

My Call and Approach to Ministry

Call to Ministry: In December, 1981, after attending a high school snow camp as a counselor, the Lord impressed upon my heart the desire to be in a pastoral ministry. It was after we had returned from camp, while I was praying for those young people who had made decisions that I knew God wanted me to serve Him as a pastor. I had felt the tug of the Holy Spirit for many years, but on this night I was confident of the Lord's calling and surrendered completely to His will. Initially, that call was confirmed through family and friends. I was in my last semester of college getting my Bachelor of Science degree from Colorado State University when I called my parents to inform them of my desire to enter the ministry. Having changed directions on one other occasion, I was somewhat unsure how they would respond. My mother, who is now with Christ, without hesitation said, "I knew the Lord had His hand upon you. Follow His will, Son!" My father was also very supportive. The following Sunday, I made my decision public at the end of the morning service, before my brothers and sisters in Christ. They also expressed their joy and affirmation.

Shortly thereafter, in recognition of my desire to serve God and my spiritual giftedness in teaching and preaching, my home church asked me to take on the position of youth pastor. I gladly accepted and served in that capacity for almost ten years. They then approached me and asked if I would consider becoming their senior pastor. At first I was somewhat hesitant, questioning my own readiness for the task, but through prayer and much encouragement, I once again accepted their offer. After four years and through a series of positive events, God called me and my family to Alaska, where I have now pastored for almost nine years.

Since that day in December, 1981, God has confirmed His call on my life over and over again, not only through the affirming encouragement of the flock, but by deepening my passion for Him, His people, and His Word. Probably one of the most special ways that God confirmed His calling on my life was a card sent to me by my grandfather when he was eighty-nine years old. It read,

"Dear John,

I heard you preach from the tape you sent me and you are well on your way to be a good speaker for your Lord and Savior. May He give you much fruit as you labor for Him. I am thankful to God! I prayed for fifty-nine years if He would give me someone in our family [*He was the father of ten children*] and call him to the ministry and at last He fulfilled my wish to call you, my grandson, to be a preacher. Therefore, I glorify and praise Him, for He has answered my prayer! May the Lord bless and keep you faithfully in His work so that sinners may be saved through your effort by the Holy Spirit's guidance. Grandpa Rysdyk"

Approach to ministry: Being completely confident that it is Christ who builds His church, I have never been one for gimmicks or church growth strategies. I have simply sought to fulfill what I believe to be my responsibilities as His under-shepherd focusing on "*giving attention to prayer and the ministry of the word*" (Acts 6:4). I long deeply for our congregation to mature in the faith. Then, not only will we not be tossed about by every wind of doctrine, but we will be eager to demonstrate our Savior's love to those around us, each using his/her particular giftedness for the glory of God (Eph. 4:12-14).

I love the apostle's words to the Colossians, "*We proclaim Him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me*" (Col.1:28-29). That

final phrase has always been such an encouragement to me. For even Paul, with all God's energy, still understood ministry to be a challenge, accomplished only in His strength. This, along with the apostles' resolve in Acts 6 to pray, has been an endless reminder to me, in my years of ministry, to stay prayerfully dependent on Christ, for apart from Him, I truly can do nothing (Jn.15:5).

A number of years ago, I found a quote by C.H. Spurgeon that I keep in my office. It has challenged me and brought me into a proper perspective on many occasions. I would like to share it with you because it has truly impacted my ministry as a pastor and it emphasizes what an essential element *constant prayer* is to having an effective ministry.

“The minister who does not earnestly pray over his work must surely be a vain and conceited man. He acts as if he thought himself sufficient of himself, and therefore needed not to appeal to God....The preacher who neglects to pray much must be very careless about his ministry. He cannot have comprehended his calling. He cannot have computed the value of a soul, or estimated the meaning of eternity. He must be a mere official, tempted into a pulpit because the piece of bread which belongs to the priest's office is very necessary to him, or a detestable hypocrite who loves the praise of men, and cares not for the praise of God. He will surely become a mere superficial talker; best approved where grace is least valued and a vain show most admired. He cannot be one of those who plough deep and reap abundant harvests. He is a mere loiterer, not a laborer. As a preacher he has a name to live and is dead. He limps in his life like the lame man in the Proverbs, whose legs were not equal, for his praying is shorter than his preaching.”¹

The relevancy of those words impact me every time I read them. I also often contemplate the priority Jesus put on prayer (Lk. 5:16; 6:12). Certainly, if He felt an urgency to be alone with God in prayer as He fulfilled His mission, how much more should we!

The second essential element of an effective ministry, in my opinion, is *clear Bible exposition*. Paul, as he passed the baton of ministry on to Timothy, told him to preach the Word (2 Tim. 4:2). Why? Because, “*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work*” (2 Tim. 3:16-17). As I asserted at the beginning of this section, my passion is to perfect the saints. Not only does it glorify God, it also guards them against harmful doctrines and prepares them for spiritual works of service. Well-fed sheep reproduce. The teaching of God's truth, then, both corporately and on a personal level, must be an absolute given! To do it faithfully and accurately takes diligence and hard work (2 Tim. 2:15), but what an incredible trust the Lord has given to elders: to count us worthy of this ministry to His people!

To further encourage the spiritual growth of God's people, I also believe that, as a pastor, I must live a *consistent example* before them (1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1; Phil. 3:17; 4:9; 2 Thes. 3:7; 1 Tim. 4:12; 1 Pet. 5:3) and seek to shepherd them with *caring affirmation* (Eph. 4:15-16, 29). I am confident that if I am sincere, eager, and passionate in serving the Lord in these things (Rom. 12:11; 1 Pet. 5:2), He will use my efforts to His glory.

These essentials are also critical in fulfilling the church's mission. Being committed to God's inspired and authoritative Word, I believe that the mission of the church must include at least three objectives. The first is a commitment to worship God acceptably. I believe that God

¹ C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978), 47.

deserves our praise (Heb. 13:15; 1 Pet. 4:11) and that He has made known the manner by which we are to worship Him (Jn. 4:24; Heb. 12:28). In light of these verses, we should be committed to worship that flows from a reverent heart and is based upon truth. This, naturally, includes an emphasis on relevant Bible exposition, music that directs our praise to God, corporate prayer, and the ordinances of baptism and communion. I believe it also requires our finest effort. The church should encourage those who participate in worship (especially those who lead) to strive to do their very best. As an organization, the church needs to strive to carry out every facet of its ministry in a fashion reflecting God's orderly character (1 Cor. 14:40; Col. 2:5).

The second objective involving the church's mission should be a commitment to encourage one another to personal holiness (Mt. 18:15-17; 1 Cor. 5; Gal. 6:1-2) and to help meet one another's needs (Gal. 6:10; 1 Jn. 3:17-18). I believe this happens by providing opportunities for fellowship where genuine friendships can be developed and where members of the body of Christ can exercise their God-given gifts (1 Pet. 4:7-11).

