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INCREASING THE KNOWLEDGE OF FIRST-LEVEL DOCTRINES
AMONG THE MEMBERS OF MT. PISGAH BAPTIST
CHURCH IN SHELBYVILLE, INDIANA

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Nicholas Ian Coulston
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Nicholas Ian Coulston

Read and Approved by:

Joseph C. Harrod (Faculty Supervisor)

Oren R. Martin

Date _____

I dedicate this work to the saints of Mt. Pisgah. Your faithfulness is a witness to the power of the gospel unto salvation. I pray this work will be a blessing to all of you who see that every matter is a theological matter.

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PREFACE

Studying the work of great minds who have spent their lives or careers plumbing the depths of God's Word is possibly the most humbling part of education, but it is also part of the great adventure. We truly stand on the shoulders of giants. At the very moment a student thinks he has a firm grasp on a particular idea or doctrine, ready to rush into the classroom and shine some light in a dark place, some article or book introduces itself to him seemingly for the sole purpose of saying, "Think again, brother." I am grateful for the authors, thinkers, theologians, and pastors who have taken me aside and implored me to think again.

I want to thank Dr. Robb Barlow and the leadership of Mt. Pisgah Baptist Church for their support as I invest this time pursuing the Doctor of Educational Ministry. Your sacrifices of time and money are recognized endearingly. I also want to thank my wife, Katie, for your support as you take such wonderful care of our daughter while I work and study. Your desire to stay at home is a witness to your trust in God's provision.

The first pastors of every child are his parents. I am grateful to John and Robin Coulston for raising my sister and me in a Godly home that always placed the church above all else. They raised us in the nurture and instruction of the Lord, laying a foundation for every blessing and trial that would come to us adults. May we raise our daughter with the same Godly vigor and tenacity.

I am grateful to my doctoral supervisor, Dr. Joseph Harrod, for his guidance

and supervision. Your ability to guide me to the perfect resource at the right time and willingness to offer a word of encouragement have been the inspiration to stay motivated through to the end.

May God bless all those who offered a kind word of encouragement during the last several years which brought such great change. I may not remember every word, but I remember you. I pray for you often, the saints of Mt. Pisgah Baptist Church, who have so generously and with great vision taken on the risky project of a young man in his mid-twenties as your associate pastor and have done everything in your power to see him be successful.

Nick Coulston

Shelbyville, Indiana
December 2019

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

While the religious landscape in America is changing, those who identify themselves as Christians still make up a large percentage of the population. Many of these people consume the products of culture that are labeled as “Christian” or simply “spiritual.” Books, movies, and television shows are being produced under the mantle of “faith based,” and they appear quite successful at drawing in consumers. Faithful believers must be able to discern what is biblical and what is heretical, especially when culture is attempting to blur the line. I have been surprised at the saints in my own church who consume such material, confess that it contradicts Scripture, then they justify its value by some other standard. Therefore, the church must learn to practice discernment, or as John says, “test the spirits” in order that we might know the Spirit of God (1 John 4:1). This project serves to show the people of Mt. Pisgah that a deepening understanding of first-level doctrines will help in practicing discernment.

Context

Mt. Pisgah is an American Baptist church in Shelbyville, Indiana. It was founded in 1826, making it the oldest church still in existence in Shelby County. Mt. Pisgah was a rural congregation that was made up mostly of farmers and their families. Generations of the same families worshiped together for decades. Worship attendance steadily grew but plateaued when the sanctuary, which seated under 200, was full. It was

a traditional country church; Sunday mornings consisted of worship and Sunday school, then there was a mid-week Bible study and prayer service.

Mt. Pisgah called its current pastor in 1987, and he has now served the church for over thirty years. The church has benefited from his long-term pastorate. Under his leadership, the church began to see steady growth. The church began a second worship service in 2001. In 2007, the church built a larger sanctuary to facilitate a rapid yet steady increase in Sunday morning worship attendance.

Other ministries have changed in recent decades, as well. There has been a greater focus on families with young children. Elementary students now make up roughly 10 percent of the congregation. The church recently hired a children's director to lead where the growth is taking place. Children's church rooms were at capacity, and a children's wing was opened in the fall of 2018. Several young families are entering church for the first time or are coming back after an extended absence now that they have children of their own.

Many of those who have begun attending Mt. Pisgah in the last five to ten years have been new believers with minimal knowledge of the Christian faith. As would be expected, Western culture has formed their worldview. There is a distinctly individualistic perspective on religious observance. Congregational worship and group discipleship are done at the convenience of the individual and/or family. Commitment levels are generally low.

Mt. Pisgah lacks lay leadership and leadership training. The church values the involvement of laity at all levels, but it has become apparent that many leaders are not well-equipped for ministry. In terms of lay leaders, Mt. Pisgah regularly needs Sunday school teachers, mid-week small group leaders for children and students, discipleship

group facilitators, vacation Bible school helpers, church camp counselors, deacons, and trustees. All of these positions require a deepening knowledge of important doctrines. The assumption has been that regular attendance assuredly indicated spiritual maturity. While all believe that Christ is the only one to offer salvation, many cannot articulate a coherent argument for their belief. Some, even those on our boards, have adopted popular understandings of God and the Bible that are syncretistic in nature without any awareness of having done so.

Deepening knowledge of first-level doctrines is where I intend to spend my efforts. The effects of low levels of biblical literacy and lack of theological discernment have started to create divisions between members, teachers, and pastors. Some members, even those in leadership, have vocalized positions in disagreement with historic Baptist positions without realizing it. When teachers or pastors question these beliefs, it has become a point of contention. Low levels of theological knowledge are also affected by the consumption of popular culture. Due to a lack of biblical discernment, both members and leaders have mixed biblical truth with various other teachings made popular by culture. The result is an ad hoc spirituality cobbled together by popular authors, bloggers, and filmmakers; the Bible is no longer the standard by which spiritual truths are judged.

Rationale

Biblical literacy and systematic theological education need bolstering among both the membership and lay leadership of Mt. Pisgah. This need is becoming increasingly clear as the surrounding culture continues to secularize and form the worldviews of those entering the church. Well-marketed authors proclaim a culturally compelling spirituality while offering little more than thinly-veiled humanism or a syncretistic, diluted version of the historic Christian faith. True biblical spirituality is the

lived experience of the Christian life. A spirituality that is formed by the Bible will understand Scripture to be the final authority for the Christian and how to integrate the Bible with lived experience.

Not only is theological discernment critical because of the infringing culture, but without the church as a guide through the Scriptures, newly converted believers have no way of discerning between what is biblical and what is pure sentimentality. The apostle Peter urges new believers to, “Like newborn infants, long for pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation—if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good” (2 Pet 2:2-3). In 2 Peter, the “pure spiritual milk” is the Word of God. Pastors and other church leaders must actively teach and preach so that those who still need milk will feed on God’s Word to grow in their salvation. Scripture offers no person the option of staying an infant in their faith (Heb 5:12-14). God expects that all who he has called to salvation would grow into spiritual maturity.

The members of Mt. Pisgah give evidence for a desire to be growing spiritually even though they seek such growth from unbiblical material. Once Christians see that the God of the Bible satisfies in ways that secular spiritualities cannot, I believe their hearts will be drawn to build a spirituality formed on the foundation of apostolic teaching. The gospel must be preached over and again into the hearts and minds of believers. It is the only word that will bring life.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to increase the theological knowledge of first-level doctrines among the members and lay leaders of Mt. Pisgah Baptist Church.

Goals

Three goals guided the implementation of this project.

1. The first goal was to assess the current knowledge of first-level doctrines among adult members of Mt. Pisgah.
2. The second goal was to develop an eight-session basic doctrinal curriculum based upon the results of the initial assessment.
3. The third goal was to implement the curriculum and increase participants' knowledge of first-level doctrines.

Attainment of these goals resulted in a congregation that is better rooted in Scripture and able to biblically critique matters of theology.

Research Methodology

The first goal was to assess the current level of theological knowledge of first-level doctrines among adults age eighteen and older who are members of Mt. Pisgah. The goal was measured by a twenty-item Likert scale survey.¹ Participants completed the survey electronically or in hard copy. Participants provided a unique personal identification code to allow anonymous responses while enabling the survey responses to be matched with later results. This goal was considered successfully met when at least thirty members took the survey and the answers had been analyzed to give a clear understanding of the state of theological knowledge at Mt. Pisgah.

The second goal was to develop an eight-session basic doctrinal curriculum based upon the results of the theological knowledge assessment. The content of the sessions covered the authority of Scripture, the Trinity, the full humanity and deity of

¹See appendix 1 for the pre-/post-course survey. All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.

Christ, and justification by faith. The curriculum consisted of eight one-hour weekly sessions. Sessions consisted of lecture and group discussion. An expert panel consisting of the senior pastor, a retired pastor, and a local high school teacher evaluated the curriculum using a rubric to measure clarity, quality, and depth of content. Critiques were reviewed and returned to the panel for further evaluation. This goal was considered successfully met when 90 percent of the evaluation criterion meet or exceed the sufficient level.

The third goal was to implement the curriculum and increase theological knowledge. All participants were required to either attend all sessions or watch them online. These sessions were recorded and posted online for those who could not attend a session. This goal was measured by administering a post-project survey to the participants. This goal was considered successfully met if the t-test for dependent samples indicates a statistically significant positive improvement.²

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

First-level doctrines. First-level doctrines are those doctrines which are fundamental to the Christian faith. This definition is informed by R. Albert Mohler Jr.'s idea of "theological triage," and Mohler includes in his definition the key doctrines of the Trinity, the full deity and humanity of Jesus Christ, justification by faith, and the authority of Scripture.³

²Neil J. Salkind, *Statistics for People (Who Think) They Hate Statistics*, 6th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2016), 190. Salkind's chart is helpful for seeing the logic in utilizing a t-test for dependent samples. Participants were tested more than once, so two groups of samples were provided for the same participants.

³R. Albert Mohler Jr., "A Call for Theological Triage and Christian Maturity," *Albert Mohler*, July 12, 2005, accessed July 11, 2017, <http://www.albertmohler.com/2005/07/12/a-call-for-theological-triage-and-christian-maturity/>. In this blog post, Mohler looks to the early church and councils that defined

Authority of Scripture. For the purpose of this project, the authority of Scripture refers to the bestowed and inherent authority of God’s revelation of himself as recorded in the collection of the sixty-six books of the Bible.⁴ The authority of Scripture extends to every area of which Scripture speaks.

Full deity and humanity of Christ. The full deity and humanity of Christ will be defined as “one Christ in two natures united in one person or hypostasis, yet remaining ‘without confusion, without conversion, without division, without separation.’”⁵ Christ, the God-man, atones for the sins of man.

Justification by faith. Justification by faith will be defined as “faith reckoned as righteousness.”⁶ In God’s sovereignty, he pardons man of his sin when man places faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Justification by faith is distinct from justification by works.

Trinity. The Trinity is defined as the distinctly Christian doctrine of the monotheistic essence of the one true God in three persons.⁷ The Trinity is God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. All three persons are of one essence in eternal relations.

A small number of delimitations were placed on this project. The participants were limited to adult members of Mt. Pisgah Baptist Church in Shelbyville, Indiana. The curriculum consisted of eight sessions. Participants must have attended or viewed six or

orthodoxy to determine what could be considered matters of first-level importance.

⁴Walter A. Elwell, ed., *The Concise Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991), s.v. “Bible, Authority of.”

⁵Elwell, *Concise Evangelical Dictionary*, s.v. “Christology.”

⁶David Noel Freeman, ed., *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000), s.v. “Justification.”

⁷Freeman, *Eerdmans Dictionary*, s.v. “Trinity.”

more of the eight sessions to be considered in the t-test for dependent samples. Full completion of the twelve-week project consisted of pre-surveys and their assessment, curriculum production, instruction, and post-surveys and their assessment.

Conclusion

The members of Mt. Pisgah Baptist Church need confidence in the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith. The following chapters present a plan for increasing the theological knowledge of adults. Chapter two will focus on the biblical and theological imperatives for having a clear understanding of the faith. Chapter three will focus on the biblical and theological content of first-level doctrines.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL SUPPORT FOR FIRST-LEVEL DOCTRINES

The contemporary age is one of enthusiastic individualism where all opinions are to be considered equal, resulting in the relativistic milieu of Western culture. Concerning this end of truth, Francis Beckwith writes, “When truth dies, all of its subspecies, such as ethics, perish with it. If truth can’t be known, then the concept of moral truth becomes incoherent.”¹ Truth-claims are far too exclusive for the contemporary mind, and the abandonment of truth inevitably results in the abandonment of morality. At a time when institutional authority is already in question, experts are denounced and the authority of the self is elevated. The ease of use and proliferation of social media has given every person with access to these technologies the ability to be a social, cultural, and theological commentator. Therefore, matters of theology are relegated to the realm of opinion and truncated thought while “ignorance has become hip, with some Americans now wearing their rejection of expert advice as a badge of cultural sophistication.”² When truth is relativized, repudiation of those who hold to truth is inevitable. Ignorance is the natural alternative to truth. Evangelicals are known to involve themselves in a variety of social structures and institutions, but the realm of the intellect is relatively vacant.³

¹Francis J. Beckwith and Gregory Koukl, *Relativism: Feet Firmly Planted in Mid-Air* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 20.

²Tom Nichols, *The Death of Expertise* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 21.

³Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994), 3.

The dismissal of firm, unwavering theological foundations stands in contrast to the biblical command to use the mind guided by the person of the Holy Spirit. The Christian should be constantly moving away from ignorance, perhaps most especially those who consider themselves “people of the Book.” The ability to articulate truth in deeper and broader terms strengthens the faith of the believer. The three passages considered in this chapter demonstrate that a deepening understanding of fundamental theology is important for a discerning Christian life. The first passage indicates that studying doctrine shows and fosters love for God and requires the use of the entire person—heart, soul, and mind (Matt 22:34-40). The second passage compels the believer to study doctrine in order to unify the body of Christ around fundamental articles of faith (Eph 4:4-16). The third and final passage teaches that studying doctrine pleases God by every member of the body walking in wisdom and knowledge (Col 1:9-12).

Matthew 22:34-40

The Gospel of Matthew records more of the teachings of Jesus than any of the other canonical Gospels.⁴ The Gospel that bears the name of Matthew owes its attribution to the tradition of the early church fathers.⁵ Due to the uncontested historical tradition of Matthean authorship, exegetical precision will not suffer due to internal authorial anonymity. Therefore, the certainty of author and date have relatively little impact on doctrinal conclusions. When regarding one’s view of whether or not Matthew was

⁴Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 1992), 21.

⁵R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007), 15.

unaware of the destruction of the temple because it was yet future or if what was written was commentary on the temple's destruction through the words of Jesus, however, perspectives on author and date will form critical pieces of the debate.

Various commentators and scholars have subdivided the Gospel in similar manners. The repetition of the phrase, "And then, when Jesus had come to the end of these sayings" serves as internal evidence for intentional divisions.⁶ The five occurrences of this phrase have led many scholars to determine that Matthew is intending these divisions to represent in some way the five books of Moses, though this correlation is inconclusive from internal evidence alone.⁷ Matthew's intent to allude to a "new law" may be implied, but the author never explicitly asserts such a correlation.

Allison convincingly argues that the five-fold pattern of narrative followed by discourse is a forced attempt at continuity between Matthew and Moses.⁸ Rather, interpreting each section on its own merits renders the plot of the gospel more clearly than presupposing any unintended correlation.⁹ The repeated phrase which concludes these five sections, however, does serve to assist the reader in relating all of the teaching and narrative that appear in a particular section.¹⁰

Concluding phrases are only one way of structuring the Gospel. J. D. Kingsbury has found that introductory phrases occur, as well. The phrase, "From that

⁶France, *Matthew*, 2.

⁷France, *Matthew*, 3.

⁸Dale C. Allison Jr., *Studies in Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 138.

⁹Allison, *Studies in Matthew*, 141.

¹⁰Blomberg, *Matthew*, 23.

time on Jesus began to” appears two times and introduces two major divisions, along with the introduction and conclusion.¹¹ Three divisions carry no other significance than to aid in clarity, readability, and understanding. However, Allison also notes that this amounts to little more than beginning, middle, and end.¹²

The passage being studied is found between the fourth and fifth discourse, placing it late in the Gospel. Matthew 21 records the “triumphal entry” of Jesus into Jerusalem during the last week of his pre-resurrection life. Jesus continues to teach and preach, but this is the beginning of intensified debates with religious leaders.

During his final week in Jerusalem, religious leaders face Jesus with three challenges in order to cast doubt on his ministry and authority. Matthew 22:15 begins a challenge concerning taxes and to whom they are owed. The Pharisees send a delegation to ask Jesus whether or not a devout Jew disobeys their own law when paying taxes to the Roman emperor. Jesus answers that he whose likeness appears on the coin is due his taxes. However, they should consider that the likeness of the One in whom they are made is due far more than tax revenue.

The Sadducees moved quickly to discredit Jesus’ ministry. The Sadducees posit a ridiculous scenario concerning seven brothers, a wife, and the resurrection. Jesus swiftly denies the Sadducees the satisfaction of having successfully mocked him and his teachings by showing the Sadducees how little they truly understand both Scripture and God’s power.

Verse 34 begins the challenge concerning the greatest commandment. Instead

¹¹Blomberg, *Matthew*, 23.

¹²Allison, *Studies in Matthew*, 136.

of sending a delegation to question Jesus, the Pharisees now send someone who is perhaps the brightest among them, as noted in that this person is both sent by the Pharisees and is a lawyer (v. 35). The lawyer asks Jesus to summarize the entirety of the Law. Don Carson notes that this request was not an uncommon endeavor in the first century. Rabbis were known to have formed summary statements that aided in understanding the enormity of Mosaic Law.¹³

Because this practice was commonplace, how to summarize the Law was an oft-debated topic. Various rabbis would have their own school of thought concerning the most important or most relevant matters. Therefore, much could be known about the rabbi by knowing how he summarized the Mosaic Law. Carson also notes that “Jews quite commonly drew distinctions among the laws of Scripture—great and small, light and heavy.”¹⁴ This was a well-known practice among all Jews, not only the educated elite.

The summary that Jesus gave is not particular to him. Other rabbis of good repute also acknowledged the dual foundational laws of loving God and loving neighbor.¹⁵ The Shema, Deuteronomy 6:4-9, was understood as the supreme command for God’s people. In that passage, the people of Israel were commanded to love God with the entirety of their being. The importance of this command is found in its requirement to instruct every person in the nation toward obedience, from the youngest and most naïve

¹³D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, in vol. 9 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 463.

¹⁴Carson, *Matthew*, 464.

¹⁵W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *Matthew 19-28*, International Critical Commentary (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 1997), 236.

to the oldest and most mature. R.T. France writes, “It was therefore already marked out in its original context as having central importance as a summary of the duty of God’s people.”¹⁶

Rabbi Akiva, only a matter of decades after Christ,¹⁷ found the command to love one’s neighbor from Leviticus 19:18 as the “greatest principle in the law.”¹⁸ Apart from these specific texts, the general principle of loving God and neighbor was understood to be initially formed by the two tablets of the Decalogue.¹⁹ The first tablet consists of commands for honoring and loving God, while the second tablet consists of commands for honoring and loving others.

Carson offers that one must not make too stark a distinction between “heart,” “soul,” and “mind.”²⁰ Both biblically and contextually, these descriptors are referring to the entirety of the person. Theologian Craig Keener notes that the interchange of “might” from the Shema with “mind” by Jesus is reflective of the idea that “mind” is inherent in the notion of “heart.”²¹ This intensifies the implication that the individual is not to separate these things as though a person could love God with the heart but not the mind. The three aspects listed command believers to love God “emotionally, volitionally, [and]

¹⁶France, *Matthew*, 844.

¹⁷Barry W. Holtz, *Rabbi Akiva: Sage of the Talmud* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017), 20.

¹⁸Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 236.

¹⁹Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 238.

²⁰Carson, *Matthew*, 464.

²¹Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Commentary Background: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 102.

cognitively.”²² Love for God requires the submission of every faculty in tandem with the others.

The lawyer is not necessarily asking for only one commandment though asking for the “great” commandment seems to imply singularity. France notes that “which” commandment could carry more of the sense of “what kind of” commandment is the greatest.²³ The lawyer is more interested in whether or not Jesus stands in line with mainstream Judaism of the time and which classification of law Jesus deems to be essential.

Commentators have noted how these two laws also protect the child of God from shameless legalism. Blomberg writes that “the relationship of all the Old Testament to the double love commandment shows that there is a hierarchy of law that above all requires one’s heart attitude to be correct. If this is absent, obedience to commandments degenerates into mere legalism.”²⁴ It must therefore be noted that the love of God is conspicuously void of any necessary emotion. Love of God and others is first and foremost a duty and is thus commanded.²⁵

The two words used in verse 38 to qualify the dual commandment have the potential to confuse the reader. The words are referring to a single quality.²⁶ “Great and first” simply mean this command is “primary because it is the greatest.”²⁷ The qualifier is

²²Blomberg, *Matthew*, 335.

²³France, *Matthew*, 844.

²⁴Blomberg, *Matthew*, 335.

²⁵Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 241.

²⁶Carson, *Matthew*, 464.

²⁷Carson, *Matthew*, 464.

both/and. Without love for God, love for neighbor will undoubtedly falter into a social Gospel where believers are nothing but social justice warriors. It is impossible to love people without first loving God because God teaches his people how to love others.

The dual command to love God and love neighbor instructs the believer to do so with the fullness of his or her being. Heart, soul, and mind are not intended to demand obedience from the pieces of the person but the sum total. Sertillanges wrote that “submission to truth is the binding condition for communion with it.”²⁸ Cognitive activity must not be excluded from love of God, but neither is it the end; love must be manifested in submission. The study of theology, the study of God and the things of God, will lead to a deeper love of his will and his attributes and greater obedience to that will for those indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Studying doctrine shows and fosters love for God and requires the use of the entire person—heart, soul, and mind.

Ephesians 4:4-16

The book of Ephesians begins by ascribing authorship to the apostle Paul. Christian history has held to this conclusion until the previous two centuries. Many scholars maintain that the earliest recorded manuscripts do not include “in Ephesus” as is currently read in 1:1, thereby giving rise to doubt that Paul was the author and intended it for a specific congregation.²⁹ This early omission and other supposed difficulties have given scholars reason to discredit traditional Pauline authorship.

²⁸A. J. Sertillanges, *The Intellectual Life* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University Press, 1987), 130.

²⁹William W. Klein, *Ephesians*, in vol. 12 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 21.

Difficulties establishing authorial certainty include language and style variations, the priority given to ethical instruction, and a seeming unfamiliarity with the recipient if indeed it was the Ephesian church which Paul had already evangelized.³⁰ Interestingly, the very issues that are said to discredit Pauline authorship are relatively simple to reconcile. Marshall recognizes that Paul's versatility is already well established in the uncontested Pauline epistles.³¹ Paul, an educated Pharisee and a "Hebrew of Hebrews" (Phil 3:5), would presumably be comfortable composing letters in a variety of styles appropriate to disparate situations. Ephesians may include more longer sentences than most of Paul's writings, but they are not entirely unknown in the uncontested epistles.³² That Paul included more ethical concerns and seems distant to the personal relationships forged during his ministry there is easily repudiated when the possibility of Ephesians originally being intended to be a circular letter in the style of Colossians (Col 4:16) is considered.³³

Traditional Pauline authorship is still to be regarded as the most likely scenario. Dating is often difficult, but based on internal evidence, information known about Paul's imprisonments, and Ephesians' relationship to other Pauline epistles, the general traditional consensus holds to sometime in the AD 60's or 70's.³⁴

³⁰Klein, *Ephesians*, 22-23.

³¹James D. G. Dunn and John W. Rogerson, eds., *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003), 1386.

³²Klein, *Ephesians*, 25.

³³Klein, *Ephesians*, 27.

³⁴F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1984), 244.

The similarities between Ephesians and Colossians have led some scholars to consider Ephesians as a type of “sequel to Colossians, expounding the cosmic role of the church, the body of Christ, as Colossians expounds the cosmic role of Christ, who is head of his body, the church and at the same time ‘head of every principality and power’ (Col 1:18; 2:10).”³⁵ The main thrust of the letter seems to be to give Gentile Christians affirmation of their place among God’s people.³⁶ Therefore, Paul spends a great deal of time focusing on the unity that must be representative of the church. Ephesians 4:4-6 speaks frankly of from whence this unity comes. Paul writes of one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all. The repetitious theme of “one” guides the young church or churches to understand that they all share the same source for their salvation. The salvation of each individual is costly and from outside of himself, so there is no room for boasting.

