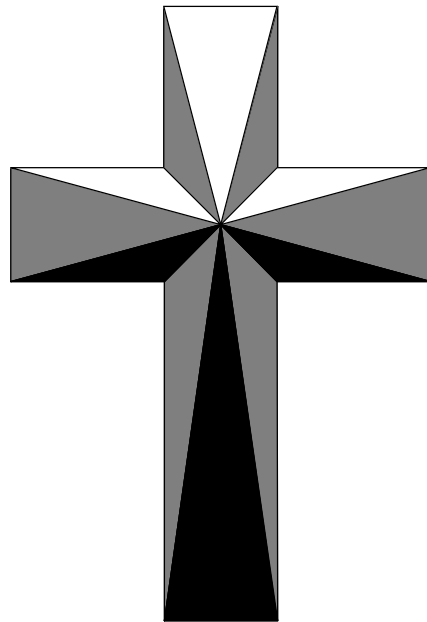


The Grace of God



A Statement of Faith

by

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The Grace of God

“But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.”

These words from Paul in Titus 3:4-7 lay out for us the infinite fullness of God's grace and mercy. From creation to Christ, from Christ to the end of the earth, God's grace defines his interaction with us. The Holy Scriptures, God's very Word, overflow with descriptions like Paul's which help us to understand God's nature; who He is, and what He does. It is this grace, this unmerited love and favor of God toward us, which will help us more completely comprehend the doctrines addressed in this paper.

If it were not for God's grace, there would be no salvation for fallen humanity. God's grace provided the means by which He would save His people, not because of their wisdom or merit or works, but simply God's provisional grace. ***“For it is by grace you have been saved, though faith--and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God”*** (Ephesians 2:8). Without grace our relationship with God would be permanently and irrevocably severed. Without grace, God would not have revealed to us His word in the Scriptures. Jesus Christ's coming into the world, his death and resurrection, would not have occurred without a gracious God. God would not have chosen to live in us through His Holy Spirit were it not for grace, nor would there be a church to do His work on earth. There would be no second coming to long for and await. If God were not a gracious God, He would not have prepared a place for us to live throughout eternity.

We know therefore, through His word and through our own experience and relationship with Him, our God is a God full of grace.

The grace of God not only defines God's attributes, but it displays itself unendingly through His actions. God's grace is dynamic, and it is this loving, enveloping grace which has drawn me to kneel before God in wonder, and filled me with the desire to serve Him. Too wonderful and too powerful is this relationship with a gracious God to be kept locked up in one's heart. God's grace must be spread to those who know Him not, and must be understood more fully by those who live under its loving embrace.

“But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be glory both now and forever! Amen.” 2 Peter 3:18

I. SCRIPTURE

God, in His grace, reaches out to communicate with us in a way which we can understand and respond. His Holy Word, the Bible, is the most elaborate form of God's communication with us. The Scriptures contain an almost endless supply of information and theology. Therefore, any examination of Christian doctrines and theology must begin and end with God's written Word to mankind. The Bible is the basis and reason for holding all of the doctrines contained within this paper.

Though there may be several applications of a given passage of Scripture, there is only one true interpretation. Scripture can never mean what the author did not intend it to mean. The meaning is to be found as one diligently applies the literal grammatical historical method of interpretation under the guidance the Holy Spirit (2 Timothy 3:16).

A. Revelation

The first aspect of the Scriptures to be addressed is the means by which God chose to reveal or disclose His message to us. There are two basic forms of revelation; general and special. God's general revelation comes primarily through nature (Romans 1:18-21). Specific, or special revelation comes about when God discloses himself to specific persons at specific times and places.

Man's sin broke the one-to-one relationship God had with him. Therefore man needed God to reveal himself in specific ways so that a greater understanding and knowledge of God could be received. Scripture then, is one way in which God chose to reveal himself to us. He used the authors of the Old and New Testaments to write down this revelation so that we would have an accurate record of who God is.

B. Inspiration

The process God used to reveal himself through Scripture is called inspiration. More specifically, inspiration is God's superintending of human authors, through the Holy Spirit, so that God's word and revelation is composed and recorded without error through the individual personalities of the human authors.

The form which this inspiration takes can be defined as **verbal plenary**. Verbal, plenary inspiration means that all of the words of God are accurately recorded by the human authors with the assistance and guiding of the Holy Spirit. This applies to the actual manuscripts as originally written, and extends to the actual words used. The major idea to separate here is that this form of inspiration does not mean God dictated every word to the author, so that the author had no say or input in the writing style. Instead, the Holy Spirit worked within the personality of each of the Biblical authors to accurately communicate the very truths and words of God.

