

# Personal Doctrinal Statement

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## **Part I – Doctrinal Statement:**

*As a Disciple of Jesus, a member of God’s Kingdom, a teacher of God’s Word, and a student of Scripture, I have come to believe that...*

*...God has revealed Himself to humanity both indirectly and directly. He has revealed Himself indirectly through general revelation which consists of the outer natural world as well as the inner philosophical world. He has revealed Himself most clearly through Special Revelation—direct encounters with humanity and the witness of such encounters contained in Scripture.*

*...Divinely Inspired Scripture is made up of the thirty-nine books contained in the Hebrew Bible and the twenty-seven documents contained in the New Testament which are the documents written under God’s Inspiration by those whom He moved to speak and/or write on His behalf.*

*...Inspiration refers to the Divine co-operation between God and the human author to produce a text that is the authoritative means of hearing from, or about, God in and through the voice, style, and personality of the individual author. The original text produced in this way is Inspired. Insofar as a translation adheres to and communicates the original text, it can be said to be Inspired as well.*

*I believe Scripture teaches that...*

*...God is, first and foremost, Creator, Sustainer, and Sovereign Ruler of the universe. God is Relational. God is Personal. God is Holy.*

*... Humanity was created in the Image of God to be His obedient stewards and rulers of the earth, but who rebelled against God and as a result were mastered by Sin, and apart from God’s Grace remain “fallen priests” captive to Sin and in need of deliverance.*

*...Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah of God’s people, Israel. He is Prophet, Priest, and King. He is the embodiment of God—completely human and completely Divine—the second Persona of the Trinity who became Incarnate as Jesus of Nazareth for the purpose of saving all of creation from the power of Sin and death.*

*...Sin is both an action, thought, or state of being that is in opposition to God’s moral order, as well as an animate force that holds humanity in bondage to decay and death—both spiritually and physically. Sin entered the world through the act of disobedience, distrust, and ultimately rebellion of the first humans. This act of Sin unleashed the power and reality of Sin into the created order which was intended to be ruled by God in cooperation with His most beloved creation—human beings. Apart from the Grace of God apprehended through faith, Sin reigns supreme over humanity. However, through God’s empowering, saving Grace, Sin’s hold on people is broken and they are free to walk in perfect obedience and relationship to God through the abiding power of the Holy Spirit. Sin can, and does, still war against God’s people, but it is now a foreign enemy trying to reclaim its former territory in the person’s life.*

*... Sin spread so quickly and thoroughly through humanity that only a small remnant remained faithful—though fallen—to God. However, God had already set in motion a plan to bring all of humanity back into proper relationship with Him. He*

*promised deliverance over Sin and its chief proponent the serpent, i.e. Satan. This promise was continually reaffirmed by God through His covenants with humanity and ultimately found its fulfillment in the people of Israel's Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. Any who believed God and put their faith in His promise are welcomed into relationship with Him and citizenship in His eternal Kingdom.*

*...The means by which this relationship is restored—the object of faith regarding God's promise—is the Atoning self-sacrifice of God in through the death of Jesus. Those who choose to believe in, put their faith in, and live in obedience to God's promise enter into God's Covenant and are saved from Sin's power. This salvation from Sin and restored relationship with God are not unconditional; nor are they the result of human effort or accomplishment. Rather, salvation and restoration are made possible by God's graceful offering being received freely by faith in God's promise on the part of fallen humanity.*

*...Those who through faith enter into the Kingdom of God are transformed inwardly and become dwelling places of the Holy Spirit. The third Persona of the Triune God comes and dwells within the transformed believer much as He came and dwelled within the Tabernacle and Temple under the Mosaic Covenant.*

*...The Holy Spirit is also at work outside the believer, calling non-believers to faith, empowering groups of believers to effectively advance the Kingdom and influencing people even if at times they don't even realize it.*

*...The Church is the term used to designate the collective members of God's Kingdom. Under the Mosaic Covenant, the Church consisted Israel and those who joined themselves to Israel in faith and obedience to God. With the coming of the Messiah Jesus and the inauguration of the promised New Covenant, the Church consisted of all those who joined themselves to the Messiah in faith and obedience to God—both inside and outside of the borders of ethnic Israel.*

*...The mission of the Church has always been the same—to serve God wholeheartedly in faith and obedience and to reflect God's character to those who don't know or follow Him and who are, therefore, outside of the Covenant.*

*...The present age is part of the "End of Days" spoken of by Jesus, the Prophets, and the Apostles. It will end with the return of the Messiah Jesus to earth as triumphant ruler who destroys all evil and rids the earth of Sin once and for all. This will be the eschatological Day of the LORD, when all of God's promises to His people will be fully realized. Until then, the Church will continue its mission to spread the Kingdom of God through telling the Good News of God's Covenant with mankind and will remain in the world to actively oppose Sin and Satan in any of their manifestations.*

*...Part of the Messiah's final victory will involve the resurrection of all of humanity from the dead. Those who are part of God's Kingdom will be changed from corruptible to incorruptible—both spiritually and physically. Those who have rejected God's reign will be separated from Him forever in a Godless eternal state. Apart from this final judgment, the entire created order will also be restored, cleansed, and freed completely from any remnant of Sin or its effects. Sin, death, Satan, and his followers will all be done away with and God will dwell in the midst of all of His people in a renewed creation forever.*

## **Part II - Elaboration & Commentary**

### *1. Epistemological Grounding (Approach to Doctrine)*

***“God has revealed Himself to humanity both indirectly and directly. He has revealed Himself indirectly through general revelation, which consists of the outer natural world along with the inner philosophical world.”***

I believe that any knowledge of God on our part must come from God revealing Himself to humanity. It seems that God has seen fit to do this in two ways: general knowledge of God that is accessible through human observation of creation—often called “General Revelation”—and specific knowledge that comes directly from God Himself in various forms of communication to individuals or groups of people—often referred to as “Special Revelation.”

General Revelation comes through humanity’s observation and contemplation of the world around them. Observed physical features of the universe reveal not only that there is a Creator but that this Creator is responsible for an amount of complexity and order that is near-incomprehensible.<sup>1</sup> Far from being a novel concept or new idea, a notion of “Intelligent Design” has been the common understanding shared by the vast majority of human beings who have ever lived.<sup>2</sup>

Apart from the natural physical features of the universe, there are also nonphysical and metaphysical features which reveal God’s existence. Laws of logic and mathematics reinforce the concept of a Master Designer<sup>3</sup>, while the existence of human consciousness and an objective moral order, pervading all of humanity, reveal that this

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<sup>1</sup> Some of the clearest expressions of General Revelation in all of Scripture are found in Psalm 19:1-6. Job 12:6-10 may allude to General Revelation, however in context Job seems to be using hyperbole to express the obviousness of his situation. Likewise, though Psalm 97:1-6 is often invoked to verify the concept of General Revelation, as it is, for example, in the *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, the Psalm is actually using poetic imagery to describe God’s supernatural intervention on behalf of Israel during the Exodus—thus making a case for Special Revelation. However, in the New Testament, we find the concept of General Revelation expressed quite clearly in Paul’s initial assessment of humanity’s current state of sinfulness in Romans 1:18-23. Paul also appeals to General Revelation in two of his public discourses recorded in the book of Acts (cf. Acts 14:15-17; 17:22-29).