A wealth of information concerning Paul’s work in Ephesus comes internally through the book of Acts. Paul first arrived in Ephesus in Acts 18 and “reasoned with the Jews” in the synagogues (v. 18). Paul departs but soon returns to Ephesus as recorded in Acts 19. Paul meets with a group of roughly twelve disciples (v. 7) and prompts them to be baptized. Luke notes that Paul stayed for two years (v. 10). Paul performs some “extraordinary miracles” (v. 11) and encounters a riot before departing for Macedonia (20:1). Paul then called for a meeting with the elders from the Ephesian church to be held in Miletus (20:17). The remainder of chapter twenty records that meeting, which included a summary of his time among them, the fact that Paul expected to not see them again, and

³⁵Bruce, *Ephesians*, 241.

³⁶Bruce, *Ephesians*, 245.

an exhortation to care for the church of which God had called them. Apart from the letter to Ephesus, there seem to be three major interactions between Paul and the Ephesian church.

Ephesians 2 brings into view Paul's theology of salvation by grace through faith (v. 8). Boasting is nonsensical and profoundly boorish, because grace is the source of salvation, not works. Paul continues that because it is God who has called these Gentiles who have now been "brought near" (v. 13), Israelites and Gentiles can both have peace with God. Both parties "have access to one Spirit to the Father" (v. 18) through Christ. There is no more room for disunity between Israel and the church. In chapter 3, Paul dwells on that fact that how God reconciled Jews and Gentiles alike is a mystery. Paul petitions the readers "not to lose heart" (v. 13) even though preaching this mystery has caused him to be imprisoned. Paul urges them to be filled with the "fullness of God" (v. 19), which is realized in being filled with love for Christ and each other.

The critical matter of unity found in the early verses of this passage at hand have led scholars to recognize 4:4-6 as an early Christian creed.³⁷ Whether or not the creed is original to Paul is debated. However, it should be noted that the Trinity is an integral part of understanding Christian unity.³⁸ This one God in three Persons has also given each member of the church a gift. "Each one of us" (v. 7) is imperative, because Paul wants to make clear that all of those redeemed by Christ has been given a gift and

³⁷Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 255.

³⁸Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 520.

are therefore ministers of that gift.³⁹

Paul then poses an interpretive difficulty. He seemingly quotes Psalm 68:18, but he does so with liberty. The most obvious issue is that the original text has God *receiving* gifts from men who were captive enemies. However, Paul recounts that God *gave* gifts to men. A variety of interpretations have been put forth to reconcile this issue. Perhaps the simplest and most logical interpretation is that Paul retained the implication or meaning of the text while altering it in order to suit his context.⁴⁰ This would not be the first instance Paul reoriented a text to suit his context. Thielman notes that Paul quoted Habakkuk 2:4 in two different letters (Rom 1:17 and Gal 3:11), and both times Paul removes “his” from the original, “the righteous person shall live by his faithfulness” to the more familiar “the righteous shall live by faith.”⁴¹ Paul goes on to explain his quotation of that verse by arguing that it is Christ who has given gifts in measure. The same One who came down ascended to the heavens so that he might quite literally fill all things and space. In any regard, Paul is reinforcing his main point that God has gifted all of his children with spiritual gifts. God is the giver of all good gifts.

Paul then lists not a series of individual gifts but a series of roles that are identified with some gifts in verse 11. The gifts, then, are the people who fill such roles. The gifts are apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor/teachers. The lack of an article before “teachers” has led many commentators to see a correlation between pastors and

³⁹Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 522.

⁴⁰Thielman, *Ephesians*, 267.

⁴¹Thielman, *Ephesians*, 267.

teachers.⁴²

Apostles were those whose role was to establish churches and preserving and proclaiming the Gospel message. Prophets had no message of their own but were responsible for authentically declaring God’s message. Evangelists by their nature have fewer roots and preach the Gospel in various locations. Pastors and teachers have a calling to a local body of believers in order to fulfill the second half of the Great Commission (baptizing and teaching).

Regardless of the gift, each of the roles is singular in purpose— “to equip the saints for the work of the ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (v. 12). The role of “pastor” is the role of caring for the sheep of God. Theologian Harold Hoehner notes that pastoring carries more of the connotation of administration. Teaching, on the other hand, is instruction “not only in factual matters and skills but most likely also in moral evaluation.”⁴³ Hoehner is also helpful in noting that while all pastors must have a teaching ability, not all teachers are necessarily required to possess the administrative skills necessary to oversee a local congregation.⁴⁴

The purpose of these gifts is to maintain unity through “the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God” (v. 13). Paul likens the danger of disunity to that of being a child (v. 14). Immaturity, like that of little children, is evidenced by being influenced by any and all doctrines and “deceitful schemes” (v. 14). The persons with gifts of pastoring and most especially teaching are “foundation gifts used for the immediate purpose of

⁴²Klein, *Ephesians*, 115.

⁴³Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 544-45.

⁴⁴Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 545.

preparing all the saints to minister.”⁴⁵ Verses 12-14 connect to give the fuller perspective on the purpose of these gifts: to equip, to build up, to attain unity around faith and knowledge, and to be certain about doctrine.

Thielman notes that Paul characterizes unity as “leaving behind immaturity, with its intertwined characteristics of ignorance . . . gullibility . . . and individualism . . .”⁴⁶ Therefore, unity is formed by being knowledgeable, discerning, and communal. Paul’s choice of the word “doctrine” in verse 14 makes clear about what the church must be knowledgeable and discerning. There will be teachers who desire to see the church divide by spreading not only a false Gospel but many false doctrines that follow. Of course, there are disputable matters of theology and doctrine about which the church should not be divided (e.g., the millennial kingdom). However, as Klein writes, “Whatever differences of opinion we possess on various matters, on the central core issues of the faith we must strive for unity.”⁴⁷ Ensuring the congregation unifies around central core doctrinal orthodoxy is the responsibility of pastors and teachers.

Teachers must ensure that the standard is met, and Paul notes in verses 13 and 15 that the standard is Christ. The standard is met in being unified around truth, but Paul makes clear that there is another essential component: love. Speaking the truth in an unworthy manner undermines that truth. Not speaking in love can leave the truth “cold and indeed unattractive.”⁴⁸

⁴⁵Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 549.

⁴⁶Thielman, *Ephesians*, 283.

⁴⁷Klein, *Ephesians*, 119.

⁴⁸Bruce, *Ephesians*, 352.

Paul ends this section by noting while we are to grow up into Christ, the head, the body only grows “when each part is working properly” (v. 16). It is the gifts being used by every member of the body, not only the ones mentioned in this passage, that causes the body to grow. Again, the body is built up “in love.” Truth without love only serves to undermine its very goal.

This passage compels the believer to study doctrine in order to unify the body of Christ around fundamental articles of faith. The mark of a mature congregation is that the people are centered around orthodox theology and doctrine and is therefore equipped to minister its own. A deepening knowledge of fundamental theology is important for a discerning Christian life.

Colossians 1:9-12

In a similar fashion to Ephesians, traditional Pauline authorship of Colossians is disputed among scholars. Similar attacks are made on Colossians as on Ephesians, i.e., atypical vocabulary and theological variants. However, the supposed discrepancies soon dissipate when they are considered in light of all of Paul’s letters. One must realize that if traditional Pauline authorship is contested, then the intent of the letter is also in question. For instance, one proposition for the letter’s having been forged was to introduce Paul to Asia Minor, but Garland asks why Paul’s followers would not have taken a copy of a letter already penned by Paul instead of a forgery.⁴⁹

The atypical vocabulary is also less of a threat to tradition than it is often

⁴⁹David E. Garland, *Colossians and Philemon*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 18.

presented to be. Nearly all of the Colossians-specific vocabulary occurs in one section, 2:8-23, which any author might do in a passage that requires new thought or particular attention.⁵⁰ However, if non-Pauline authorship is entertained, it is possible that Timothy, who is clearly identified as part of the letter-writing process in 1:1, may have drafted a letter to which Paul later affixed his signature (Col 4:18).⁵¹ Such a possibility is not unwarranted but neither is it required to understand the peculiarities of a small section of one letter.

One is led to consider what to make of the extensive list of specific names and groups found in the final greetings of Colossians if a late date and unknown or questionable authorship is assumed. No city of Colossae has yet been excavated, and many studies have found that to be due to the possibility of Colossae being destroyed by an earthquake in the early AD 60's.⁵² The question must be asked why a late-dated forgery to a non-existent city would use a questionable tactic such as specific names to garner authenticity. In addition, when clear examples of the supposed Colossian-specific theological divergences are found to be replicated in undisputed Pauline letters, the more difficult position to hold would actually be that of a forged document.

The Colossian church must have first heard the Gospel from Epaphras (1:7). In return, Epaphras bore witness to Paul of the Colossian's "love in the Spirit" (1:8). Wright notes that religion was already becoming increasingly syncretistic but had a large, though still in the minority, representation of Jews. Wright concludes that though the issue facing

⁵⁰Garland, *Colossians and Philemon*, 19.

⁵¹Garland, *Colossians and Philemon*, 19.

⁵²James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to Colossians and to Philemon*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1996), 37.

the young church was Jewish pressure to conform to Mosaic Law, Gentile converts would already have seen syncretistic practices as commonplace.⁵³ One must also consider that Jews who did keep the Law while living outside Jerusalem would not have been welcoming to Gentiles who believed themselves to be inheritors of the covenant and re-interpreting Jewish Scripture.

Paul is not necessarily addressing any specific person or group when he condemns a particular philosophy. As Wright states, “The main emphasis of the letter is on Christian maturity.”⁵⁴ This makes efforts to establish precisely what the “Colossian heresy” was unnecessary. Paul is advocating truth and knowledge that flows from thanksgiving; he is not distancing himself and his readers from an unnamed enemy.

This letter follows a common Pauline form by beginning with a salutation and thanksgiving. Paul commands this same kind of thanksgiving among the Colossians.⁵⁵ Paul is grateful because of the faithfulness exhibited by the Colossians. The Gospel is bearing fruit all around the globe, and it is happening no less among them (v. 6). Paul is no less thankful that only do they exhibit faithfulness, but they “understand the grace of God in truth . . .” (v. 6). Their action is not baseless, neither is it based on emotion. The church in Colossae has distinct understanding of what God has done for them through the substitution of his Son in their place. Throughout the letter Paul will spend time ensuring this understanding is true. Correct knowledge of God’s will is a critical matter in

⁵³N.T. Wright, *Colossians and Philemon*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 24-25.

⁵⁴Wright, *Colossians and Philemon*, 30.

⁵⁵Todd Still, *Colossians*, in vol. 12 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 279.

Colossians.

For Paul, “factual knowledge” is not the height of understanding.⁵⁶ Old Testament wisdom literature places significant emphasis on understanding, but understanding is not an end in itself. The Proverbs teach us that “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight” (Prov 9:10).⁵⁷ To truly gain understanding or insight, one must begin by recognizing God’s mighty power and strength. A healthy fear of God precedes knowledge.

Garland states that “in Judaism, one finds knowledge of God’s will exclusively through the law.”⁵⁸ Since Jews found God’s will in his law and early Christians were looking for God’s will in Christ, there was a deep need for Paul to clarify how knowledge of God’s will is identified. Galatians 5:18 becomes ever more crucial in Paul’s theology—“But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.” The church was to search for God’s will by relying on the Spirit.

By using the words knowledge, wisdom, and understanding in verse 9 together, he is insinuating that they are parts of a greater whole. A person cannot have one and not the others. Using these words together also helps the reader understand that Paul is using them in their greater Old Testament context. “Wisdom and spiritual understanding” is distinctly Jewish. The wisdom writings repeat the theme of God’s will coming forth from the law, but it ultimately has its source in the Spirit.⁵⁹

⁵⁶Still, *Colossians*, 283.

⁵⁷Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are from the English Standard Version.

⁵⁸Garland, *Colossians and Philemon*, 65. Note also in Dunn, *Colossians and Philemon*, 69.

⁵⁹Dunn, *Colossians and Philemon*, 71.

“Wisdom,” says Wright, “is the characteristic of the truly human person, who takes the humble yet confident place marked out for Adam in the order of creation, under God and over the world.”⁶⁰ This definition functions so well because it stays theocentric and grounded in Scripture. Mankind is a “thinking” creation. The faculties of the mind are a distinctive among those made in God’s image.

Christ is therefore the preeminent part of all knowledge because understanding is greater than (but not less than) knowing what to do in any given situation. God desires his people to know him *through* Christ.⁶¹ As a person, Christ is more than a set of truths to which believers give mental ascent (again, though he is not less than that). Wright emphasizes that “Paul never plays off spiritual life against intellectual understanding.”⁶²

Since knowledge of God’s will is about Christ, the Colossian church is therefore freed from fear about the future. Dunn writes, “The corollary, spelled out in the following phrases, is that such knowledge gives insight into and therefore reassurance regarding what happens (often unexpected in human perspective) and helps direct human conduct to accord with that will.”⁶³ God’s sovereignty is praised here as a central tenant to God’s will. In his sovereignty, his perfect will shall come to pass regardless of any human intervention. Therefore, knowledge of God’s will has implications for how man behaves not so much in how he acts but in how he responds in trial and persecution.

Paul then writes that wisdom and understanding have a secondary aim, that is

⁶⁰Wright, *Colossians and Philemon*, 62.

⁶¹Wright, *Colossians and Philemon*, 61.

⁶²Wright, *Colossians and Philemon*, 62.

⁶³Dunn, *Colossians and Philemon*, 69.

to “walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God” (v. 10). Paul uses “walk,” a common choice for Paul, is a metaphor for conduct or behavior.⁶⁴ Ultimately, knowledge manifests itself in the fruit borne by the church. Note, though, that pleasing God includes increasing in knowledge of him. Growing in knowledge is as much about bearing fruit as are good works. The relationship between knowledge and action is reciprocal. People cannot rightly act without first knowing what is right, and they cannot know what is right without God first acting. Dunn notes that value of “wisdom and understanding is that it enables appropriate conduct.”⁶⁵

Knowing and obeying God’s will must be empowered by God. Paul prays that the Colossians would endure with patience (v. 11). Knowledge requires action, or else what is known is not truly understood. In a world that is threatened by those submitting to God’s will, Paul knows that the church will need endurance. Putting knowledge into action will require patience. However, Paul also notes that patience does not inherently mean a joyless existence. The Colossians can know God’s will through the preaching of the Gospel and walk in a manner that pleases God, i.e., obedience, and do so with joy.

Therefore, because God has equipped the church to walk in a worthy manner, the church must be thankful. “A knowledgeable, spiritual, insightful believer is one who ‘gives thanks to the Father.’”⁶⁶ All knowledge comes from God, the giver of all good things. Pleasing God is therefore a matter of waiting on him. That waiting, though, is

⁶⁴Still, *Colossians*, 284.

⁶⁵Dunn, *Colossians and Philemon*, 71.

⁶⁶Still, *Colossians*, 285.

active. The study of God and the things of God is what leads to ethical living and bearing good fruit. Walking in wisdom and knowledge pleases God, and this will lead the body to walk in a worthy manner.

Conclusion

Sound doctrine serves to preserve the individual and the church from wavering into “myths and endless genealogies” (1 Tim 1:4). Doctrine forms the entire person. The Christian is to love God with his heart, soul, and mind. Doctrine does not only form the individual but also fosters unity among believers. A church unified around sound doctrine will please God by the people walking together in wisdom and discernment. A deepening understanding of fundamental theology is important for a discerning Christian life.

CHAPTER 3
THEORETICAL, PRACTICAL, AND HISTORICAL
ISSUES RELATED TO FIRST-LEVEL
DOCTRINES

The biblical commands to “test the spirits” and to “examine everything carefully” are calls to apply the truth of God to every situation in order to discern between the true and the false (1 John 4:1, 1 Thess 5:21). Scripture holds that sound doctrine is a central tenet of the Christian faith. There are, however, doctrines that are of primary importance which are the foundation of the faith, without which the Christian is led into error (1 Tim 4). Primary doctrines ground the Christian in historical orthodoxy. Therefore, a deepening knowledge of first-level doctrines is necessary for a discerning Christian life.¹

The Trinity

Theologians refined the doctrine of the Trinity over the first few centuries of the church due to internal debates and external challenges. By the third century, Tertullian had written in his work *Against Praxeas* that the Father sends both the Son and the Spirit, and this doctrine has been agreed upon since “the beginning of the gospel.”²

¹R. Albert Mohler Jr., “A Call for Theological Triage and Christian Maturity,” *Albert Mohler*, July 12, 2005, accessed July 11, 2017, <http://www.albertmohler.com/2005/07/12/a-call-for-theological-triage-and-christian-maturity/>. In this blog post, Mohler looks to the early church and councils that defined orthodoxy to determine what could be considered matters of first-level importance.

²Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, ed. A. Cleveland Coxe, *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (New York: Christian Literature Publishing, 1885), 3:598.

Trinitarianism was again addressed throughout the Arian controversy of AD 325.³ At that, the emphasis was on the natures of Christ; the Holy Spirit is given little more than a mention. Though it was not until the Council of Constantinople of AD 381 that the divinity of the Holy Spirit was brought to the fore and expanded, there are clear traces of teachings on the Holy Spirit in the early church.⁴ Concerning the development of the Trinitarian doctrine of one God in three co-equal persons, professor Gregg Allison notes that

This orthodox position was hammered out amid challenges to a ‘Trinitarian consciousness’ that arose in the early church. By this consciousness I mean a sense, grounded in the teaching of Scripture, that developed in the church as it reflected on the nature of God; baptized new Christians; prayed; worshipped; constructed its ecclesiology; and as it developed its apologetics against pagans.⁵

One significant issue concerning the doctrine of the Trinity is that it relies entirely on Scripture; natural theology (knowledge of God apart from divine revelation)⁶ and reason cannot lead a person to a rich understanding of one God in three persons. Theologians are therefore either limited to Scriptural terms to describe the Trinity or to the formulation of new terms that must be carefully defined. However, a growing knowledge of the Trinity ensures the believer is worshipping God according to his true nature.

³*Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed., s.v. “Arianism.”

⁴*Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed., s.v. “Subordinationism.”

⁵Gregg R. Allison, “Denials of Orthodoxy: Heretical Views of the Doctrine of the Trinity,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 16, no. 1 (2012): 18-27.

⁶*Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed., s.v. “Natural Theology.”

Equal Ultimacy

There is one God who is the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. Each of the three persons share what theologian Robert Letham calls “equal ultimacy.”⁷ While the persons of the Trinity have always been in the roles of Father, Son, and Spirit, their equality does not negate particular roles or any notion of submissiveness. Letham adds, “Their distinctiveness or difference is in no way whatever erased, obliterated, or eroded by the union.”⁸

The distinctions of the three persons of the Trinity are internal and external.⁹ That is to say, the internal properties of names and relations of origin are qualities that the persons have that are essential. To remove an internal quality is to deny each one’s distinct personhood. The external distinctions, on the other hand, are those that are known by each person’s actions; the external is equated with mission.

The Trinity in Scripture

The term “Trinity” may be absent from the Scriptural text, but the truth of the term is found in Old Testament narrative (though perhaps loosely in the form of allusion) and New Testament formula and doxology. The term may be missing, but that does not insinuate the fullness of the doctrine is omitted, as well. Fred Sanders writes that “it is better to suppose that Scripture speaks from an achieved synthesis and gives partial expression, here and there, to glimpses of that fullness and coherence. To be specific,

⁷Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company, 2004), 463.

⁸Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, 466.

⁹Fred Sanders, *The Triune God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 127.

what we have in Scripture is rightly ordered, with the emphases falling in the right places.”¹⁰ Theologian Gerald Bray notes that the authors of the Old Testament were ready to give “divine status to the Word, the Wisdom and the Spirit of God.”¹¹ In the creation narrative, for example, the Spirit of God is a distinct actor from the God who speaks (Gen 1:2). Sanders advocates several interpretative suggestions to see how the Trinity is not only present but active: the term “Elohim” is plural; the angel of the Lord is a Christological figure; God speaks of himself in the plural.¹² Still, the kind of clear interactions and references between the persons of the Trinity as found in the New Testament are absent from the Old Testament.

The New Testament contains several more references to early Trinitarian belief. Jesus gives the church the baptismal formula of being baptized “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” in Matthew 28:19. The apostle Paul provides another Trinitarian formula in 2 Corinthians 13:14 in the benediction to that letter. The importance of recognizing the Trinitarian nature of God was already an important factor in the life of the church as early as Paul. While Paul does not use the familiar terms of Father and Son and inverts the familiar order, Bray notes that Paul likely does this intentionally in the context of a heavily Christocentric passage.¹³ Paul is keeping in line with the same type of formula as Christ’s. In several other passages, the

¹⁰Sanders, *The Triune God*, 242.

¹¹Gerald Bray, *The Doctrine of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993).

¹²Fred Sanders, “What Does the Old Testament Say about the Trinity?,” Zondervan Academic, December 14, 2017, accessed December 10, 2018, <https://zondervanacademic.com/blog/what-does-the-old-testament-say-about-the-trinity>.

¹³Bray, *The Doctrine of God*, 144-45.

order of the persons is greatly varied.¹⁴

One passage which deserves greater consideration is 1 Corinthians 15:20-28. Augustine (354–430) interprets this passage to mean that Christ is only lesser than the Father at that moment because he took on the form of a servant, whereas the Father did not.¹⁵ Augustine is stressing the importance of the Son and Father in relationship. The Father is greater than the Son but only in the sense that the Son will one day hand over the kingdom to the Father once the redemptive mission is completed. However, Augustine makes the point that the Father is not the Son and the Son is not the Father. They are distinct in their respective personhoods.

On the matter of how Scripture identifies the persons of the Trinity, the Bible must speak on its own terms without having any personal notions or experiences into the titles of Father, Son, and Spirit imposed upon it that Scripture does not explicitly or implicitly convey. Human fathers exist before their sons; this is not so with the Father and Son of the Trinity. Both are co-eternal in their existence and relationship.¹⁶

Therefore, the question, “Where does the Son come from?” is not the question Trinitarian doctrine seeks to answer. The terms of Father and Son seek to identify their relationship and roles, not their origins. The role of the Holy Spirit is equally identified with the Father and Son and is without origin.¹⁷ From eternity past and into eternity future, each of the three persons has held and will hold their respective role of either

¹⁴Bray, *The Doctrine of God*, 146.

¹⁵Augustine, *On the Trinity*, ed. John E. Rotelle (New York: New City Press, 2015), 80.

¹⁶Fred Sanders, *The Deep Things of God: How the Trinity Changes Everything* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 91.

¹⁷Sanders, *The Deep Things of God*, 97.

Father, Son, or Spirit. These roles are not contingent upon the incarnation or any other act of God in relation to humanity.

Trinitarianism in Contemporary Theology

Trinitarian doctrine is often absent from contemporary teaching and preaching, resulting in an apathetic attitude toward these critical truths from both pastors and laity. Perhaps contemporary preachers, enamored with relevance and practicality, consider complex theological formulation impractical. Michael Reeves notes that the matters the church often focuses on (such as the crucifixion, resurrection, and grace alone) are understood to be intrinsically Christian and more critical to matters of salvation. However, the doctrine of God is the fountainhead of what makes orthodox Christianity different from other religions and aberrant forms of Christianity.¹⁸ Every other truth relies on the doctrine of God. God is Triune, and he must be understood as such.

God's triunity should always compel the church to consider his simplicity.¹⁹ The simplicity of God insists that God is not merely a composite of his attributes.²⁰ God does not possess omniscience; he is omniscient. If, for example, eternity existed outside of God, then he would be dependent upon and subject to the qualities of eternity.²¹ A God who is dependent on anything is not sovereign. Therefore, there are "incommunicable"

¹⁸Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity: An Introduction to the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 14-15.

¹⁹K. Scott Oliphint, "Simplicity, Triunity, and the Incomprehensibility of God," in *One God in Three Persons*, ed. Bruce A. Ware and John Starke (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 225.

²⁰Daniel J. Treier, *Introducing Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 111.

²¹Oliphint, "Simplicity, Triunity, and the Incomprehensibility of God," 222. Oliphint uses this as an illustration for God's simplicity.

qualities, such as eternity, that God shares only with himself and not with creation. Trinitarianism holds steadfastly to a monotheistic view of God, and each person possesses all of these attributes. The Trinity consists of three equal, co-eternal persons “in joyful communion and union.”²²

Contemporary heretical viewpoints are often old heresies manifested in a new form. Such is the case with Trinitarianism. Two well-known modern Christian sects either deny or radically alter the doctrine of the Trinity. Jehovah’s Witnesses are monotheistic; however, they deny the deity of both Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, emphasizing that neither the word “Trinity” nor the doctrine is explicitly taught in Scripture.²³ Concerning Jesus, while they recognize he understood himself as the Son of God, they believe that “Jesus never identified himself as Almighty God.”²⁴ Jehovah’s Witnesses believe that Christ was created by God²⁵ and that God and Jesus were one in purpose, not essence.²⁶ The Holy Spirit receives similar treatment. The Spirit is not a person or even of the same essence of the Father and the Son. “By referring to God’s Spirit as his ‘hands,’ fingers,’ or ‘breath,’ the Bible shows that the holy spirit is not a person.”²⁷ The Spirit of God is nothing more than God’s action or will.

