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**The Basis of Good Church Doctrine
is Right Theology
about God and His Relationship to Man**

Trinity

The mystery of the Trinity can be quickly described, but a thousand lifetimes of thought can not understand it. The Trinity has existed eternally and has been revealed to us as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, with distinct personal attributes, but without division of nature, essence, or being. These three persons are co-equal and are one God. Each of the persons within the Godhead is Deity. None of the persons of God is inferior or superior to the others in essence. Although the word "trinity" does not appear in the Bible, careful study yields no other answer to the nature of God.

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. (Mt. 28:19)

God the Father

God the Father, the first person of the Trinity, is the Creator and Ruler of the universe (Ge. 1 - 2). He rules with providential care over His world, His creatures, and human history according to His purposes (Isa. 40:28-31). He is real; He is revealed to us through His Word and His Son, Jesus Christ; and He is relational. He is fatherly in his attitude toward all people, and He is Father in truth to those who become children of God through faith in Jesus Christ. He is all-loving, all-powerful, and all-wise. He is holy, eternal, and transcendent.

I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. (Isa. 46:9)

God, the Son, Jesus Christ

God the Son is the second person of the Trinity. His name, *Jesus*, means “salvation of God”; the name *Christ* identified Jesus as the Messiah. Jesus is the eternal Son of God (Jn. 3:16) and He is completely God. In His incarnation as Jesus Christ, He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary (Mt. 1:23). He voluntarily took on a full human nature and lived a sinless human life (Php. 2:6-7). He offered Himself as the perfect substitutionary sacrifice for the atonement of sins of all people by dying on the cross (Php. 2:8). It was the final, last, and complete sacrifice necessary for all people. By His blood, we are saved. He arose from the dead after three days to demonstrate His power over sin and death. He ascended to Heaven’s glory and will return again someday to earth to reign as King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Php. 2:5-11). He now dwells in all believers as the living and ever-present Lord.

“I tell you the truth,” Jesus answered, “before Abraham was born, I am.”
(Jn. 8:58)

God, the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, is not an impersonal “force” or “it.” He is present in the world to make men aware of their need for Jesus Christ. He lives in every Christian from the moment of salvation. He provides the Christian with power for living, understanding of spiritual truth, and guidance in doing what is right. He gives every believer spiritual gifts when they are saved. As Christians, we live under His control daily (Jn. 16: 5-15). He calls men to the Savior and effects regeneration (new birth). He is our teacher and Guide. He convicts us of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. He cultivates Christian character, comforts believers (Paraclete), empowers, inspires, intercedes for us, and seals the believer unto the day of final redemption (Ro. 8:26). His presence in the Christian is the assurance of God to bring the believer into the fullness of the stature of Christ. As Christians, we are to live Spirit-filled lives (Gal. 5:22-25).

But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. (Jn. 14:26)

Is the Bible true?

The Holy Bible was written by God's chosen human messengers under the supernatural guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is God's revelation of Himself to humanity. It is the authoritative* truth by which we are instructed to live. As the inspired, written Word of God, it is the basis for how we conduct ourselves. I believe in the inerrancy and infallibility of the Holy Scriptures. (I understand that "inerrant" means *free from error* and "infallible" means *will not fail; is true and trustworthy*. *"Authoritative" means *the standard, the rule, or the final word*.)

The Bible was written over a span of 1,500 years (fifty generations) by forty different authors on three continents – without contradiction – with Christ being its focal point. The Old Testament gives us the Messianic hope. The Gospels stand as a trustworthy account of Christ's incarnation and plan of salvation. Acts shares the work of the Holy Spirit in the early church. The Epistles interpret Christ and His work, and Revelation announces His final triumph and glory. The books of the Bible that have been officially recognized as inspired Scripture are referred to as the Canon.

Inspiration of the Bible: The Dynamic Theory, which I believe to be the truth, states that the Holy Spirit inspired the thought rather than the exact wording and that He guarded the writers from error. The Dictation/Verbal Theory purports that the Holy Spirit selected the very words of the Scriptures and dictated them to the writers. The Intuition/Illumination theories say that only portions of the Bible are inspired.

Illumination is the process of the Holy Spirit working in our lives today to help us understand the Bible. The primary purpose of the Spirit's illumination is not just to increase our knowledge, though; it is to change lives.