C. Inerrancy

This verbal, plenary inspiration also extends to, and includes, the inerrancy of Scripture. The inspired Word of God as written in the original manuscripts by the human authors is without error. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 proclaims *“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching,*

rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” The term θεοπνευστος (*Theopneustos*), translated “God-breathed,” explains that God is the creator of all Scripture, and that He breathed it into man just as he first breathed life into Adam (Genesis 2:7).

If **all** Scripture is inspired, to what degree is it without error? There are different opinions about levels of accuracy and inerrancy. Some hold that every fact, number, dimension, detail, and description is absolutely and technically accurate. Others hold that the Scripture is accurate only in its purpose. My position falls between the two. I hold to full inerrancy, which states that the 66 books of the Canon are completely true. The message God reveals has been communicated without errors. The Bible however, is a theological book. It contains historical events and technical data, but in this God has a theological purpose. Every word He intended to communicate to us has been given to us truthfully. However, some events, as recorded through the human eyes, and with human perceptions, may reflect ancient human worldviews. This however, does not negate the complete inspiration and inerrancy of these Scriptures.

D. Authority

If then, we hold to God's perfect truth as communicated through His Word, Scripture must be respected as authoritative. To say otherwise would be to turn one's back on the truth God has graciously revealed to us. The Bible is God's instruction manual for how we should live our lives and relate to our creator.

Although there have been many steps involved in the delivering of our present day Bible, God's perfect Word is the ultimate authority, and the Holy Spirit, not scribes, interpreters, church councils, denominations, or specific people, is responsible for the written truth we have today. The Scripture then is the ultimate authority and the basis of our beliefs and doctrines.

II. GOD

A. The Attributes of God

Defining God is probably one of the most difficult tasks one could ever undertake. God's very nature goes beyond any human understanding or definition. The best way then to understand who God is involves looking at specific attributes or characteristics He has revealed.

As stated in the opening of this paper, I believe that one of the most powerful aspects of God's personality is exhibited in His grace. Through His grace God displays his love, goodness, truthfulness, holiness, and justice. Moreover, it is by His grace that we have eternal life.

God can also be better understood, by looking at His revealed name. The name God revealed to Moses in Exodus 3:14 was Yahweh. In Hebrew this means “I am who I am,” and implies God's self-existent sovereignty, and his uncompounded and indivisible nature.

God is also eternal. The proclamation of the four angels in Revelation 4:8 was “**Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.**” Genesis 1:1 describes that “In the beginning” God was already present. Genesis 21:33 describes Yahweh as “The Eternal God.”

God is immutable. That is, God is unchanging; His nature remains the same “yesterday, today and tomorrow” (Hebrews 13:8, James 1:17).

God is omnipresent. God is everywhere at all times (Psalm 139:7-12).

God is omnipotent. God is all powerful (Revelation 19:6). There is nothing that God cannot or is unable to do.

God is omniscient. God possess the knowledge of all that can be known, actual and possible (Matthew 11:21).

B. The Trinity

One of the most difficult aspects of understanding who God is revolves around the doctrine of the Trinity. In essence, the doctrine states that God is one God, but God-the Father, The Holy Spirit, and Jesus-the son, are all unique, eternal, coequal personalities within the Godhead. Although the word “trinity” is never used in Scripture, the Bible does give many evidences of its existence.

In Matthew 28:19 Jesus states, *“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...”* Paul, in 2 Corinthians 13:14 affirms *“May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”* All three persons of the Trinity are referred to equally as God; the Father in John 6:27, the Son in Hebrews 1:8, and the Holy Spirit in Acts 5:3-4.

No human analogy can properly or adequately describe the nature of the Trinity. One simply must understand, as best our minds will allow, this complex aspect of who God is.

C. The Works of God

What has God done, and what does he do? The works of God are many and mighty. All that exists has been created by God. *“Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made”* (John 1:3).

1. Creation

The first recorded act of what God has done is found in Genesis 1:1, *“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”* From what did he create the world? Paul, in Romans 4:17 states, *“...God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were.”* The author of Hebrews likewise proclaims, *“By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible”* (Hebrews 11:3). God's *ex nihilo* (from nothing) creation brought about the beginning of the world. From which God has made everything that exists, even man. Genesis 1 is God's revelation in poetical form of God's initial creative act. The implication of God's creative work is that He alone is the ultimate reality. Nothing exists apart from God.