²²Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, 462.

²³Jehovah’s Witnesses, “Is the Trinity Doctrine in the Bible?” Accessed May 16, 2019, <https://www.jw.org/en/bible-teachings/questions/trinity/>.

²⁴Jehovah’s Witnesses, “Is God’s Name Jesus?,” accessed May 16, 2019, <https://www.jw.org/en/bible-teachings/questions/is-gods-name-jesus/>.

²⁵Jehovah’s Witnesses, “Who is Jesus Christ?,” accessed May 16, 2019, <https://www.jw.org/en/publications/books/good-news-from-god/who-is-jesus-christ/>.

²⁶Jehovah’s Witnesses, “One With the Father, but Not God,” accessed May 16, 2019, <https://www.jw.org/en/publications/books/jesus/ministry-in-judea/not-equal-to-god/>.

²⁷Jehovah’s Witnesses, ²⁷“What Is the Holy Spirit?,” accessed May 16, 2019, <https://www.jw.org/en/bible-teachings/questions/what-is-the-holy-spirit/>.

Moving in the other direction, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS) professes belief in innumerable gods, because humans can be deified. Not only can man become god, but the creator god was once a man, as well.²⁸ Human souls have existed before their bodily incarnation. Thomas S. Monson, sixteenth president of the LDS church, wrote, “How grateful we should be that a wise Creator fashioned an earth and placed us here, with a veil of forgetfulness of our previous existence, so that we might experience a time of testing, an opportunity to prove ourselves, and qualify for all that God has prepared for us to receive.”²⁹ They confess a theology of Father, Son, and Spirit, but these represent three distinct persons, not a Trinity.³⁰ These were all once human beings who eventually attained deification. Jesus is God’s Son, but he is the offspring of *both* a spiritual relationship between the Heavenly Father and the Heavenly Mother and the Heavenly Father and Mary.³¹

Both of these aberrant views of Trinitarian doctrine deny key components of orthodoxy. Jehovah’s Witnesses and the LDS church root their claims in textual authorities beyond the books of Scripture. Both of these Christian sects interpret Scripture in new ways, creating authorities of their own.

The doctrine of God, grounded in the Bible, preserves the Christian from moving into heterodox or heretical systems of belief. The belief in God’s Triune nature

²⁸Andrew Jackson, *Mormonism Explained: What Latter-Day Saints Practice and Teach* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 110.

²⁹Thomas S. Monson, “An Invitation to Exaltation.” *Ensign* 14, no. 7 (1984), accessed May 22, 2019, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1988/05/an-invitation-to-exaltation?lang=eng>.

³⁰Jackson, *Mormonism Explained*, 112.

³¹Allison, “Denials of Orthodoxy,” 24.

separates orthodox Christianity from aberrant sects or non-Christian religions.

Trinitarianism preserves the consistent biblical witness to God's nature and work.

The Authority of Scripture

Trinitarian theology amplifies the importance of relying on Scripture for doctrine. Without Scripture, the church would have no understanding of God being three-in-one, thereby missing one of the most distinctive Christian doctrines concerning God. The sixty-six books of the Bible are the final authority for Christian faith and life. The Second London Confession (1689) states that “the Holy Scripture is the only sufficient, certain and infallible rule of all saving knowledge, faith and obedience.”³² David Dockery holds the authority of Scripture to be of “ultimate concern” for how the Christian understands and interprets the Bible.³³ While inerrancy and inspiration are critical, a sub-biblical perspective on authority undermines Scripture's very power. A rich understanding of Scripture's authority allows Christians to live in faith from and obedience to Scripture's commands and promises.

Inspiration Gives Authority

The strength of the authority of a person or object is a consequence of who sent that person or object. Scripture's authority is a consequence of it being God's revealed word and not the collection of the wisdom of man over many centuries. Scripture's authority is grounded in the fact that it is inspired by God and recorded through men he

³²Second London Confession (1689) (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2012), ch. 1.

³³David S. Dockery, *Christian Scripture: An Evangelical Perspective on Inspiration, Authority and Interpretation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1995), 70. Dockery further defines authority as “the right or power to command obedience or belief.”

chose to deliver his words. God’s voice gives authority to Scripture.³⁴

In some instances, most clearly in the Old Testament prophets, God dictated words to his prophets. For instance, Jeremiah 9:23 begins with “Thus says the Lord.” This introductory phrase serves to present what was precisely dictated by God to Jeremiah. In this and hundreds of other instances, the authors are clearly quoting precisely what God had spoken.³⁵ However, dictation was not the primary means by which God revealed his word to the biblical authors.³⁶

Wayne Grudem illustrates that Scripture itself describes the various means of inspiration God used by calling attention to Hebrews 1:1 and Luke 1:1-3.³⁷ The beginning chapter of Hebrews notes that God used a variety of means to communicate his word. Luke notes his method of compiling information through eyewitness accounts and careful examination. The human authors of Scripture affirm that it was formed by diverse means; therefore, Christians are not forced to decide which passages are inspired and which are not. “All Scripture is inspired by God,” so believers are warned against privileging one means of inspiration above another (2 Tim 3:16). Dictation should not be considered a higher form of inspiration than Luke’s method of interrogation and investigation. Grudem, writing specifically of the Old Testament prophets, notes that the texts themselves “were to be accorded the same status and character as direct speech from

³⁴Matthew Barrett, *God’s Word Alone: The Authority of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 227.

³⁵Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, ed. Allan Sholes and Jim Vincent (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2014), 158. Enns notes that some form of the phrase “God said” or “Thus says the Lord” appears roughly 3800 times throughout Scripture.

³⁶Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 80.

³⁷Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 81.

God.”³⁸

The New Testament was formed less by divine dictation, but this fact should not call into question the authority it shares with the Old Testament. Higher critics have at times attempted to show the New Testament writers were unaware of the fact they were inspired and consequently authoring Scripture. Mark Powell writes, “The authors of our New Testament books did not know that they were writing Scripture—our current books of the Bible. They did not know that a New Testament would ever exist, much less that their writings would be a part of it. Nevertheless, these writings owe their prominence and influence to the fact that they came to be included in that corpus.”³⁹ Under this view of the formation of Scripture, the authority of Scripture is born from happenstance. The church held some writings in a high regard while disregarding others. The church decided to canonize certain letters or books and not others, and that decision is what bestowed the title of Scripture. In this understanding, “authority” is a relatively hollow word. Inspiration is not a relevant term.

At first glance, 1 Corinthians 7:12 could be shown to indicate a distinction between Paul’s words in that setting and the remainder of Scripture, proving that the Bible contains both inspired and uninspired passages. However, Paul is doing no more than indicating that Christ had not specifically taught that some should marry and some should not. Paul implies to the reader of 1 Corinthians that his words carry the same status of divine revelation as Christ’s. When Paul writes, “I, not the Lord,” he is simply

³⁸Wayne Grudem, *Scripture and Truth*, ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), 23.

³⁹Mark Allan Powell, *Introducing the New Testament: A Historical, Literary, and Theological Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2018), locs. 1104-7, Kindle.

citing other direct revelation. His words have the same authoritative power as the rest of Scripture. Instead of denouncing selections of the New Testament text as uninspired, Paul actually raises the entirety of his writings up to the status of Scripture in a single text. Paul speaks even more clearly in 1 Corinthians 14:37 when he says, “If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord’s commandment.” Paul understood his words to be inspired as “the Lord’s commandment” and therefore worthy of equal authority as that of the Old Testament.

The apostle Peter unequivocally deems the writings of Paul to be equally regarded as Scripture as the Old Testament. In 2 Peter 3:14-16, Peter writes that the difficulty of some of Paul’s writings does not negate the fact that the church should receive them as Scripture. To distort or disregard Paul’s teachings is to secure one’s own destruction. Similar warnings against ignoring or twisting God’s word are found in the Old Testament.⁴⁰

Second Timothy 3:16 affirms that the words of Scripture, not only its ideas, are necessary. For “all” Scripture to be inspired, that would require the use of specific words, not general principles. Matthew Barrett summarizes this truth clearly by writing, “These words are what make up the ideas and concepts, and this is why bifurcating the two is unjustified. Without words, there would be no message. The words of Scripture are indispensable and essential.”⁴¹ Attempts to divide passages into categories of “inspired” and “uninspired” subvert the consistent witness of Scripture.⁴² B. B. Warfield notes that

⁴⁰Hos 4:6, Jer 7:22-24, Prov 23:23, etc.

⁴¹Barrett, *God’s Word Alone*, 236.

⁴²Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 78.

Paul, in this passage, has in mind solely the written words of God, not the spoken words.⁴³ While this distinction may seem arbitrary, to what Paul assigns this quality of inspiration is of critical importance. What is bound in the preserved text is God's intention. The texts preserved for us are sufficient for faith and life.

The above ideas are the support for the theory of inspiration called "verbal plenary inspiration." The essence of this theory is that the Holy Spirit was the superintendent of the authors.⁴⁴ Style, grammar, and other particular linguistic issues were not an obstacle for the Spirit of God to overcome but rather the vehicle for communicating truth. Not only do the words themselves matter deeply, but each and every part of the words matter as well.

Contemporary Arguments Against Authority

Christians are often faced with the argument that the words of Scripture are not trustworthy because there are no extant originals, and the manuscripts available to the church are replete with errors and contradictory statements. This claim fails to recognize the thousands of preserved manuscripts (either complete or partial) and the overwhelming agreement between them. In fact, it is the overwhelming amount of material that complicates such textual criticism.⁴⁵ The discipline of textual criticism "involves

⁴³Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Louisville: SBTS Press, 2014), 133.

⁴⁴Barrett, *God's Word Alone*, 225.

⁴⁵David Alan Black, *New Testament Textual Criticism: A Concise Guide* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 18. Black gives the following examples: close to 5,000 partial or complete Greek copies, 8,000 in Latin, and 1,000 other versions, many of which were copied within the first three centuries of the New Testament's existence.

analyzing the manuscript evidence in order to determine the oldest form of the text.”⁴⁶

Many of the variances found in both the Old and New Testaments are not damaging to the authority of Scripture once they are placed in the proper context.

The authority of Scripture is found in its source of inspiration, and that authority has practical implications for the Christian. Scripture therefore guides the church’s worship, behavior, and doctrine because they are the very words of God. God did not breathe life into man’s words, but the words were breathed out by God. Whether a person actively advocates for a position contradicting orthodox positions on authority or simply redefines the terms, the results are the same. The Bible is a product of divine inspiration, a text of divine revelation.⁴⁷

Arguments against the above perspective on the authority of Scripture attempt to undermine the significance of the Bible and its rule over the Christian’s life.

Theologian Bart Ehrman is among the leading progressive New Testament scholars questioning the historical understanding of Scripture’s authority. Ehrman does so by establishing a dissenting viewpoint on how the canon was established. In his work *Jesus, Interrupted*, Ehrman interprets the process of canonization as a clear indicator that the books of the Bible are uninspired and evidence of bias in the early church. Ehrman writes, “If God was making sure that his church would have the inspired books of Scripture, and only those books, why were there such heated debates and disagreements that took place over three hundred years? Why didn’t God just make sure that these

⁴⁶Amy Anderson and Wendy Widder, *Textual Criticism of the Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2008), 6.

⁴⁷Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture*, 133.

debates lasted weeks, with assured results, rather than centuries?”⁴⁸

The implication that “debates and disagreements” went on for centuries is that the original autographs were not intended to be received as Scripture immediately, and therefore, the church has authority over the Scriptures by deciding which books or letters are worthy of the title. Contrary to this theory, theologian Michael Kruger clarifies that “canon” carries with it a variety of nuanced definitions, and the definition to which the person gives priority will determine how he understands “Scripture” and its function within the church.⁴⁹ Kruger outlines three definitions of “canon”: the exclusive, the functional, and the ontological. The exclusive and functional definitions both discredit Scripture and give the church an undue amount of authority over Scripture. The ontological definition rightly recognizes that a writing does not ever *become* Scripture but *is* Scripture from the very outset because it is from God and to be received by the church as such. The nuance becomes increasingly important in arguing against unorthodox views of how Scripture was canonized and clarifying the views held by the church in the first four centuries. The church must understand Scripture of course as “the Bible” but more specifically as the inspired writings of the apostles (or under their authority), handed down immediately to believers as authoritative texts for the life of the church.

Modern progressive scholars claim that the very notion of Christianity requiring a canon came as a rather late response to the rise of incompatible belief systems, especially those of Marcion in the early second century.⁵⁰ The theory that an

⁴⁸Bart Ehrman, *Jesus, Interrupted* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2010), 183.

⁴⁹Michael Kruger, *The Question of Canon* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013).

⁵⁰Kruger, *The Question of Canon*, 18.

authoritative grouping of books did not arise until a later date is called the “extrinsic” model, meaning that a canon was imposed upon the church as opposed to a clear understanding by the earliest recipients that what they received was already Scripture (the “intrinsic” model). Kruger clearly does not reject the entirety of the extrinsic model in terms of the date of canonization, but he wants to emphasize that the first recipients of the biblical texts received them as authoritative, apostolic teaching, IE, Scripture.

However, the early church received the message of the apostles as authoritative from the very beginning. Kruger adds, “If apostles were viewed as the mouthpiece of Christ, and it was believed that they wrote down that apostolic message in books, then those books would be received as the very words of Christ himself. Such writings would not have to wait until the second-, third-, or fourth-century ecclesiastical decisions to be viewed as authoritative—instead they would be viewed as authoritative from almost the very start.”⁵¹ To view Scripture only as what was canonized at any particular church council is necessarily too narrow a view of Scripture. Understandings of Scripture’s authority that disregard the text itself and rely only on the decisions of church councils fail to recognize how the immediate audiences received the text.

Christology

Jesus Christ teaches his followers to turn to the Scriptures to understand his person and work (John 5:39). The church must hold to the teachings of Christ concerning the authority of Scripture, because they all point to him (Luke 24:27). Only in Scripture does God reveal the importance of the Son maintaining his divinity while assuming

⁵¹Kruger, *The Question of Canon*, 70.

humanity. The dual natures of Christ clarify how God the Son took on flesh to atone for the sins of man. A growing knowledge of Christology undergirds the exclusivity of Christ in salvation, worship, and evangelism.

Son of Man

Christ's preferred title of the Son of Man identifies himself with the Son of Man figure in the book of Daniel. In taking on a human nature, Christ "emptied" himself.⁵² This "emptying" of which Paul speaks in Philippians 2 is typically used elsewhere as a metaphor and should be understood as a lowering of status.⁵³ In emptying himself, he took on another nature in addition to this divine nature. The "emptying" involved lowering himself into man's realm. The human nature did not eradicate his divine nature, and neither did the divine eradicate the human.

Donald Macleod helps clarify precisely what "emptying" Christ achieved at the incarnation. Christ did three things: he became a servant, he was a public figure, and he was able to (and did) die.⁵⁴ As a servant, Christ humbled himself to the lowest stature to which a man is capable of descending. As a public figure, Christ was a social creature who sought relationships with his fellow man. As a person able to die, he took on the full effect of the curse of death. This triplet of assumptions ensures the Christian understands the fullness of Christ's humanity by noting a few ways he shared that humanity with all mankind.

⁵²See Phil 2:5-8. This is Paul's key passage in understanding what took place in the incarnation concerning the technical definition of "emptying."

⁵³Donald Macleod, *The Person of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 215.

⁵⁴Macleod, *The Person of Christ*, 216.

The title “Son of Man,” when used in the New Testament, is only used by Christ to refer directly to himself.⁵⁵ The title has Old Testament roots in Daniel 7:13. In the passage from Daniel, a Son of Man is given a kingdom so that he would receive due praise from all men. The Son of Man’s kingdom is without end. The Son of Man is presented before the Ancient of Days, or God. Christ assumes the title, and by using it he affirms that he is the one to whom this passage looks forward.

By using the terminology of “like” a Son of Man, Daniel makes clear that this man shares the qualities of mankind but is wholly different. Daniel emphasizes neither his humanity or divinity. The Son of Man is “distinguished from and identified with Yahweh himself.”⁵⁶ Wellum notes that as this term is used, it progressively refers to “one who is unique among humanity.”⁵⁷ God gives this Man the kingdom. James Hamilton writes that “The placement of thrones in Daniel 7:9 indicates that when the one like a son of man receives his kingdom, he will be enthroned alongside Yahweh.”⁵⁸ He will have an appearance of a man and the essence of divinity. Christ also uses this title in conjunction with his messianic ministry, such as in Luke 19:10 (“For the Son of Man has come to seek and save that which was lost”). God alone can save, so Christ’s own usage closely links this term with his divinity.

Christ’s humanity raises issues of how a man would be able to live the sinless

⁵⁵Stephen J. Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate: The Doctrine of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 163.

⁵⁶James M. Hamilton Jr., *With the Clouds of Heaven: The Book of Daniel in Biblical Theology*, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 147.

⁵⁷Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate*, 164.

⁵⁸Hamilton, *With the Clouds of Heaven*, 149.

life and minister in the way he did. In his work “Communion With the Triune God,” John Owen wrote that “He was *never federally in Adam*, and so not liable to the imputation of his sin on that account. . . . Had it been reckoned to him as a descendant from Adam, he had not been a fit high priest to have offered sacrifices for us, as not being ‘separate from sinners.’”⁵⁹ Christ was not guilty of Adam’s sin. Throughout his life and ministry, though tempted, Christ did not suffer the curse until he took on the sins of the world as a servant, willingly on the cross as an act of obedience to the Father.

Christ was not imbued with original sin, but the question remains of how a man was still able to maintain that sinlessness. Bruce Ware aids in this area by noting that it was by relying on the Holy Spirit in every area of life that Christ was able to be completely obedient to his heavenly Father and fulfill his earthly ministry.⁶⁰ The same Spirit upon which Christ relied is the same Spirit given to all who call on Christ’s name in faith. The divine nature did not supersede the human nature in moments of trial and affliction. Christ’s life in the Spirit serves as an encouragement for Christians learning how to live life in the Spirit.

The divinity of Christ links the Son with the Father. The Son is obedient to the Father, and yet they are “united in their works.”⁶¹ The Son is to be worshiped in the same way that the Father is to be worshiped. Both Father and Son are eternal. Yet with all the shared characteristics, Scripture does not teach the existence of two separate Gods

⁵⁹John Owen, *Communion With the Triune God*, ed. Kelly M. Kapic and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 166.

⁶⁰Bruce A. Ware, *The Man Christ Jesus: Theological Reflections on the Humanity of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 43.

⁶¹Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate*, 160.

working in tandem. The Father and Son are of the same essence, yet their unity is their defining characteristic.

Matthew 26 is an excellent example of where both terms, Son of Man and Son of God, are used to identify both the deity of Christ and the exclusivity of Christ's claims. "Then the high priest said to him, 'By the living God I place you under oath: tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God!' 'You have said it,' Jesus told him. 'But I tell you, in the future you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power and coming on the clouds of heaven'" (Matt 26:63b-64 HCSB). Christ confesses that he is the Son of God *by using the term* Son of Man. Even the priests are so convinced of the equality of these two terms that they charge him with blasphemy in verse 66.

The Kenotic Theory of the Incarnation

The mystery of the incarnation has led to a variety of theories concerning precisely how two natures resided, unmixed, in Jesus Christ. Without question, there are concerns such as how Christ could retain the divine attribute of omniscience yet at the same time "increase in wisdom" (Luke 2:52). The incommunicable attributes of God, the attributes that belong only to him, would necessarily have to reside in Christ along with the human attributes if Scripture and the orthodox creeds are to be upheld.

One theory of how the communicable and incommunicable attributes of God coincide in Christ is the kenotic theory of the incarnation. The theory derives its name from Philippians 2:7, where Paul writes of how Christ "emptied (*kenoō*, hence *kenotic*)" himself. Professor Stephen T. Davis writes that "the whole kenotic scheme depends on there not being any essential divine properties that no human being can have and on there

not being any essential human properties that no divine being can have.”⁶² The kenotic theory, while an honest attempt to clarify the mystery of the incarnation and remain faithful to Scripture and the orthodox creeds, neglects the “essentialness” of the divine attributes. The incommunicable attributes are identified as such because God shares those aspects of his nature with no part of creation, including humanity.

The “emptying” of Christ should not be understood as the attributes of divinity and humanity competing for residence in the same space. The Greek *kneoō* is used elsewhere to refer to represent a lack of significance, thereby meaning in the context of Philippians 2:1-11 that Christ simply “renounced his privileges and rights.”⁶³ To read into the passage that Christ renounced any one of his divine attributes necessarily calls into question his ability to pay the full cost of our sin in the atonement. While Davis argues with humility and winsomeness that the essential attribute of, for example, omniscience is better understood as “omniscient-unless-freely-and-temporarily-choosing-to-be-otherwise,”⁶⁴ the idea is disconcertingly close to open theism.⁶⁵

Grudem notes that the text itself explains precisely what the *kneoō* meant: servanthood. What Christ emptied himself of was his role and privilege, not his incommunicable attributes.⁶⁶ Again, the context of the passage is Paul’s admonition to

⁶²Stephen T. Davis, *Christian Philosophical Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 177.

⁶³David E. Garland, *Philippians*, in vol. 12 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 220.

⁶⁴Davis, *Christian Philosophical Theology*, 177.

⁶⁵Treier, *Introducing Evangelical Theology*, 118. Treier defines open theism as denying that “God has exhaustive foreknowledge, holding instead that God’s foreknowledge is as comprehensive as possible *given the world God chose to create*.”

⁶⁶Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 550.

the Philippians to serve each other humbly. The logic of kenosis fails to make an impression, as well. If Christ emptied himself, even for a time, of the essential divine attributes, which of the divine attributes that would have made him God remained? The kenotic theory of the incarnation serves as a means to help grasp the fullness of how a divine and human nature resided in Christ pre-ascended state, but it neglects the importance of maintaining the essential attributes of God throughout the life and ministry of Christ.

Justification

A high Christology will necessarily include the work of Christ and what he accomplished through his life, death, burial, and resurrection. Through Christ's obedience, including his death, mankind can be justified before a holy God. Justification is the declaration of God that a person is considered righteous based on their being in Christ.⁶⁷ A growing knowledge of justification by faith assures the believer of his salvation by removing dependence on self-righteousness and glorifying Christ by relying on his work.

Justification Defined

Justification is necessary because of man's insufficiency and lack of holiness before a perfectly holy God. Man has no righteousness of his own, and if salvation is to be possible at all, God must act first. Righteousness, therefore, is the initiative of God that restores the "moral qualities" of which sin disposes.⁶⁸ Righteousness is a standard, or

⁶⁷John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013), 966.

⁶⁸Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 965.

a norm, that man is incapable of reaching and maintaining.⁶⁹ Any breach of that standard is a breach of the entire standard.

There are, no doubt, conflicting views of such a central tenet of the Christian faith. Roman Catholicism, for instance, denies that justification consists primarily of an imputation of righteousness from Christ to the sinner and sin from the sinner to Christ; the sinner is truly made righteous and is sanctified simultaneously.⁷⁰ Those within the New Perspective on Paul camp see the need to incorporate Paul's insistence on the reconciliation of Jew and Gentile in Christ as an indispensable part of justification.⁷¹ Justification is as much about reconciliation between men as it is between men and God.

Breaching God's standard of holiness or righteousness brings about natural consequences. Good sense and minimal reflection on natural law teaches that forgiveness for trespasses or breaches of righteousness is not the natural course of things; what is natural is punishment.⁷² The punishment for breaking the universal and holy law of God is what the human race deserves. For the outcome to be anything but punishment, God would necessarily have to intervene.

Justification is based on the grace of God presented to men apart from any works or merits of man's own.⁷³ God's righteousness is based on his own character and

⁶⁹Thomas Schreiner, *Faith Alone: The Doctrine of Justification* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 150.

⁷⁰Gerald O'Collins and Oliver Rafferty. "Roman Catholic View," in *Justification: Five Views*, ed. James K. Beilby and Paul Rhodes Eddy (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 283.

⁷¹James D. G. Dunn, "New Perspective View," in Beilby and Eddy, *Justification*, 189.

⁷²Herman Bavinck, *Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, vol. 3 of *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 181.

⁷³Bavinck, *Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, 181.

dependent on him dispensing justice. For God to forego the punishment of sin would be for him to turn his back on his own attributes. God cannot justify the wicked. Therefore, justification is concerned with man's place before God, whether or not man will be condemned or acquitted.⁷⁴ Scripture is clear that all of humanity stands condemned before God (Rom 3:10). Humanity has no inherent righteousness and must therefore have it granted to us. Our own works are wholly insufficient for the task.