<sup>2</sup> The current debate in North America over the Intelligent Design theory vs. the New Synthesis, or Neo-Darwinian theory of macroevolution, has been of great interest to me ever since I first encountered the work of the current “Wedge” proponents, Phillip Johnson, William Dembski, and Michael Behe in the late 90s. It has been a fascinating debate because it is really a rhetorical, philosophical, and (unfortunately) political debate rather than a strictly scientific one. The ID camp has raised serious objections to the current Neo-Darwinian paradigm that will have to be answered by its proponents, rather than simply dismissed as “closet creationism” or “fundamentalist” *a priori*—which seems to be the current strategy of those who oppose ID theory in principle.

<sup>3</sup> General Revelation via philosophy and statistical probability persuaded noted Atheist Antony Flew to change worldviews from a lifetime of atheism to a form of deism at the age of 81. Flew spoke of his conversions in a letter in the August-September issue of Britain’s *Philosophy Now* magazine: “It has become inordinately difficult even to begin to think about constructing a naturalistic theory of the evolution of that first reproducing organism.” In a video entitled “Has Science Discovered God?” Flew admits that biologists’ investigation of DNA “has shown, by the almost unbelievable complexity of the arrangements which are needed to produce [life], that intelligence must have been involved.” (cf. “There Is a God, Leading Atheist Concludes” Associated Press article. Dec. 9<sup>th</sup>, 2004.)

Master Designer is also the origin of personality and morality—and is therefore Himself Personal in nature.<sup>4</sup>

***“He has revealed Himself most clearly through Special Revelation—direct encounters with humanity and the witness of such encounters contained in Scripture.”***

General Revelation is sufficient to give humanity knowledge of God’s existence and, to a degree, knowledge of God’s nature. But in order for us to have knowledge of God’s desire, will, and purposes, God must enter into some type of relationship with humanity using direct communication. This is often referred to as “Special Revelation.”

The most authoritative and trustworthy example of God’s Special Revelation is Scripture. In fact, I believe that direct communication from God to human beings form the primary content of the Biblical documents. By studying Scripture, we can see that God has revealed Himself directly to humanity through various methods and at various points in history, revealing His will, His desires, and His purposes for creation—specifically for humanity’s relationship to Him and to one another.<sup>5</sup>

## 2. Scripture

***“Divinely Inspired Scripture is made up of the 39 books contained in the Hebrew Bible and the 27 documents contained in the New Testament which are the documents written under God’s Inspiration by those whom He moved to speak and/or write on His behalf.”***

Though my Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Coptic brothers and sisters would disagree, I believe that the term “Inspired Scripture” refers only to the documents found in the Hebrew Bible, or “Old Testament” as it is commonly referred to<sup>6</sup>, that were affirmed by the Jewish Council of Jamnia in 90 A.D. and the New Testament documents which were affirmed by the early Church at the Councils of Hippo (393 A.D.) and Carthage (397 A.D.).

***“Inspiration refers to the Divine co-operation between God and the human author to produce a text that is the authoritative means of hearing from, or about, God in and through the voice, style, and personality of the individual author.”***

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<sup>4</sup> Psalm 8:3-9 seems to reinforce this notion. In addition to this, the intuitive, philosophical, and experiential evidence for an objective moral order to the human psyche is overwhelming. C.S. Lewis was by no means the first person to demonstrate how objective morality points to the existence of God, but his presentation of this idea in *Mere Christianity* is as good as any that have followed.

<sup>5</sup> In John 4:22 and Romans 3:2 both Jesus and Paul state quite clearly that God’s Covenant dealings with Israel as found in the Hebrew Scriptures are the clearest (and ultimately, salvific) form of Special Revelation.

<sup>6</sup> Out of sensitivity to Jewish-Christian dialogue, and in order to remove needless barriers that many Jews encounter when their Bible is referred to as “old”, I try to use the term “Hebrew Bible” or “Hebrew Scriptures” as much as possible. Though I don’t always avoid using the term “Old Testament”, I try to share with fellow Christians as often as I can that because of the Church’s awful history—especially in its dealings with Judaism—we must sometimes go out of our way to avoid using terms which may be taken as derogatory or pejorative by those whom we wish to hear the Gospel message apart from needless rhetorical baggage. I commend the works of Michael Brown, especially *Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus, Vols. 1-4*, to anyone interested in genuine interaction with non-Messianic Jews.

To say that Scripture is “Inspired” is to say that it is not simply the product of human authors. Nor is it a work of literature dictated or otherwise sent down directly from the mouth of God without any human element. To say that Scripture is “Inspired” is to say, as Paul does, that it is θεόπνευστος (theopneustos)—literally “God-breathed” (2 Timothy 3:16). Therefore, though Scripture communicates clearly what God intends it to communicate (2 Peter 1:20), it also reflects the characteristics of all other literature penned by human hands.

The doctrine of the Inspiration of Scripture has led to debate by a number of camps within evangelicalism over such terms as “Inerrant”, “Infallible”, and “Authoritative.” I believe that much of this is simply semantics, but there are subtle differences that really do affect how one views the origin and authority of Scripture. Through my studies in seminary, interaction with other Christians, and (probably most importantly) my discussions with non-Christians, it is my belief that the terms “Unity”, “Integrity”, and “Authority” best describe what it means to say that Scripture is “Inspired.” Unity refers to the notion that Scripture, while written as separate works by separate authors, forms one complete message, which God intends humanity to possess in written form. Integrity means that Scripture is completely trustworthy in all matters on which it speaks<sup>7</sup>, and does not teach anything that is not in conformity with truth (or “the way things really are”). Authority refers to Scripture’s role as the ultimate guide for the Christian faith and the measure by which any and all theological notions must be judged.<sup>8</sup>

Among passages which support the notion of Scripture’s Inspiration, Jesus’ statement in John 10:35 that Scripture is “not able to be broken” seems to be the most direct. It is Divine testimony that the message contained in the words that make up Scripture possesses complete unity, integrity, and authority.<sup>9</sup>

***“The original text produced in this way is Inspired. Insofar as a translation adheres to and communicates the original text, it can be said to be Inspired as well.”***

This point is crucial for us in ministry to clearly teach to those under our care! Countless foolish arguments and empty critiques of Scripture’s truth have arisen within

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<sup>7</sup> It is important to qualify, however, that Scripture must be read as it was meant to be read or heard in its original language, culture, historical setting, and genre in order to understand its meaning—and to avoid attributing errors to it which are really errors on the part of the reader. Both liberal and conservative students of Scripture have failed at times to do this and the results have been very poor scholarship on all sides (i.e. the Documentary Hypothesis, the Literal Six-Day Creation interpretation of Gen.1, “Left Behind” Rapture theology, etc.)