2. Providence

On the more practical side of God's work is His providence. Simply defined, providence is God's divine care and guardianship, providing for our needs. Paul declares, *“He is before all things, and in him all things hold together”* (Colossians 1:17). Ever since creation, God has been sustaining His work and His people. God is our caregiver and our protector. In His grace, He provides us with what we need (Luke 11). God even displays providence for the unsaved by sending rain on the crops of the righteous and the unrighteous (Matthew 5:45, Acts 14:17).

III. HUMANITY

Humanity was created by God and is therefore morally responsible to God (James 3:9). God fashioned Adam from the dust and breathed life into him (Genesis 2:7). What exactly was this new creation, and what purpose did it have?

A. The Nature of Humanity

What makes up a man or woman? There are two unified components or ingredients. The first is the physical part of the body. God made this physical part of our being from the dust of the earth. It therefore consists of physical elements, like the earth. The second part of man is the immaterial; the soul or spirit. God breathed into Adam a spirit which made man different from the other works of His creation. This spirit, interwoven with the material part of man, allows God to communicate with us, and allows us to respond spiritually to God (Romans 8:16, 1 Corinthians 2:11). The two components are brought together at conception, and separate at death. The body returns to dust, and the spirit either ascends to God, or descends to hell (Revelation 20:12, 15). Man as a whole was created in God's image. Genesis 1:26-27 declares:

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

B. The Purpose of Humanity

What is the meaning of life? Why am I on the earth? These are two seemingly difficult and in-depth questions many people ask. The answer is easier than one might first suspect. Because man was created in God's image, that meant God had a unique relationship with man, and gave man special responsibilities. ***"God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'"*** God gave to man his physical earthly responsibilities, but there were also spiritual obligations. Jesus proclaimed to the woman at the well, ***"God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth"*** (John 4:24). Our purpose is to glorify God through worship and service, and be used by Him to proclaim and display His glory.

IV. SIN

“For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Sin as defined in this passage suggests that we, as humans, have “missed the mark” which God had set for us. We have come up short. But, what is sin?

A. The Nature of Sin

The Bible uses many different terms to describe sin, but they all have a commonality of man failing to live by and fulfill God's law. Adam and Eve's actions in the Garden of Eden brought sin into the world. God wanted them to respond to Him out of freely given love. He allowed evil to exist as an option so that they could freely choose to acknowledge God, but they chose evil instead (Galatians 5:13). Since then, we have all been born under the curse of that sin. Paul writes ***“I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out”*** (Romans 7:18). Man's sinful nature has great power and comes in many forms. At the core of man's sinful nature is selfishness (Galatians 5:17). It is selfishness that causes a removal of God and His law from its proper primary location within the heart of man (Ephesians 2:3). God is displaced by sensual pleasures of the flesh. Again Paul states, ***“Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires...”*** (Romans 8:5).

B. The Results of Sin

What then is the result of man's sinful nature? First of all, ***“Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God”*** (Romans 8:8). Secondly, ***“The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction;”*** (Galatians 6:8), and ***“For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die”*** (Romans 8:13). Sin broke man's relationship with God, and unless that relationship is repaired through God's plan--the shed blood of Jesus Christ-- eternal damnation results. Sin caused men to be spiritually dead. Ephesians 2:1-4 says,

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.

Without the work of God, sin would leave man without hope. ***“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”*** (Romans 6:23).

V. JESUS CHRIST

The means through which God chose to exhibit His grace was through the giving of His one and only son Jesus. Who is Jesus?

A. The Person of Christ

The first aspect of Jesus Christ to be considered is his personhood; his nature, his being, who he is. The Bible states that he is the Son of God, but also born of a virgin woman. Was he God, or was he man?

1. The Deity of Christ

Jesus Christ's appearance on earth was by no means normal. He was no mere man. He was God. Scripture uses his name and refers to him as God in many different contexts (Hebrews 1:8). Scripture proclaims that he is the Son of God (Matthew 16:16). He is called LORD (Psalm 110:1, Matthew 22:43). Revelation 19:16 states ***“On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.”*** John declares, ***“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*** Jesus Christ was and is fully God. Christ proclaimed it himself, ***“Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me”*** (John 14:11).