While it is true that God does in fact make us righteous through progressive sanctification, that is not the essence of justification. Justification is the declaration of man's right-standing before a perfect and holy God. This right-standing, though, happens through God's grace as exhibited through the works of Christ. Reformed theology generally categorizes the mechanism by which God gives grace to sinners without ignoring justices as "double imputation." God's justice and wrath are perfectly executed by him imputing the sins of all mankind onto Jesus Christ in his crucifixion. Because Christ bore our sin, God is just by then imputing Christ's righteousness to us.⁷⁵ God is both just and merciful. Schreiner summarizes the way God justifies men by writing that "believers are counted as righteous, not because of what they have done, but because of what God has done for them in Jesus Christ."⁷⁶

Justification Performed

Justification is more clearly understood in relation to sanctification, because

⁷⁴Schreiner, *Faith Alone*, 136.

⁷⁵Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 968.

⁷⁶Schreiner, *Faith Alone*, 165.

they are distinct yet often combined. Justification is the declaration of man's acquittal before God; it is a "forensic" or legal term. Sanctification is the transformation of the person into the image of Christ.⁷⁷ There are theologies that confuse the two and in doing so take away from the mercy and grace of what God does in justification.

Through faith one is justified; faith is what "receives" the effects of justification.⁷⁸ Roman Catholicism understands justification in such a way that God only justifies those who are so deserving. In the Catholic view (as articulated in the Roman Catholic Catechism), God gives grace to a person, and upon being pleased with seeing his grace in him or her, justifies that person. The Catholic view of justification is essentially salvation by works, and it skews the biblical data.⁷⁹ God does not give grace in order to make us righteous, because we would still be unrighteous in our sins. To be truly righteous, God must grant righteousness to us, or impute righteousness to us, before making such a declaration.⁸⁰ In removing our sin from us and imputing it to Christ, God is just; in imputing the bountiful righteousness of Christ to us, God is merciful.

Faith is therefore the mechanism by which we are justified, not the grounds. God proves himself righteous by crucifying Christ and is able to justify those who possess faith.⁸¹ Bavinck illuminates a necessary distinction within justification in order to

⁷⁷R. C. Sproul, *Faith Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine of Justification* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2017), 118.

⁷⁸Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 969.

⁷⁹Gregg Allison, *Roman Catholic Theology and Practice* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), pp. 117-30. Allison critiques disagreements between evangelical and Catholic theology through the text of the Roman Catholic Catechism.

⁸⁰Sproul, *Faith Alone*, 121.

⁸¹Bavinck, *Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, 3:209-10.

avoid the predictable extremes. Within the bounds of justification is “active” and “passive” justification. Active justification is determined to be the “divine decree” set forth by God in eternity. God initiated salvation by determining to send his son to absorb his wrath and dispensing grace to men. Passive justification is then the application of the divine decree by faith to individuals.⁸²

Faith, then, does not bring about righteousness, though it is the mechanism by which God justifies. Salvation is still by grace through faith. God justifies the ungodly, crediting faith as righteousness. Where there is faith, there is righteousness to endorse it.

Conclusion

The doctrines presented in this paper are essential teachings of the Christian faith. To reject these doctrines is to undermine a confession of faith. These doctrines are not abstract or esoteric ruminations. Primary doctrines ground the Christian in historical orthodoxy and foster a life of obedient faithfulness. Therefore, a deepening knowledge of first-level doctrines is necessary for a discerning Christian life.

⁸²Bavinck, *Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, 3:203. Bavinck later clarifies that this is a logical distinction, not a temporal distinction (219). Later Reformed theologians desired to avoid the extremes of man’s having no responsibility or the entirety of the responsibility in salvation. Active and passive justification take place simultaneously.

CHAPTER 4

TEACHING FIRST-LEVEL DOCTRINES

In the summer of 2019, I taught an eight-session course on first-level doctrines of the Christian faith to the people of Mt. Pisgah Baptist Church in Shelbyville, Indiana. While the class studied the doctrines of the Trinity, the authority of Scripture, Christology, and justification, participants were able to develop a deepening understanding of first-level doctrines to aid in practicing discernment. The goal of this chapter is to describe the ministry project's implementation within the context of Mt. Pisgah Baptist Church, though some insights may be gleaned for future curriculum development. This fifteen-week project began with a seven-week preparation period, followed by a four-week teaching period, and concluded with a four-week follow-up period.

Framing the Need for Doctrinal Clarity

In the weeks preceding the course, I shared a video on social media highlighting the need for doctrinal clarity in the church. The video announced the doctrines that would be studied and indicated the dates and times the class would meet. Some individuals were invited personally because of their affiliation or leadership position within the church. Each doctrine was divided into two sessions. Part 1 would take place during an adult Sunday school class normally followed by part 2 the following Wednesday evening. The course was open to every adult in the church. Every session

was recorded, and links to the videos were posted on Mt. Pisgah's website along with all supplementary material for those who could not attend.¹

In order to participate, students were required to complete a pre-course survey consisting of 20 questions covering the 4 doctrines. Surveys were disseminated 1 week before the first session both on paper and online using Google Forms. Surveys were anonymous and identified by a PIN created by each student. Each class meeting consisted of lecture, slides, and worksheets for notetaking. Students were required to participate in 6 of the 8 sessions to have their surveys counted.

Preparing and Implementing Curriculum

The 7 weeks before class began consisted of administering the surveys and writing the curriculum. The main themes for the curriculum were already established before surveying, but the surveys helped focus each class meeting by drawing attention to specific gaps in knowledge. Four weeks were devoted to instructions and 4 weeks to interpretation and developing a response to the material.

Week 1

During week 1, surveys were administered on paper and online. Paper surveys were administered at the beginning of the Sunday school class. Online surveys facilitated completion for those students who had missed class or were otherwise planning only to attend this course. The online survey option was activated the day before so that participants were able to complete it immediately. The vast majority of participants

¹See appendix 3 for the handouts.

completed the survey on paper during Sunday school. Only 9 participants completed the survey online. The surveys consisted of 20 scalar items with five questions per doctrine.² Each question was measured on a six-point Likert scale. Students returned 53 surveys.

Week 2

During week 2, survey responses were evaluated. Each item was given a score between 1 and 6. Responses brought clarity to how well participants understood each doctrine and which components had not been well understood.

The average pre-test score was 80 out of a possible 120. Survey scores were varied for all four doctrines. The highest set of scores belonged to the authority of Scripture, the average score being 24 out of 30. Participants already held to a high view of Scripture and seemed to understand why. Scores for the Trinity averaged 22 out of 30. Scores for justification averaged at 18 out of 30. The lowest set of scores belonged to Christology, the average score being 16 out of 30. The item within Christology with the lowest total score was “Jesus had two natures, human and divine, that came together to form one nature.” The incarnation of Christ is truly a mystery, and the survey indicated that the mystery is not well understood. However, scores for the item “Jesus claimed equality with God” totaled 89 out 120, which was significantly higher than the other items (89, 49, 80, 70, and 68, respectively).

Week 3

During week 3, curriculum was created for each of 4 doctrines. Much of the

²See appendix 1 for the pre-/post-course survey.

material was drawn from the research from chapter 3. Additional material was consulted and incorporated as deemed beneficial. An outline for each session was developed

Table 1. Pre-test scores for all surveys.

The Trinity	The Authority of Scripture	Christology	Justification
21	26	5	21
22	23	12	17
24	26	15	15
17	29	20	20
23	29	20	25
20	25	20	30
30	30	30	20
25	18	14	14
20	19	14	13
23	21	8	19
21	18	10	21
27	18	19	21
26	27	21	21
20	20	15	20
19	16	12	12
20	19	15	15
20	30	5	15
20	28	29	15
21	25	10	11
24	24	27	19
20	30	11	17
25	26	24	20

alongside presentation slides and a worksheet with space for notes and fill-in-the-blanks.³ Because each doctrine was covered over 2 sessions, the basic pattern was to cover introductory material in the first session and divergent or heterodox views in the second session.

The pattern of instruction was broken when preparing for the authority of Scripture. Surveys indicated that participants already understood a high view of Scripture. Instead of having to convince the participants of the deficiencies of their views, the first session covered the most important passages that addressed the doctrine. The second session covered related issues such as reliability, translation philosophies, and the history of transmission.

Week 4

During week 4, curriculum was submitted to an expert panel for evaluation. The panel consisted of the senior pastor of Mt. Pisgah, a retired pastor, and a local high school teacher to measure clarity, quality, and depth of content. Each person evaluated the material using a rubric.⁴ Panel members were either given a hard copy or electronic copy on which to make notes and suggestions. Material was considered successful if measurements reach a 90 percent satisfaction rate. The total evaluation returned at 95 percent satisfaction. However, panel members did offer helpful suggestions.

Week 5

During week 5, changes were implemented to the curriculum. The majority of

³See appendix 3 for the handouts.

⁴See appendix 2 for the curriculum evaluation tool.

Table 2. Expert panel scores

	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5
Reviewer 1	3	4	4	4	4
Reviewer 2	4	4	3	4	4
Reviewer 3	3	4	4	4	4

suggestions dealt with the abundance of material in each session. The concern was that the scope of the material was more than one or two sessions could cover and ensure a high level of understanding. Material that was thought to be more complicated and distracting from the primary content was removed. Initially, sessions on the Trinity incorporated some historical material to present how the doctrine was present in Scripture but clarified as a result of the Arian controversy and the council of Constantinople. While these notes about historical development might be interesting, one reviewer commented that due to the existing mysterious nature of the doctrine, an introductory course should not include any material that was not absolutely necessary. Reviewers recommended that historical material from the sessions on the Trinity, Christology, and justification be removed without any negative impact on the remaining material.

One reviewer commented that incorporating some of the graphics from the slides onto the handouts might be beneficial. The overall style of the worksheets was considered satisfactory if they reflected the removal of historical content. Panel members noted that fill-in-the-blanks were helpful in focusing the students' attention and anticipating the upcoming material.

Week 6

During week 6, changes suggested by the expert panel were implemented in the curriculum. Unnecessary historical content was removed and supplementary graphics were added. The outline for each doctrine was refined and divided into two sessions to follow a general pattern of introductory material in session one and divergent views in session two. Outlines and worksheets were printed for the first session.

Week 7

Week 7 consisted of resubmitting the material to the expert panel for further review and comment. The panel was satisfied with the revisions to content and slide material. No further revisions were necessary. Handouts and slides were finalized with textual and graphic elements and transitions.

Week 8

Week 8 consisted of teaching two sessions on the doctrine of the Trinity. A Trinitarian understanding of God is the main differentiation from other religions. Without the doctrine of God as the center point from which the remainder of the course was to be derived, little advance would be made. At the beginning of the first session, five to ten minutes were allotted to allow those who had not yet completed the pre-course survey to do so. The session consisted of an introduction to the importance of doctrinal clarity, an overview of the doctrines that would be studied, and a lecture on key Trinitarian points. Points included the importance of understanding God's true nature as three persons of one essence, equal ultimacy between the persons, and example passages from the Old and New Testaments that present a Trinitarian view of God. The first session closed with

questions and answers.

The second session consisted of a short review of session 1, a lecture on the relationship between the persons of the Trinity, and a presentation of the views on the Trinity of the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS) to illustrate divergent views. One participant wanted clarification that these views were not the views of orthodox Christianity. She was concerned that I was advocating that the participants adopt these views. In stark terms, I affirmed that the views of the Jehovah's Witnesses and the LDS church are heretical and to be rejected. In a future session, another misperception about the divergent views would call into question the effectiveness of including contrary theologies. After the completion of each session, the recording was aligned with the slides and uploaded to the church's website for those not in attendance. Worksheets were uploaded as well.

Week 9

Week 9 consisted of teaching two sessions on the doctrine of the authority of Scripture. Surveys indicated that scores in this category were consistently high and participants generally understood the doctrine, so content focused on related material. In the first session, authority was defined as Scripture's ability to obligate Christians to believe and behave a certain way. A case was made that the New Testament authors were aware they were writing Scripture equal in authority to the Old Testament. A presentation of verbal plenary inspiration concluded this session.

The second session began with a review of session 1 with an emphasis on verbal plenary inspiration. There was then a presentation of the criteria the early church used for rejecting letters or books as non-Scriptural and the role of councils in forming

the canon. The session concluded with an overview of translation philosophy and examples from popular English translations such as the ESV, NIV, NASB, and NLT. A small number of participants asked questions about the King James Bible and what place it still had in contemporary church culture. Participants were interested in why certain groups advocate “KJV-onlyism.” These questions prompted a discussion of the differences between translation and revision and a brief description of manuscript transmission. After the completion of each session, the recording was aligned with the slides and uploaded to the church’s website for those not in attendance. Worksheets were uploaded as well.

Week 10

Week 10 consisted of teaching two sessions on the doctrine of Christology. The first session focused on the exclusivity of Christ as the basis for all subsequent theology of Christ. A presentation on Christ’s divinity and Christ’s humanity followed. The emphasis was on the incarnation as the moment in time when Christ assumed a human nature without mixture of his divine nature. The session concluded with a presentation of how Christ’s view of his own divinity led to the charges of blasphemy and him being handed over to Rome for crucifixion.

Instead of meeting on Wednesday of that week, the class met on Monday evening due to scheduling conflicts. The second session introduced the hypostatic union. A presentation of the substitutionary penal atonement followed. The session concluded with an overview of one particular divergent view, the kenotic theory of the incarnation. Questions and answers followed. One participant was concerned that I was espousing the kenotic theory as the definitive theory of the incarnation. I again was required to clarify

that the course would also have short presentations on divergent views and that I would not advocate the kenotic theory of the incarnation. Because this confusion happened at least twice, I came to understand that incorporating contrary views of these four doctrines may have done more to disturb the participants than offer clarity. After the completion of each session, the recording was aligned with the slides and uploaded to the church's website for those not in attendance. Worksheets were uploaded as well.

Week 11

Week 11 consisted of teaching two sessions on the doctrine of justification. The first session began by defining justification as God's gracious declaration of a person's righteousness based on their union with Christ. Several Bible passages were given as prooftexts. Justification was then set against sanctification as the ongoing work of the Spirit forming the individual into Christ-likeness. The session concluded with a presentation on active and passive justification.

The second session was a presentation of the relationship between faith and works. A biblical case for agreement between Paul and James was made. An overview of Romans 4 and James 2 supported the idea that Paul and James used the term "justified" with different nuances. The session concluded with a short review of the four doctrines.

Those in attendance were given the option of completing their post-course survey at the conclusion of the session. Participants were reminded that attendance of six or more of the sessions was required to accept their surveys. Fewer than ten completed the survey at that time. Some requested to take their paper form home to return at a later date. The online survey's link was made public that evening on social media. After the completion of each session, the recording was aligned with the slides and uploaded to the

church's website for those not in attendance. Worksheets were uploaded as well.

Week 12

Week 12 consisted of administering the post-course surveys. At the beginning of the Sunday school class, paper surveys were distributed. Participants were reminded that attendance of six or more of the sessions was required to accept their surveys. Participants were given several minutes to complete their surveys. Participants were given a deadline of the following Sunday to complete their surveys on paper or online.

Week 13

Week 13 consisted of comparing the pre- and post-course surveys using a t-test for dependent samples. Twenty-two surveys were successfully completed. Online forms were printed for markup. Every item was given a numerical value based on a 6-point Likert scale. Scores were entered into Excel, and the t-test for dependent samples formula showed an overall positive change.

A t-test for dependent samples was administered for each of the four doctrines. The doctrines of the authority of Scripture and justification showed positive change. The doctrines of the Trinity and Christology showed no significant change. Items whose scores that decreased between pre-course and post-course surveys are highlighted.

The only category that saw no decrease in scores was justification; every score increased or stayed the same. Justification also saw the greatest increase in average scores by 2.95455. The authority of Scripture scores increased on average by 2.63636. Christology scores increased by 2.0458. The Trinity scores increased by 1.54546.

Table 3. Post-test scores for all surveys

The Trinity	The Authority of Scripture	Christology	Justification
22	16	18	25
21	30	7	20
15	27	16	20
20	30	15	20
15	30	25	25
29	30	15	30
27	30	30	25
30	21	5	16
20	20	11	15
20	30	25	20
30	30	25	25
25	30	25	25
29	26	25	25
20	25	15	20
23	25	14	15
25	27	21	16
25	27	7	19
21	23	29	25
21	26	20	23
25	25	20	20
25	30	15	14
24	27	19	23

Week 14

Week 14 consisted of writing chapter 4. Record-keeping throughout the intervention phase facilitated a rapid writing process. Each week was delineated and described in summary fashion.

Week 15

Week 15 consisted of evaluating the project and writing chapter 5. The project was evaluated for its effectiveness based on the purpose and goals established in chapter one. The project's strengths and weaknesses were assessed. The chapter concluded with presenting a way forward and anticipated changes to future iterations of the curriculum.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

Mt. Pisgah Baptist Church is a two-hundred-year-old church with a rich history in the Shelby county community. Mt. Pisgah has also experienced steady growth over the course of the last decade. This period of conversion and transfer growth has shone a light on an underlying crack in the foundation. Leaders and members affirm biblical truth on a philosophical level, but many have a difficult time espousing even an elementary view of doctrines such as the atonement and justification. The leadership has become aware of a disparity between the conventional assumptions of how people understand and experience the Christian faith and the reality of the situation. While the majority of the members and leaders would enthusiastically self-identify as “conservative” and “Bible-believing,” a lack of theological precision hinders the depth their convictions.

An eight-session theological study entitled “This I Believe” was an attempt at intervention to increase the depth and breadth of knowledge while supplying theological vocabulary for the purposes of forming discerning minds. The approach was based on R. Albert Mohler’s theory of theological triage.⁵ Responses to the possibility of a more

⁵R. Albert Mohler Jr., “A Call for Theological Triage and Christian Maturity,” *Albert Mohler*, July 12, 2005, accessed July 11, 2017, <http://www.albertmohler.com/2005/07/12/a-call-for-theological-triage-and-christian-maturity/>. In this blog post, Mohler looks to the early church and councils that defined orthodoxy to determine what could be considered matters of first-level importance.

focused study on key theological and doctrinal matters ranged from enthusiasm to apathy. Motivations were varied, as well. One participant, for example, was going to be a freshman in the fall of 2019 at an Indiana Christian university and wanted to be sure she understood the essential framework of the faith before being confronted with opposing views. Another participant was a recently retired physician who was never satisfied with customary answers to his questions that he had received as a young man. Two participants, a married couple with school-age children, were new members who felt as though taking their faith seriously meant applying themselves to theological precision. Strewn among these and other examples are all those who only attended the course because it took place during the Sunday school class they had traditionally attended for years.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

The purpose of this project was to increase the theological knowledge of first-level doctrines among the members and lay leaders of Mt. Pisgah Baptist Church. Four doctrines were considered “first-level.” The Trinity was chosen because it is the Christian doctrine of God. The authority of Scripture was chosen because the Bible obligates Christians to believe and behave in particular ways. Christology was chosen because of the exclusivity of Christ’s claims concerning his person and work. Justification was chosen because of man’s inability to please God without God’s intervention.

The consistent theme of the pre-course surveys was that these doctrines had rarely been directly addressed. The consequence of neglecting doctrinal teaching and preaching is that church members cannot articulate their core beliefs beyond truisms and clichés. Every participant entered the course with some understanding of each of these

doctrines, but part of this project's purpose was to give them vocabulary for their knowledge.

Initially, 53 participants returned pre-course surveys. The content was delivered in a Sunday school class and on Wednesday evenings, but any adult was welcome to attend. Utilizing an established time and place for half of the courses to deliver the material made it simple for people to commit. The most inconvenience that would be thrust upon an average attender would be the need to watch at least two of the mid-week sessions if they were not present at all eight sessions.

Evaluation of the Project's Goals

The first goal was to assess the current knowledge of first-level doctrines among adult members of Mt. Pisgah. This goal was considered successfully met when at least fifty members took the survey and the answers had been analyzed to give a clear understanding of the state of theological knowledge at Mt. Pisgah. A total of 53 participants completed the survey. When the items were analyzed, the evidence supported the idea that there was a high variance in theological understanding. A perfect score in each doctrine would have been 30. A total perfect score would have been 120. Scores ranged from 66 to 110.

The second goal was to develop an eight-week basic doctrinal curriculum based upon the results of the initial assessment. The curriculum, to include a presenter's outline, worksheets, and slides, was evaluated by an expert panel. This goal was considered successfully met when 90 percent of the evaluation criteria met or exceeded the sufficient level. While no revisions were necessary to reach 90 percent satisfaction, valuable input did affect the amount of content in the curriculum.

Table 4. Average scores of pre- and post-course surveys

	The Trinity	Authority of Scripture	Christology	Justification	Total
Pre-course	21.72727	23.95455	16.18182	18.22727	80.09091
Post-course	23.27273	26.59091	18.27273	21.18182	89.21818

The third goal was to implement the curriculum and increase participants' knowledge of first-level doctrines. This goal was considered successfully met when a t-test for dependent samples indicated a statistically significant positive improvement, which occurred: $t_{(21)} = -3.675, p < .0014$.

Twenty-three participants attended or watched at least six sessions and completed the post-course survey. When the doctrines were analyzed individually using a t-test for dependent samples, the doctrines of the authority of Scripture and justification both showed a statistically significant positive improvement. However, the doctrines of the Trinity and Christology each had test statistics that were smaller than the t Critical two-tail values, -1.5234 and -1.3779 respectively (the t Critical two-tail value being 2.0796).

Interpreting the disparity between the success of each doctrine required closer analysis of the data. The variance of responses related to the doctrine of the Trinity greatly (9.3506 to 18.2078). This indicates that participants moved their responses to the extremes of the Likert scale, though not always in the desired direction. The variance of responses in items related to Christology did decrease (51.2987 to 49.6364). Participants did not change their responses in a significant manner between the two surveys. Within Christology, the item that received the lowest score in the pre-course survey (item 12:

“Jesus had two natures, human and divine, that came together to form one nature”) increased by 3 points in the post-course survey.

Table 5. t-Test: paired two sample for means

	Pre-Test Total	Post-Test Total
Mean	80.09090909	89.31818182
Variance	174.6580087	161.2748918
Observations	22	22
Pearson Correlation	0.587705048	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	21	
t Stat	-3.675435692	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.000703934634620	
t Critical one-tail	1.720742903	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.001407869	
t Critical two-tail	2.079613845	

The doctrines of the Trinity and Christology are two already complex doctrines that require a significant amount of study and reflection. It is possible that two one-hour sessions on each doctrine was insufficient to foster a significant change in understanding. Overall, however, the analysis showed a statistically significant positive improvement.

Strengths of the Project

The study of first-level doctrines proved to be a difficult but enjoyable task. First, because of this course, there is now greater awareness of the deep things of God among those who participated. Participants mentioned greater personal enjoyment and pleasure in knowing more of the Lord they worship. Long-time church members were afforded a fresh approach to teachings with which there was some familiarity. New church members were introduced to foundational truths that undergird the faith.

Second, this study is highly adaptable to different scenarios. While the course was taught in a large-group setting, the course could be adapted to a small-group or home-group scenario with minimal additional considerations. Because the content dealt with first-level doctrines with which there is considerable agreement between orthodox denominations, the course could be used in a variety of denominational contexts, as well.

Third, the pre-course surveys gave considerable insight into the particular areas that needed to be addressed. The course is the first study of any systematic theology that any church member could remember. Mt. Pisgah emphasizes verse-by-verse exposition in the weekly Bible studies. Studying one book, following one author's thoughts over the course of several weeks, helps people understand each of the books of the Bible on their own terms.

One of our regular teachers often remarks, "If they know what the Bible says, they'll know what to do." This kind of idealist philosophy reflects a high view of the Bible, but developing a theology that adapts to the mundane details of life requires the formulation of a system, as well. The mid-week group studies are often topical and stage-of-life appropriate in nature. Both approaches to Bible study are necessary for developing

a discerning Christian life.

Fourth, the course emphasized the relationships between these doctrines and thus showed the consistency of the Christian faith. The doctrine of the Trinitarian God began the series, followed by two sessions on the revealed word of God, the means by which we know God. Following the authority of Scripture came two sessions about the person and work Christ, the word of God made flesh. After Christology came justification, the truth by which Christ earned our merit before a holy God.