Is the creation story true? Yes.

Was Adam a real person? Yes.

Was Jonah really swallowed by a fish? Yes. (See Mt. 12:40-41 regarding Christ's reference to the Old Testament event.)

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Ti. 3:16-17)

How can a person be saved?

Salvation is God's free gift to us, but we must accept it. We can never make up for our sins by self-improvement or good works. Only by trusting in God's Son, Jesus Christ, and His offer of forgiveness can anyone be saved from sin's penalty. When we turn from our self-ruled life and turn to Jesus in faith, we are saved. Eternal life begins the moment one receives Jesus Christ into his life by faith (1 Jn. 5:5).

The natural question is: "Since faith is a choice, that only some decide to make, is it not therefore, some form of a work?" The Bible clearly answers this question. Faith is not a work or accomplishment; it is a gift (Eph. 2:9 below).

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

How were you saved?

As background information, I will mention that I was "sprinkled" as an infant and raised as a Catholic in my mother and father's church, which taught me the importance of believing in God and trusting Him. I later attended my husband's church (Church of Christ) for six years, and I grew deeply in my faith through God and the pastor's promptings about relationships, fellowship, fifteen-minute Quiet Times, study, tithing, fasting, and ministry. I had loved God and the Holy Spirit (but not Jesus – who I didn't think could possibly be real) dearly all my life, but I slowly became "sold out" for Christ – heart, body, and soul...but not mind. In 1985, as an adult, I chose baptism by immersion after my cousin died suddenly of toxic shock.

Several years later, I began to read my Bible more regularly and grapple with the cognitive confusion I felt over whether Jesus Christ was fact or fiction. I determined that He must be a symbolic figure, just like the hundreds of characters I had read about when I was a Comparative Literature major in college. After all, how could our loving Father allow His real Son to die such a horrible death on the cross? After much study, many sermons, and continuous revelation from the Holy Spirit about the Trinity, the Bible as a document, and passages about being saved by faith in Jesus Christ, I better understood the layman's version of justification, regeneration, sanctification, and glorification. I accepted Jesus as fully human and fully God – and as my real and personal Savior. Over the years, I have become more and more surrendered to His Perfect Will for my life, but I can now see more and more areas of my life that need His grace and mercy.

What is sin and how do I get forgiveness for my sins from God?

Sin

Sin is the only denial of the living God, from whom we draw our life and existence (Ac. 17:28 – “in him we live, move, and exist”). It is the only rebellion against the authority of God. It is separation from God, who is holy. It is the doing of evil. In our sinfulness, we stand guilty before God and still ready to disobey Him again.

Forgiveness

Forgiveness is available to all who repent of their sins and humbly submit to God’s Lordship. Confession is the admission of personal responsibility and guilt combined with the commitment to turn from our wicked ways. Forgiveness is nothing less than total and perfect reconciliation with God. This restoration is made possible by the substitutionary work of Christ for sinful humanity on the cross (Eph. 1:7). First John 1:9 says, “But if we confess our sins, he will forgive our sins, because we can trust God to do what is right. He will cleanse us from all the wrongs we have done.” (See David’s confession in Ps. 51. Yes, David was forgiven, even though Christ had not died yet for all sins.)

Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not hide my iniquity. I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord” -- then you forgave the guilt of my sin. (Ps. 32:5)

Most importantly, love each other deeply, because love will cause many sins to be forgiven. (1 Pe. 4:8)

Eternal security: Can a person lose his salvation?

Because God gives us eternal life through Jesus Christ, the believer is secure in that salvation. If a person has been genuinely saved, he/she cannot “lose” it. The Holy Spirit seals all true believers, giving them a promise and a guarantee of eternal security. Salvation is maintained by the grace and power of God, not by the self-effort of the Christian.

What if a person commits suicide? John 10:28-29 tells us that no one is able to snatch the believer out of Christ’s hands. Second Timothy 1:12 says, “He [God] is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until the day of his return.” Once Jesus Christ is truly accepted, even the believer himself does not possess the power to give salvation back. Romans 8:38-39 says, “For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession – to the praise of his glory. (Eph. 1:13-14)

What is the difference between the assurance of salvation and eternal security?