2. The Humanity of Christ

Christ's nature is not as simple as just being fully God however. At the same time Christ was fully God he was also fully man. He had a human body (Galatians 4:4, Luke 2:52) and was subject to the limitations of humanity. He; was thirsty (John 19:28), hungered (Matthew 4:2), wept (John 11:35), became tired (John 4:6), underwent tests and temptations (Matthew 4:1-11), and, he died (Matthew 27:50). Christ's humanity however, did not negate his deity. He was both fully man and fully God at the same time.

B. The Work of Christ

As the God-man, what then did Christ do while he was incarnate?

1. The Teaching of Christ

In his three years of ministry on the earth, Jesus Christ spent the majority of that time teaching people about God. The four gospel writers all relate a vast number of Jesus' teachings. The writers were limited however, in what they could record. John relates, ***“Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written”*** (John 21:25).

Often, Christ's teachings took the form of parables, which usually illustrated God's purpose and plan. Christ also taught who he was, and what he had come to do.

2. The Atonement

Of course, what Christ had come to do was to offer himself as a living sacrifice for sins. Isaiah prophesied about Jesus saying:

“But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

Christ's death and resurrection provided for his people the needed restoration of the original relationship with God. Jesus' sacrifice meant that his people could now have that relationship.

The only way Christ could be this sacrifice was if he was without sin. John states, ***“But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin”*** (1 John 3:5). Hebrews also proclaims his earthly perfection (Hebrews 4:15, 7:26, 9:14). The law was

powerless to forgive, but Christ accomplished what used to be impossible under the law (1 Timothy 2:6).

VI. HOLY SPIRIT

As Christ was preparing his disciples for his death on the cross, he told them, ***“But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you”*** (John 16:7). God, in his grace, knew that His children someone to be with them and care for them, and therefore he sent the Counselor (Romans 5:5). But just who is this “Counselor,” and what does he do?

A. The Person of Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit (αγιος πνευμα) is a person, just as Christ and The Father are. The name πνευμα, which means “wind,” tends to give the idea that the spirit is something other than a personal being. However, on occasion the Biblical author will exchange the name “Holy Spirit” which is neuter in Greek, with the masculine “He” (John 16:13-14), which goes against all normal rules of Greek grammar. The idea being forwarded is that the Holy Spirit is truly deity, and a personage of the God-head.

B. The Work of Holy Spirit

Jesus told his disciples:

“When He comes, (Holy Spirit) He will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment...But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you...But you know Him for He lives with you and will be in you.” (John 14,16)

Jesus' description of the Holy Spirit's work on earth fairly well summarizes what the Spirit was sent to do. The Holy Spirit regenerates us causing us to see God and His truth, he then lives in us, and intercedes on our behalf, forming an eternal seal of our redemption and eternal life.

The Holy Spirit is also the giver of spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:1-11). Life in the Spirit also produces fruit--evidence of the Spirit's indwelling (Galatians 5:22-23).

VII. SALVATION

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--not by works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9). Salvation is

wholly of God by grace on the basis of redemption of Jesus Christ, the merit of his shed blood, and not on the basis of human merit or works (1 Peter 1:18-19, Ephesians 1:7).

A. Effectual Calling

Before we can look at the point of conversion we must first address the direction in which salvation occurs, in other words, is salvation accomplished as an act of God's will or man's will. Does God elect some to be saved, or does man decide to reach out for God? This is a key debate that has raged for centuries. I believe that it is by the gracious Will of God, in which, before the foundation of the world (2 Thessalonians 2:13-13) He chose (elected) those whom He would graciously regenerate, save, sanctify and draw to himself. The central passage for this position is Romans 8:28-30:

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

So then, God elects us and draws us to himself (John 6:44, 65, 1 Peter 1:1-2, Ephesians 1:4, 11). His grace is so powerful, that we cannot resist it. We accept Him and believe and place our trust and hope in Him and set apart Jesus as Lord of our lives (1 Peter 3:15, 18.)

B. Conversion

Being made alive by the spirit and having our eyes opened (Colossians 2:13, Ephesians 2:4-5) to God's grace is the point of our conversion. The response of all those God so moves is belief, faith and repentance.

C. Regeneration

This is the essential act of God in salvation. As fallen sinful men we are spiritually dead, and incapable of saving ourselves or choosing to be saved. But, upon the Holy Spirit's quickening, or regenerating us and making us alive (Ephesians 2:4-5), we become a "new creation" or "made brand new" (LB). ***"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"*** (2 Corinthians 5:17).