Weaknesses of the Project

Though the course overall had a positive impact on the participants, a number of weaknesses could be improved upon. First, the course was designed to meet twice in one week and only eight times. While this allowed the course to be completed in only four weeks, the schedule did not allow much time for helpful question-and-answer segments of time. Doctrines were introduced on a Sunday and addressed again on another day throughout the week. Due to the complex nature of these doctrines, there were often too many questions lingering from part one that distracted from the focus of part 2. The first session was almost purely introductory, so the second session should have focused more on answering specific questions raised during session one. Specifically, the mystery of the Trinity gave rise to questions from nearly half of the group. A group of questions had to do with the presence of the Trinity in the Old Testament. The participants affirmed the truth of equal ultimacy between the Godhead, but they also strove to understand it in a new and deeper way in the course of two hour-long sessions.

Second, there was a significant difference in the number of participants who attended Sunday mornings versus Wednesday evenings. Wednesday evenings are not a

normal time for group discipleship throughout the summer and Mt. Pisgah. Average attendance on Sunday mornings was 55. Average attendance on Wednesday evenings was fifteen. While the content was not affected by the number in attendance, the room dynamic assuredly was. More people were required to watch the videos online because they would necessarily miss four sessions if they did not attend on Wednesdays. This added requirement to keep up surely discouraged some people from participating. The fact that 30 fewer post-course surveys were returned than pre-course surveys supports the idea that additional meeting times throughout the week were difficult to sustain.

Third, the course was administered in June and July 2019. Throughout the school-year, Mt. Pisgah has a mid-week family night most Wednesdays where those in attendance break out into age-appropriate groups and adults have their own Bible study. This pattern is interrupted from May through July because of family vacations and in order to give an enormous number of volunteers some rest. However, once this pattern is interrupted, it is difficult to re-establish. A small number of participants came every Wednesday, but many fluctuated on whether or not they attended or watched the video later.

Fourth, I contributed to the scheduling difficulty. As a member of the Indiana National Guard, I am committed to fifteen days of training in the summer. This summer, the training dates fell between the weeks I would teach on the authority of Scripture and Christology. The class studied the Trinity and the authority of Scripture and then did not meet for a week. The following week I had a seminar from Tuesday through Friday, so class met on Monday evening instead of Wednesday evening. Unnecessary breaks and odd changes tend to hurt momentum.

What I Would Do Differently

I overestimated the pace at which I could teach these doctrines and the amount of material that I could cover in the span of eight one-hour sessions. If I were to revisit this curriculum and teach it again, I would make two considerable changes to the content and one change to the schedule. First, I would remove even more new material to ensure the main idea is clear to the majority of the participants. For example, I introduced the Trinity with Robert Letham's idea of "equal ultimacy."⁶ Before moving on to another subpoint, I would continue to expound upon this one idea and continue to relate every subpoint back to equal ultimacy. For many people, this time of study and reflection was the first time they have spent any time focusing solely on these core doctrines in any systematic manner. As I reflect on the content, it hardly seems wise to think that anyone would be able to sufficiently cover the hypostatic union, substitutionary penal atonement, and the kenotic theory of the incarnation in one hour.

Secondly, I would remove the sessions on divergent views. Three of the sections (all but the authority of Scripture) had one session on introductory material and one session on unorthodox beliefs concerning that doctrine. Instead of one positive session and one negative session, I would either remove the negative session or have two positive sessions. This approach would allow me to ensure I have clarified all the necessary main points before moving on to tangential material.

In the second session on the Trinity where I presented the views of the LDS church and the Jehovah's Witnesses, one participant believed that I was espousing the

⁶See "The Trinity" in chap. 3.

theology of Mt. Pisgah. At the conclusion of the session, she remarked that she had trouble believing all these new ideas since she could not find them in the Bible. Other teachers she had before rebuffed these very ideas, and she was becoming agitated that I would attempt to clutter her mind with such garbage. I had to clarify in the starkest of terms that I was presenting heretical theology, not the theology of Mt. Pisgah. A similar issue occurred during the second session on Christology. A participant believed that I was encouraging heretical views of Christ's person and work while presenting the kenotic theory of the incarnation. While I had hoped that presenting heretical or heterodox views would help to clarify orthodoxy, I now believe I only added to the confusion. The results of the t-tests for the Trinity and Christology support this concern. Several items received lower scores on the post-course survey in these two categories.

In terms of scheduling, I would teach the course in one of two ways. One option would be to teach the course in either the fall or spring and one session per week. The church can more easily align our weekly schedule with the members' during that time of the year. Mt. Pisgah currently has a Bible study nearly every day of the week, so I would be able to teach it in an established time slot. Teaching one session a week would allow for more flexibility in accommodating small changes in content week-to-week. The second option would be to continue to teach this course in the Sunday school classes, where the audience is more captive, and continue in the one-session-per-week pattern. Trying to complete the course too quickly or holding two sessions per week seemed to work against the purpose of the course.

Theological Reflections

In an interview with Kim Lawton at Religious and Ethics Newsweekly, D. A.

Carson said of those in the emerging church,

No one believes more strongly than I do that every Christian should be a theologian. In that sense we all need to work it out. I want all Christians who can read, to read their Bibles and to read beyond the Bible—to read the history and theology. By all means read, read, read and, in that sense, interact. I don't want a kind of priestly class of scholars or pastors or theologians who somehow give dictates to the church about what must be believed.⁷

While Carson was commenting on the emerging church in particular, his point rings true for those in every denomination or movement. Every Christian is a theologian. A single thought or word about God consequentially makes one a theologian. Carson is also emphasizing the need for personal accountability in one's theology. Even in lesser matters, the apostle Paul affirms that a believer should be "fully convinced in his own mind" (Rom 14:5). Every matter is not a fundamental matter, but intellectual honesty requires consistency of thought. The question is not whether or not one is a theologian but whether or not one's theology is rooted in an honest interpretive process of Scripture.

Christian theology must be consistent across the board. Our faith is at peace with mystery, not contradiction. This mystery is no more apparent than in the reality of the sovereignty of God in salvation and man's personal, moral responsibility. Faithful Christians can live with the mystery of the relationship between sovereignty and responsibility, but we are not to pit them against each other. Christians cannot preach

⁷Kim Lawton, "D. A. Carson Extended Interview," Religion and Ethics Newsweekly, July 8, 2005, accessed August 19, 2019, <https://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/2005/07/08/july-8-2005-d-a-carson-extended-interview/11760/>.

God's sovereign election and reprobation and then fall into either a careless disposition to a lost world or overemphasize man's free will. Theology must be internally consistent.

Paul himself seems to be making distinctions between greater and lesser matters of faith. To reject some doctrines, such as those outlined in this study, is to dismiss the essential theological and philosophical underpinnings of the faith. To reject some doctrines is to reject the whole of Christianity as a system of thought. One cannot be intellectually honest and biblically faithful while claiming the name of Christ and rejecting matters such as a God of one essence in three persons.

This approach is not philosophically identical to the form of fundamentalism that understands every matter as a matter of first importance.⁸ Thinking Christians must discern between greater and lesser matters if we are to effectively engage our fellow believers and unbelievers. Believers devoted to the same congregation can excitedly debate whether or not the man of lawlessness and the great apostasy come before or after the rapture. The implications of either perspective still place the Christian hope in God's sovereign plan of salvation. Believers can disagree on second- and third-tier matters if the clear teaching of Scripture, the first-tier matters, are affirmed with full conviction and sincerity.

Even within the pages of Scripture, Paul gives authoritative teaching on how to handle lesser matters (Rom 14). Issues not directly related to Christ and him crucified should be understood as the lesser matters. These matters or doctrines are not at all unimportant, but they are logically secondary after Christ and him crucified. Such

⁸See 1 Corinthians 15:3-8. Paul clearly articulates exactly what are matters of first importance: Christ was foretold in the Old Testament, was dead, buried, then resurrected and appeared to many people.

doctrines might separate true believers on Sunday mornings, but Baptists and Presbyterians can affirm each other's confession of faith in Christ.

Without the Trinity, there is no Christian doctrine of God. Without Scriptural authority, the church loses the epistemological basis for absolute truth. Without a high Christology, the church misunderstands the atonement. Without justification by grace alone through faith alone, we lose God's sovereignty over salvation. Discernment requires a set of lenses through which life and culture are interpreted. The four doctrines studied here, when understood to be intrinsic to a Christian worldview, foster healthy discernment.

Personal Reflections

I did not have the opportunity to attend Sunday school during my high school years, so most of my Bible instruction came through sermons on Sunday morning. When I enrolled in college, I took an introduction to the Bible course at a secular institution. The professor taught in a winsome manner but did not make theological claims. For the first time, I had to interact with the Bible in a different way. During that semester, my affection for the word of God changed dramatically. I had a desire to know more about the things of God. I desired to teach others what I had learned.

Every Christian is by nature a theologian. If theology is the study of the things of God, then in one sense those who make statements or have thoughts about God are practicing theology. Awareness of what we are doing and fear of speaking or thinking wrongly about God should embolden every Christian to formulate biblically sound convictions. Pastors must therefore equip and encourage their people to the best theologian they can be. The surrounding culture continues to grow antagonistic toward

those who hold to the existence of absolute truth and public exhibitions of faith.

Therefore, Christians have no other option but to have a firm grasp of the content of their faith. The Holy Spirit is the guarantor of our faith, but we work out our salvation with fear and trembling by learning about God and the things of God. Pastors must lead the way, model what they want to see in their congregations, and stretch their own minds if they want to be out in front of their people.

Many of the resources I consulted in developing my theology for this project were new to me. I had not interacted with the likes of B. B. Warfield and Herman Bavinck. These great thinkers have encouraged me to improve my theological precision and accuracy. I look forward to incorporating more complex theological works in the vein of Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics* into my study time. These great thinkers constantly beseech me to "Think again, brother."

Teaching what was new to so many, including myself, has shown me that people are willing to be stretched in their thinking. Those who are born again have a desire for the things of God and his Word. People will entertain new ideas that are presented winsomely and with precision. Christians in all stages of life have a thirst for the things of God. He always satisfies, but we never have enough of him.

Conclusion

The church will never exhaust the depth of the truth found in God's Word. There is unmatched pleasure in being transformed by the renewing of one's mind. There is also great pleasure in seeing others come to a new place of loving God by learning something new and true about him. Christians today need to be able to articulate a rationale argument for their faith, and that does not only mean an apologetic defense.

Christians must be able to articulate the doctrines that have sustained the church for two-thousand years. Navigating a landscape that is increasingly hostile to truth requires the ability to practice discernment amidst animosity and confusion. Increased biblical literacy and theological precision are critical aspects of practicing discernment. A deepening understanding of fundamental theology is important for a discerning Christian life.

APPENDIX 1

PRE-/POST-COURSE SURVEY

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to measure the breadth and depth of your knowledge of key Christian doctrines. This research is being conducted by Nicholas Coulston for purposes of doctoral project research. In this research, you will select how much you agree or disagree with the given statements. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

Post-course survey question: HOW MANY SESSIONS DID YOU EITHER ATTEND OR WATCH ONLINE (1-8)? _____

SD – Strongly Disagree **DS** – Disagree Somewhat **NT** – Neutral
AS – Agree Somewhat **SA** – Strongly Agree

Category One: The authority of Scripture

Question	SD	DS	NT	AS	SA
The Bible is free from errors.					
The Bible contains mistakes in terms of dates and numbers, but it is still otherwise true.					
The Bible authors are only concerned about matters of faith and practice.					
The Bible is the final authority for Christian living.					
The Bible contains everything man needs to know to be saved.					

Category Two: Christology

Question	SD	DS	NT	AS	SA
Jesus claimed equality with God.					
Jesus had two natures, human and divine, that came together to form one nature.					
Jesus has always had a divine and human nature.					
God created Jesus.					
Jesus created the world.					

Category Three: Justification by faith

Question	SD	DS	NT	AS	SA
I must choose God to be saved.					
My good works are necessary for salvation.					
I am saved because of Christ's good works.					
Through continued sin and a lack of good works, I am able to lose my salvation.					
Those who God has saved are legally declared innocent.					

Category Four: The Trinity

Question	SD	DS	NT	AS	SA
God is three different persons.					
God has always been Father, Son, and Spirit.					
The Holy Spirit has less of a role in the church than the Father and the Son.					
The Son is subordinate to the Father.					
God is the Father, Son, or Spirit at different times.					

APPENDIX 2

CURRICULUM EVALUATION TOOL

1: Insufficient

2: Requires Attention

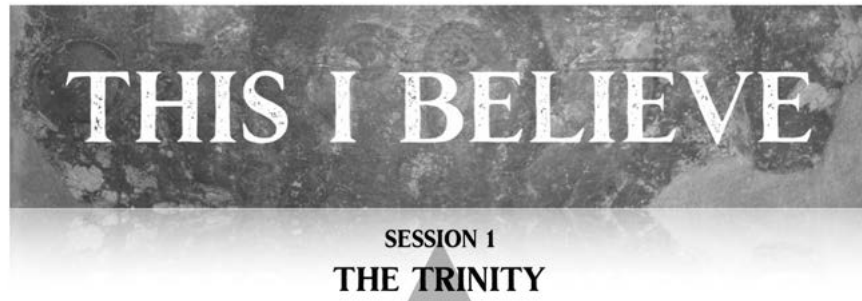
3: Sufficient

4: Exemplary

Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Key terms are clearly defined.					
Each session has a clearly articulated main idea.					
Graphics support the curriculum and are not a distraction.					
Handouts have enough information to keep the participant focused.					
Each section has a clear connection to what came before and what comes after.					

APPENDIX 3

HANDOUTS



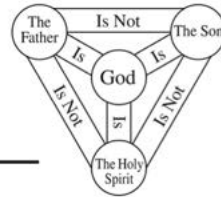
INTRODUCTION

1. WHAT WE _____ AFFECTS OUR _____.

2. SOUND DOCTRINE RAISES THE HEIGHT OF OUR _____
AND THE DEPTH OF OUR _____.

3. A GROWING KNOWLEDGE OF THE TRINITY ENSURES THE BELIEVER
IS WORSHIPING GOD ACCORDING TO HIS _____.

4. _____ : THERE IS
NO RANKING AMONG THE THREE PERSONS
OF THE TRINITY.



THE TRINITY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

5. OLD TESTAMENT AUTHORS OFTEN SPOKE OF THE DIVINE STATUS
OF THE _____, _____, AND THE _____.



SESSION 1: THE TRINITY

6. THE _____ IS DISTINCT FROM THE ONE WHO _____.
7. "ELOHIM," THE WORD FOR "GOD," IS _____.
8. "LET _____ MAKE MAN IN _____ IMAGE." GENESIS 1:26
9. "YOU SHALL HAVE NO OTHER GODS BEFORE _____." EXODUS 20:1-3
10. "THE LORD OUR GOD, THE LORD IS _____." DEUTERONOMY 6:4

THE TRINITY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

11. "GO THEREFORE AND MAKE DISCIPLES, BAPTIZING THEM IN THE NAME OF THE _____, _____, AND _____." MATTHEW 28:19
12. "THE GRACE OF THE LORD _____, AND THE LOVE OF _____, AND THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE _____, BE WITH YOU ALL." 2 CORINTHIANS 13:14

SESSION 2 HIGHLIGHTS

MORE VERSES THAT HIGHLIGHT EACH PERSON'S ROLE
WHAT ARE SOME CONTRARY VIEWS?



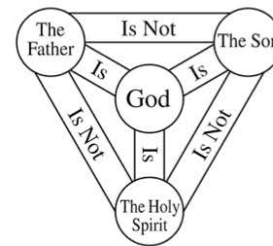
THIS I BELIEVE

SESSION 2 THE TRINITY

RECAP

1. A GROWING KNOWLEDGE OF THE TRINITY ENSURES THE BELIEVER IS WORSHIPING GOD ACCORDING TO HIS _____.

2. _____: THERE IS NO RANKING AMONG THE THREE PERSONS OF THE TRINITY.



3. THE “_____” TRINITY: HOW THE TRINITY IS ORDERED _____ OF ITSELF.

4. THE _____ SENT THE SON TO REDEEM HIS PEOPLE.

5. THE _____ BECAME INCARNATE TO DIE AS OUR SUBSTITUTE.

6. THE _____ WAS SENT TO FILL THE CHURCH.



IN CREATION

7. GOD THE FATHER _____.
8. GOD THE SON _____ THE DECREES OF THE FATHER.
9. GOD THE SPIRIT _____ CREATION.

IN SALVATION

10. GOD THE FATHER _____ REDEMPTION.
 11. GOD THE SON _____ REDEMPTION.
 12. GOD THE SPIRIT _____ REDEMPTION.
-
13. THE “_____” TRINITY: HOW THE TRINITY IS ORDERED _____ OF ITSELF.
 14. JESUS WAS: THE FORM OF _____, THE FORM OF A _____, AND FROM THE _____.
 15. EQUAL IN _____, SUBORDINATE IN _____.



CONTEMPORARY PROBLEMS

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

- THEY ARE MONOTHEISTIC.
- THEY DENY THE DEITY OF THE SON AND THE SPIRIT.
- FATHER AND SON ARE ONE IN PURPOSE, NOT IN ESSENCE.
- GOD'S SPIRIT IS JUST GOD'S ACTION.

MORE RESOURCES: WWW.JW.ORG

THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS (PREVIOUSLY MORMONS)

- HUMANS CAN BECOME GODS.
- HUMANS EXISTED LONG BEFORE THEIR INCARNATION.
- FATHER, SON, AND SPIRIT EXIST BUT ARE HUMANS WHO ACHIEVED GODHOOD.
- JESUS IS THE OFFSPRING OF THE HEAVENLY FATHER AND MOTHER.

MORE RESOURCES: CHURCHOFJESUSCHRIST.ORG

RESOURCES ON THE TRINITY

"ONE GOD IN THREE PERSONS," BRUCE WARE AND JOHN STARKE

"THE HOLY TRINITY," ROBERT LETHAM

"THE TRIUNE GOD," FRED SANDERS

"THE DEEP THINGS OF GOD," FRED SANDERS

"THE DOCTRINE OF GOD," GERALD BRAY

"DELIGHTING IN THE TRINITY," MICHAEL REEVES



THIS I BELIEVE

SESSION 3

THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE: PART 1

1. THE BIBLE IS:

S: _____

C: _____

A: _____

N: _____

2. AUTHORITY IS THE BIBLE'S ABILITY TO _____ CHRISTIANS TO BELIEVE AND BEHAVE CERTAIN WAYS.

3. A RICH UNDERSTANDING OF SCRIPTURE'S AUTHORITY ALLOWS CHRISTIANS TO LIVE IN FAITH FROM AND IN OBEDIENCE TO SCRIPTURE'S _____ AND _____.

4. GOD DICTATES: "THUS SAYS THE LORD" APPEARS ABOUT _____ TIMES.

5. CHRISTIANS ARE NOT FORCED TO DECIDE WHICH PASSAGES ARE _____ AND WHICH ARE NOT.

6. _____ SCRIPTURE IS INPIRED BY GOD AND PROFITABLE FOR TEACHING, FOR REPROOF, FOR CORRECTION, FOR TRAINING IN RIGHTEOUSNESS. 2 TIMOTHY 3:16



SESSION 3: THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE, PART 1

7. “NEVERTHELESS, THESE WRITINGS OWE THEIR PROMINENCE AND INFLUENCE TO THE FACT THAT THEY CAME BE INCLUDED IN THAT CORPUS.” WHAT’S WRONG WITH THIS?

THE NEW TESTAMENT

8. “IF ANYONE THINKS HE IS A PROPHET OR SPIRITUAL, LET HIM RECOGNIZE THAT THE THINGS WHICH I WRITE TO YOU ARE THE _____ . 1 CORINTHIANS 14:37

9. “...IN WHICH SOME THINGS ARE HARD TO UNDERSTAND, WHICH THE UNTAUGHT AND UNSTABLE DISTORT, AS THEY DO ALSO THE REST OF THE _____, TO THEIR OWN DESTRUCTION. 2 PETER 3:14-16

10. “BUT TO THE REST I SAY, _____ [..]” 1 CORINTHIANS 7:12

11. VERBAL: WORDS, NOT _____
PLENARY: COMPLETE, NOT _____
INSPIRATION: REVELATION, NOT _____

12. EVERY WORD _____, EVERY WORD _____.



THIS I BELIEVE

SESSION 4

THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE: PART 2

RECAP

1. VERBAL: _____, NOT IDEAS.
PLENARY: _____, NOT PARTIAL.
INSPIRATION: _____, NOT DISCOVERED.
2. EVERY WORD _____, EVERY WORD _____.

ARGUMENTS AGAINST AUTHORITY

3. "OFFICIAL" CANONIZATION TOOK PLACE IN A.D. _____, AND _____.
4. EARLY COLLECTIONS OF SCRIPTURE:
 - A. MURATORIAN CANON: LATE 100s, ____ BOOKS.
 - B. TERTULLIAN: EARLY 200s, ____ BOOKS.
 - C. ORIGEN: EARLY 100s, ____ BOOKS.
5. BASIS OF AUTHORITY:
 - A. _____
 - B. _____
 - C. _____



TRANSLATION

6. CHRISTIANITY IS A _____ RELIGION. ACTS 2:10-11.

7. THERE ARE _____ IN THE MANUSCRIPTS.

HISTORY BOOKS	OLDEST MANUSCRIPTS	NUMBER SURVIVING
LIVY (59 B.C-A.D. 17)	300S	27
TACITUS (A.D. 56-120)	800S	3
SUETONIUS (A.D. 69-140)	800S	200+
THUCYDIDES (460-400 B.C.)	10S	20
HERODOTUS (484-425 B.C.)	10S	75
NEW TESTAMENT	C. 100-150	5700

TRANSLATION	ENGLISH WORDS ADDED	GREEK WORDS REMOVED	VERBS CHANGED TO NOUNS
NASB	8	3	YES
ESV	4	2	YES
NIV	8	4	YES
KJV	5	2	NO



SESSION 4: THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE, PART 2

8. KEEP IN MIND:

- A. TRANSLATION IS _____.
- B. READ THE _____.
- C. USE THE _____ AND _____.

HELPFUL RESOURCES ON POPULAR TRANSLATIONS

<https://www.thenivbible.com/about-the-niv/niv-translation-philosophy/>

<https://www.esv.org/translation/philosophy/>

<http://www.lockman.org/nasb/nasbprin.php>

ON THE KING JAMES VERSION

The King James Version Debate: A Plea for Realism.

D. A. Carson

Short, scholarly book that addresses the superiority claims of KJV-onlyism from the perspective of basic translation philosophy.

One Bible Only? Examining Exclusive Claims for the King James Bible.

Roy Beacham

Balanced response to hyper-fundamentalism's willingness to ascribe infallibility and inerrancy to not only the original autographs but also to the KJV.

Defending the King James Bible.

D.A. Waite

A proponent of KJV-onlyism presents an extended argument for its superiority.

In the Beginning: The Story of the King James Bible and How It Changed a Nation, a Language, and a Culture.

Alister McGrath

A historical book that recognizes the cultural relevance of the KJV without making theological claims about its superiority.



THIS I BELIEVE

SESSION 5 CHRISTOLOGY: PART 1



INTRO

1. JESUS TEACHES HIS FOLLOWERS TO TURN TO THE _____ TO UNDERSTAND HIS PERSON AND WORK.
2. A GROWING KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST SHOWS HIS EXCLUSIVITY IN _____, _____, AND _____.

CHRIST'S DIVINITY

3. CHRIST _____ HIMSELF. PHILIPPIANS 2:5-8
4. THREE WAYS: HE BECAME A _____, WAS A _____, AND _____.
5. " _____ " COMES FROM THE BOOK OF DANIEL.
6. THE SON OF MAN CAN DO WHAT ONLY _____ CAN DO.



CHRIST'S HUMANITY

7. JESUS WAS NEVER _____ IN ADAM.
8. BY LIVING IN THE _____, JESUS WAS ABLE TO LIVE OBEDIENTLY TO THE FATHER.
9. THE FATHER AND THE SON ARE _____ IN THEIR WORKS.
10. CHRIST WAS CHARGED WITH _____ BY REFERRING TO HIMSELF IN THESE TERMS.



THIS I BELIEVE

SESSION 6 CHRISTOLOGY: PART 2



RECAP

1. _____ UNION: THE UNION OF TWO NATURES IN ONE PERSON.
2. A GROWING KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST SHOWS HIS EXCLUSIVITY IN _____, _____, AND _____.

CHRIST'S WORK

3. SUBSTITUTIONARY: INSTEAD OF _____.
4. PENAL: INSTEAD OF _____.
5. ATONEMENT: INSTEAD OF _____.
6. ANIMAL SACRIFICES DID NOT _____ SINS.