Thirdly, I believe the church should have a commitment to proclaim to a lost world the good news of Jesus Christ (Mt. 28:18-20; 2 Cor. 5:19-20). Evangelism should be emphasized on a personal level, and corporately, the church needs to have a heart for participating in worldwide missions (Mk. 16:15; Acts 1:8). It should provide training and opportunities for personal involvement through prayer, finances, encouragement, and active participation.

To Him be glory in the church forever and ever!

The Doctrine of Revelation and the Scriptures

General Revelation: I believe that God has disclosed certain aspects about Himself to all humanity throughout history. He has done this by means of nature (Ps. 19:1-6; Rom. 1:18-21), providential control (Dan. 2:21; Acts 14:15-17; 17:24-26), and the moral law He has written within each human heart (Rom. 2:14-15). This revelation gives people an awareness of their Creator and His moral demands so that they might seek Him (Acts 17:27), but it is of itself inadequate to provide salvation (Rom. 10:9-14).

Through general revelation, God has made known that He is the only creator and sustainer of the world (Acts 17:24-25), that He is independent of all things, eternal, invisible and powerful (Ps. 93:2; Rom. 1:20), personal and wise (Ps. 104:24), and that He alone is worthy of worship (Rom. 1:25). Therefore, all people will be held accountable for seeking, honoring, and worshiping God. Anyone who fails to do this will be without excuse (Rom. 1:20-25).

Special Revelation: I believe that for the purpose of restoring fallen humanity to fellowship with Himself, God revealed in a special way His plan of salvation. His redemptive purposes were progressively disclosed to specific individuals at specific times and places,² through signs and miracles (Heb. 2:3-4), the expressions of the prophets (Isa. 9:1-7; Heb. 1:1-3) and the apostles (Acts 2; Gal. 1:11-12), but supremely through the words and works of Jesus Christ (John 5:36; 6:63; Heb. 1:2-3).

² Some examples: **Divine Speech** – God spoke to Satan (Gen. 3:15); to Noah (Gen. 6:3); to Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3); to Moses (Ex. 20:3-17). **Dreams** – Joseph's dream (Gen. 37:5-9); Jacob's covenant dream (Gen. 28:10-17); Peter and Cornelius' vision (Acts 10:10-16). **Theophany** – Abraham's tent visitors (Gen. 18:1-5); God appearing to Moses in fire at Horeb (Ex. 3:5-8); Paul's Damascus road encounter (Acts 9:3-7). **Mighty Acts** – Plagues on Egypt (Ex. 7-10); Parting of the Red Sea (Ex. 14).

The Scriptures: I believe that the Bible is God's written revelation to humanity and is equally inspired in all of its parts by the Holy Spirit (Mt. 5:18; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20-21). The Holy Spirit so superintended the human authors that, through their individual personalities and writing styles, they composed and recorded God's inerrant (completely true in the original documents)³ and infallible (reliable) Word (1 Pet. 1:23-24). As a result, the Bible is authoritative and profitable for all matters of faith and practice (Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:6-11; 2 Tim. 3:16-17).

I believe that the Bible consists of sixty-six canonical books: thirty-nine in the Old Testament and twenty-seven in the New Testament. The criterion that sets these writings apart from other human documents is important to note. Perhaps foremost is the issue of authorship. In the Old Testament the writer had to be recognized as one of God's prophetic spokesmen. Since it was common Jewish belief that prophecy ceased with the ministry of Malachi, about 450 – 400 BC, no books written subsequent to that time were received into the Hebrew canon.

This is the primary reason why Protestants and Jews reject the Apocrypha as inspired Scripture. The Apocrypha also introduced heretical doctrines such as praying for the dead (2 Macc. 12:44-45). The Bible is clear that following physical death, people have no further opportunities to receive salvation (Ecc. 7:2; Lk. 16:19-31; Acts 4:12; Heb. 9:27). Even many of the early church fathers, most notably Augustine, did not consider the Apocrypha as authoritative doctrine. Only reluctantly did Jerome include it in the Latin Vulgate.

Two other reasons for accepting the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament as God's authoritative Word are as follows. First, they were preserved, read, and considered by the nation of Israel to be divinely inspired. And secondly, Jesus acknowledged the entire Jewish canon to be the Holy Scriptures (Mt. 5:17-18; Lk. 24:44-45).

The fact that Jesus clearly indicated to his disciples that further revelation was to be anticipated (Jn. 16:12) paved the way for the writing of New Testament. In fact, He let them know that they would assist in composing it, for the Holy Spirit would help them to remember His very words and guide them into all truth (Jn. 14:26; 16:13). Like the Old Testament then, authorship was again a significant issue in determining whether a book was included in the New Testament canon. Either an apostle or someone closely associated with an apostle or Jesus wrote every book of the New Testament, and all lived during the first century. Additionally, it is significant that Peter considered the Apostle Paul's letters equal with Scripture (2 Pet. 3:15-16).

Besides authorship, it is important to note that despite the diversity of content found in the New Testament, the theology and ethics promoted throughout is consistent and orthodox. This gives a person good reason to conclude that it was indeed given by the inspiration of God. The final reason for accepting the twenty-seven books of the New Testament as God's revealed Word is that, from the earliest generation of Christianity to the present, the church has recognized them as inspired and authoritative.

Confident that we have been given God's inspired Word, I believe it must be studied and taught. While there can be several applications of any given passage of Scripture, there is but one true interpretation. Therefore, it is the responsibility of believers to diligently ascertain the true intent and meaning of Scripture through a literal, grammatical, and historical method of interpretation, so that they will be able to apply it properly (2 Tim. 2:15).

³ Inerrancy recognizes that there are textual variants among the various manuscripts, but insists that no Christian doctrine depends only on passages that are textually uncertain.

The Doctrine of God

The Trinity: I believe that there is but one living and true God (Deut. 6:4; Isa. 45:5-7; 1 Cor. 8:4-6; Gal. 3:20; 1 Tim. 1:17) who eternally exists in three persons; God the Father (Eph. 4:6), God the Son (Jn. 1:1,14), and God the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3-4). These three persons are ontologically equal in Their essential being, and yet have separate and distinct functions among Themselves in order to accomplish Their one divine will. This is seen in both creative (Gen. 1:1-2; Jn. 1:1-3) and redemptive activity (Eph. 1:3-14; Tit. 3:4-7). In respect to salvation, the Father planned it, the Son provided it, and the Spirit applies it.

The belief of a triune God or “Trinity” is clearly hinted at in the Old Testament (Gen. 1:1, 26; 3:22; 11:7; 35:7; Isa. 6:8) and more precisely rendered in the New (Mt. 28:19; Jn. 14:16-17; 2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 4:3-6; 1 Pet. 1:2), even though the word itself is never used. Probably the clearest indication of “the Trinity” in the Old Testament is the prophetic utterance of the pre-incarnate Christ in Isaiah 48:16. One of the key references in the New Testament is Matthew 3:16-17. This is the record of Jesus’ baptism. Here, all three persons of the Godhead were present simultaneously, performing different functions. Further proof exists in that all three persons are addressed as God (see references above) and each share the same qualities of deity. For example, all are holy (Acts 1:8; 3:14; Rev. 15:4), eternal (Ps. 90:2; Jn. 1:2; Heb. 9:14), omniscient (Jer. 17:10; Rev. 2:23; 1 Cor. 2:11), and omnipresent (Jer. 23:24; Mt. 18:20; Ps. 139:7).