Assurance is the confident realization that I have done what is needed to be done in order to be saved; whereas, *eternal security* is the promise of God of “once saved, always saved.” *Assurance* has to do with removal of doubt as to whether a person was ever saved in the first place; *security* addresses the question of whether it is possible to lose one’s salvation.

What is the importance of the Lord's Supper?

Celebrating the Lord's Supper, Communion, is a command of Jesus to His church. It is an ordinance of the church that symbolizes the truths of Christ's death and resurrection, which are His redeeming work and promised return in His second coming (Mt. 26:29). It is a time of fellowship with Christ and His people (1 Co. 10:21). It has no power in itself to give saving or sanctifying grace to those who partake. (All acts of obedience shower us with more of God's grace.) It is a memorial or remembrance of the sacrifice that our Savior made on the cross. The elements of bread and wine simply represent the broken body and spilt blood of Jesus. Communion is for believers only.

... and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after supper, he took the cup, saying, "This is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me. For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." (1 Co. 11:24-26)

What is the importance of Baptism?

Baptism is an ordinance of the church that represents our identification with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is not a requirement of salvation, but rather an act of obedience. Rising up out of the water after immersion is a symbolic statement of the believer's death to sin, burial of his/her old life and of the resurrection to walk in the newness of life in Christ. It is a public declaration of one's allegiance to Christ. **(Although salvation is essential to baptism, baptism is not essential to salvation. It is simply an identification as a believer.)** Baptism is essential to church membership and communion, but it is not a means of grace (Ac. 2:41; 8:38; 10:47).

Baptism is the immersion of a believer (believer's baptism – those old enough to confess their faith in Christ, not paedobaptism) in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. (The Greek word, "baptizo" means *to dip, plunge, submerge, or immerse*. "Sprinkling" or "pouring" may be necessary for those with a serious, mental/physical, extenuating circumstance.)

We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. (Ro. 6:4)

Explain indwelling.

To be indwelt or baptized with the Spirit means that the Holy Spirit created a new nature in us at the time of our salvation. It means that He took up residence in our person. It is what God does for us as a one-time event in establishing our relationship with Jesus Christ, thus putting the believer in the position to receive power. The indwelling Spirit of holiness is the initiator in us for the desire to be holy and to live a transformed life. The Holy Spirit magnifies Christ, not Himself.

For we were all baptized by one Spirit. (1 Co. 12:13a)

You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. (Ro. 8:9)

Explain "filling."

To be filled with the Spirit is a progression from merely being indwelt to being yielded to the Will of the Father. It means that you have surrendered your life to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is *experiential*, that is, having to do with the deliberate experience of submitting to the Spirit's control. It is commanded in Eph. 5:18, and it is a continuous transformation process of character building. Scriptural signs of being filled by the Spirit include joy, victory, power, boldness, liberty, fruit of the Spirit, sensitivity to sin, and submission.

After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly. (Ac. 4:31)

What are spiritual gifts, how do they differ from talents, and how does one get them?

Spiritual gifts are special gifts bestowed on Christians by the power of the Holy Spirit, for the defined purposes of 1) building up the church and edifying believers, 2) the formation of Christian character, and 3) service to the community. Some examples of those gifts are wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, exhortation, teaching, faith, administration, mercy, helps, prophecy, discerning of spirits, speaking in tongues, and interpretation of tongues. (Ro. 12:3-8). Love, the greatest of all spiritual gifts, is to guide the use of all other gifts (1 Co. 13). A spiritual gift is often an enhancement of a natural talent (which might previously have been latent or evident) that the Holy Spirit supernaturally anoints for a specific purpose of the church body for an undesignated season.

To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another the ability to speak in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. (1 Co. 12:8-10)

What is the gift of tongues and what does the Bible say about speaking in tongues?

The gift of tongues is the Spirit-given ability to speak in languages or ecstatic utterances not known to the speaker. It is a spiritual gift bestowed upon sovereignly chosen individuals in the church. The purpose of tongues, particularly in Corinth and the surrounding areas during the first centuries of the church, was a means of worship, thanksgiving, and prayer. The Pentecostal teaching that tongues is a necessary sign of baptism by the Holy Spirit has no scriptural foundation. Paul said that all believers in Corinth were baptized (1 Co. 12:13) but that not all spoke in tongues (v. 30).