<sup>8</sup> It is precisely this issue of Authority that is at the heart of the current divisions within mainline churches over issues such as the Church’s view on homosexuality. Those who favor removing homosexual lifestyles from the category of Sin do so by appealing to reason, experience, and emotion as overriding the teaching of Scripture on the issue. This is seen most clearly in the Episcopal Church’s recent division after Gene Robinson, a non-celibate homosexual priest, was ordained Bishop in New Hampshire last year. My own denomination, United Methodist, as well as the Presbyterian Church USA, are also continuing to deal with the issue of homosexuality and the deeper foundational issue of the Authority of Scripture.

<sup>9</sup> λύω can mean "to loosen, undo, dissolve...to annul, subvert; to do away with; to deprive of authority, whether by precept or by act...to loose what is compacted or built together, to break up, demolish, destroy" (cf. Thayer, Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament). Shades of each of these meanings can be detected in Jesus' words as well as His actions throughout the Gospel accounts regarding the unity, integrity, and authority of Inspired Scripture.

as well as outside of the Church because people equate “Scripture” with “the (fill-in-the-blank) translation/version.”<sup>10</sup> We must be clear in teaching the Body that it is only *the original texts themselves* which are Inspired; *not* subsequent transmissions or translations of them. *Every* translation is an interpretation and we should acknowledge this openly. Pastors and teachers who are able should possess at least a working rudimentary knowledge of, and familiarity with, the original languages of Scripture. We should also encourage laypeople to do the same, as they are able. Thus, churches that hold to even the highest views of Scriptural Inspiration can confidently rely on the various solid translations because they will be equipped to study Scripture without falling victim to “translation bias.”<sup>11</sup>

### 3. Theology (Doctrine of God)

**“God is, first and foremost, Creator, Sustainer, and Sovereign Ruler of the universe.”**

Any attempt to describe God will always fall short. And many attempts to describe God rely more on Greek philosophical notions than they do on Scripture. Often God’s attributes are first assumed (such as the doctrine of Immutability), and then proof-texting is used to bolster them.<sup>12</sup> Rather than beginning with General Revelation and trying to fit Scripture’s description of God into a preconceived philosophical idea, I believe we must begin closest to the source—Special Revelation via Scripture—in order to see clearly who God has revealed Himself as.

The first three words of the Hebrew Scriptures affirm at the outset that God is the Creator of everything. God is likened to a sovereign king who simply speaks the universe into being and orders creation with total sovereignty. King imagery dominates the Hebrew Scriptures<sup>13</sup> and, therefore, should not be underemphasized. Though many of the traditional doctrines of God (omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence, etc.) have their place in describing God, they should always take a back seat to the exegetical focus of Scripture’s own witness.

This tension between the categories found in Scripture and those of classical theology is a major factor in the current “Openness” debate regarding God’s foreknowledge. A minority of Biblical scholars and theologians have become convinced that Scripture itself leads one to the conclusion that not only is God *not* immutable, but he is also *not* omniscient in the classical sense of the term. These proponents of Limited Divine Foreknowledge (or “Openness theologians” as they are commonly called) believe

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<sup>10</sup> The “King James Only” controversy and the more recent squabbles over the ESV and TNIV by scholars such as Wayne Grudem, John Piper, and Ben Witherington III—if not explained properly to the average layperson—can be divisive and unproductive; two things that Scripture is not supposed to be!

<sup>11</sup> The works of N.T. Wright (specifically his newest title “The Last Word”), D.A. Carson’s “The Inclusive Language Debate”, Gordon Fee and Doug Stuart’s “How to Read the Bible...” volumes, and lectures or debates involving Ravi Zacharias have been very influential in shaping my view of Scripture and the role of translations in studying, preaching, teaching, and defending it.

<sup>12</sup> I’ve seen this most clearly in the works of Norman Geisler.

<sup>13</sup> As Jeff Niehaus points out in lectures and in “God at Sinai”, God is described using various Hebrew terms which are used by other Ancient Near East cultures to describe their gods as king, judge, ruler, and protector. Even the word for “temple” is a lone word which refers to the “big house” of a sovereign ruler.

that in order to maintain authentic relationships with humanity which involve genuine risk on His part, God has sovereignly chosen to limit His knowledge to that of infinite knowledge *of the past and present*, but has remained *intentionally ignorant* of many future events. They appeal to passages such as the testing of Abraham in Genesis 22, God’s “repenting” of His plans to wipe out rebellious Israel because of Moses’ intercession in Exodus 32, and His “regretting” making Saul king over Israel in 1 Samuel 15:35 to show that God does not have the future set in stone, but rather leaves some things open to change.

This view has caused a great deal of controversy among Evangelicals and has led to some bitter diatribes against proponents of the Openness model—primarily (but certainly not surprisingly) from many strong Calvinist theologians and scholars.<sup>14</sup> These debates usually seem to generate more heat than light and can often resemble heresy trials rather than theological debate.

It is my view that while the Openness model is not necessary to make sense of the passages of Scripture to which it most often appeals, and has severe weaknesses overall, it is not heretical because it doesn’t deny any of God’s attributes expressed in Scripture. To say that God has *chosen to limit Himself with regard to certain attributes* is not to say that God is limited and therefore not sovereign. Having read extended debates between Openness theologians and classical theologians, I feel that the Openness model challenges some things within the classical model of God which need to be challenged (such as Divine Immutability and Simplicity)<sup>15</sup>. Rather than merely condemning Openness theologians and warning of their “dangerous” way of thinking, we who hold to a more traditional understanding of God should hear their objections honestly and sincerely, and then seek to show from exegesis of the Biblical text itself (rather than quotes from Church Fathers or Reformed theologians) why the Openness model is not correct.

### **“God is Personal and Relational; But God is Holy.”**

Equally as prevalent in Scripture as the notion of God as King is the notion of God as Personal and Relational Being. The fact that God has chosen to not only create, but also communicate with humanity is proof of this notion. God enters into relationships with nations and peoples as well as with individuals. People like Adam, Noah, Abraham, Hagar, Moses, Balaam, Joshua, Samuel, Saul, David, Elijah, Daniel, Ezekiel, Paul, Peter, and John are just a handful of those with whom God personally

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<sup>14</sup> An example of this would be Gordon-Conwell’s invitation to a prominent Reformed theologian who lectured on the dangers of the openness model during chapel services in South Hamilton in 2003, as well as an issue of the alumni magazine *Contact* which was entirely devoted to refuting the Openness model that same year. It seems to me, though, that many who decry openness theology the loudest are also giving public voice to their disagreements with Arminianism in general under the guise of correcting the heresy of the openness model.