SESSION 6: CHRISTOLOGY, PART 2

7. THREE POINTS OF IMPUTATION:

_____ SIN TO US.

_____ SIN TO CHRIST.

_____ RIGHTEOUSNESS TO US.

KENOSIS: WELL INTENTIONED BUT FALLS SHORT

8. COMMUNICABLE: ATTRIBUTES GOD SHARES WITH _____.

9. INCOMMUNICABLE: ATTRIBUTES THAT BELONG TO GOD _____.

**10. KENOTIC THEORY: JESUS LEFT BEHIND SOME OF THE
_____ ATTRIBUTES OF GOD BECAUSE THEY WERE
NOT NECESSARY.**



THIS I BELIEVE

SESSION 7 JUSTIFICATION: PART 1



RECAP

1. THE TRINITY: THE CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE OF GOD, ONLY KNOWABLE FROM _____.
2. THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE: THE WAY WE KNOW _____.
3. CHRISTOLOGY: WHO CHRIST _____ AND WHAT HE _____.

JUSTIFICATION DEFINED

4. A GROWING KNOWLEDGE OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ASSURES THE BELIEVER OF HIS SALVATION BY REMOVING DEPENDENCE ON _____ AND GLORIFYING CHRIST BY RELYING ON HIS WORK.
5. JUSTIFICATION IS GOD'S GRACIOUS ACT OF REMOVING HIS _____ AND DISPLAYING HIS _____.
6. RIGHTEOUSNESS IS A STANDARD THAT MAN IS INCAPABLE OF _____ AND _____.



JUSTIFICATION & SANCTIFICATION

7. SANCTIFICATION IS THE _____ ACT OF GOD IN TRANSFORMING THE BELIEVER INTO THE LIKENESS OF CHRIST.
8. JUSTIFICATION _____ RIGHTEOUSNESS; SANCTIFICATION _____ RIGHTEOUSNESS.
9. JUSTIFICATION IS _____; SANCTIFICATION IS _____.
10. JUSTIFICATION IS AN _____; SANCTIFICATION IS A _____.
11. THE FACT THAT JUSTIFICATION IS A FINISHED WORK OF GOD IS OUR _____.
11. FAITH IS THE MECHANISM BY WHICH WE ARE JUSTIFIED, NOT THE _____.
12. _____ JUSTIFICATION IS GOD'S DIVINE DECREE IN ETERNITY.
13. _____ JUSTIFICATION IS GOD'S APPLYING IT IN REAL TIME.



THIS I BELIEVE

SESSION 8 JUSTIFICATION: PART 2



RECAP

1. A GROWING KNOWLEDGE OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ASSURES THE BELIEVER OF HIS SALVATION BY REMOVING DEPENDENCE ON SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS AND GLORIFYING CHRIST BY RELYING ON HIS WORK.
2. SANCTIFICATION IS THE LIFELONG ACT OF GOD IN TRANSFORMING THE BELIEVER INTO THE LIKENESS OF CHRIST.
3. FAITH IS THE MECHANISM BY WHICH WE ARE JUSTIFIED, NOT THE GROUNDS.

FAITH AND WORKS

4. “_____” IS THE WORD THE BIBLE USES FOR EVIDENCES OF SAVING FAITH.
5. JAMES AGREES WITH PETER THAT GOD SAVES BY _____ THROUGH _____.



SESSION 8: JUSTIFICATION, PART 2

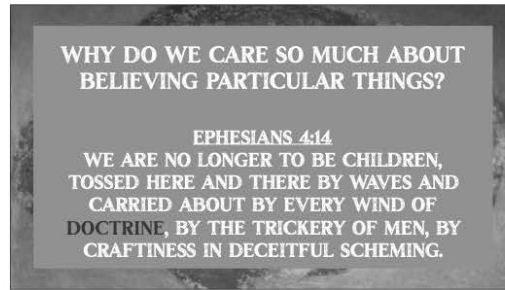
6. PAUL USED “JUSTIFIED” TO REFER TO THE _____
OF GOD’S IMPUTING CHRIST’S RIGHTEOUSNESS TO US.
7. JAMES USED “JUSTIFIED” TO REFER TO THE _____
OF GOOD WORKS AS A RESULT OF GOD’S GRACE TO US.
8. ABRAHAM’S AND RAHAB’S WORKS PROVED THEIR FAITH WAS
_____.
9. _____ IS THE RESULT OF REAL FAITH.
10. FAITH AND WORKS ARE THE _____ AND _____ OF THE
CHRISTIAN LIFE.



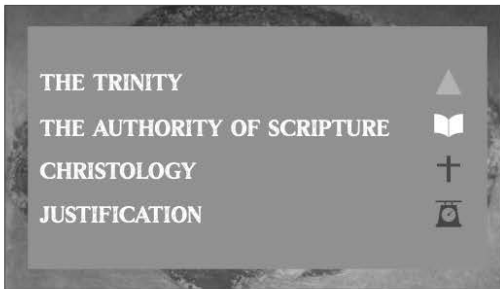
APPENDIX 4
PRESENTATION SLIDES



1



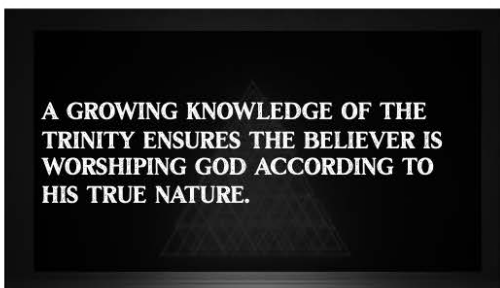
2



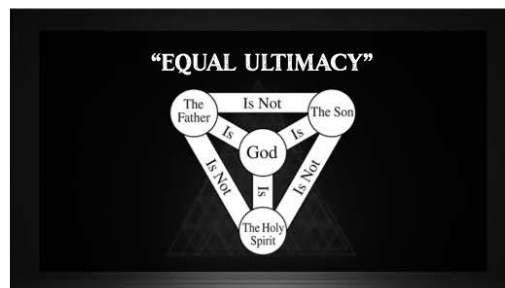
3



4



5



6

THE SPIRIT IS DISTINCT FROM THE ONE WHO SPEAKS.

“ELOHIM,” THE WORD FOR “GOD,” IS PLURAL.

“LET US MAKE MAN IN OUR IMAGE...”
GENESIS 1:26

7

THEN GOD SPOKE ALL THESE WORDS, SAYING, “I AM THE LORD YOUR GOD, WHO BROUGHT YOU OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT, OUT OF THE HOUSE OF SLAVERY. YOU SHALL HAVE NO OTHER GODS BEFORE ME.”

EXODUS 20:1-3

8

THE LORD OUR GOD, THE LORD IS ONE.

DEUTERONOMY 6:4

9

GO THEREFORE AND MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL THE NATIONS, BAPTIZING THEM IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND THE SON AND THE HOLY SPIRIT.

MATTHEW 28:19

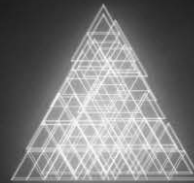
10

THE GRACE OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, AND THE LOVE OF GOD, AND THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, BE WITH YOU ALL.

2 CORINTHIANS 13:14

11

THE TRINITY: PART 2



12

A GROWING KNOWLEDGE OF THE TRINITY ENSURES THE BELIEVER IS WORSHIPING GOD ACCORDING TO HIS TRUE NATURE.

13

“EQUAL ULTIMACY”



14

REPENT AND BE BAPTIZED EVERY ONE OF YOU IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF YOUR SINS, AND YOU WILL RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT. FOR THE PROMISE IS FOR YOU AND FOR YOUR CHILDREN AND FOR ALL WHO ARE FAR OFF, EVERYONE WHOM THE LORD OUR GOD CALLS TO HIMSELF.
ACTS 2:38-39

15

**THE “ECONOMIC” TRINITY:
HOW THE TRINITY IS “ORDERED”
OUTSIDE OF ITSELF.**

16

**THE FATHER SENT THE SON
TO REDEEM HIS PEOPLE.**

**THE SON BECAME INCARNATE
TO DIE AS OUR SUBSTITUTE.**

**THE SPIRIT WAS SENT BY BOTH
TO FILL THE CHURCH AT PENTECOST.**

17

IN CREATION

GOD THE FATHER SPOKE.

**GOD THE SON FULFILLED THE
DECREES OF THE FATHER.**

GOD THE SPIRIT SUSTAINS CREATION.

18

IN SALVATION

GOD THE FATHER PLANNED REDEMPTION.

GOD THE SON ACCOMPLISHED REDEMPTION.

GOD THE SPIRIT APPLIES REDEMPTION.

19

**THE "IMMANENT" TRINITY:
HOW THE TRINITY IS "ORDERED"
INSIDE OF ITSELF.**

20

**"ETERNAL SUBJUGATION" OF THE
SON: JESUS HAS ALWAYS BEEN CO-
EQUAL WITH THE FATHER BUT ALSO
SUBJECT TO HIM.**

21

**HOW DOES THE BIBLE TALK ABOUT
JESUS AS PART OF THE TRINITY?**

THE FORM OF GOD
THE FORM OF A SERVANT
FROM THE FATHER

22

**EQUAL IN BEING,
SUBORDINATE IN ROLE.**

23

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

- THEY ARE MONOTHEISTIC.
- THEY DENY THE DEITY OF SON AND SPIRIT.
- FATHER AND SON ARE ONE IN PURPOSE, NOT IN ESSENCE.
- GOD'S SPIRIT IS JUST GOD'S ACTION.

24

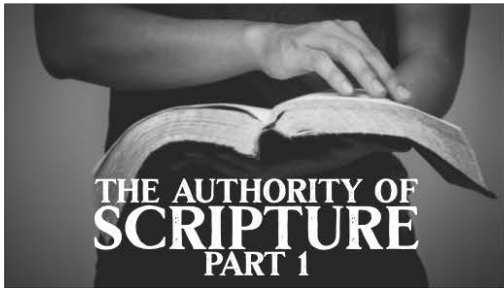
LATTER-DAY SAINTS

- HUMANS CAN BECOME GODS.
- HUMANS EXISTED LONG BEFORE THEIR INCARNATION.
- FATHER, SON, AND SPIRIT EXIST BUT ARE HUMANS WHO ACHIEVED GODHOOD.
- JESUS IS THE OFFSPRING OF THE HEAVENLY FATHER AND MOTHER.

25

A GROWING KNOWLEDGE OF THE TRINITY ENSURES THE BELIEVER IS WORSHIPING GOD ACCORDING TO HIS TRUE NATURE.

26



THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE
PART 1

27

SCAN

S: SUFFICIENT
C: CLEAR
A: AUTHORITATIVE
N: NECESSARY

28

AUTHORITY IS THE BIBLE'S ABILITY TO OBLIGATE CHRISTIANS TO BELIEVE AND BEHAVE IN CERTAIN WAYS.

29

IF YOU LOVE ME, YOU WILL KEEP MY COMMANDMENTS.
JOHN 14:15

30

A RICH UNDERSTANDING OF SCRIPTURE'S AUTHORITY ALLOWS THE CHRISTIAN TO LIVE IN FAITH FROM AND OBEDIENCE TO SCRIPTURE'S COMMANDS AND PROMISES.

31

GOD DICTATES
"THUS SAYS THE LORD..."
JEREMIAH 9:23
~3800 TIMES

32

SEVERAL METHODS
"GOD, AFTER HE SPOKE LONG AGO TO THE FATHERS IN THE PROPHETS IN MANY PORTIONS AND IN MANY WAYS, [...]"
HEBREWS 1:1

33

SEVERAL METHODS
"[...] TO COMPILE AN ACCOUNT [...] THEY WERE HANDED DOWN TO US BY THOSE [...] EYEWITNESSES AND SERVANTS [...] HAVING INVESTIGATED EVERYTHING CAREFULLY [...]"
LUKE 1:1-4

34

CHRISTIANS ARE NOT FORCED TO DECIDE WHICH PASSAGES ARE INSPIRED AND WHICH ARE NOT.

35

ALL SCRIPTURE IS INSPIRED BY GOD AND PROFITABLE FOR TEACHING, FOR REPROOF, FOR CORRECTION, FOR TRAINING IN RIGHTEOUSNESS.
2 TIMOTHY 3:16

36

“THE AUTHORS OF OUR NEW TESTAMENT BOOKS DID NOT KNOW THAT THEY WERE WRITING SCRIPTURE—OUR CURRENT BOOKS OF THE BIBLE.

37

“THEY DID NOT KNOW THAT A NEW TESTAMENT WOULD EVER EXIST, MUCH LESS THAT THEIR WRITINGS WOULD BE A PART OF IT.

38

“NEVERTHELESS, THESE WRITINGS OWE THEIR PROMINENCE AND INFLUENCE TO THE FACT THAT THEY CAME TO BE INCLUDED IN THAT CORPUS.”
MARK POWELL

39

IF ANYONE THINKS HE IS A PROPHET OR SPIRITUAL, LET HIM RECOGNIZE THAT THE THINGS WHICH I WRITE TO YOU ARE THE LORD'S COMMANDMENT.
1 CORINTHIANS 14:37

40

THEREFORE, BELOVED, SINCE YOU LOOK FOR THESE THINGS, BE DILIGENT TO BE FOUND BY HIM IN PEACE, SPOTLESS AND BLAMELESS, AND REGARD THE PATIENCE OF OUR LORD AS SALVATION; JUST AS ALSO OUR BELOVED BROTHER PAUL, ACCORDING TO THE WISDOM GIVEN HIM, WROTE TO YOU, AS ALSO IN ALL HIS LETTERS, SPEAKING IN THEM OF THESE THINGS, IN WHICH ARE SOME THINGS HARD TO UNDERSTAND, WHICH THE UNTAUGHT AND UNSTABLE DISTORT, AS THEY DO ALSO THE REST OF THE SCRIPTURES, TO THEIR OWN DESTRUCTION.
2 PETER 3:14-16

41

ALL SCRIPTURE IS INSPIRED BY GOD AND PROFITABLE FOR TEACHING, FOR REPROOF, FOR CORRECTION, FOR TRAINING IN RIGHTEOUSNESS.
2 TIMOTHY 3:16

42

BUT TO THE REST I SAY, NOT THE LORD, THAT IF ANY BROTHER HAS A WIFE WHO IS AN UNBELIEVER, AND SHE CONSENTS TO LIVE WITH HIM, HE MUST NOT DIVORCE HER.
1 CORINTHIANS 7:12

43

**VERBAL PLENARY
INSPIRATION**

VERBAL: WORDS, NOT IDEAS
PLENARY: COMPLETE, NOT PARTIAL
INSPIRATION: REVEALED, NOT DISCOVERED

44

EVERY WORD INSPIRED.
EVERY WORD TRUE.

45

THE AUTHORITY OF
SCRIPTURE
PART 2

46

**VERBAL PLENARY
INSPIRATION**

VERBAL: WORDS, NOT IDEAS
PLENARY: COMPLETE, NOT PARTIAL
INSPIRATION: REVEALED, NOT DISCOVERED

RECAP

47

EVERY WORD INSPIRED.
EVERY WORD TRUE.

RECAP

48

**ARGUMENTS AGAINST
AUTHORITY**

**“OFFICIAL” CANONIZATION TOOK
PLACE IN A.D. 393 AND 397.**

PART 1

49

**“IF GOD WAS MAKING SURE THAT HIS CHURCH
WOULD HAVE THE INSPIRED BOOKS OF
SCRIPTURE, AND ONLY THESE BOOKS, WHY
WERE THERE SUCH HEADED DEBATES AND
DISAGREEMENTS THAT TOOK PLACE OVER
THREE HUNDRED YEARS? WHY DIDN'T GOD
JUST MAKE SURE THAT THESE DEBATES LASTED
WEEKS, WITH ASSURED RESULTS, RATHER THAN
CENTURIES?”**

BART EHRMAN

PART 1

50

**EARLY COLLECTIONS
OF SCRIPTURE**

**MURATORIAN CANON: LATE 100s, 21 BOOKS.
TERTULLIAN: EARLY 200s, 22 BOOKS.
ORIGEN: EARLY 200s, 27 BOOKS.**

PART 1

51

BASIS OF AUTHORITY

- 1. APOSTOLICITY**
- 2. ORTHODOXY**
- 3. CATHOLICITY**

PART 1

52

TRANSLATION

- 1. CHRISTIANITY IS A TRANSLATING
RELIGION.**

PART 2

53

TRANSLATION

**[...] CRETANS AND ARABS—WE HEAR
THEM IN OUR OWN TONGUES
SPEAKING OF THE MIGHTY DEEDS OF
GOD.**

ACTS 2:10-11

PART 2

54

TRANSLATION

2. THERE ARE VARIANCES IN THE MANUSCRIPTS.

PART 2

55

HISTORY BOOKS	OLDEST MANUSCRIPTS	NUMBER SURVIVING
LIVY (59 B.C.-A.D. 17)	300s	27
TACITUS (A.D. 56-120)	800s	3
SUETONIUS (A.D. 69-140)	800s	200+
THUCYDIDES (460-400 B.C.)	10s	20
HERODOTUS (484-425 B.C.)	10s	75
NEW TESTAMENT	C. 100-150	5700

PART 2

56

TRANSLATION	ENGLISH WORDS ADDED	GREEK WORDS REMOVED	VERBS CHANGED TO NOUNS
NASB	8	3	YES
ESV	4	2	YES
NIV	8	4	YES
KJV	5	2	NO

PART 2

57


KEEP IN MIND

1. TRANSLATION IS CHRISTIAN.
2. READ THE FRONT MATTER.
3. USE THE FOOTNOTES AND CROSS REFERENCES.

PART 2


58

CHRISTOLOGY



59

JESUS TEACHES HIS FOLLOWERS TO TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES TO UNDERSTAND HIS PERSON AND WORK.




60



**“IT IS THESE THAT
TESTIFY ABOUT ME.”
JOHN 5:39**


61



**HE EXPLAINED TO
THEM THE THINGS
CONCERNING
HIMSELF IN ALL THE
SCRIPTURES.**

LUKE 24:27

62



**A GROWING
KNOWLEDGE OF
CHRIST SHOWS HIS
EXCLUSIVITY IN
SALVATION, WORSHIP,
AND EVANGELISM.**


63



**CHRIST “EMPTIED”
HIMSELF.**

PHILIPPIANS 2:5-8

64



**THREE WAYS CHRIST
EMPTIED HIMSELF:
HE BECAME A SERVANT,
WAS A PUBLIC FIGURE,
AND DIED.**

65



**“SON OF MAN”
COMES FROM THE
BOOK OF DANIEL.**

66




**THE SON OF MAN
CAN DO WHAT ONLY
GOD CAN DO.**

67



**JESUS WAS NEVER
FEDERALLY IN ADAM.**

68




**BY LIVING IN THE
SPIRIT, JESUS WAS
ABLE TO LIVE
OBEDIENTLY TO THE
FATHER.**

69



**THE FATHER AND
THE SON ARE UNITED
IN THEIR WORKS.**

70




**CHRIST WAS
CHARGED WITH
BLASPHEMY BY
REFERRING TO
HIMSELF IN THESE
TERMS.**

71




**CHRISTOLOGY
PART 2**

72




**HYPOSTATIC UNION:
THE UNION OF TWO
NATURES IN ONE
PERSON.**

73



**A GROWING
KNOWLEDGE OF
CHRIST SHOWS HIS
EXCLUSIVITY IN
SALVATION, WORSHIP,
AND EVANGELISM.**


74



**HE HIMSELF BORE OUR
SINS IN HIS BODY ON THE
CROSS, SO THAT WE
MIGHT DIE TO SIN AND
LIVE TO RIGHTEOUSNESS;
FOR BY HIS WOUNDS YOU
WERE HEALED.**

1 PETER 2:24

75



**SUBSTITUTIONARY
INSTEAD OF US

PENAL
INSTEAD OF GRACE

ATONEMENT
INSTEAD OF DEATH**

76



**[...] BUT THE LORD HAS
CAUSED THE INIQUITY OF
US ALL TO FALL ON HIM.
ISAIAH 53:4-6**

77



**[...] HE HIMSELF LIKewise
PARTOOK THE SAME.
HEBREWS 2:14**


78

**ANIMAL SACRIFICES
DID NOT TAKE AWAY
SINS.**



79

**THREE POINTS OF
IMPUTATION:
ADAM'S SIN TO US.
OUR SIN TO CHRIST.
CHRIST'S RIGHTEOUSNESS
TO US.**



80


**COMMUNICABLE:
ATTRIBUTES GOD
SHARES WITH US**

**INCOMMUNICABLE:
ATTRIBUTES THAT
BELONG TO GOD ALONE**




81

**KENOTIC THEORY:
JESUS LEFT BEHIND
SOME OF THE
INCOMMUNICABLE
ATTRIBUTES OF GOD
BECAUSE THEY WERE
NOT NECESSARY.**



82

**A GROWING
KNOWLEDGE OF
CHRIST SHOWS HIS
EXCLUSIVITY IN
SALVATION, WORSHIP,
AND EVANGELISM.**

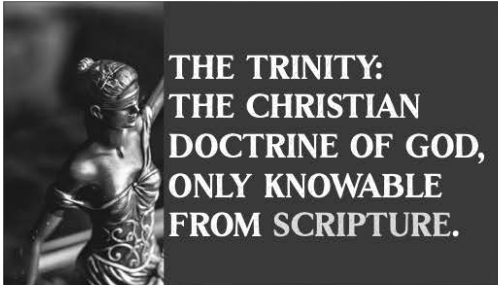


83

JUSTIFICATION

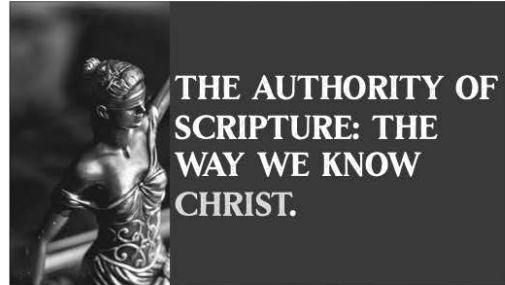


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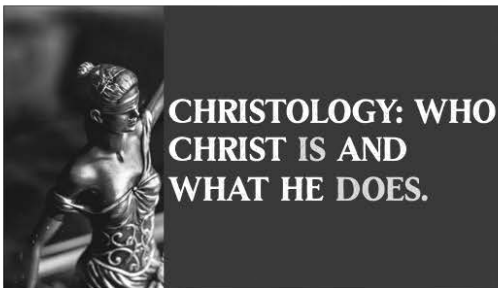
**THE TRINITY:
THE CHRISTIAN
DOCTRINE OF GOD,
ONLY KNOWABLE
FROM SCRIPTURE.**

85



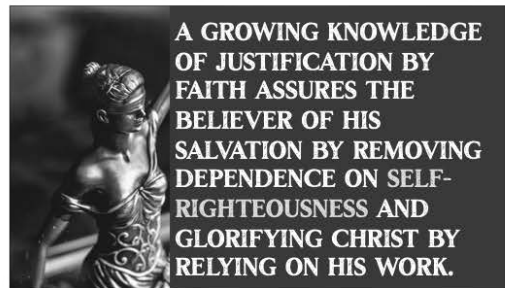
**THE AUTHORITY OF
SCRIPTURE: THE
WAY WE KNOW
CHRIST.**

86



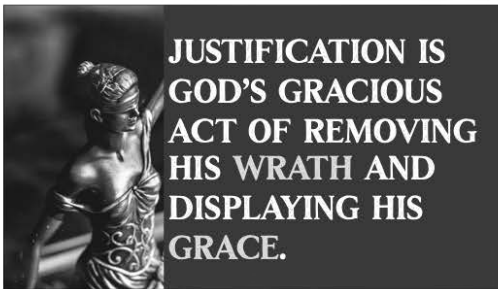
**CHRISTOLOGY: WHO
CHRIST IS AND
WHAT HE DOES.**

87



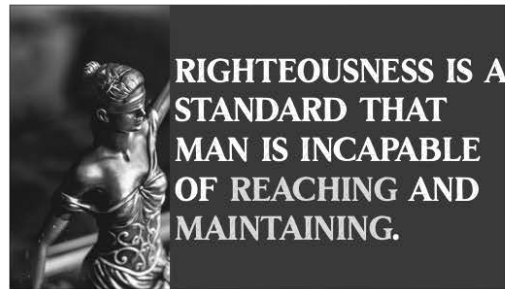
**A GROWING KNOWLEDGE
OF JUSTIFICATION BY
FAITH ASSURES THE
BELIEVER OF HIS
SALVATION BY REMOVING
DEPENDENCE ON SELF-
RIGHTEOUSNESS AND
GLORIFYING CHRIST BY
RELYING ON HIS WORK.**

88



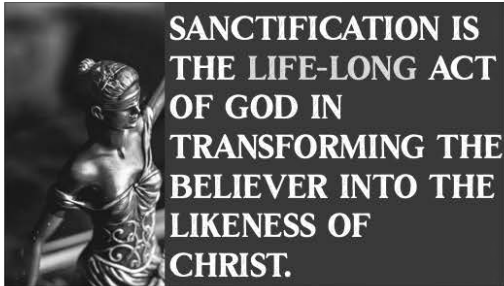
**JUSTIFICATION IS
GOD'S GRACIOUS
ACT OF REMOVING
HIS WRATH AND
DISPLAYING HIS
GRACE.**