The Nature and Attributes of God: I believe that God is a living, active, personal Spirit. As a spirit being (Jn. 4:24) He does not exist in a body that can be touched or seen. He is invisible (Job 9:11; Jn. 1:18; Col. 1:15; 1 Tim. 1:17; 6:16; Heb. 11:27). Although it is true that at times God represented Himself through theophanies and christophanies (Gen. 18; Ex. 3:2-6; 13:21; Dan. 3:25; Mt. 3:16), it is clear that those appearances did not reveal the real essence of God. I also believe that God, as a spirit being, transcends the aspects of both maleness and femaleness.

God is personal in that He possesses such characteristics as intelligence (Ps. 139:1-6; Acts 15:18; Rom. 8:29; 11:33; Heb. 4:13; 1 Jn. 3:20), emotion (Num. 11:1; 2 Sam. 11:27; Ps. 104:31; 147:11), and will (*decretive* – Isa. 14:24,27; Dan. 4:35; *preceptive* – Ex. 20:1-17; 1 Thes. 4:3; *permissive* – Ps. 81:12; Rom. 1:24). Beyond this, the fact that God is referred to by names, titles, and personal pronouns conveys the truth that He is, indeed, a personal being.

God is also living and active (2 Sam. 22:47; Job 19:25; Ps. 42:1,2; Mt. 16:16; Jn. 6:57; 2 Cor. 6:16). He actively creates, sustains, covenants, commissions, provides, fights, builds, judges, comforts, and the list could go on and on.

Defining God also involves examining the essential characteristics of His divine nature. I believe His attributes can logically be classified into six categories: **1) *metaphysical*** (self-existent – Ex. 3:14, eternal – Ps. 90:2; 1 Tim. 1:17, immutable – 1 Sam. 15:29; Heb. 1:12, and omnipresence – Ps. 139:7-12), **2) *intellectual*** (omniscience – Ps. 147:5, faithful – Ps. 119:90, and wise – Rom. 16:27), **3) *ethical*** (just – 1 Pet. 1:17, merciful – Rom. 9:16, loving – 1 Jn. 4:8,10, and holy – Lev. 11:44; Isa. 6:1-5), **4) *emotional*** (detests evil – Prov. 15:9,26, long-suffering – Jer. 15:15, compassionate – Ps. 145:8-9, jealousy and wrath – Na. 1:2), **5) *volitional*** (free – Ps. 15:3, authentic – 1 Cor. 2:11, and omnipotent – Gen. 18:14; Ps. 33:6,9; Lk. 1:37), **6) *relational*** (gracious – Rom. 3:24; Eph. 1:7; 2:8).

In light of “Open Theism,” which asserts that God took risks in creating a world in which He does not know and control everything, a few more things need to be said in regard to God’s omniscience. A common verse used to support this position of divine ignorance is Genesis

22:12, where God is assured of Abraham's faith because the patriarch was willing to offer his only son as a sacrifice to Him. Besides the fact that God already had complete confidence in Abraham's faith (Gen. 18:19), if God had to test him to find out what was in his heart, why does the Bible say, *"For the Lord searches all hearts, and understands all the intent of the thoughts"* (1 Chron. 28:9)? God does not gain knowledge. He knows (Isa. 40:13; Rom. 11:34). His knowledge extends beyond the exterior (1 Sam. 16:7) and beyond the limitations of time (Ps. 139:4,16).

The Doctrine of Christ

I believe Jesus to be the Anointed Messiah and the incarnate Son of the living God. I believe He descended from heaven to earth in order to reveal the Father and to make atonement for the sins of humanity by offering Himself as the final sacrifice. After accomplishing this, I believe He physically resurrected from the grave and returned to heaven where *"God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord"* (Phil. 2:9-11).

His Person: I believe that when the Son of God became flesh, He added to Himself all the attributes of humanity except a sinful nature (Lk. 1:35; Heb. 4:15). As a result, He is one person that is both God and man. In Him, the properties of the divine and human natures are inseparably united without mixture or loss of separate identity. In theological terms, this is referred to as the "hypostatic union."

The New Testament offers explicit testimony to Christ's humanity (1 Cor. 15:21,47; 1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 2:17) and deity (Jn. 1:1,14; Col. 2:9). Humanly speaking, Jesus possessed a real, physical body that was subject to birth (Lk. 1:30-31; 2:7,11), growth (Lk. 2:52), hunger (Mt. 21:18), thirst (Jn. 19:28), fatigue (Jn. 4:6; Mt. 4:38, 39), temptation (Mt. 4:1-11; Heb. 4:15), and death (Lk. 23:46, 52-55; Heb. 12:14).

From a divine perspective, the Bible ascribes to Jesus Godlike names, attributes, works and claims. Most significantly, He is addressed as God (Jn. 1:1,18; 20:28; Rom. 9:5; Titus 2:13; 3:4; Heb. 1:8; 2 Pet. 1:1; 1 Jn. 5:20). Some of the attributes used to describe Him declare Him to be self-existent (Jn 1:1), eternal (Jn. 8:58), loving (Eph. 3:18-19), and sinless (2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 2:22; 1 Jn. 3:5). Works attributed to Him include creation (Jn. 1:3; Col. 1:16-17), forgiving sins (Mk 2:1-12), judging the world (Ps. 62:12; Mt. 13:41-43), raising the dead (Jn. 11:25), and the granting of eternal life (Jn. 4:14). Finally, He claimed to be one with the Father (Jn. 10:30), to possess complete authority (Mt. 28:20), to be the ultimate object of a person's faith and obedience (Jn. 14:1-3; 1 Jn. 5:3), and He understood Himself to be the Son of God and Messiah (Mt. 16:16-20; 26:64).

The doctrine involving the relationship of the two natures in Jesus is somewhat complex, but the scriptural evidence is quite clear. Jesus had to become human to die as humanity's representative, and He had to be God to conquer the penalty of sin and rise from the grave.

His Life: I believe in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, that the eternal Son of God took to Himself a human nature by means of the virgin birth (Isa. 7:14) and "became flesh" (Jn. 1:1,14; Phil. 2:6-11). In doing so, I believe he "emptied" Himself (Phil. 2:7). Some believe that this means that He literally emptied Himself of His relative attributes (omnipotence, omnipresence, and omniscience), but if that were true, by mere definition He would have

ceased to be, in essence, God. Therefore, it must be concluded that what He gave up was His position of equality with the Father and the constant use or the prerogatives of His divine attributes and consciousness. These He would only use as led by the Holy Spirit to accomplish His purposes as Messiah.