Tongues, today, is intended with the other gifts, to be exercised for the building up of the church and the mutual benefit of its members. It is to be done in an orderly fashion, which includes an interpretation of what is being said. It is not appropriate in a busy worship service or with an impure motive of self-edification. The gift of tongues is often called a "Missions Gift" because speaking in other languages (without knowing the language) is a missional activity for spreading the Gospel.

On the Day of Pentecost, the followers of Christ "were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." (Ac. 2:4)

What is meant by the *priesthood of believers*?

The priesthood to which Israel was called continues today for men and women in the church. Every Christian is a believer-priest and is to be of service in the kingdom of God. A priest is one who “builds” bridges between Jesus and non-believers (1 Pe. 2:5). Jesus, the High Priest, built a bridge between God and us (Heb. 7:23-28).

You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, his own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. (1 Pe. 2:9)

What is grace?

Grace is the undeserved and gracious blessing (unmerited favor) freely given to human beings by God. In fact, grace is God’s gift of freedom to us. It is His opportune, unsolicited lovingkindness to needy and helpless sinners. It is the enabling gift by which God redeems, sanctifies, and glorifies His people. The only appropriate human response to grace is faith (Jn. 1:16-17). The Christian experience begins in grace, and it continues in grace (2 Co. 12:9).

Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are. (Ac. 15:10-11 – Peter said in talking about circumcision vs. grace)

What is regeneration?

Regeneration is a new birth, a work of God’s grace whereby believers become new creatures in Christ (2 Co. 5:17). It is a change of heart wrought by the Holy Spirit through conviction of sin. It is a decisive experience that happens once for all, though it has continuing results in the life of a Christian. It involves a change in inner nature. Before the new birth, self and sin are in control; but after it, the Holy Spirit is in control (Tit. 3:3-7).

In reply Jesus declared, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.” (Jn. 3:3)

What is justification?

Justification has often been explained simply as “Just as if I’d never sinned.” It is God’s gracious and full acquittal of all sinners who repent and believe in Christ. It means that Jesus “made a person right” with God, that the demands of God’s holy law have been fully satisfied by Christ’s life and death. It declares us eternally “not guilty” (Ro. 5:1). Justification delivers us from the penalty of sin. It involves a change in one’s standing before God judicially. Justification entails the removal of condemnation through forgiveness, which is based upon Christ’s bearing of the condemnation. The basis of justification is the righteousness of Christ, not human faith (Gal. 2:15-21).

He did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies the man who has faith in Jesus. (Ro. 3:26)

What is sanctification?

Sanctification is the act of being set apart once for all to be holy (1 Co. 6:11), and it is the experience of growing in Christlikeness (1 Th. 5:23-24). It is “once and complete,” and it is “continual and progressive” (Heb. 10:14). It is the process that sets the believer apart for God’s purposes. It enables him/her to progress toward moral and spiritual perfection through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Sanctification delivers us from the power of sin, because of the power of Jesus’ death and resurrection. The believer must cooperate with God’s process of growth by beginning to act in a new way – putting off the old self and putting on the new self (Ro. 6:18).

If a man cleanses himself from the latter, he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work. (2 Ti. 2:21)

What is glorification?

Glorification is the completed act of our being with God for eternity. It is the culmination of salvation and is the final blessed and abiding state of the redeemed. Glorification delivers us from the presence of sin.

And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. (Ro. 8:30)

What is meant by the phrase, “competency of the soul”? (not used in the Bible)

Competency of the soul means that people are not puppets and that God does not coerce us against our will to believe anything. God grants to every Christian the right to read and interpret the Bible for him/herself as led by the Holy Spirit. That interpretation must be in harmony with the overall teachings of the Bible and must adhere to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, for the Holy Spirit neither contradicts Himself nor denies God’s revelation in His Son.

It also means that we should not coerce each other into believing what we believe. A responsible man must be free to decide for himself in matters of religion. We are called, therefore, to minister to the unsaved using persuasion as directed by the Holy Spirit.

And if you are asked about your Christian hope, always be ready to explain it. But you must do this in a gentle and respectful way. Keep your conscience clear. Then if people speak evil against you, they will be ashamed when they see what a good life you live because you belong to Christ. (1 Peter 3:15-16)

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