89



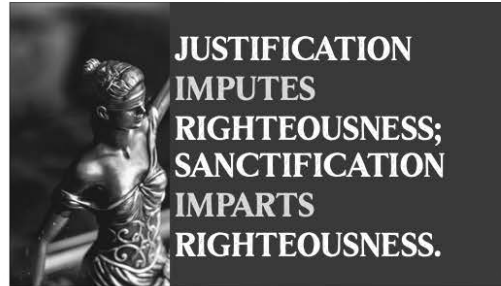
**RIGHTEOUSNESS IS A
STANDARD THAT
MAN IS INCAPABLE
OF REACHING AND
MAINTAINING.**

90



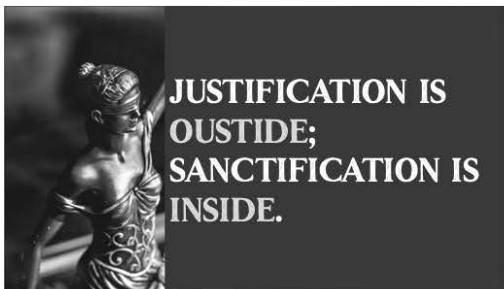
**SANCTIFICATION IS
THE LIFE-LONG ACT
OF GOD IN
TRANSFORMING THE
BELIEVER INTO THE
LIKENESS OF
CHRIST.**

91



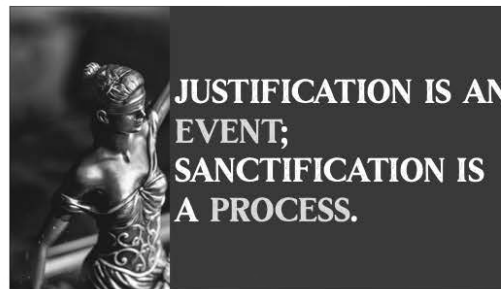
**JUSTIFICATION
IMPUTES
RIGHTEOUSNESS;
SANCTIFICATION
IMPARTS
RIGHTEOUSNESS.**

92



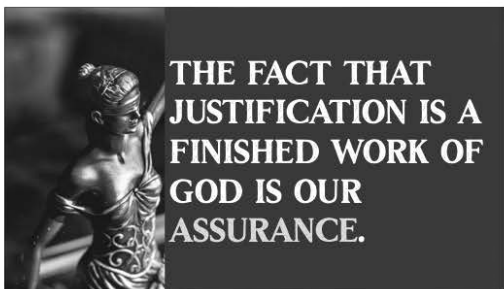
**JUSTIFICATION IS
OUTSIDE;
SANCTIFICATION IS
INSIDE.**

93



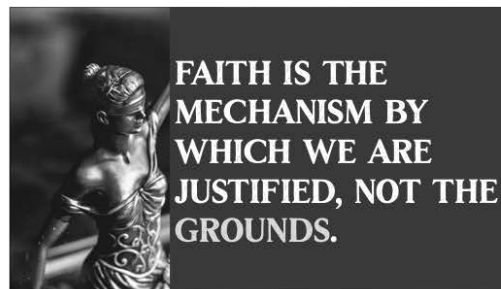
**JUSTIFICATION IS AN
EVENT;
SANCTIFICATION IS
A PROCESS.**

94



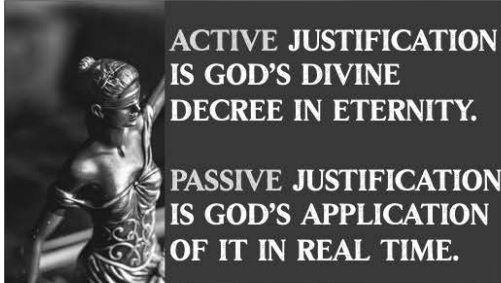
**THE FACT THAT
JUSTIFICATION IS A
FINISHED WORK OF
GOD IS OUR
ASSURANCE.**

95



**FAITH IS THE
MECHANISM BY
WHICH WE ARE
JUSTIFIED, NOT THE
GROUNDS.**

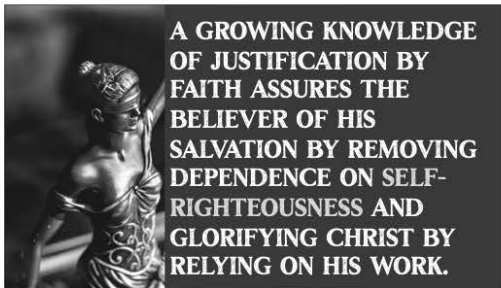
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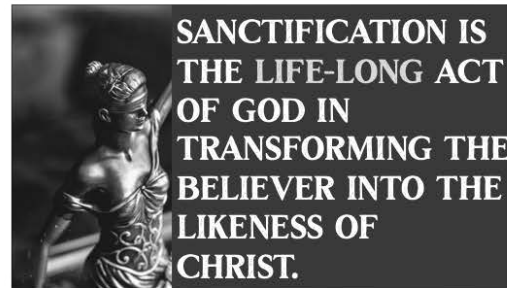
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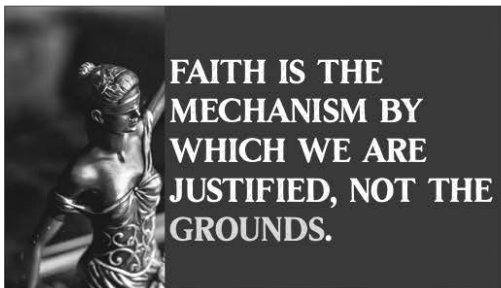
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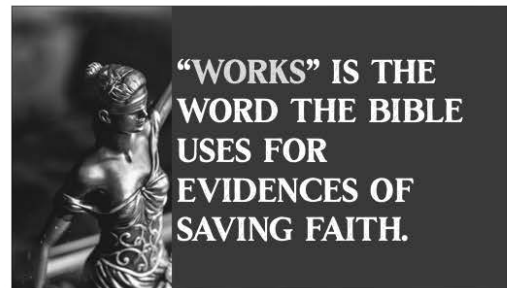
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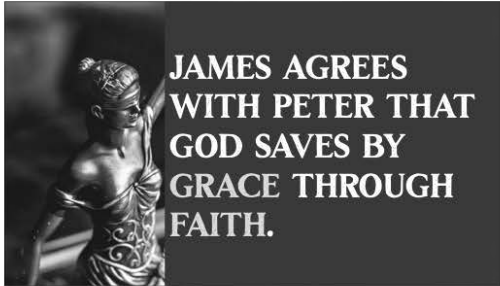
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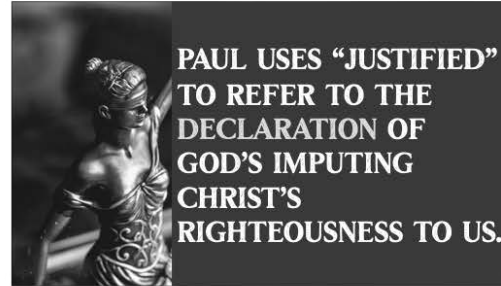


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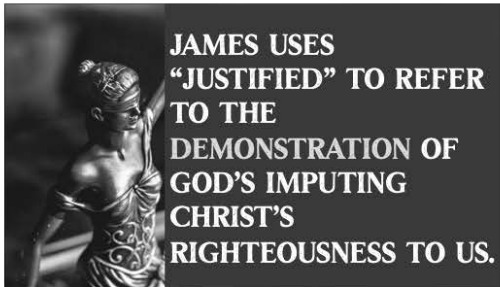
**JAMES AGREES
WITH PETER THAT
GOD SAVES BY
GRACE THROUGH
FAITH.**

103



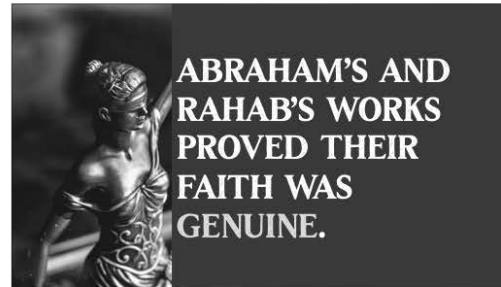
**PAUL USES “JUSTIFIED”
TO REFER TO THE
DECLARATION OF
GOD’S IMPUTING
CHRIST’S
RIGHTEOUSNESS TO US.**

104



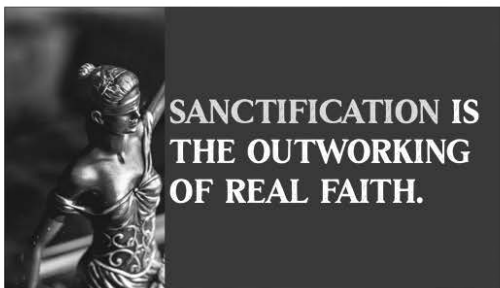
**JAMES USES
“JUSTIFIED” TO REFER
TO THE
DEMONSTRATION OF
GOD’S IMPUTING
CHRIST’S
RIGHTEOUSNESS TO US.**

105



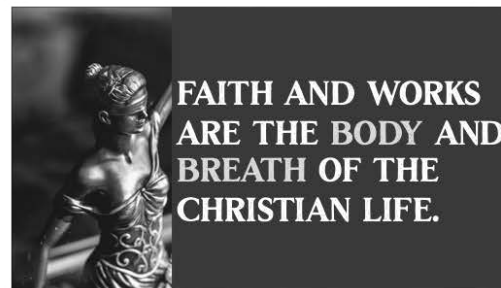
**ABRAHAM’S AND
RAHAB’S WORKS
PROVED THEIR
FAITH WAS
GENUINE.**

106



**SANCTIFICATION IS
THE OUTWORKING
OF REAL FAITH.**

107



**FAITH AND WORKS
ARE THE BODY AND
BREATH OF THE
CHRISTIAN LIFE.**


108

WHY DO WE CARE SO MUCH ABOUT
BELIEVING PARTICULAR THINGS?

EPHESIANS 4:14
WE ARE NO LONGER TO BE CHILDREN,
TOSSED HERE AND THERE BY WAVES AND
CARRIED ABOUT BY EVERY WIND OF
DOCTRINE, BY THE TRICKERY OF MEN, BY
CRAFTINESS IN DECEITFUL SCHEMING.

109

THE TRINITY
THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE
CHRISTOLOGY
JUSTIFICATION



110

THIS I
BELIEVE

111

APPENDIX 5
PRESENTER NOTES

Session 1
The Trinity: Part 1

Intro.
Welcome.

Surveys: no right or wrong, no one hangs in the balance; for the purposes of research; are we skirting the boundaries of orthodoxy and just need simple correction; we we just a little unsure of what we believe; we are we sure but need some clarification; IE, discipleship.

How many allow their view on immigration to affect how they vote?

How many allow their view on abortion to affect how they vote?

How many allow their relationships with their siblings, cousins, or parents affect how much you let your kids see them?

How many allow your view the Trinity affect how you worship?

We get the idea that [what we **think** affects our **behavior**.] Same goes for doctrine and worship.

The Bible commands us to “test the spirits” and to “examine everything carefully” so that we can rightfully apply the truth of God in every situation. So what we believe about what the Bible says has everything to do with everyday life. We just don’t always connect those dots.

So why do we care so much about believing particular things? Why don’t we open up our fellowship to anyone and everyone, regardless of creed? Why do we place boundaries on acceptable ways of living and ways of thinking? Because of this right here: Eph. iv.14.

Sound doctrine does two things: it raises the height of our **worship** and depth of our **knowledge**.

Some doctrines are simply more critical to the life of the church than others. Theological triage.

If you lose these doctrines, you lose Christianity. [Slide of four doctrines.]

We begin with the doctrine of God: **the Trinity**.

A complex doctrine b/c our finite minds have a hard time reconciling God being three persons of one essence; of God always existing as three persons.

We don't always grasp the different roles each of the three persons has in how we're saved and their current role in the church.

Another difficulty: the word "Trinity" never appears in the Bible; it shows that a doctrine can be fully formed in Scripture but without the language. But it's a very early doctrine; it's one of those that wasn't developed more fully until it was challenged, inside and outside. In fact, it's because early Christians were so sure that the Bible taught this so clearly that they fought for it in the church councils; it's not that it was a late development and maybe less important, but they fought for it b/c of its being so critical to a right view of God.

Why? A growing knowledge of the Trinity ensures the believer is worshiping God according to his true nature.

The Trinity: **Father, Son, Spirit**.

Equal ultimacy: there is no ranking among the three persons of the Trinity; they remain distinct persons. Refer to Trinity chart.

Trinity in OT:

The Bible completely presents the Trinity; it is we who are thinking incompletely and need Scripture to form and correct us.

OT authors spoke often of the **Word**, the **Wisdom**, and **Spirit**. All given divine status.

Word:

"The word of the LORD came to me..." Jeremiah 1:4, 2:1, Ezekiel 16:1.

"The word of the Lord is perfect..." Psalm 19:7.

"The words of the LORD are pure words..." Psalm 12:6.

Wisdom

"The LORD brought me forth as the first of his works, before his deeds of old" Prov. 8:22

Spirit

Creation account. Gen. 1:26.

Look no further than creation: the **spirit** is distinct from the one who **speaks** (Gen. 1.2)

“Elohim,” the word for “God,” is **plural**. God speaks of himself in the plural.

“Let **us** make man in **our** image.” Genesis 1:26. Note: not “images.” God is plural yet singular. This is not confusion w/i the Bible.

But what’s the first commandment? Exodus 20:1-3. There is one God.

The Shema: Deuteronomy 6:4.

So, OT references are not clearly trinitarian (in that there are exactly three persons), but we can conclude that: God is one (first commandment) yet has persons (plural).

NT is more clearly trinitarian. The early church had the doctrine as soon as they received the gospel. The early church fathers said that this was one of the first doctrines developed, “since the beginning of the gospel.” (Tertullian)

Jesus gives the church the “baptismal formula” in Matthew 28:19. Distinct persons, all decidedly God.

Paul shows how each person of the Trinity has a function and yet are equal in his benediction of 2 Corinthians. Note: not Son and Father, but Jesus and God. Still a differentiation of persons with different names. Paul varies the order he mentions the three persons, but sometimes he is focusing on one of the persons and their specific work in salvation, so he lists them first. The order doesn’t seem to mean anything, because he varies it and uses different yet familiar names. He is just using Christ’s formula.

Wednesday evening at 6:00pm:

We’ll look at a few verses more in depth and see how they add to our understanding of the Trinity (what each person’s role in the Trinity is). Roughly 40 minutes. Then we’ll spend about 20 minutes looking at some contemporary heretical viewpoints. Helpful to know what we *don’t* mean by Trinity.

Session 2

The Trinity: Part 2

Recap of part 1: "Equal ultimacy."

A growing knowledge of the Trinity ensures the believer is worshiping God according to his true nature.

God is three, distinct persons. All share the same attributes at all times. All have eternally existed; God is **not** sometimes Father, sometimes Son, or sometimes Spirit. All play a part in creation and salvation and are continually involved in redemption and will be involved in judgment (**Acts ii.38-39**).

This is where we'll camp out this evening. What are the distinct roles of each of the persons of the Trinity?

This will look more like a proper Bible study, looking at lots of passages to form a doctrine of the Trinity instead of a more philosophical overview like last session.

So do they all do the same thing or not? What's their level of involvement?

In short:

The Father sent Jesus, not the Spirit, to redeem his people.

The Son became incarnate to die on the cross as our substitute.

The Spirit was sent by the Father and Son to come in power on the church at Pentecost.

Define **economics**. Not just financials, but the ordering of something.

Creation

God the Father spoke (Genesis i.3ff)

God the Son carried out the decrees of the Father (John i.3; Colossians i.16)

God the Spirit sustains creation (Psalm xxxiii.6, 139.7).

Salvation

God the Father planned redemption (John 3:16, Galatians 4:4, Ephesians 1:9-10).

God the Son accomplished redemption (John 6:38, Hebrews 10:5-7).

God the Spirit applies redemption to individuals (John 14:26, John 3:5-8, Romans 8:13, 15:16, Acts 1:8, 1 Corinthians 12:7-11). Many verses because of the many ways he applies redemption, through regeneration, sanctification, empowering for service.

Have these distinctions been around forever?

These differences are not temporary but will last forever. Eternal subjugation of the Son to the Father. 1 Corinthians 15:28.

How the Bible talks about Jesus in the Trinity.

The form of **God**. John 10:30.

The form of **a servant**. John 14:28.

Sent from **God**. John 5:26.

The point: the relationships between the Trinity have always been this way. God is unchanging, therefore these relationships have existed in eternity. **Ephesians 1:3-4, Romans 8:29, John 3:17.**

We see this mystery illustrated in marriage: husband and wife are equal in dignity and worth; but the wife is to willingly, of her own volition, subjugate herself to her husband, and the husband is to willingly, of his own volition, use his authority over her to care for her, not to validate himself or to care for himself.

The only distinctions between the persons of the Trinity are in the ways they relate to each other and to creation.

Equal in being; subordinate in role.

If we do not have equality of being, we do not have three persons who are fully God. But if we do not have subordination in role, there is no inherent difference in the way the three persons relate to one another, and there are not the distinctions of Father, Son, and Spirit.

God's being is so much greater than ours that within his one undivided being there can be an unfolding into interpersonal relationships, so that there can be three distinct persons.

Heresies

There have been attempts to simplify the doctrine of the Trinity either to make it completely understandable, removing all mystery, or to change it in a way to fit with other false views.

We don't hear much about the Trinity b/c we're enamored with practical theology and application that we consider complex, biblical truths impractical. But the Trinity is the fountainhead of what makes Christianity Christian.

Two modern views.

Jehovah's Witnesses:

Highly monotheistic.

They deny the deity of The Son and the Spirit.

Quote from their website: "Jesus ever identified himself as Almighty God."

Christ was created by God.

God and Jesus were one in purpose, not essence.

The Spirit of God is nothing more than God's action or will; the Bible refers to hands, fingers, and breath.

Latter-Day Saints:

Humans can be deified, therefore there are innumerable gods.

The god who created this world was once just a man on a different planet.

Once a person who achieves god-hood dies, they are deified and are able to create their own planets.

Humans existed long before their incarnation; Thomas S. Monson, 16th president, wrote, "..."

There is a Father, Son, and Spirit, but not in a Trinity; all human beings who eventually achieved godhood.

Jesus is the offspring of the spiritual relationship between the heavenly father and the heavenly mother.

How'd they get these ideas? Are these ideas in the Bible? Both deny key components.

They used other texts to interpret Scripture instead of starting and ending with Scripture.

They went beyond the truths of Scripture, and we see the radical result. They create their own authorities.

Conclusion

Is this all just what people come up with when they don't have anything better to do?

Thinking about these matters is important in order to avoid unbiblical and unfaithful theologies of who God is and his work in creation.

Session 3

The Authority of Scripture: Part 1

Intro

The doctrine of the Trinity shows why it's so important to have a high view of Scripture; it's a doctrine we can only know if we believe that Scripture is true.

There's a lot to be said about the Bible that is true:

SCAN: Sufficiency, clarity, authority, and necessity. Authority is just one part. Is it the most important?

David Dockery, "the ultimate concern" for the how the Christian understands and interprets the Bible. Does inerrancy or inspiration matter that much if we don't believe it has any authority over our lives? If it has no authority, is it any different from the Koran or even the phone book.

Authority is the Bible's ability to obligate Christians to believe and behave certain ways.

What are some of the obligations that the Bible gives the believer?

A wide variety of obligations: worship, family, marriage, faith, Sabbath, generosity, etc.

Adam and Eve were obligated to obey God's word even before it was written. They simply had to take him and his word. Satan interpreted God's word a different way, and they eventually followed him. Was God's word confusing on its own, or did Satan confuse it for them?

The Bible praises Noah, Abraham, and a ton of others because of their faith, which was grounded in God's word. You can't have faith in nothing!

For the church, Jesus says that if we love him, we will obey him. **John 14:14.**

A rich understanding of Scripture's authority allows Christians to live in faith from and obedience to Scripture's commands and promises.

Where does authority come from? How'd we get this idea?

Scripture's authority is grounded in the fact that it is inspired by God and recorded by men who he has chosen to deliver his words. It is God's voice that gives Scripture its authority; its source gives its authority.

God dictates:

Jeremiah 9:23, "Thus says the Lord..."

This phrase or some version appears ~3800x.

Authors are clearly quoting what God said, but not even the primary way God inspired.

Other methods of inspiration:

A variety used by God

Hebrews 1:1—a variety of ways and means.

Luke 1:1-3—eyewitness accounts and investigation.

What does this mean, that God used a variety of ways?

Christians are not forced to decide which passages are inspired and which are not.

Do not privilege certain passages above others just because it follows “Thus says the Lord...”

2 Timothy 3:16; do not make a distinction between authoritative passages and unauthoritative passages.

OT prophets, even when writing by various forms of inspiration, were given the same status as direct speech from God.

What about the NT?

Did they know they were writing Scripture?

This is a way of subverting its authority; if they didn’t think they were writing Scripture, then we shouldn’t be forced to take it as Scripture. The early church gave it the title “Scripture” much later.

Mark Powell: “The authors of our New Testament books did not know that they were writing Scripture—our current books of the Bible. They did not know that a New Testament would ever exist, much less that their writings would be a part of it. Nevertheless, *these writings owe their prominence and influence to the fact that they came be included in that corpus.*”

The NT is happenstance under this view. Just a matter taste by the early church three hundred years after Jesus. “Authority” becomes a hollow word; we give it meaning, it does not give us meaning.

The idea that the church formed the Bible, not the Bible formed the church; totally backwards; the theology of Roman Catholicism; all the authority resides in the church and therefore had the authority to bestow the title of Scripture on these books and not others.

Inspiration no longer carries any real meaning if the church has an authority even higher than that.

What does the NT actually say about itself?

1 Corinthians 14:37

Paul raises the entirety of his writings to the status of the OT, the status of Scripture; Paul knew his words were inspired by God and therefore worthy of equal authority as that of the OT.

Peter does the same thing.

2 Peter 3:14-16

Paul's writings should be received as Scripture, no matter how difficult they are to understand. To distort or disregard is to secure your own destruction. Similar warnings in OT: Hosea 4.6, Jeremiah 7.22-24, Proverbs 23.23.

What about the parts that don't seem to apply immediately to us?

2 Timothy 3:16

Affirms that all the words of Scripture are inspired and authoritative; w/o words, you have no meaning or message; it's not just the ideas that are foundational, it's the words.

What about **1 Corinthians 7:12**?

Does this contradict the idea that every word in here is authoritative if Paul says, "Nor the Lord, but I"? Do we have to then try to figure out which passages are inspired and which are not?

Paul is simply in line with what we learned about the OT: various forms of inspiration; Jesus never said this, but it was revealed to Paul. He's just making clear the method of revelation, and thereby its source: still God. He's actually insinuating that his words carry the same weight as Christ's! B/c they're all words of revelation.

How would we sum up the Bible's teaching on itself? How was it given to us?

Verbal Plenary Inspiration

Verbal: word for word

Plenary: complete, not partial

Inspiration: revealed, not discovered

Style, grammar, other issues of language were not an obstacle for the Holy Spirit, but they were the vehicle for communicating truth. Not only do the books of the Bible matter, but every word plays a part.

Every word inspired, every word true.

Wednesday evening, 6:00-7:00pm, we'll look at some of the contradictory views so we better understand our own.

Session 4

The Authority of Scripture: Part 2

Review

Verbal plenary inspiration

Every word inspired, every word true

Part 1: Arguments against authority

Evangelicals only apply these standards to the original manuscripts, which we do not have any of. What does this mean for those of us who do not read the original languages? What does it mean for the variances between manuscripts? How do we know what the originals said?

B/c the process of canonization didn't take place until AD 393 at the council of Hippo and again in 397 at the council of Carthage, clearly there was no agreement before this time. Three centuries of ambiguous letters.

Erhman writes, "If God was making sure that his church would have the inspired books of Scripture, and only those books, why were there be such heated debates and disagreements that took place over three hundred years? Why didn't God just make sure that these debates lasted weeks, with assured results, rather than centuries?"

This gives too much credit to councils and ignores the previous three hundred years of history. Beyond the way the Scripture speaks of itself, history shows that there were collections during and very soon after the final books were written.

Selected in response to contradictory positions to what was already accepted; Gnosticism and Marcionism around the 150s. We didn't have disagreements, so there were no lists. Apostolic tradition was there from the beginning.

Muratorian canon: late 100s, 21 books.

Tertullian: early 200s, 22 books.

Origen: early 200s, all 27 books.