His Work: I believe the ultimate purpose of Christ's incarnation was that He might pay the penalty for the sin of humanity through His voluntary, sacrificial, and substitutionary death (Mk. 10:45; Gal. 3:13; 1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18), also known as the atonement. Through Him, being the propitiation for our sins, God's righteous demands were fully satisfied and the divine wrath of God was averted (Rom. 3:25; 1 Jn. 2:2). This allowed humanity, which was alienated from their Creator by sin, to be reconciled to Him (Rom. 5:10; 2 Cor. 5:18-20) and redeemed, which means being bought and rescued from slavery to sin and its consequence of death (Rom. 3:24; 6:6-7; 1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23; Gal. 3:13; 4:5; Col. 1:14; Rev. 5:9). Temptation no longer has dominion over us, because, by the cross, Christ conquered Satan and the power of sin (Col. 2:13-15; Heb. 2:14-15).

I believe that the validity of Christ's atonement rests upon the truth of His physical, bodily resurrection (Isa. 53:10-11; 1 Cor. 15:17). I do not believe that His resurrection was a mere reviving, but a permanent reuniting of His body and spirit (Phil. 2:9-11). The empty tomb (Lk. 24:5-6), the shape of the grave clothes (Jn. 20:6-8), His post-resurrection appearances (Mt. 28:9-10; Lk. 24:13-35; 1 Cor. 15:5-8), and the transforming effect it had in the lives of His disciples (compare Mt. 26:73-74 and Acts 2), all give proof to the resurrection's legitimacy.

The significance of the resurrection cannot be underestimated. In addition to giving validity to the atonement, it also confirmed Jesus' earlier claims and teachings (Mt. 12:40; 16:21; 17:9; 20:19). Besides this, it ensures the justification of believers and their acceptance at the final judgment (Rom. 8:33-34). If the resurrection were not true, then sinners would not be redeemed, there would be no hope of a future life, the apostles would be liars, preaching the gospel would be foolish, and hedonism would be the wisest pursuit for life (1 Cor. 15:13-19, 23-32).

I believe that after the resurrected Christ spent forty days with His followers, He then ascended into the sky and returned to His rightful place in heaven (Acts 1:1-11; 2:33; Mk. 16:19; Lk. 24:51). Today, He is building His church (Mt. 16:18), preparing a heavenly home for believers (Jn. 14:1-3), interceding on their behalf (Rom. 8:34; 1 Jn. 2:1), and producing fruit in their lives (Jn. 15:5-8).

The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit

His Personality: I believe that the Holy Spirit is not simply an influence, but a person who has the characteristics of personality. To begin with, when Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit, He used masculine pronouns (Jn. 15:26; 16:7-14), for He, Himself understood the Spirit to be a person. This is significant because normally, a neuter gender word like "Spirit" (*pneuma* in the Greek), would be replaced with a neuter pronoun. His individual attributes of intellect (1 Cor. 2:10), knowledge (1 Cor. 2:11), thought (Rom. 8:27), emotion (Rom. 15:30; Eph. 4:30), and will (1 Cor. 12:11), also confirm His personality. As a person, He can be insulted (Heb. 10:29), lied to (Acts 5:3), and blasphemed (Mt. 12:31-32). He also, on a personal level, speaks (Acts 10:19; Rev. 2 & 3), leads (Rom. 8:14), commands (Acts 13:2), aids and intercedes (Rom. 8:26), teaches and helps to remember (Jn. 14:26), and bears witness (Jn. 15:26).

His Deity: I believe, as already stated under the doctrine of the Trinity, that the Holy Spirit is God. Not only is He addressed as God (Acts 5:3-4), but He possesses the qualities of deity. For example, He is revealed to be holy (Acts 1:8), eternal (Heb. 9:14), omnipresent (Ps. 139:7), omnipotent (Job 33:4), omniscient (1 Cor. 2:10-11), and true (Jn. 14:17).

His Work: I believe the Holy Spirit has worked historically in the past and continues to minister in the present. He was actively involved in creation (Gen. 1:2; Job 33:4), the writing of God's revelation (2 Pet. 1:20-21), and the incarnation (Mt. 1:18; Lk. 1:36). He also, time and again, came upon the leaders of Israel, enabling them to fulfill their ministries and to advance God's saving purpose in the nation (Gen. 41:38; Deut. 34:9; Jud. 3:10; 6:34; 15:14; 1 Sam. 10:10; 16:13,14; 2 Chron. 24:20; Ezek. 11:5). He was even the power behind the skill of Bezalel when Bezalel helped in the construction of the Tabernacle (Ex. 35:31).

The present work of the Holy Spirit, which I believe began at Pentecost when He came from the Father as promised by Christ (Jn. 14:16-17; 15:26) to the 120 believers gathered in Jerusalem shortly after the Lord's ascension (Acts 2:1-4), is multi-faceted. Generally speaking, His purpose is to bring glory to Christ (Jn. 16:14). More specifically, He convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgement (Jn. 16:7-8) by opening the minds and wills of individuals to the reception of God's revelation, commonly referred to as illumination (2 Cor. 2:14). At conversion, the child of God is sealed with the Holy Spirit, Who is a deposit guaranteeing his/her eternal inheritance (Eph. 1:13; 4:30). The Holy Spirit is also the spiritual agency with which Christ baptizes all believers into His body; the church (1 Cor. 12:13). He is the divine force behind regeneration (Titus 3:5), which instantaneously transforms a convert into a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). Taking up permanent residence, the Holy Spirit indwells the believer (Rom. 8:9) and begins to practically work out what is already positionally true. Gradually, as each believer yields to His control the Holy Spirit transforms him/her into the image of Christ (1 Cor. 6:11; 2 Cor. 3:18). He also bestows upon the believer power and spiritual gifts in order to implement the divine work of redeeming the lost and building up the body of Christ in the most holy faith (Acts 1:8; 1 Cor. 12:7-11).

I do not believe the extraordinary manifestations of the Spirit (speaking in tongues, the gifts of healing, and miraculous powers) are for today. I believe these were sign gifts given in the beginning days of the church for the purpose of pointing to, and authenticating the message of, divine truth, especially as given through the apostles (1 Cor. 13:8-10; 2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:1-4). By saying this, I in no way mean to convey that God does not miraculously heal in our day and age. He does, but I believe it is in response to the fervent prayers of righteous people and His own divine will (Mt. 6:10; 26:42; Ja. 5:16).

The Doctrine of Angels

The Nature of Angels: I believe in the existence of angels, both holy and fallen in nature. They were created by Christ the Lord (Col. 1:16; Ps. 148:2-5) in order to serve, worship, and bring glory to Him (Gen. 3:24; Isa. 6:2-3; Col. 1:16). They, themselves, are not to be worshiped (Rev. 22:8-9). Although they have often taken on human form while fulfilling earthly ministry (Lk. 24:4-7), they are, indeed, spirit beings (Heb. 1:14) who, if holy in nature, have a home in heaven (Mt. 22:30; Lk. 2:15). There are countless thousands of them (Rev. 5:11), and they are unable to reproduce (Mt. 22:30) or die (Lk. 20:36). Unlike humanity, they apparently were not created in the image of God, and therefore, believers will one day be exalted above them (1 Cor. 6:3). All angels have great wisdom (2 Sam. 14:20; Ezek. 28:12) and power (Mt. 28:2; Mk. 5:2-4; 2 Pet. 2:11), but both of these attributes are limited (Mt. 8:9;

24:36; Dan. 10:13; Job 1:7). They are also personal beings known by personal names, such as Gabriel (Lk. 1:26), Michael (Jude 9), and Lucifer (Isa. 14:12). The Bible also seems to present different classifications (Cherubim – Gen.3:24 and Seraphim – Isa. 6:2) and rankings of angels (Eph. 6:12; Col. 2:15; Jude 8). Finally, as implied by the designation “fallen,” angels are capable of sinning (2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6).