<sup>15</sup> In the book “Does God Have a Future?” James Sanders presents what I believe to be some of the strongest arguments in favor of the Openness model as well as some of the most devastating critiques of various classical doctrines which are usually assumed, but derive from Platonic concepts rather than Biblical theology.

related through direct communication—either through spoken word, theophany<sup>16</sup>, vision, or otherwise. The God of the Bible is not an emotionless entity; nor is He a gray-haired old man in the sky. The God of the Bible is YHWH<sup>17</sup>—the source of all being who simply IS—but YHWH is ‘Being in Relationship.’ YHWH feels joy, gladness, anger, sorrow, and mercy. Usually these simply designated as anthropomorphisms applied to God; but it seems more likely that our experience of such emotions derive from God—rather than vice versa—and would probably be better described as ‘theopomorphisms’ applied to humanity rather than anthropomorphisms applied to God!

The most profound aspect of God as “Being in Relation” is that He is the only one who can truly be, in and of Himself, relational. God exists in eternal relationship apart from any other entity because, unlike any other entity, God is triune in nature. God exists as Trinity—one *Essence*, three *Persons*. And while the doctrine of the Trinity was not fully formulated until three centuries after Jesus walked the earth, the concept of God as One, yet more than One, can be traced from Genesis to Revelation. Indeed at the very beginning of Scripture we find God existing both apart from creation (1:1) and, as Spirit, “hovering” within creation (1:2). It is His Word that serves as the means by which creation comes into being (1:3ff); and only later do we find that this Word is God as well (John 1:1) who “tabernacled” among us as Jesus of Nazareth.

The Trinity is the most mysterious—and therefore—most controversial notion in Christian theology I believe. But this is to be expected if it’s actually true because if God is truly Trinity, He is the only example of Trinity that exists. Therefore, any attempt to describe God’s triunity using word pictures or analogies will always be flawed by definition. However, unless God is indeed Trinity, the core message of the New Testament is hollow—as we’ll see below when we look at the nature of Jesus Himself.

God is Personal and Relational, but the third aspect of God’s nature most emphasized in Scripture is God’s Holiness (or “Perfect Other-ness”). God is described three times in Scripture using the phrase “God is...” God is Fire. God is Light. God is Love.<sup>18</sup> These three metaphors capture what it means to say that God is “Holy” perhaps better than any definition ever could. God, like fire, is consuming, dangerous, unapproachable apart from protection, and refining of whatever comes in contact with Him and survives. Like light, God is pure, elusive, seemingly contradictory in nature<sup>19</sup>,

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<sup>16</sup> By theophany, I am referring not only to Storm Theophanies such as those encountered by Moses and Elijah on Mt. Horeb, but also to localized embodiments of YHWH Himself in various forms. While two of the “men” who visited Abraham and Sarah in Genesis 18 were angelic beings, one was YHWH Himself appearing as a man. Likewise, the ‘Angel of the LORD’ (Gen. 16, 22, Num. 22, Judg. 2, 6, 13, 1Ki 19, 2Ki 1, 1Ch 21) is almost always spoken of as YHWH Himself (this would be the “Appositional Genitive” use of YHWH—i.e. ‘the Angel that *is* YHWH’).

<sup>17</sup> YHWH (Yahweh) is, I believe, the best way to refer to God because it makes it clear that it is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who is being referred to. It keeps the “Hebrew-ness” of God at the forefront and helps one distance God from the popular Deistic or philosophical notions people think of when they hear the word “god.”

<sup>18</sup> Hebrews 12:29, 1 John 1:5, and 1 John 4:8

<sup>19</sup> Just as scientists continue to struggle with understanding how light can be both wave and particle, people often still struggle to understand how God is Just, yet Merciful; One, yet Three; Sovereign, yet genuinely emotional. While none of these are truly contradictions, we do well to retain the mystery and not try to iron out all the “wrinkles” presented in Scripture. In my opinion many evangelical theologians (such as Norman Geisler in his “Chosen But Free”) are guilty of such systematizing. However, I believe many liberal theologians, even moderate ones, (such as Walter Bruggemann in his “Old Testament Theology”) fall into

and able to provide clarity and vision for those who walk in Him. And like love, God is relational, giving, affirming, self-sacrificing, and comforting. God is all of these things and more. In short, because of Sin God is infinitely separated from humanity in nature and is therefore unapproachable except on His own terms.<sup>20</sup>

#### *4. Anthropology (Doctrine of Humanity)*

***“Humanity was created in the Image of God to be His obedient stewards and rulers of the earth, but who rebelled against God and as a result were mastered by Sin, and apart from God’s Grace remain “fallen priests” captive to Sin and in need of deliverance.”***

That humanity is the crowning achievement of God’s creation is clear from the very beginning of Scripture. Humanity is seen by God as “very good.” No doubt the main reason for humanity’s high status in creation is the fact that humans are created in the “image of God” (Gen. 1:26-27). Humanity bears a resemblance of God unique among all other creatures.

In addition to being made in God’s image, humans are made for a purpose. God places man in His original temple—Eden<sup>21</sup>—to “work” and “guard/watch over” it (Gen. 2:15). This command would later be given to those who served in the Tabernacle/Temple as priests.<sup>22</sup> However, because of their rebellion, humanity fell victim to the captivity of Sin. Throughout the rest of Scripture the idea of Sin as being an enemy captor would resurface again and again. The Exodus, God’s deliverance of His people out of physical bondage and captivity by an enemy, was a foreshadowing of the coming Kingdom, God’s future deliverance of His people out of spiritual bondage and captivity by the ultimate enemy.

#### *5. Christology (Doctrine of Jesus)*

***“Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah of God’s people, Israel. He is Prophet, Priest, and King.”***

Any attempt at forming an appropriate understanding of Christ must begin with the person of Jesus of Nazareth. First and foremost, Jesus saw Himself as the promised deliverer of Israel—the Messiah. Jesus was thoroughly Jewish and bears little resemblance to the many conceptions of Him based on much European art and literature. Jesus’ every word and deed in the Gospel accounts of Scripture are drawn to draw the reader’s mind back to the Hebrew Scriptures and show how Jesus is reenacting Israel’s history—

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the opposite error of often elevating the tensions in Scripture to the point of being irreconcilable. As in almost everything, I believe the truth lies somewhere in between (a good example being N.T. Wright’s concluding chapters in “Jesus and the Victory of God” and “The Resurrection of the Son of God.”)

<sup>20</sup> For more on Sin and its effect on humanity’s relationship with God, see below.