How did they choose (what was the basis of authority)?

1. **Apostolicity**: by an apostle or associate, limited to the first century.
2. **Orthodoxy**: does not contradict other revealed Scripture (OT).
3. **Catholicity**: universal agreement by all Christians (as distinct from the Gnostic writings that only the Gnostics approved).

There was no suppression of popular, inspired books. In fact, the cannon grew, not shrunk.

Part 2:

We're going to talk about translation because as Bible-believing evangelicals, it's 99.9% of what we have. We're not reading the original languages, so I want to show how we can still have a high view of Scripture, especially its authority, and still trust the Bible you have in your hands.

First, the principle: Christianity is **translating** religion.

Comment on the LXX.

What the NT authors have Jesus quoting. Sometimes their own quotation or paraphrase.

We cannot fulfill the Great Commission without translating; either teach everyone in the world Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, or have a few teams do the translating for everyone.

Translation vs. revision.

The church began b/c the word of God was translated. Acts 2:10-11.

Second, the variances found in ancient manuscripts.

There are **thousands** of preserved manuscripts, either complete or partials of books, and an overwhelming amount of agreement between them.

Reference graph.

Translating brings its own set of difficulties, b/c no two languages have the same vocabularies or forms.

English is dependent on word order, Greek is much less so.

Matthew 1:6b

David was the father of Solomon by Bathsheba who had been the wife of Uriah.

Translation	English word added	Greek words removed	Verbs changed to nouns
NASB	8	3	Yes
ESV	4	2	Yes
NIV	8	4	Yes
KJV	5	2	No

Translators have to make decisions. It's all about what they choose to prioritize: form or function; the original language or English.

Prioritizing form would mean doing their best to keep the form of the original language and forcing it into the new language (10 words in Greek into 10 words in English). Prioritizing function would mean making necessary changes to the form to have the meaning come across more clearly in English.

No translation sticks to one way or the other every single time.

What can we do to have the best understanding of what we're reading?

1. Understand that translations fit neatly into the Christian worldview.
2. Read the front matter in as many translations as possible. (translation philosophy and examples of what they did.)
3. Read the footnotes and cross references. (have you ever wondered what these were for anyway?)

Helpful resources:

<https://www.thenivbible.com/about-the-niv/niv-translation-philosophy/>

<https://www.esv.org/translation/philosophy/>

<http://www.lockman.org/nasb/nasbprin.php>

The King James Version Debate: A Plea for Realism.

D. A. Carson

Short, scholarly book that addresses the superiority claims of KJV-onlyism from the perspective of basic translation philosophy.

One Bible Only? Examining Exclusive Claims for the King James Bible.

Roy Beacham

Balanced response to hyper-fundamentalism's willingness to ascribe infallibility and inerrancy to not only the original autographs but also to the KJV.

Defending the King James Bible.

D.A. Waite

A proponent of KJV-onlyism presents an extended argument for its superiority.

In the Beginning: The Story of the King James Bible and How It Changed a Nation, a Language, and a Culture.

Alister McGrath

A historical book that recognizes the cultural relevance of the KJV without making theological claims about its superiority.

Session 5

Christology: Part 1

Moving from Scripture to Christ: what's the connection?

The Trinity showed us how important it is to rely on Scripture for our doctrine b/c of its reliance on special revelation.

Jesus does the same. **Jesus teaches his followers to turn to the Scriptures to understand his person and work.**

“You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about me.” [John 5:39] All of the Bible, every word and book, is a signpost to Christ. Every page should be read asking how it reflects God's plan of salvation through his Son.

Road to Emmaus: Jesus approaches two disciples and remains unrecognized. They are sad/disappointed that Jesus' body is missing and seemingly isn't the Messiah; he corrects their misunderstandings *through Scripture*. **“Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.” [Luke 24:27]**

Do you want to know Christ? Turn to the Scriptures. They reveal who he is. Christ himself says that that is the way. And we find among many things that Christ maintained two natures: divine and human; not mixed, not at different times. From the incarnation forward, Christ has had two natures. But the importance of the dual-natures of Christ is that they help us understand how God the Son took on flesh to atone for our sins.

We're going to look at what the Scriptures teach us about who Christ is and what he did. We think we know it all—he died for our sins. True, but how did that work? What does it mean on the other side of conversion?

A growing knowledge of Christ shows his exclusivity in salvation, worship, and evangelism.

Christ's Divinity

Christ's preferred title was “Son of Man.” Identifies his human nature.

Important passage for helping us understand how that worked: **Philippians 2:5-8 [read].**

Christ emptied himself.

This word has a technical meaning, beyond just dumping a bag of flour over to “empty” it. In the Greek, it’s a lowering of status. He did this by taking on an additional nature. In “emptying” himself, he lowered himself into man’s realm. Humanity did not eradicate divinity or vice versa. He did not give up his status as God.

Paul outlines what this emptying looked like in three ways: **He became a servant, was a public figure, and died.**

Servant: humbled himself to the lowest stature a man is capable of descending.

Public figure: a social creature who sought out relationships with his fellow men and women.

Died: took on the full effect of man’s curse.

These truths help us better understand the fullness of Christ’s humanity and what he shared with us.

What is “Son of Man” showing us?

“Son of Man” comes from the book of Daniel.

Daniel comes in two parts: history (chs. 1-6) and vision (chs. 7-12).

Read Daniel 7:9-14. A Son of Man is given a kingdom *so that* he could receive worship and praise from all men; kingdom without end; SoM presented before the Ancient of Days (God). There are multiple thrones set up (v. 9). How these thrones are placed shows that when “one like a son of man” received the kingdom, he will sit on his throne beside the Ancient of Days.

SoM is identified with God but still distinguished from him. **The Son of Man can do what only God can do.**

Christ assumes this title for himself, affirming that he’s the one that Daniel saw in his vision of the consummation of God’s plan of salvation. EG, **Luke 19:10. “For the Son of Man has come to seek and save that which was lost.”** God alone can save, and by Christ using this term that is equated with God, he is equating himself with the Father.

Christ’s Humanity

How did Christ, if any part of his was human, not sin? Wouldn’t he have inherited original sin if he was a man?

Federal headship: one person acting on behalf of others (like a federal government). God has appointed two federal headships in history: Adam and Christ. All who are in Adam are represented by him before God. All are born inclined to sin and rebel against God, so we receive the same penalty: death. **Read Romans 5:12-14.**

Adam had one law and broke it. Before we had any law from Sinai, we died b/c we are represented by Adam. **Jesus was never federally in Adam.** Adam was a type or model of what was to come in Jesus, our new federal head. The incarnation shows us that by being placed in the womb of Mary by the Holy Spirit, Jesus did not inherit the sin of man.

He did suffer the curse—but as an act of obedience, not an effect of sin. He took on the sins of man but lived a sinless life. How?

By living in the Spirit, Jesus was able to live obediently to the Father.

Read Luke 1:1-2. “Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led around by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And He ate nothing during those days, and when they had ended, He became hungry.”

Acts 11:24, “for he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And considerable numbers were brought to the Lord.”

Ephesians 5:18, “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit.”

Acts 6:3, “Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task.”

Micah 3:8, “On the other hand I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the Lord, and with justice and courage to make known to Jacob his rebellious act, even to Israel his sin.”

Able to be completely obedient to the Father and fulfill his earthly ministry. The same Spirit living in us.

This shows us that the divine nature did not take over or supersede the human nature when he was tested in the wilderness or confronted by leadership. His obedience came from the human nature being obedient to the will of the Father.

So Christ’s divinity links him to the Father and his humanity links him to us. **The Father and the Son are united in their works.** The Father sends, the Son obeys. But it is one act/plan of salvation.

Jesus never backs off the assertion that he is equal to the Father; not two gods, not a new nature from two different ones, but two modes of being, but one God, one plan of salvation.

The claim of divinity gets Jesus in trouble.

Read Matthew 26:57-68.

Both terms, and Son of God (v. 63) Son of Man (v. 64) are used. Christ confesses to them that he is the Son of God *by using the term* Son of Man, b/c they understood the reference. They are so convinced that he thinks he's God, **Christ was charged with blasphemy by referring to himself in these terms.**

We started seeing how a growing knowledge of Christ shows his exclusivity in salvation, worship, and evangelism. Only God can save, and Christ claimed to be God. Only God saves, only God is due our worship, and only God builds his church.

We'll look **tomorrow night** a little more at the third one, God building his church through Christ, but we'll also look at what we don't believe in order to help us better understand what we do believe. The mystery of the incarnation: how did two natures reside in the same person without one overtaking the other?

Session 6 Christology: Part 2

Intro

After the service, a man greeted him: “professor Barth, thank you for your sermon. I’m an astronomer, you know, and as far as I’m concerned, the whole of Christianity can be summed up by saying, ‘Do unto others as you would have others do unto you.’”

Barth replied: “Well, I am a humble theologian, and as far as I am concerned the whole of astronomy can be summed up by saying ‘Twinkle, twinkle, little star, how I wonder what you are.’”

John Godsey, “Reminiscences of Karl Barth”

Recap: Christ’s person (he had two natures). **The hypostatic union: the union of two natures in one person.**

1. We turn to Scripture to know Christ.
2. Christ emptied himself, or lowered his status to that of a servant, to live as one of us.
3. Jesus was both Son of God and Son of Man.

A growing knowledge of Christ shows his exclusivity in salvation, worship, and evangelism.

Today: Christ’s work (his substitutionary penal atonement).

“He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.” 1 Peter 2:24

Substitutionary: Instead of us

Penal: Instead of grace

Atonement: Instead of death

To die for our sins, Christ would have to be fully God and fully man.

Why not just a perfect man? He’d pay for it like we would. Eternally; “The reason hell is eternal is simply that justice demands a full payment for our sins, and a full payment is impossible for finite humans to render to an infinitely holy God.” Ware, 112.

He was a man, so his death was substitutionary. He was God, so he death was atoning.

Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep

have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him. Isaiah 53:4-6

Notice the themes of both substitution and penalty in these verses.

Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil. Hebrews 2:14

“Nothing less than the one who shared fully in our ‘flesh and blood,’ i.e., our human nature, could in fact atone for sin and bring victory over Satan.” Ware, 119.

Animal sacrifices did not “take away” sins, Hebrews 10:4. Those sacrifices were only powerful in what they looked forward to. Metaphor of a credit card.

Passed over former sins, looking forward to the one coming, Romans 3:25-26.

We talked about two federal heads: Adam and Christ. Where Adam failed, Christ succeeded. Romans 5:15-17.

Three points of imputation:

Adam’s sin to us

Our sin to Christ

Christ’s righteousness to us

“Double imputation.” Our sin given to him, his righteousness given to us.

For our sin to be given to Christ, he had to be a man. God cannot receive sin.

There is a sense in which one nature is acting when the other is not. EG:

“I thirst.” (John 19:28). Human nature. Sleeping, eating, etc.

Jesus forgives sin. Divine nature. Healing, etc.

In the same breath, we cannot say that the divine nature took on sin and death; impossible. The human nature bore our sin; divinity is not susceptible to sin or death. In order for Christ to bear our sin and die, he had to be fully and truly a man. For the atonement to be effective, he had to be fully and truly God.

We are all saved by works; but they’re Christ’s, not ours.

Main takeaways:

- 4. Jesus became a man mainly (among other things) to bear our sin and die for us.**
- 5. Jesus’s death was both substitutionary and penal.**

Discussion

How should our lives reflect that we have been bought with a price? (1 Cor. 6:20)

Moving on...

What are some things we *don't* believe? Helps us better understand what we do.

Back to Philippians 2:5-8. "Emptied."

How could Jesus "increase in wisdom" (Luke 2:52) but be already omniscient?

"Incommunicable" attributes vs. "communicable"

Communicable: Attributes God shares with us.
Incommunicable: Attributes that belong to God alone.

Wouldn't God have to give up some of his incommunicable attributes if he did things like "increase in wisdom?"

Enter the "kenotic" theory of the incarnation. *Kenoo*, Greek for "emptied."

Kenotic theory: Jesus left behind some of the essential characteristics of God because they were not necessary.

An honest attempt to clarify the mystery of the hypostatic union, two natures in one person. Technically, *kenoo* refers to a lowering of status.

Some argue God is only omniscient in the sense of "omniscient-unless-freely-and-temporarily-choosing-to-be-otherwise;" too close to open-theism, the idea that God chooses or cannot know some things about the future.

The logic fails, too; if Jesus left some parts of God behind, what was left to make him fully God? The ancient creeds are rendered meaningless or unnecessary.

Neglects the importance of Jesus maintaining the essential attributes of God throughout his life and ministry.

Lastly: justification; the doctrine on which the church stands or falls. How are we saved?

Session 7

Justification: Part 1

Intro

Trinity: the Christian doctrine of God, which led us to the authority of Scripture b/c we need Scripture to know God.

Authority of Scripture: the Bible is the way we know Christ, which led us to Christology.

Christology: who Jesus was/is and what Jesus did/does, which leads us to Justification; *a high Christology will necessarily include the work of Christ and what he accomplished through is life, death, burial, and resurrection. Through Christ's obedience, up to and including his death, mankind can be justified before a holy God. Justification is the declaration of God that a person is considered righteous based on their being in Christ. A growing knowledge of justification by faith assures the believer of his salvation by removing dependence on self-righteousness and glorifying Christ by relying on his work.*

“The doctrine on which the church stands or falls.”

Why is theology downplayed? Why this doctrine? What unchurched person wants to hear about this? Seeker sensitivity will always downplay clarity of biblical truth.

Justification Defined

What does “justification” mean? Where does it appear in the Bible?

Read Luke 18:9-14. On screen: “I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other.” Luke 18:9-14.

A legal term, describes what God *declares* about the believer, not what he does to *change* the believer; a change of status, not quality.

Similar to a wedding ceremony; at the end you're declared married, but what actually changed? Life-long changes took place b/c of that declaration.

Not guilty/fully righteous; not under wrath/under blessing. When God justifies, he imputes (assigns) his son's righteousness to us. Christ's merits/works/obedience become the ground on which the believer stands before God.

Justification is God's gracious act of removing his wrath and displaying his grace.

1 Cor. 1:30 — And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption.

Philippians 3:9 — Not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness of God that depends on faith.

We are not longer guilty by any measure. Romans 8:33 — Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.

On our own, we are not righteous and are declared guilty before a holy God. For salvation to be possible, God must act first. We talked about the importance of Christ being fully man but also fully God and why he couldn't just be a perfect man; even a perfect man would have to pay for sin like all men: through eternity in hell; that's how we would pay for our sin if God had not acted first.

Righteousness is a standard that man is incapable of reaching and maintaining.

Natural consequences for our sin; forgiveness is not the natural course of things; punishment is; therefore it is what we deserve from God; for the outcome to be anything but punishment, God must act.

Dependent on the grace of God; based on his character; for God to forego the punishment of sin would be for him to turn his back on his own attributes; God does not justify the wicked; everyone is condemned or acquitted;

Romans 3:10-11 — “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God.”

Charles Spurgeon said, “Don't get angry when people talk poorly of you, for you are far worse than they think.”

Justification and Sanctification

These two are distinct acts of God, not simultaneous.

Sanctification is the **lifelong** act of God in transforming the believer into the likeness of Christ.

“Being saved” of 1 Cor. 1:18 — For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

—Justification **imputes** righteousness; sanctification **imparts** righteousness.

—Justification is **outside**; sanctification is **inside**.

—Justification is an **event**; sanctification is a **process**.

Faith alone by grace alone through Christ alone. Christ's works save you.

Can't have one w/o the other; God does not justify who he does not sanctify and does not sanctify who he does not justify. So why make a big deal about the differences?

By the middle of the Middle Ages, the doctrine had almost been lost; not by all, but by some in the Roman Catholic Church. Others inside and out had been fighting for it all along; Luther is just the best-known.

RC theology says that justification is a special gift of grace that actually makes the sinner righteous; notice the difference; RC says justification is an internal change in the believer, thereby the believer is actually righteous based on their merits. So sanctification and justification are blended to make both of them null. Ask any RC and they will say that it is presumptuous that you can know you're saved, b/c of this confusion right here; instead of God giving you Christ's righteousness based on his works, salvation is just a subjective experience, no security, no assurance; ultimately justification is your ability to continue in virtue, not Christ's perfect righteousness.

The fact that justification is a finished work of God is our assurance.

Keeps us from boasting in our good works; nothing makes us worthy of Christ.

Abraham was credited righteousness b/c of faith.

Habakkuk 2:4 — But the righteous shall live by his faith.

Romans 1:17 — As it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

Galatians 3:11 — Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for "The righteous shall live by faith."

Hebrews 10:38 — "But my righteous one shall live by faith."

So what is the role of faith? **Faith is the mechanism by which we are justified, not the grounds.**

We don't want to land on either extreme of the truth; we bear all the weight of being saved (our choices), or God bears all the weight in the sense that it doesn't matter if we have faith or not.

Helpful corrective: active and passive justification.

Active justification is God's divine decree in eternity.

Passive justification is God applying it in real time to people.

This helps assure that we don't totally do away with our moral responsibility or take full responsibility for our salvation.

Wednesday: faith and works; the relationship.
Session 8
Justification: Part 2

Intro

A growing knowledge of justification by faith assures the believer of his salvation by removing dependence on self-righteousness and glorifying Christ by relying on his work.

A legal term, describes what God *declares* about the believer, not what he does to *change* the believer; a change of status, not quality.

Similar to a wedding ceremony; at the end you're declared married, but what actually changed? Life-long changes took place b/c of that declaration.

Sanctification is the lifelong act of God in transforming the believer into the likeness of Christ.

So what is the role of faith? **Faith is the mechanism by which we are justified, not the grounds.**

This helps assure that we don't totally do away with our moral responsibility or take full responsibility for our salvation.

Faith and Works

The big question, one that divides Protestants and Catholics.

“Works” is the word the Bible uses for evidences of saving faith. Could be anything from clear acts of charity to a renewed way of treating your family, to a renewed work ethic, to a renewed prayer life, to a renewed way of political engagement. Covers both interior and exterior changes; affections and behaviors.

Luther came really close to saying he hated God b/c of his demand for righteousness, that we can't fulfill. Then came **Romans 1:17. *For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”***

The turning point for Luther. “I greatly longed to understand Paul's Epistle to the Romans, and nothing stood in the way but that one expression, ‘the righteousness of God,’ because I took it to mean that righteousness whereby God is righteous and deals righteously in punishing the unrighteous. Night and day I pondered until I grasped the truth the the righteousness of God is that righteousness whereby, through grace and sheer mercy, he justifies us by faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning, and whereas before ‘the righteousness of God’ had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage of Paul became to me a gateway to heaven.”

Still struggled with James. He translated from Greek to German; in intro. to James: “an epistle of straw.” “He would give his doctor’s beret to anyone who could reconcile James and Paul.” If it’s ever given you anxiety, you’re in good company. Many have done so over the years. Not until the Council of Trent, in response to the Reformation, did RC formalize their position.

This is not an ancillary debate about the millennium or mode of baptism; this is the essence of the gospel: “how is a person made right before a holy God?”

Some helpful tips in interpreting difficult/confusing passages: the Bible does not contradict itself; use clear texts to interpret unclear texts; make sure you understand the context as best you can (what is the idea behind the idea for each author?); we should try to systematize what the Bible teaches in a way that considers the full council of God.

So what is the role of works in faith?

First, we need to see if James and Paul agree or disagree with each other.

Consider the Jerusalem council, Acts 15. *Read vv.9-11.*

James agreed with Peter that God saves by grace through faith.

He was just making sure Gentiles would not offend Jews.

What about agreeing with Paul?

Romans 3:28—“For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the law.”

Romans 4:5—“But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness.”

But James says—

James 2:21—“Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar?”

James 2:25—“And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?”

Here’s where the larger context of every book comes into play:

6. Paul was writing to those who taught that we must add works to faith to be justified.

7. James was writing to those who taught they had faith but works implied otherwise.

The point: the vocabulary of each writer takes on shades of meaning by context.
Paul used “justified” to refer to the declaration of God’s imputing Christ’s righteousness to you.

James use “justified” to refer to the demonstration of good works as a result of God’s grace to us.

How’d we get this?

Both authors use Genesis 15:6 (*Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.*) to make their case; if God’s word does not contradict itself, then they’re simply using the same passage to draw out two different “significances” that are really there. Two ways of applying the same passage.

Paul—Romans 4:3. Looking at how a person begins their right-standing with God.

James—James 2:21-23. Looking at how a person fulfills their right-standing with God.

The events of Genesis 15:6 took place between 30 and 40 years before Abraham placed Isaac on the altar. Clearly James is not using “justified” in the exact same sense that Paul is. Reminder: for Paul, justification is a declaration; for James, justification is a demonstration.

Similar to vindication. Proof of a previous declaration. “I’ve been saying this all along!”

Keep James’s context in mind. *Read 2:14-17.*

“Alone” in v.24 means that he’s looking back at what he’s already said about faith. Faith that does not result in the transforming of the mind, from which behavior follows, is not the kind of saving faith that Paul harps on in Romans 3-4.

Paul even talks a lot about good works:

Titus 2:14—“[Jesus Christ,] who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession *who are zealous for good works.*”

Titus 3:5-8—“he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God *may be careful to devote themselves to good works.* These things are excellent and profitable for people.”

Faith and works are foreign to neither Paul nor James.

Let’s look at the two people mentioned by James and see what the common themes are.

James says **Abraham’s and Rahab’s works proved their faith was genuine.**

Sacrificing Isaac was not what saved Abraham or gave him righteousness.

Hebrews 11:8—“By faith, Abraham, when he was called, obeyed...” Referring to him leaving his homeland, not sacrificing Isaac. Only later does Isaac come up.

Hebrews 11:17—“By faith, Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac.”

Hebrews 11 is all about what people with real faith *did*. Not what they did to *receive* faith.

James’s point is that real faith always has interior and exterior alterations. What’s the word for this?

Sanctification is the result of real faith.

Jesus’s own words communicate the same thing in Luke 6:43-44:

“For there is no good tree which produces bad fruit, nor, on the other hand, a bad tree which produces good fruit. For each tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they pick grapes from a briar bush.”

Now Rahab. From Joshua 2 and 7. Ask a summary.

Why use her story? To show that she didn’t say “I believe” then help the police arrest the spies. He’s making a simple logical argument that a renewed heart and a renewed spirit will without question be reflected in renewed behavior. That’s the big obvious one: don’t say you believe the missionaries then have them killed. But the same goes for the smaller, more intimate details of our life. Sanctification is the ordering of our lives into alignment with God’s word and the implications of God’s word.

James ends his passage on faith and works with the well known verse, *read v.26*.

The point, then, is not just to see how Paul and James agree (the big answer being that they use the same word in different settings and contexts). The point is to see how justification is “the doctrine on which the church stands or falls.”

Trying to separate faith and works into two different categories is like trying to separate body and breath. You can separate them for reasons of discussion and understanding, but to remove one is to kill the other.

But we also can’t combine them *in such a way* to turn faith into a work itself. Where we read passages like “without faith it is impossible to please God” (Heb. 11.6) turns into how we earn our salvation.

Justification is God’s declaration that he has imputed our sin to Christ and Christ’s righteousness to us.

Sanctification is the lifelong process of transformation into Christ-likeness.

Faith and works are the body and breath of the Christian life.

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ABSTRACT

INCREASING KNOWLEDGE OF FIRST-LEVEL DOCTRINES AMONG THE MEMBERS OF MT. PISGAH BAPTIST CHURCH IN SHELBYVILLE, INDIANA

Nicholas Ian Coulston, DEdMin
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2019
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Joseph C. Harrod

This ministry project was designed to teach first-level doctrines at Mt. Pisgah Baptist Church in Shelbyville, Indiana. The purpose of this intervention was to assist leaders and members of Mt. Pisgah to think theologically and practice discernment on theological and cultural matters. Chapter 1 explains the context, rationale, purpose, goals, and research methodology of the project. Chapter 2 describes the biblical basis for loving God with one's mind through the exegesis of the following passages: Matthew 24:34-40, Ephesians 4:4-16, and Colossians 1:9-12. Chapter 3 is a literature review of broadly Reformed evangelical theology on the doctrines of the Trinity, the authority of Scripture, Christology, and justification. Chapter 3 also contrasts orthodoxy with divergent views of each of these four doctrines. Chapter 4 details the production, implementation, and analysis of the results of the ministry project. Chapter 5 evaluates the project's success, strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement. It also included theological and personal reflections.

VITA

Nicholas Ian Coulston

EDUCATION

BA, Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis, 2011
MDiv, Wesley Seminary, 2015

ORGANIZATIONS

Ethics Council of Major Health Partners

MINISTERIAL EMPLOYMENT

Associate Pastor, Mt. Pisgah Baptist Church, Shelbyville, Indiana, 2013-