Holy Angels: Holy angels live to serve and worship God. In their service to Him they, first of all, ministered to the incarnate Son throughout His earthly life (Mt. 2:13; Mt. 4:11; Lk. 22:43). Secondly, they have an ongoing ministry to believers (Heb. 1:14). We read of them protecting (Ps. 91:11-13), providing (1 Kings 19:5-7), encouraging (Acts 27:23-25), and directing (Acts 8:26) God’s people. Finally, they are often given the task of announcing and bringing about the judgement of the ungodly (Gen. 19:12-13; Mt. 13:37-42; Acts 12:23; Rev. 14 &16).

Fallen Angels: There are a group of angels who fell from heaven when they rebelled against God with Satan (Ezek. 28:16-17; Jude 6). These fallen angels are called evil spirits or demons (Mt. 12:24; Lk. 8:26-39), and they will face future judgement because of their sin (Mt. 25:41; Rev. 12:9). However, because of the extreme wickedness of some, the Scripture indicates that even now there is a group of demons that God has chosen to confine in a place known as Tartarus (2 Pet. 2:4). As Satan’s emissaries, they follow in his evil ways. They propagate lies and will deceive the world until the end of time by means of false doctrine (1 Tim. 4:1) and the performance of miraculous signs (Rev. 16:14). As God permits (Job 1:12; 2:6), they are able to inflict physical disabilities (Mt. 12:22; Lk. 13:11) and injury (Lk 9: 37-43). They are even sometimes allowed to oppress (not possess) believers (2 Cor. 12:7-10). In fact, Christians often wrestle with the demonic influence in this world (Eph. 6:12). Since they have been given everything they need for life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3), the normal way Christians are to deal with demonic influence is to put on God’s armor and stand (Eph. 6:11). We can rejoice that victory is ours in Jesus Christ (1 Jn. 4:4)!

In regard to demon possession, I do not believe Christians can be possessed, since the Holy Spirit indwells them. As far as casting out demons is concerned, I am unaware of any Scriptures that command, instruct, or give example that Christians today have this authority. Besides Christ, the seventy-two He personally commissioned (Lk. 10), the apostles, and Philip (the evangelist on whom the apostles had laid their hands), no one else is recorded in Scripture to have done this. In regard to the anonymous disciple in Mark 9:38-40, there is so little information given in respect to his method or his success that the episode should not be used as a clear endorsement of the non-apostolic practice of casting out demons.

Satan: The ruler of fallen angels is Satan (Lk. 11:15; Eph. 2:2). He is known by many names and each one in some way seems to convey his character and activity. His power should not be underestimated. He is cunning (1 Pet. 5:8) and disguises himself as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14) to blind the minds of the lost concerning the truth of the gospel (2 Cor. 4:4). He actively seeks to influence both believers (2 Cor. 11:3) and unbelievers (2 Tim. 2:26) in negative ways. As Christians, we are to resist him and he will flee (Ja. 4:7), but nowhere in Scripture are we told to bind Satan. The only time Satan will be bound is during the millennium (Rev. 20:2-3). He will, in the end, be eternally punished in the lake of fire (Rev. 20:7-10).

The Doctrine of Creation

I believe that the universe, including matter-energy, was created out of nothing by God's spoken word and as a direct result of His decretive will and pleasure (Gen. 1:1-2; Job 38:4-7; Ps. 90:2; 102:25; 148:5-6; Prov. 16:4; Mk. 13:19; Jn. 1:1-3; Rom. 11:36; Col. 1:16-17; Heb. 11:3; Rev. 4:7,11). I believe the purpose of creation was to display His glory and the invisible qualities of His divine nature (Ps. 8:1; 19:1; Isa. 16:4; Rom. 1:20). A chronological and historical account of God's progressive creative acts is found in Genesis Chapter One. For a number of reasons, I believe in a literal six-day creation. First, the Hebrew word "day" seems to indicate this, especially when a numeral or the phrase "evening and/or morning" modifies it. Surely, if the Holy Spirit wanted to convey the idea of long geological ages, he could have chosen other words to express it far more clearly.

Secondly, Exodus 20:9-11 emphasizes a twenty-four hour creation day by analogy. In fact, this whole passage becomes nonsense if "day" is equated with a long, indefinite period of time. Thirdly, the logical implications of a day-age theory lead to untenable conclusions. For example, if each day were a billion years, as progressive creationists require, then half of the day (500 million years) would have been darkness. Genesis 1:5 explicitly states that the light was called day and the darkness, night. If each day had a period of light and darkness, how could plants and animals survive? They could not.

Furthermore, a day-age theory allows for thousands of years of death prior to the creation of humanity, yet Paul states clearly that "*sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin*" (Rom. 5:12). To conclude that death existed prior to the creation of man is to make God the author of death. Finally, day-age theorists assert that since there is an absence of any reference to evening or morning on the seventh day, God's Sabbath day rest continues even until now. This hypothesis is clearly contradicted by God's activity mentioned in John 5:17 and John 9:4.

The Doctrine of Humanity and Sin

I believe God created human beings in His image (Gen. 1:26; 5:1; 9:6; 1 Cor. 11:7) and therefore, they also resemble Him closely in character. *Metaphysically*, humans consist of an outer (material) body and an inner (immaterial) soul/spirit (Gen. 2:7; Mt. 10:28; Lk. 12:5; 2 Cor. 4:16). Although the body and spirit are ontologically distinct from one another, during this life they are intricately united. When physical death occurs, the body decays in the ground (Ecc. 12:7), but the spirit lives on forever (Lk. 23:43). *Intellectually*, humans are given the ability and the responsibility to rule over creation (Gen. 1:28; Ps. 8:6-8). They are also designed to think critically (1 Cor. 13:12) and to make conscious, rational choices (Rom. 12:2). Beyond the realm of earthly intelligence, humans are also capable of transcending thoughts about God and becoming conscious of Him (Acts 17:27; Rom. 1:20).

Ethically, God made humans with consciences (Ecc. 7:29; Acts 23:1; Rom. 2:14-15), enabling them to judge their own actions, as well as the actions of others. God has also designed humans to be capable of feeling and expressing emotions. Unlike Him, however, they can employ their emotions in evil ways (Eph. 4:26).

Relationally, just as the three persons of the Godhead are equal in their essential being and yet have separate and distinct functions, God created male and female as equals (Gen. 1:27; 2:18; Gal. 3:28; 1 Cor. 11:11), but He directed men to exhibit functional authority over their wives in the marriage relationship in order to preserve unity and harmony in the family after the Fall (Gen. 2:21-23; Col. 3:18). Although women such as Sarah are praised for their

godly submission (1 Pet. 3:5-6), the concept of submission is tempered with the admonition to husbands to treat their wives with special respect and consideration (1 Pet. 3:7).