<sup>21</sup> That Eden is meant to represent the tabernacle/temple (or vice versa) is pretty clear. Parallels include a rectangular boarder, God’s direct presence, the tree motif, entrance in the east, and cherubim (cf. Jeff Niehaus, “God at Sinai” and Meredith Kline, “Kingdom Prologue” for a much fuller discussion of the Eden/Temple parallels).

<sup>22</sup> Num. 3:7-8; 8:26; 18:7

but infusing it with new meaning. Though Jesus fulfilled the role of Prophet, Priest, and King over Israel<sup>23</sup>, He also seemed to act as if He was representative of Israel as a whole. His childhood flight from Egypt, His baptism in the Jordan by John, and His time in the wilderness enduring temptation are all clear allusions to Jesus as the embodiment of Israel. Furthermore, Jesus used the title “Son of Man” most frequently to refer to Himself. This is a reference to the “Son of Man” figure in Daniel 7 who somehow is able to not only overcome Israel’s powerful beastly enemies, but is also able to “come on the clouds of heaven” directly into the presence of the “Ancient of Days”—God Himself. This Son of Man is given power, authority, and worship—things always reserved for God and God *alone*. Jesus echoes this in His various teachings on His equality with God the Father and His preeminence before Abraham. This leads us to conclude that while Jesus may have been a human prophet, a great teacher, and a revolutionary in His day, He was not *merely* any these things.<sup>24</sup> He is much, much more!

***“He is the embodiment of God—completely human and completely Divine—the second Persona of the Trinity who became Incarnate as Jesus of Nazareth for the purpose of saving all of creation from the power of Sin and death.”***

Jesus’ earliest followers believed that not only was He the long-awaited Messiah of Israel, the final sacrifice for the Sins of the world, and the promised Prophet of whom Moses spoke before his death—they believed that Jesus was somehow God Himself! Jesus spoke and acted as if, in addition to embodying Israel, He was also the embodiment of YHWH among His people. Jesus spoke of His existence with God before the creation of the world as well as His “oneness” with God. He said things only God could say, such as “your sins are forgiven.” He did things only God could do, such as control the sea and provide an abundance of bread in the wilderness. Because of all this, Jesus is to be seen as God Incarnate. He is the second *Persona* of the triune God. He was born of a woman, but not by a man. He is both Son of Man and Son of God; 100% human and 100% divine. His primary purpose for taking on the limitation and weakness of being fully human was to fully and perfectly represent humanity before God’s measure of Justice and to pay the penalty for the Sin of all who put their faith in Him as their sacrifice and substitution. After His atoning sacrifice on the Cross, Jesus returned briefly to encourage, instruct, and equip His followers to take this message of God’s good news to all of humanity in every corner of the world. He then ascended into Heaven and the Holy Spirit was poured out on His followers as they entered into the promised New Covenant with God through Jesus.

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<sup>23</sup> Jesus heard God’s word and spoke it to Israel authoritatively, as well as predicted future acts of God’s judgment on the nation (Prophet); He functioned as the mediator between God and humanity and offered His own blood as the final Sacrifice on behalf of those who seek to worship God (Priest); and after conquering death itself, Jesus promised to return in royal splendor, judge evil justly, and rule all of creation (King).

<sup>24</sup> The most in-depth, eloquent, and exegetically sound investigation of Jesus’ identity (particular His own understanding of His identity) is by far, in my opinion, N.T. Wright’s two volumes in his series on Christian origins, “Jesus and the Victory of God” and “The Resurrection of the Son of God.” Equally helpful for placing Jesus within the overall Biblical concept of God’s Kingdom purpose is John Bright’s “The Kingdom of God.”

## 6. Hamartology (Doctrine of Sin)

***“Sin is an action, thought, or state of being that is in opposition to God’s moral order as well as an animate force that holds humanity in bondage to decay and death—both spiritually and physically.”***

Though sin is designated by a number of terms,<sup>25</sup> all of which suggest an action (or state of being brought about by an action) which is (or is the result of) wrongdoing or rebellion against God, such a definition does not reflect the vivid portrayals of sin found in the pages of both Testaments very well—particularly the depiction of sin as a conquering enemy. The Exodus slavery motif is drawn on heavily by the Biblical authors, especially in the New Testament, where sin plays the part of Pharaoh and the pursuing Egyptian army and believers are following their new deliverer, Jesus, into the Promised Land. In fact, the first time Sin is mentioned in Scripture, it is characterized as a crouching predator ready to attack and overpower its human prey.<sup>26</sup> The most explicit portrayal of Sin as an enemy captor is found in Romans 6-7. Paul, drawing from rabbinic tradition regarding the nature of Adam’s transgression, personifies Sin as a harsh master from whom he’s trying to escape.<sup>27</sup>

***“Sin entered the world through the act of disobedience, distrust, and ultimately rebellion of the first humans. This act of Sin unleashed the power and reality of Sin into the created order which was intended to be ruled by God in cooperation with His most beloved creation—human beings.”***

The eating of the forbidden fruit by Adam and Eve was no small act or innocent mistake. God had given Adam dominion over the whole earth and had specifically charged him with working and “guarding” Eden.<sup>28</sup> By allowing the serpent to bring doubt about God into Eve’s mind rather than protecting her from this evil being, Adam relinquished his role as guardian and ruler. Eve not only listened to the serpent, she also mischaracterized God’s initial prohibition by saying that God told them “not to look at” the fruit at all. Finally, she and Adam both chose to side with the serpent in his analysis of God’s motives rather than trust the God who created them. They rebelled against God and for the first time ever, encountered the reality of Sin and its consequences. They were banished from God’s direct presence in Eden and forced to live in a world where Sin, evil, and suffering were potent forces at work through and ultimately against them. The rest of the Biblical record recounts humanity’s continuing enslavement to Sin and their inability to break free from it on their own.

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<sup>25</sup> The Hebrew חַטָּאת (sin), עוֹן (iniquity), and פְּשָׁע (transgression) as well as the Greek ἁμαρτία (sin), ἀνομία (lawlessness), and ἀδικία (unrighteousness) all portray this basic meaning of sin.

<sup>26</sup>In Genesis 4:7 God has just rejected Cain’s offering after accepting Abel’s. God asks a dejected Cain, “If you do right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do right, sin (חַטָּאת) is crouching (רִבֵּיץ) at your door. Its desire (תַּשׁוּקָה) is towards you, but you will master (תִּמְשָׁל) it” [my translation].

<sup>27</sup> The most helpful commentaries on this section of Romans can be found in Ben Witherington’s “Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary” and N.T. Wright’s “Paul for Everyone: Romans vol.1.”

<sup>28</sup> See the above discussion of humanity as “priests” in Eden.

