christians should submit to the governing bodies that have been set over them, realizing that those governments ultimately belong to God. Therefore, we can ultimately trust the direction and future of a society because we trust that God directs the course of this world.

## 125—OF THE EVANGELIZATION OF THE WORLD

**The Gospel is designed for all nations, its field of operation is the whole world, and the church and people of God are under solemn obligation to make known its saving truth and power among the heathen. To this great work we are impelled and encouraged by the command of the Lord and the promises and prophecies of the Holy Scriptures.**

Jesus reveals the universal nature of the gospel in his last command given while on earth: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations."<sup>243</sup> From this statement, it is obvious that God intended his gospel to be presented to all peoples throughout the world. The Scriptures also

238 Matthew 22:19-21

239 John 18:36

240 *Discipline*; Part One, Section III, Christian Practice, 144.4 Human Rights.

241 Psalm 46:6; Psalm 66:7; Psalm 82:8; Jeremiah 18:7-10; Amos 6:14; Habakkuk 1:5

242 Romans 13:1-3

243 Matthew 28:19

Although inferior to God's heavenly kingdom, earthly governments are necessary to restrain and punish evil, preserve public order, and establish justice throughout the world.



As God's Spirit of illumination chooses to operate in many diverse regions of the world, he calls men and women to faithfully share the gospel.



remind us that Jesus came to seek and to save the lost<sup>244</sup> and that he died for the sins of the whole world.<sup>245</sup> Jesus paid the penalty for the sins of all people and does not want anyone to perish.<sup>246</sup> As a result, God invites all people throughout the world to repent and believe in Jesus Christ.<sup>247</sup>

As God's Spirit of illumination chooses to operate in many diverse regions of the world, he calls men and women to faithfully share the gospel. The Scriptures reveal the uncharacteristic movement of God's Spirit in shaping the Church—first beyond Jerusalem and among the Samaritans, then across racial barriers with devout, God-fearing people, and in due course into the far reaches of the pagan world.<sup>248</sup> As God's Spirit moves, he authorizes members of his Church with the responsibility to share the gospel.<sup>249</sup>

The apostle Paul reminds all believers of their privilege and responsibility to share this message with those inside and outside of their own cultural barriers when he writes:

*I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome. I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."<sup>250</sup>*

When believers accept this counsel from Scripture and recognize that "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved,"<sup>251</sup> they will possess a concern for those outside of God's kingdom and assume their responsibility in making the gospel of Jesus Christ known to those who have never heard. This involves not only faithfully sharing the hope of the gospel with friends, neighbors, and family members but also connection with corporate efforts to reach people of other lands, languages, and cultures, whether they are overseas or have relocated into our own American cultural settings.

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244 Luke 19:10

245 1 John 2:2

246 2 Peter 3:9

247 Mark 1:15

248 Acts 8; Acts 10; Acts 13-14

249 Acts 1:8

250 Romans 1:14-17

251 Romans 10:13