Volitionally, humans possess the freedom to set and pursue their own goals (Lk. 12:18-19). They are given the option to follow God's moral code and make wise choices or to disregard God's directives (Josh. 24:14-15; Mt. 23:37; Jn. 7:16-17). Unfortunately, the first humans, Adam and Eve, used their ability to choose of their own free wills and sinned when they broke God's only spoken command to them. This event is commonly referred to as "the Fall" and I believe it was a factual event (Rom. 5:12-19; 1 Cor. 15:22; 2 Cor. 11:3; 1 Tim. 2:13-14). Their sin resulted in God's judgement on the serpent, Satan, the woman, the man, creation, and humanity (Gen. 3:14-19; Rom. 5:12-19; 8:19-21).

I believe that, since that day, Adam's sin has been imputed seminally to every person ever born (Jn. 3:6). Just as Levi, although not yet born, paid tithes to Melchizedek through Abraham (Heb. 7:9-10), each individual participated in and inherited Adam's sin. Therefore, every person is said to possess original sin, also commonly thought of as an innate sin nature that has a natural tendency to disobey God (Ps. 51:5; 58:3; Ja. 1:14-15). A comprehensive view of sin includes intentionally and unintentionally committed and omitted acts, thoughts, and words (Lev. 4:2,13; 5:1-4; Ja. 4:17).

I believe that every part of a person's being is affected by sin. As a result, even one's best efforts are tainted by evil (Isa. 64:6). This does not imply, however, that individuals are always as bad as they could possibly be, but because of their sin, they are destined to die physically, spiritually, and eternally (Jn. 3:36; Rom. 6:23; Eph. 4:18; Ja. 2:26). Only by the grace of God can an individual escape the latter two deaths.

The Doctrine of Salvation and Sanctification

Conversion, Regeneration and Justification: Practically speaking, for salvation/conversion to happen, people must first acknowledge their own sinfulness, their hopeless condition, and their need for a Savior (Rom. 3:23; 6:23; 2 Thes. 1:7-9). Secondly, they must respond to the call of the Holy Spirit as He convicts them of sin, righteousness, and judgement (Jn. 16:8). This is done by placing their faith and trust, unreservedly, in the truth of the gospel (Jn. 3:16; 1 Cor. 15:1-4; Eph. 2:8-9). In evidence of their faith, sinners will turn from their sin toward God in repentance (1 Thes. 1:9). Good works and righteous deeds play no part in one's conversion (Rom. 3:20; Eph. 2:9; Tit. 3:5).

At the moment of conversion, a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit, called regeneration, also takes place. It is an instantaneous event that transforms the convert into a "new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17), a "born again" individual (Jn. 3:3-8). Having been renewed by the Holy Spirit and given the divine nature (Tit. 3:5), there is an unconscious intellectual change of desires within a believer that ultimately results in the outward manifestations of the Spirit's fruit (Gal. 5:22-23).

Sinners are also justified at conversion (Rom. 5:1, 20-26). Justification is the legal act of God, whereby He, as divine Judge, declares or vindicates the believing sinner as righteous on the basis of the shed blood of Christ. It does not make a person righteous or transform his/her heart; it simply changes one's legal status before God. The results of justification for believers are peace and reconciliation with their Creator (Rom. 5:1; 2 Cor. 5:19-20), and the hope of eternal life (Tit. 3:7).

Predestination and Election: No one is worthy of eternal life and fellowship with God. All people, because of their sin, deserve death and eternal punishment. As a result, salvation had to begin with God and His desire that no one perish (2 Pet. 3:9). In 1 Timothy 2:1-7, Paul encouraged the church to pray for the salvation of all people, because Christ, the one Mediator, died on the cross to provide a ransom for all and to exchange Himself for the release of every sinner. There is an amazing verse in 2 Peter 2:1 that says the Lord actually bought false prophets and teachers. In other words, the sufficiency of His work really does extend to all people. Of course, not all people appropriate that work. Therefore, I believe the atonement is limited in that its power is only applied to those who place their faith, unreservedly, in the gospel of Christ. Consequently, I believe we should pray for all people because the sufficiency of Christ's work is applicable by faith to anyone. In John 6:37, Jesus said, *"The one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out."* Revelation 22:17, speaking about the offer of salvation, says, *"Let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."* And in Romans 10:13, Paul declared that, *"Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved."* Given these verses and others like Jn. 3:16, it is my opinion that no theology can be biblical and teach that God is pleased with the damnation of the wicked or that He does not want all people to be saved. God has commanded *"all men everywhere to repent"* (Acts 17:30). Christ told His disciples to spread the message of salvation to the entire earth (Mt. 28:19-20). In Ezekiel 33:11, God said through His prophet, *"'As I live!' declares the Lord God, 'I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways!'"*

Yet, even though Scripture is clear that God desires all people to be saved, it also teaches the doctrines of election and predestination. The term "predestination" comes from a Greek word that means, "to mark out beforehand." It is used to refer to the fact that the believer's future glorification and eternal inheritance were secured in eternity past by God's sovereign design. While God has predestined His elect to receive salvation through Jesus Christ, according to His pleasure and will (Acts 13:48; 1 Thes. 1:4; Rom. 8:29-30; Eph. 1:3-6), He still requires a human response of acceptance of His salvation (Rom. 10:13-15; Jn. 5:24; 1 Tim. 4:10). Scripture does not present the idea that a person may be lost because he/she was not elected or predestined. Rather, those that are lost are themselves to blame because they refused to believe the gospel. One verse that clearly implies this is found in Mt. 23:37. There, Jesus said, *"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, [but you were not predestined? No!] and you were unwilling."*

Some might conclude and argue that in light of the doctrine of election, God still, in the end, is the final cause of their unwillingness, but it is vital to remember that there is a difference between being the final cause and being the blameworthy cause. God is not the one to blame for sin or rebellion against Himself.

Another important thing to remember in light of the term "election" is that the Scripture teaches that we are *"chosen [or elect] according to the foreknowledge of God"* (1 Pet. 1:1-2). But to what does God's foreknowledge refer? Does it mean "foreordained," or does it simply mean "to know beforehand?" This is a dispute that godly people, through the centuries, have debated, and I am certainly not bold enough to say that I now hold the key that will end all further discussion. However, having visited this issue on a number of occasions, I have personally concluded that although *human foreknowledge* clearly refers to a simple prior knowledge, as in Acts 26:5 and 2 Peter 3:17, *divine foreknowledge* means something more. In fact, it's significant to note that Peter, after making the statement in 1 Peter 1:2 shared above, utilized the same term 18 verses later in reference to the saving mission of Jesus Christ. There it unmistakably conveys the idea of 'foreordination'. So much so, that the King James

Version translates the verse, “*Who verily was foreordained* [literally – foreknown] *before the foundation of the world*” (1 Peter 1:20). Again, on the Day of Pentecost using the exact same term, Peter declared the exact same truth (Acts 2:23). Therefore, I believe that those who place their faith in the good news of Jesus Christ are those God chose [or elected] before the foundation of the world according to His foreordination or the kind intention of His sovereign will.