***“Apart from the Grace of God apprehended through faith, Sin reigns supreme over humanity. However, through God’s empowering, saving Grace, Sin’s hold on people is broken and they are free to walk in perfect obedience and relationship to God through the abiding power of the Holy Spirit. Sin can, and does, still war against God’s people, but it is now a foreign enemy trying to reclaim its former territory in the person’s life.”***

God would not allow Sin to reign supreme among humanity forever. Throughout history, those who “called on the name of the LORD” and put their faith in Him as their promised deliverer, were put back in right standing with God—i.e. made Righteous—through God’s empowering Grace. Even before the time of Jesus’ Incarnation, God’s Grace was at work through the Covenant He had made with His people as they put their faith in Him.<sup>29</sup>

God’s promised of deliverance was finally revealed in the person and work of Jesus. Those who had put their faith in God to deliver them had as the object of their faith the atoning death of the promised Messiah—even though they did not have cognitive knowledge of the details. Thus, all who realize their captivity to Sin, repent of their allegiance to it, cry out to God for help, and put their faith in God’s means of deliverance enter into the New Covenant with God spoken of by the Prophets.<sup>30</sup> Those who partake in this Covenant are freed from Sin’s dominion and empowered to resist its continued attempts to reclaim them. If or when a believer does lapse back into the ways of the old master by committing sin, they are convicted by the Holy Spirit who dwells in them. Sin is no longer natural for those who have entered into the New Covenant. Upon realizing this, confession and repentance of sin are all that is required to once again break the chains of bondage and restore the believer’s right standing with God.

#### *7. Soteriology (Doctrine of Salvation)*

***“Sin spread so quickly and thoroughly through humanity that only a small remnant remained faithful—though fallen—to God. However, God had already set in motion a plan to bring all of humanity back into proper relationship with Him. He promised deliverance over Sin and its chief proponent, the serpent, i.e. Satan. This promise was continually reaffirmed by God through His covenants with humanity and ultimately found its fulfillment in the people of Israel’s Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. Any who believed God and put their faith in His promise are welcomed into relationship with Him and citizenship in His eternal Kingdom. The means by which this relationship is restored—the object of faith regarding God’s promise—is the Atoning self-sacrifice of God in through the death of Jesus.***

Within one generation of the first sin being committed, murder had been committed—fratricide at that! Genesis 3-6 records humanity’s downward spiral into Sin and death. Even when God allows humanity to “start over” through Noah and his family,

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<sup>29</sup> Paul goes to great lengths in Romans 3-4 to show how those who were declared righteous by God, such as Abraham and David, were done so through their faith in God’s promise of deliverance from their current state.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Ezekiel 36 and Jeremiah 31.

Sin quickly regains its control over them and humanity is again reduced to a rebellious, dark, confused spiritual state.

God, however, had promised that one day a human would overcome the serpent and its power to enslave.<sup>31</sup> This promise was reiterated in the form of God's successive Covenants with certain individuals and their descendents—Noah, Abraham, Jacob/Israel, and David. As history progressed, the purpose and identity of the deliverer gradually came into focus. Finally, it was revealed that the deliverer and culmination of all of God's salvation promises to His people throughout history was Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah of Israel. And not only did Jesus provide the means by which God's people under the previous Covenants could be delivered, He established the long-awaited New Covenant and opened the doors of "Israel" to encompass all who would put their faith in and allegiance to Israel's God, YHWH, and Israel's King, Jesus. Those who embrace this message are freed from Sin's grip and become citizens of the Kingdom of God. Their former sins are paid atoned for by Jesus' death on the cross. This atoning death is necessary because God could not sacrifice either mercy or justice in His judgment of Sin. But it is precisely this combination of mercy and justice that necessitated the cross. For it was there that both qualities of God were fully revealed. In His justice, God could not overlook the sin of humanity. There had to be atonement by humanity. However, in His mercy, God Himself made that atonement by receiving the full punishment of His justice in the form of Jesus—"that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation."<sup>32</sup> It was here at the cross that God's justice and God's mercy met head-on. And that is the very core of the Gospel message.

***Those who choose to believe in, put their faith in, and live in obedience to God's promise enter into God's Covenant and are saved from Sin's power. This salvation from Sin and restored relationship with God are not unconditional; nor are they the result of human effort or accomplishment. Rather, salvation and restoration are made possible by God's graceful offering being received freely by faith in God's promise on the part of fallen humanity."***

Though there has been little debate as to the means of Jesus' Atonement by Christians who hold Scripture as their authority, there have often been vigorous (and sadly sometimes violent) debates regarding the way in which this Atonement is applied to humanity. The theological camps of Calvinism and Arminianism (or notions similar to them) have emerged as the two main schools of thought on the subject. Without getting into the details of this ancient and ongoing debate, I will simply note that through my reading of Scripture, as well as my reading of the proponents of both systems, I have come to believe that the passages cited by both camps seem to almost never be speaking of individual salvation, but rather, corporate salvation or election. The means by which humanity enters the Kingdom of God (i.e. is "saved") is through corporate solidarity with the Messiah. Those who unite with the Messiah through repentance and faith (i.e. those

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<sup>31</sup> This is the "seed of the woman" who would "crush the head" of the serpent in the promise of Genesis 3:15.

<sup>32</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:19 (ESV)

who are “in Christ”<sup>33</sup>) have been predestined to be made righteous and dwell with God in a resurrected state of Glory.<sup>34</sup> However, the decision to enter into such a relationship is one that an individual must freely make.<sup>35</sup>

All of this is the result of God’s Grace, and can in no way be seen as the result of human effort or initiation—as is commonly alleged by those who oppose “Arminian theology—because it is God who makes the promise, God who achieves victory through the Atonement, God who convicts humanity of Sin, God who shows humanity their position of bondage and spiritual death, and God who offers Covenant membership to those who repent and receive His offer of deliverance through faith. God is sovereign through all of this; yet He allows humanity the freedom to reject His offer of unlimited Atonement and the Grace that accompanies it.

#### *8. Pneumatology (Doctrine of the Spirit)*

***“Those who through faith enter into the Kingdom of God are transformed inwardly and become dwelling places of the Holy Spirit. The third Persona of the Triune God comes and dwells within the transformed believer much as He came and dwelled within the Tabernacle and Temple under the Mosaic Covenant.”***

Just as the Glory of God entered and filled the Tabernacle after it had been made ready, set apart, and cleansed thoroughly, so to the Holy Spirit enters and fills the person who has received God’s offer of salvation and has been united with God’s New Covenant Kingdom through repentance and faith. The Holy Spirit indwells the believer and provides spiritual cleansing from the stain of Sin, continual guidance in faithfully walking with God, and witness to Jesus’ teachings and power over Sin and death.

The Holy Spirit is not a “force” (as is erroneously taught by many in the church). Rather, the Holy Spirit is the third *Persona* of the triune God who dwells within His new “tabernacles”. He is also the believer’s comforter and advocate against the charges of Satan, and serves as God’s “seal” of ownership for the individual believer. The Holy Spirit is the means by which the believer lives a life of obedience to God and is the source of spiritual power and gifting to the people of God.