D. Justification

Regeneration reverses the course of our life and changes our sinful nature. However, we still are liable or guilty for the sins we have committed. Our rebirth into Jesus and his death and resurrection, allows Christ to cover our past sins. He took the death sentence in our place, therefore we are justified, or made right, in God's eyes.

E. Sanctification

Simply defined, sanctification is the continuing work of God in a born again person's life, whereby their life is made to conform to the will and laws of God. God grants grace which can make us holy. 1 Thessalonians 5:23 states, ***"May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you***

through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Sanctification is a process. God, through the Holy Spirit, corrects our path, confronts us with and forgives our sin, and helps us to walk closer and closer to Him.

F. Perseverance

1 Peter 1:3-5 provides Scriptural insight to the perseverance of believers:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

This passage and others (Romans 8:31-39, Revelation 3:5) affirm the traditional Calvinist view that holds, “Once saved always saved.” If God's Spirit sustains us and seals us, and we are promised eternal life, then there is no way our salvation can ever be taken or given away. For not only does Christ protect us from outside attacks, but also inside doubts. God has called us to Him, and has written our names in the Book of Life. His power and grace certainly will preserve our faith (Romans 8!).

VIII. THE CHURCH

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19-20)

As Christ prepared to return to heaven, he left this exhortation for his disciples. It was their commission—their new work. With Christ no longer on earth to tell of his father, the task now must be carried on by his followers.

A. The Nature of the Church

“The Church” has been and still is a widely misunderstood concept. Many associate “The Church” with the building they go to on Sunday morning. Others feel that “The Church” is one specific denomination or group.

The term used in the Bible for the church literally means “called out ones” or “assembly.” It includes both Jews and Gentiles. It is, in essence, a spiritual body all truly regenerate believers which has Christ as its head. The Church serves as an earthly extension of Christ; we are now his incarnation. The Church is a body of those who seek to serve Christ and fellowship with one another.

B. The Mission of the Church

As Jesus proclaimed in Matthew 28:19-20 and as he stated in Acts 1:8, *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem,*

and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” The disciples and Jesus' followers were commanded to go out and proclaim. Jesus expected them to do so, but when he found them sitting in Jerusalem too long, he used Paul and others to challenge the new young fellowship to preach the Gospel everywhere. God wanted the Word to be spread throughout the world. The local church in Antioch, sending forth Paul to preach to others began the external mission of the church. The elders and pastors took on the other objective of teaching and making disciples.

C. The Government of the Church

Because the church is not only a group of universal believers, but also consists of local congregations, their needs to be some type of organization so that Christ's work can be carried out as effectively as possible. Paul and the other New Testament authors understood this and so laid out for us certain specific positions within the local church.

The first of these positions is that of an **elder** (πρεσβυτερος). The elders were appointed by Paul and Barnabas at each church (Acts 14:23), to be a group of leaders in whom authority was placed. Their duties were; to oversee (1 Timothy 3:1), to rule (1 Timothy 5:17), and to guard the right doctrine (Titus 1:90). The second position mentioned in that of a **deacon** (διακονος). This word means “to serve” or “to be a servant.” The deacons are to assist and serve the elders and the church (Acts 6:1-6, Philippians 1:1, 1 Timothy 3:8-13). The wives of the deacons may also have had a similar role of serving the church (Acts 16:1, 1 Timothy 3:11).

The other positions of the church are granted on the basis of the gifts the Holy Spirit has laid upon them. No other directions are given as how to organize a church government, however I believe that each individual church should, as a body appoint elders and deacons, who have the qualifications mentioned in Timothy and Titus, and give them the authority to run the church. Some local congregations may feel that their needs to be corporate decision making so that the church is knit closely together, and this is fine. The final word however, must come from those whom are holy and upright and have been given the authority to administer Christ's church.

D. The Ordinances of the Church

Part of Christ's great commission included giving the disciples the command to baptize in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This then was another function of the church. What other functions or ordinances was the church to carry out?

1. Baptism

Those who have become regenerate believing Christians are commanded to be baptized. The act is an outward sign of an inward reality. It proclaims that the person has been buried to his old sinful nature, and has been raised up a new person in Christ. Baptism itself is not that which saves, for as we have seen, salvation does not come from an action, but rather from faith. Baptism was ordained by Christ to give us the opportunity to be joined with him and proclaim our new faith.