Accordingly, it is my conviction that Scripture affirms both human responsibility and divine sovereignty. How they correspond to one another, I can only reply with Deuteronomy 29:29, “*The secret things belong to the Lord our God.*” Philosophically, two conclusions have helped me to live within this apparent paradox. The *first* is the reality that, no matter how one chooses to understand divine foreknowledge, no more and no fewer than the elect will be saved (Acts 13:48). And *secondly*, even when one chooses to define divine foreknowledge as simple omniscience, it still must be conceded that even though God in eternity past foresaw the rejection of many individuals, He still chose to create them as “*vessels of wrath fitted to destruction*” (Romans 9:22). Practically speaking, in regard to evangelizing the lost, the believer’s responsibility remains the same; we are to preach the good news of Jesus Christ.

Sanctification and Perseverance: When the Scripture refers to the doctrine of sanctification, the fundamental thought behind its teaching is holiness: “being set apart unto God.” There are three aspects to sanctification. The first is *positional* (1 Cor. 1:2; 6:11). Although many of the believers in Corinth were unmistakably sinful, yet Paul boldly affirmed their sanctification. By doing so, he implied that at the time of their justification they were also set apart unto God. The second aspect of sanctification is *ultimate* (Rom. 8:29; 1 Jn. 3:2). This dimension anticipates a Christian’s final transformation into the likeness of Christ. The final aspect is *experiential* (2 Pet. 1:3-8). This dimension of sanctification relates to the daily life and experience of a believer. It is the gradual and progressive process by which one is conformed to the image of Christ. Its sole objective is to be holy, for He is holy (1 Pet. 1:15-16; 1 Jn. 3:3).

While holiness is the goal, the Bible clearly teaches that it will remain just out of reach throughout a person’s life. The apostle Paul humbly admitted that he had not yet “*been made perfect,*” but was indeed pursuing that end, and would until God called him heavenward (Phil. 3:12-14). Even the apostle John, in his old age, acknowledged sins in his life and sensed the need for divine forgiveness (1 Jn. 7-10).

Realistically, Christians do sin and must expect to wrestle with this problem throughout their lives (Rom. 7:14-25; 1 Cor. 9:27; 1 Pet. 2:11; Gal. 5:17). Yet, as they humbly seek to work out their salvation, realizing that it is God who works in them to will and to act according to His good purpose (Phil 2:12), and as they are involved in prayer and Bible study (Mt. 26:41; Jn. 17:17), they can expect to attain increasingly higher levels of victorious Christian living throughout their lives (2 Pet. 1:3-4).

A doctrine that goes hand in hand with sanctification is perseverance of the saints. It teaches that the truly justified sinner will persevere in the way of holiness until death, and such a progressive sanctification would conclude in glorification (Rom. 8:29-30). This means, of course, that a person’s salvation is totally secure, for to assert that a true convert can lose his/her salvation is to deny its foundation. Salvation is grounded in one’s justification (Rom. 5:1-2; 8:30; Tit. 3:7), the Spirit’s sealing ministry (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:13-14), God’s unwavering faithfulness (1 Cor. 1:8-9; Phil. 1:6; 2 Thes. 3:3; 2 Tim. 1:12), His limitless power (Jude 24-25), and Christ’s atoning work, love, and promises (Rom. 8:31-39; Jn. 5:24; 10:28-30).

The Doctrine of the Church

Defining the church: I believe that all who have personally embraced, through faith, the atoning work of our risen Lord, have been placed, by the Holy Spirit, into one united spiritual body (1 Cor. 12:12-13) of which Christ is the Head (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18). This spiritual body is commonly referred to as the church universal. I also believe, however, that the members of this body who are currently living on earth are directed to associate themselves together in local assemblies (Heb. 10:25). Those who first believed in Christ were baptized and added to the local fellowship in Jerusalem (Acts 2:41). As in the universal church, all members of the local church should be true believers. Yet, this is not always the case, since profession of faith in Christ does not always equal true conversion (Mt. 13:24-30, 36-43; 1 Jn. 2:19).

Given the fact that Jesus, in Matthew 16:18, said, *"I will build My church"* (future tense), and that it is by Spirit baptism that believers are placed into His body, I can only logically conclude that the church began on the day of Pentecost. I believe her formation will continue until the return of Christ. Although spiritually, all God's people will share a common destiny in His kingdom, I believe that institutionally, the church and Israel remain distinct (Acts 1:6-7; Rom. 11:1-2; 28-29) and their relationships to the divine covenants are different. The covenants were given to Israel (Rom. 9:4) and as a restored nation, they will see them fulfilled (Rom. 11:28-29). The church today and in the future joyfully participates and will participate in the blessings of those covenants. For example, the Abrahamic and Davidic promises regarding Israel's capital city and being an heir to certain land acquisition, is significant primarily to the nation organized under Moses.

In Acts 2:42, we are told that the first local church *"devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."* In a nutshell, that is what I believe the objective of all churches should be. Of course, as one studies apostolic doctrine, the mission of the church becomes more defined (I will discuss this further in my approach to ministry section), but ultimately, it is to glorify God (Eph. 3:21) in all it does (1 Pet. 4:10-11).

I believe the local church to be free from any external authority with the right of self-government (Acts 14:23; Tit.1:5). The form of church government that most closely fits the biblical model, in my opinion, is elder led, yet maintaining congregational involvement (Acts 15).

Church Ordinances: I believe that two ordinances have been committed to the local church: baptism and the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:38-42). Before His ascension, Christ commissioned His disciples *"to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"* (Mt. 28:19). This command was faithfully taught and obeyed in the early church (Acts 2:38, 41; 8:12, 36-39; 9:18; 10:47-48; 16:15, 33; 18:8; 22:16). There is no record of anyone in the New Testament receiving baptism apart from faith in Jesus Christ. Therefore, I do not believe that infant baptism is defensible from Scripture. Certainly, many godly people have argued for it from a position of circumcision, but because this parallel is never made in the Bible, and the fact that circumcision was administered regardless of one's spiritual convictions (Gen. 17:23), I believe that the analogy easily breaks down. I do not believe that baptism is necessary for salvation (Eph. 1:13; 1 Cor. 1:17; 15:1-4), but instead is an outward testimony of an inward faith in Christ's death, burial, and resurrection (Rom. 6:3-5). The mode of Christian baptism is

indicated not only by example (Mt. 3:23; Acts 8:36-39), but by the very definition of the word, which means, “to dip.”

I believe the Lord’s Supper, also commonly referred to as communion or the breaking of bread, is a commemoration and proclamation of Christ’s death until He returns (1 Cor. 11:23-26). The bread symbolizes His body, which He sacrificed on behalf of all humanity (1 Pet. 2:24), and the cup testifies to the blood He shed for the remission of sins (Eph. 1:7). I believe the elements to be representative in nature (Jn. 6:41; 10:9; 15:1). I do not believe they literally change into the body and blood of Christ (Transubstantiation) or that Christ is literally present in them (Consubstantiation). Communion is a special time when believers unite together to focus on their common faith in Christ and anticipate His soon return (1 Cor. 10:17; 11:26). It should always be preceded by a solemn self-examination (1 Cor. 11:28-32).