***“The Holy Spirit is also at work outside the believer, calling non-believers to faith, empowering groups of believers to effectively advance the Kingdom and influencing people even if at times they don’t even realize it.”***

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<sup>33</sup> This phrase, or phrases like it (“in Him”, “in Jesus”, etc.) dominate Paul’s letter to the Ephesians as well as Jesus’ final discourse to His disciples before His arrest in John 14-16.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Romans 8:29-30, Ephesians 1:5-11, 1Corinthians 1:1-4, 2Corinthians 1:20-21, Galatians 3:28, and 1Peter 5:10.

<sup>35</sup> This notion of humanity having the ability to choose or reject God’s gracious offer of salvation is usually seen by those holding to a Calvinist position as limiting God’s sovereignty and giving humanity the ability to thwart God’s plan of salvation. It is also argued that even the ability to accept God’s offer would qualify as a “work” and therefore is not Biblically true on the basis of Romans 4:5 and 9:32. My response to both of these objections is that nowhere in Scripture can it be found that humanity is incapable of recognizing good and evil (in fact, Genesis 3 teaches the exact opposite was the result of the fall!); nor is there anything which teaches that, when presented with God’s offer of salvation, humanity does not have the desire to repent and believe. Furthermore, the notion that putting one’s faith in a promise of God qualifies as “work” on the part of the person is both lexically and grammatically unjustified.

The Holy Spirit's influence is not limited to the individual believer or to the church as a whole; He is active throughout creation<sup>36</sup> and in the lives of non-believers as well.<sup>37</sup> It is the Holy Spirit who convicts the world of Sin and their need of deliverance from it, God's standard of Righteousness and their failure to measure up to it, and the reality of His Judgment on Sin and Satan so they can escape it (John 16:5-12). The Holy Spirit at times even speaks through individuals who are not believers and stand in opposition to God's Kingdom.<sup>38</sup>

#### *9. Ecclesiology and Missiology (Doctrine of the Church & Mission)*

***“The Church is the term used to designate the collective members of God's Kingdom. Under the Mosaic Covenant, the Church consisted Israel and those who joined themselves to Israel in faith and obedience to God.***

Though the term “church” is usually considered to be a New Testament development, this is simply not the case. Throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, the collective people of God are referred to as the “congregation” (קהל) of Israel.<sup>39</sup> This term is translated in the LXX as ἐκκλησία, the word translated “church” in the New Testament. It is Covenant membership with God which defines the Church. With the giving of the Covenant to Moses at Sinai, God's Church became a visible, defined community of people. Ethnicity was never a determiner of one's membership in the Church, as even non-Israelites, such as Caleb and the “mixed multitude” of Exodus 12:38 were considered members of God's Covenant family. Covenant obedience is the only true identifier of those who are members of God's Kingdom.

***With the coming of the Messiah Jesus and the inauguration of the promised New Covenant, the Church consisted of all those who joined themselves to the Messiah in faith and obedience to God—both inside and outside of the borders of ethnic Israel.***

Just as the Church under the Mosaic Covenant was open to any who would enter into it in faith and obedience, the Church under the New Covenant is open to all as well. Jesus, as Messiah, inaugurated the Messianic Kingdom of God and commissioned His followers to spread this Kingdom to the ends of the earth. The People of God—once consisting primarily of ethnic Israel—now consist of any and all who unite themselves to Israel's God and Messiah, regardless of ethnicity or cultural background.

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<sup>36</sup> Cf. Isaiah 34:16

<sup>37</sup> Evidence of this is seen in Jesus' denunciation of those who blaspheme the Holy Spirit (Matthew 12:32, Mark 3:29 and Luke 12:10). Such people see the Holy Spirit at work in the world, yet they attribute His power to Satan instead of recognizing God at work among them.

<sup>38</sup> John 11:49-52 portrays Caiaphas' unintentional prophecy, which John lets us know he spoke “not on his own.” 1Peter 1:21 seems to make clear that the Holy Spirit is the source of all actual Prophecy in Scripture.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. also Leviticus 8:3, Numbers 20:8, Deuteronomy 23:1ff, Judges 20:2, 1Kings 8:14

***The mission of the Church has always been the same—to serve God wholeheartedly in faith and obedience and to reflect God’s character to those who don’t know or follow Him and who are, therefore, outside of the Covenant.”***

Just as the people of Israel under the Mosaic Covenant were called to be a witness to the nations for the One True God, so too the New Israel—those who follow the Messiah under the New Covenant—are called to this same role. Those who have entered into the New Covenant with God through faith in Jesus are called to walk in faith and obedience to God. This was required under the Mosaic Covenant, how much more so does it apply under the Messianic Covenant! Holiness is the result of salvation. It is the “aroma of Christ to God”<sup>40</sup> that believers spread everywhere they go. This Holiness, this otherness, is what reflects God’s character to the world, to those who are not in Covenant with Him. Such obedience must accompany the church’s proclamation of the Gospel in order for the message to ring true. And it is the proclamation of the Gospel which is the primary mission of the church. Jesus’ final instruction to His followers was to take His message of the Kingdom to everyone in the world. It is this mission that the Church has been seeking to carry out for the past 2 millennia. This Church is not one denomination or ecclesiastical structure, rather the Church consists of all true believers who have entered into Covenant with God through the atonement of Jesus the Messiah in every denomination and congregation throughout history.

#### *10. Eschatology (Doctrine of Final Things)*

***“The present age is part of the “End of Days” spoken of by Jesus, the Prophets, and the Apostles. It will end with the return of the Messiah Jesus to earth as triumphant ruler who destroys all evil and rids the earth of Sin once and for all. This will be the eschatological Day of the LORD, when all of God’s promises to His people will be fully realized.***

The “End of Days” spoken of throughout Scripture began with the appearance of Jesus before the Throne of God after His ascension and has been continuing since. One of the clearest presentations of this concept is in Revelation 5. It is only after the Lamb takes the Scroll from God’s hand that He begins opening the seals—thus setting into motion cataclysmic events which symbolize world history’s goings-on until the final return of the Lamb as a conquering king. The Hebrew Prophets spoke of many things which would happen during the end times, but never made clear that all the events would happen at once. There is much fluidity in Scripture with regard to the end times.<sup>41</sup> The New Testament authors spoke as if they themselves were living in the last days and urged their fellow believers to remain vigilant for the Messiah’s return.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> 2 Corinthians 2:15

<sup>41</sup> For various examples of such fluidity cf. Jer 23:20; 30:24; Ezek 38:16; Jas 3:5, Jn 6:39–0, 44, 54; 11:24; 12:48; 2 Tim 3:1; Jas 5:3; 2 Pet 3:3, Dan 8:17; 9:26; 10:14; 11:35, 40; 12:4, 9, 13; Mt 10:22; 13:39–0, 49; 24:3, 6, 13–4; 28:20, etc.