How about the mode of baptism. The word itself, βαπτίζω (baptizo) means literally “to dip or to plunge into water.” In Mark 1:10 after Jesus was baptized, “he came up out of the water.” This is a symbolic act, therefore the symbolism must be maintained. Being placed under the water symbolizes death, and the rising out of the water symbolizes being raised to a new life. Any other mode of baptism would not hold the symbolic nature Christ intended it to represent.

2. Communion

Christ also gave us the ordinance of the “Lord's Supper” or communion (Matthew 26:26-28, Mark 14:22-24, Luke 22:19-20). This is also a symbolic act. Christ told his disciples that the blood represented his blood which would be shed for them. The bread represented his body that would be broken. Partaking of this meal was a call to remember (“this do in remembrance of me”) what Christ did on the cross. It also is a call to look forward, “*For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes*” (1 Cor. 11:26).

The elements themselves only represent or symbolize what Christ has done. They are in no way magically transformed in any way. The believer is not specially blessed in any way, other than receiving the blessing of partaking of the Lord's Supper in the fellowship of the body of believers.

Paul's instructions concerning the partaking of the Lord's Supper, place it in its proper context. It is to be a service of respect and dignified. Those who partake must properly examine themselves, and be mindful of what they are doing. Communion is for believers only, and should be administered by a respected person of the church, typically the pastor or elder.

IX. THE LAST THINGS

A good portion of Jesus' teaching on earth concerned the coming events, and the age to come. Known as **eschatology**, this is the study of things to come or future events.

A. Death

It has been said that there are only two certainties in life, death and taxes. It is true, that as living creatures, we as human beings will face death (Hebrews 9:27). When we are given life, God breathes into our physical bodies a spirit which is then joined to our physical nature. At death, our spirit is removed from our body and for the Christian, ascends to paradise (Luke 16:19-31). For Paul, and as it should be for all Christians, death has no sting for “*Death has been swallowed up in victory*” (1 Corinthians 15:54). To live means to live *for* Christ. To die means to live *with* Christ.

B. Intermediate State

For the non-Christian, the picture of death is not so positive. Whereas the Christian's spirit ascends to paradise, the spirit of those who die without knowing Christ descends to Hades. The spirit of both the Christian and the non-Christian then both await the final judgment which will come.

C. Second Coming

When Jesus was preparing to leave the earth he promised his disciples that he would return, stating, “*At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory*” (Matthew 24:30). Christ however, left the date uncertain. He said that not even the Son knows the time or date. Christ will return like a thief in the night (1 Thessalonians 5:2).

Because the time is uncertain, it would seem apparent that Christ's return would occur without a specific time sequence (The Tribulation) preceding it, which would allow one to calculate fairly closely the time of his return. Jesus states in John 14:3, "***And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.*** Christ's return will be a personal appearance in which he will come on the clouds of heaven and all the dead in Christ and those who remain on earth will be drawn up to meet Christ in the sky. The bodies of those who have died will be reunited with their spirit, and they will be given brand new spiritual bodies. This "rapture" will immediately precede the time of the tribulation at which time the Holy Spirit as manifested in the Church will be taken out of the way (2 Thessalonians 2:1-12, 1 Thessalonians 4 and 5, Revelation 3:10).

D. Tribulation

The tribulation period is a period of time which was prophesied by Daniel as the 70th week (Daniel 9:27). Based on this prophecy we know that the length of the tribulation will be 7 years. The first half of this time (42 months) will be characterized by a time of peace and relative prosperity on the earth. At the beginning of the second half of the tribulation however, the anti-Christ will declare himself to be God and set up his rule in the temple in Jerusalem. The harlot church (those who proclaimed religion, but were left after the rapture) will be persecuted along with the Jews. At the end of the 7 years, the armies of the Lord will defeat the army of Satan and the anti-Christ and the beast will be cast into the lake of fire. Then Christ will establish his kingdom on earth (Matthew 24:21, Revelation 6:15-17ff).

E. Millennium

This kingdom of Christ on earth will last for a set period of time (perhaps a thousand years), and is therefore called the millennium. Christ will be the head of government on the earth (Revelation 19:6). Satan will be bound during this period, but will be loosed for a short while and deceive the nations of the world to revolt one last time against Christ. But, Satan will be defeated and thrown into the lake of fire like the beast and the false prophet.

At the end of the earthly reign of Christ, God will deliver his final judgment. Those who have believed in Him will be with God in heaven for eternity. Those who have not believed will be doomed to hell (Gehenna) for all eternity where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 8:12)

***He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon."
Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.
The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen.
Revelation 22:20-21***

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