Church Offices and Gender Roles: The one supreme authority for the church is Christ, and He has gifted certain *men* to lead His church, biblically designated as elders, bishops, pastors, and pastor-teachers (Acts 20:17, 28; Eph. 4:11; 1 Pet. 5:1-4). It is their responsibility to shepherd the Lord’s sheep by feeding them (Acts 20:20; 1 Tim. 4:2), guarding them (Tit. 1:9-11), and exercising spiritual oversight of them by seeking to identify and meet their needs (1 Pet. 5:2). Those designated in Scripture to assist them in their oversight of physical needs are deacons and deaconesses (Acts 6:2-4; 1 Tim. 3:8-13). There are qualifications for all three offices (1 Tim. 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9).

The reasons why I believe 1 Timothy 3:11 indicates the office of deaconess are as follows. First, the sentence structure of verse eleven is the exact equivalent of verse eight, both of which are dependant on the verb “must” in verse two, and thus strongly implying three categories. Secondly, why would Paul give qualifications for the wife of a deacon and not the wife of an elder? One would think the reputation of an elder’s wife would be even more crucial. Finally, since there is no feminine form of the word “deacon” in the Greek language, using the word “women” was the only way Paul could distinguish them from their male counterparts. Unfortunately, because many churches have adopted the view that a deacon’s main responsibility is to help give spiritual direction to the church (in the sense of an elder), women have often been pushed out of this vital position.

I personally believe women can be spiritually gifted in the same ways as men, but I do not believe that when the local church gathers for worship, women are to authoritatively teach men (1 Tim. 2:11-14). This, therefore, would disqualify them from the office of elder. The reason Paul gave for this had nothing to do with local culture, a woman’s lack of education, or the supposed problems of heretical female teachers. He simply referred back to God’s creative design. As in both the Trinity and the home, the issue is function, not essence. Men and women are spiritually equal in every respect, but for the sake of order and consistency within His divine institutions, men are meant to take the role of leadership. Having said that, I do believe the church should do all it can to make sure that women are able to use their gifts and talents to serve Christ and not be made to feel like second class Christians.

The Doctrine of Last Things

To preface to this section, I want to say that I believe that prophecy was primarily given to encourage the faithful and warn the faithless. It is no secret that many godly people today disagree as to the topics addressed below. In my opinion, it is due, in a large respect, to the fact that these things have not happened yet. So, to make them an issue of fellowship is unwise.

The Rapture of the Church: I believe in the personal bodily return of the Lord Jesus Christ to rapture the people of God, which make up the institutional and spiritual church (Jn. 14:1-3; 1 Cor. 15:51-53; 1 Thes. 4:16-17; Tit. 2:13). I believe that the return of Christ is imminent, which means that it could occur at any hour, and that believers are to be constantly sober about their spiritual life as Christ and the apostles commanded. I believe the rapture will occur prior to the beginning of the seven-year period known as Daniel's seventieth week, and therefore, believers will not have to pass through the tribulation (Dan. 9:24-27; Rev. 3:10).

The Tribulation Period: I believe that immediately following the removal of the church from the earth, the righteous judgements of God will be poured out upon an unbelieving world (Jer. 30:7; Dan. 9:27; 12:1; 2 Thes. 2:7-12; Rev. 16), and that these judgements will be climaxed by the return of Christ in glory to the earth (Matt. 24:27-31; 25:31-46; 2 Thes. 2:7-12). At that time, the Old Testament and tribulation saints will be raised and the living will be judged (Dan. 12:2-3; Mt. 25:31-46; Rev. 20:4-6). This period is also referred to as the seventieth week of Daniel's prophecy (Dan. 9:24-27; Matt. 24:15).

The Judgement Seat of Christ: The Bema Seat Judgement, also known as the Judgement Seat of Christ, is the event where believers will be rewarded according to their deeds (1 Cor. 3:11-15; 2 Cor. 5:10). This is not a judgement concerning eternal destiny, but rather, concerning a Christian's lifetime of obedience to God. Given the fact that the church appears to have already been rewarded at the time of the Second Coming (Rev. 19:8), it seems logical to place the judgement prior to this event.

The Second Coming and the Millennial Reign: I believe that, after the tribulation period, Christ will come to earth to occupy the throne of David (Matt. 25:31; Lk. 1:31-33; Acts 1:10-11; 2:29-30) and establish His messianic kingdom for a thousand years (Rev. 20:1-7). During this time, the resurrected saints will reign with Him over Israel and all the nations of the earth (Ezek. 37:21-28; Dan. 7:17-22; Rev. 19:11-16). This reign will be preceded by the overthrow of the Antichrist and the False Prophet, and by the removal of Satan from the world (Dan. 7:17-27; Rev. 20:1-7).

I believe that the kingdom itself will be the fulfillment of God's promise to Israel (Isa. 65:17-25; Ezek. 37:21-28; Zech. 8:1-17) to restore them to the land which they forfeited through their disobedience (Deut. 28:15-68). The result of their disobedience was that Israel was temporarily set aside (Matt. 21:43; Rom. 11:1-26), but will again be awakened through repentance to enter into the land of blessing (Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:22-32; Rom. 11:25-29).

I believe that the millennial reign of Christ will be characterized by harmony, justice, peace, righteousness, and long life (Isa. 11; 65:17-25; Ezek. 36:33-38), and will conclude with the release of Satan (Rev. 20:7).

The Judgement of the Lost: I believe that after Satan is released, he will deceive the nations of the earth and gather them to battle against the saints and the beloved city, at which time he and his army will be devoured by fire from heaven (Rev. 20:9). Following this, Satan will be thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone (Matt. 25:41; Rev. 20:10), after which Christ, who is the Judge of all humanity (Jn. 5:22), will resurrect and judge the great and small at the Great White Throne Judgement. I believe that this resurrection of the unsaved dead to judgement will be a physical resurrection, whereupon receiving their judgement, they will be committed to an eternal conscious punishment in the lake of fire (Matt. 25:41; Rev. 20:11-15).

Eternity: I believe that after the judgement of unbelievers (Rev. 20:7-15), the saved will enter the eternal state of glory with God, after which the elements of this earth are to be dissolved (2 Pet. 3:10) and replaced with a new earth, where only righteousness dwells (Eph. 5:5; Rev. 20:15; 21-22). Following this, the heavenly city will come down out of heaven (Rev. 21:2) and will be the dwelling place of the saints, where they will forever enjoy the fellowship of God and one another (Jn. 17:3; Rev. 21-22). The Lord Jesus Christ, having fulfilled His redemptive mission, will then deliver up the kingdom to God the Father (1 Cor. 15:24-28), that in all spheres, the triune God may reign forever and ever (1 Cor. 15:28).