<sup>42</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5 contains Paul’s clear admonition to the Thessalonians to live as those who are living in the end times. Because of the continued delay of final judgment in the early Church’s eyes, Peter found it necessary to remind them that the end times is something that takes place on God’s timetable rather than theirs (2 Peter 3).

However, the final “End” to the end times will come unexpectedly, as Jesus emphasized to His followers.<sup>43</sup> And when it finally does come and the End of Days draws to a close, the result will be the return of Israel’s Messiah to destroy evil completely and establish God’s Kingdom once and for all. All of the promises of peace given to God’s people by the Hebrew Prophets will finally be realized and “Israel”—all those who have united themselves to God’s Covenant and their Messiah—will experience the blessings promised to Jacob, Abraham, and previously to the Man and Woman in Eden. The “seed of the woman” will totally crush the “seed of the serpent” and victory will be complete.

***Until then, the Church will continue its mission to spread the Kingdom of God through telling the Good News of God’s Covenant with mankind and will remain in the world to actively oppose Sin and Satan in any of their manifestations.”***

God’s People will remain in the world until the final Day of Judgment. This is made pretty clear in Jesus’ teaching on the wheat and the weeds (Matthew 13:24-30) as well as the often-misquoted “left behind” passage (Matthew 37:42 and Luke 17:26-35). Contrary to popular teaching, Jesus is not speaking of non-believers being “left behind” on earth while Christians are raptured into heaven. It is, in fact the opposite! Jesus makes it clear that this judgment to which He is referring is the similar to the judgments on Noah’s generation and that on Sodom and Gomorrah. Just as Noah’s family and Lot’s family were the only ones “left behind” after God’s respective judgments, so too will believers be the only ones “left behind” after God’s final Judgment at Jesus’ return. Those who are “taken” will not be “Christians taken to Heaven,” they will be unbelievers “taken away” in judgment to eternity apart from God. That so many in the church today believe (and worse yet, teach) the direct opposite meaning of Jesus’ words in order to fit various Rapture theologies is simply unbelievable!

Furthermore, those who will be judged and declared righteous upon the Messiah’s return will be all who have embraced Him as their Lord and seek to follow Him obediently. There is only one true Israel—those who are in covenant with God. Modern notions of the political entity known as Israel still being “God’s People” are simply unsupported by Scriptural exegesis. This does not mean that God has rejected His people Israel; rather, He has purified and expanded “Israel” to include those who walk in New Covenant with Him as spoken of by Moses and the Prophets.<sup>44</sup> And while many of my fellow Christians point to Revelation 20 to show that Jesus will return and then a period of time—a “millennium”—will pass before His final judgment, I do not believe this can be supported by Jesus’ own teaching, nor by anything else in Scripture. The 1,000 years spoken of in Revelation 20, like almost all the rest of the numbers in Revelation and other Apocalyptic literature, are symbolic of a fixed period of time in which the Kingdom will be free to spread without being stopped by Satan’s power. It seems to me that the End of Days, the “Church Age”, is what is being described by this symbolic numerical figure.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> See His discussion in Matthew 24:36-51 and its parallel in Luke 12:39-40). Paul, Peter, and John all reemphasized this in their writings as well (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:2-6, 2 Peter 3:10, Revelation 16:15-21).

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Deuteronomy 18:15, Jeremiah 31, and Ezekiel 36.

<sup>45</sup> The most persuasive arguments I have encountered regarding the 1,000 years of Revelation 20 representing the present age can be found in Greg Beale’s Revelation commentary (NIGTC), Richard

After this age—this “1,000 years” of Kingdom expansion—the forces of Sin and Satan will rise up for one final battle, but like the last throws of a creature who has been mortally wounded, they will be judged and destroyed by the conquering Messiah, Jesus, at His return.

***“Part of the Messiah’s final victory will involve the resurrection of all of humanity from the dead. Those who are part of God’s Kingdom will be changed from corruptible to incorruptible—both spiritually and physically. Those who have rejected God’s reign will be separated from Him forever in a Godless eternal state. Apart from this final judgment, the entire created order will also be restored, cleansed, and freed completely from any remnant of Sin or its effects. Sin, death, Satan, and his followers will all be done away with and God will dwell in the midst of all of His people in a renewed creation forever.”***

Even before the explicit teaching found in Daniel 12 that God would resurrect the dead at the end of the world and judge between the wicked and the righteous, there was a belief among the Hebrew faithful that the dead would live again.<sup>46</sup> The New Testament elaborated on this idea greatly, primarily through Jesus’ teachings on resurrection—both His own, and that of the rest of humanity.<sup>47</sup> Though it is a popular notion, even among Christians, the idea that at death the individual goes to Heaven or Hell forever is one that is not found in Scripture. What we do find in Scripture is the teaching that regardless of where they spend the intermediate period, the dead will all be bodily raised at God’s final judgment.<sup>48</sup>

It is at this final judgment that believers will be separated from non-believers—the sheep from the goats (Matthew 25:32), the good fish from the bad fish (Matthew 13:47-48), the wheat from the chaff (Luke 3:17) or weeds (Matthew 13:30), the wedding guests from the wedding crashers (Matthew 22:11-13)! Those who are not members of God’s Covenant Kingdom will be separated from Him forever in a horrific state of existence.<sup>49</sup> However, those who are God’s People will be transformed, along with the rest of Creation, into a glorious new eternal existence free from sin, sorrow, decay, death, sickness, and pain. This will be a bodily existence, not the “eternal disembodied spirit” concept of popular understanding. But it will be unlike our current bodily state which is infected by and exposed to Sin, decay, and death.

The most important and glorious aspect of this New Creation is the fact that humanity will no longer remain separated from God because of Sin. The New Creation

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Bauckham’s “The Theology of the Book of Revelation”, G.B. Caird’s “The Revelation of St. John”, “The Case for Amillennialism” by Kim Riddellbarger, and “The Throne, the Lamb, and the Dragon” by Paul Spilsbury.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Job 26:5, Isaiah 26:19

<sup>47</sup> Matt 12:42; 22:23, 28, 30f; Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:34; 12:18, 23, 25; Luke 11:31; 14:14; 18:33; 20:27, 33, 35ff; John 5:29; 11:23ff; 20:9

<sup>48</sup> By far the most influential works on this subject have been those of N.T. Wright, specifically his magisterial “The Resurrection of the Son of God”, which is by far the most comprehensive work on the theme of resurrection in print today.

<sup>49</sup> Though Scripture uses many metaphors to describe this eternal separation from God—Gehenna, fire, darkness, worm-infested, etc.—the main point is that eternity apart from God and His New Creation will be full of anger, sorrow and despair.

will be perfect; so perfect, in fact, that God will dwell in the very presence of His People (Revelation 21:1-7) and the fellowship which was only hinted at in Eden will finally be realized for all Eternity!

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