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A DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

BIBLIOLOGY: DOCTRINE OF THE SCRIPTURES

The Holy Bible is God's inspired, inerrant, and authoritative Word. Contained within the Old Testament and New Testament (consisting of 39 books and 27 books, respectively), the whole counsel of God is revealed—either explicitly or through scriptural deduction (cf. Westminster Confession [WC]; the Baptist Faith and Message [BFM]). By the phrase *whole counsel of God*, it must be seen that the Holy Scriptures are entirely trustworthy and true to express what is necessary to glorify God, as well as that which is integral for man's salvation, faith, and life (WC).

The canonical Scriptures comprise the 66 books mentioned above of the Old and New Testaments alone and do not include the extra-biblical books known as the Apocrypha. Those books deemed canonical (and thus divinely inspired) are attested by preceding generations of the Church, including the Apostles, early believers, and the Church Fathers. The criteria utilized to determine the canonicity of the biblical texts (mainly NT texts) were comprised of Apostolic origin (or authorship), catholicity, and the Rule of Faith—or an early credal system of belief among the Church Fathers and early believers.

The canonization of Scripture was accomplished through “reception,” or, to state it more clearly, in the years following Christ's ascension, the Church received from the Apostles actual, inspired writings and instruction, and those writings have been passed down over the generations as the truly inspired Word of God. The Apostles affirmed the Hebrew Scriptures of the Old Testament and composed their texts by the divine instruction and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. In this capacity, the Scriptures' authenticity and authority are recognized by the Church historic. They depict the unifying action and power of the Holy Spirit within the Church throughout the ages.

Scripture attests to its authentic nature as God's divinely inspired and revealed Word. The Bible describes its contents as that which has been “breathed out by God” for profitable teaching and preparation of the Christian for living a holy life in worship (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16). In 2 Peter, the first chapter, one can read that all the Scriptures, especially the prophetic writings, are not meant to lead men astray as “cleverly devised myths.” Instead, they are to be viewed as a “lamp shining in a dark place,” not written by man's hands merely, but spoken by God himself and composed through the “carrying along” of its authors by the Holy Spirit. The Bible declares

itself the living and active Word of God (cf. Heb. 4:12), not in need of any man's additions or human-centric interpretations (cf. Deut 4:1-2; WC), but that which is at work in the hearts of believers as the complete, revealed Word of God (1 Thess. 2:13).

The Bible is indeed the revealed and inspired Word of God for the edification and guidance of Christian believers. "It has God as its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter" (BFM). The Bible is the center of Christian union and the standard by which every Christian teaching, creed, opinion, or action should be tried (BFM). Jesus Christ is at its center—the revelation of God's salvific love for humanity. The Holy Bible is foundational for true Christian faith and the necessary "perfect treasure of divine instruction" (BFM).

THEOLOGY: DOCTRINE OF GOD

THE TRIUNE GOD: THREE-IN-ONE

As attested to by the Holy Bible, the Apostle's Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Baptist Faith and Message, I must affirm that God is a triune God. God is eternal and eternally triune, or three-in-one. God has revealed himself to man as, like the above creeds state, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

From the testimony of Scripture, one can see how God is genuinely three-in-one. In passages like Deuteronomy 6 and Isaiah 44:6, God speaks of himself as the only God. God makes clear that his authority is singular and there is no other like him. But how exactly does this promote the notion of the Holy Trinity?

Other passages of Scripture suggest, in conjunction with those above, that God alone is God but does indeed exist in three separate yet equal persons. Genesis 1:26 is one of the clearest examples of God using plural language, referring to himself when he suggests making man "in our image." In other passages, Jesus Christ himself equates himself to God. In the Gospel of John, Jesus is explicit regarding his oneness with God the Father. John 10:30 and John chapter 17 contain plain language regarding this divine union between Christ and God the Father. Acts 5:3-4 also suggests the oneness of the Holy Spirit with God the Father.

It is clear from Scripture that God is triune comprised of three equal yet separate persons. Each person is unique, but one in the Godhead. The beauty of the trinity is the depiction of the magnitude of power that exists with God. He is the creator and sustainer, enacting his divine will as Father, Son, and Spirit. The Westminster Confession states this well:

In the unity of the Godhead, there be three persons of one substance, power, and eternity; God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. The Father is of

none, neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son.

God the Father:

The Baptist Faith and Message describes God the Father as reigning “with providential care over His universe, His creatures, and the flow of the stream of human history according to the purposes of His grace.” Much like the language in the Apostle’s Creed, God is the all-powerful Father, the Maker of heaven and earth.

The Bible explicitly depicts the nature of God the Father. Romans 8:14-15 is one of the most straightforward declarations of God being Father. Here, Paul communicates to Christians that they are called out as adopted, beloved children of “Abba, Father” and freed from the spirit of slavery to sin. In Matthew chapter 6—the Lord’s Prayer—one can quickly determine that God is Father. Christ teaches in Scripture to pray to God as Father praising his name and seeking that his divine, paternal, and loving will be done for his glory upon the earth.

Peter writes in his first epistle describing God as Father along with Paul in 1 Corinthians 8:6. The Scriptures speak of God the Father as “all powerful, all knowing, all loving, and all wise,” who is “Father in truth to those who become children of God through faith in Jesus Christ” (BFM). He is the judge of sin and the Father of salvation. Though God does not clear those guilty of sin (cf. Ex. 34:7), he loves humanity and has provided the only avenue for substitutionary salvation—his eternal Son, Jesus Christ.

God the Son, aka Christology

Throughout the history of the Church, the debate over the triune nature of the Godhead has been continuous. The aspect of the discussion most focused upon has been God the Son. Many a council has been convened to establish a unified view regarding the Trinity, but more specifically, the generation of Jesus the Son from God the Father.

The Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325) and the Council of Constantinople (A.D. 381) are just a couple of examples where the second person of the Trinity was deliberated over. The discussion ranged from Arius viewing Christ as having been created *ex nihilo* (out of nothing) as an offshoot of the Father’s will to Alexander’s notion of Christ being *of* the same essence (*homoousias*) and *from* the same essence (*exousias*) as God the Father. The Council of Nicaea favored Alexander’s view. The Cappadocian fathers later supported it. They worked further to clarify the persons of the trinity (hypostases) and to define that each person of the Trinity was one in the Godhead’s nature and operation. It was not until the Council of Chalcedon (A.D. 451)

that the nature of Jesus Christ was settled upon in an orthodox manner. At Chalcedon, it was determined that Jesus indeed possesses two natures—human and divine. Still, neither nature detracts from the other nor detracts from the unity of each within the person of Jesus. These leaders at Chalcedon agreed that Christ was like humanity in every way except in sin and in every way like God.

With the historical framework established, it must be made clear that Christ is the eternal Son of God. He has ever existed as the eternally begotten Son of the Father (John 1; Col. 1:15-20). He was incarnated as Jesus Christ—conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary (BFM, Apostles' Creed [AC]). Jesus is entirely God and entirely human—the true Son of God (1 John 5:9-11). He embodies, perfectly reveals, and accomplishes the will of God the Father as a human without sin (1 Pet. 2:21-25), fulfilling the divine Law outlined in the Old Testament Scriptures, and he makes way for the salvation of all men (BFM; John 12:44-50). Salvation has been accomplished on man's behalf due to Christ's substitutionary death upon the cross (Romans 3:23-26).

Jesus was raised from the dead on the third day following his crucifixion (AC; Luke 24:46; John 20; Matt. 28). He appeared to his disciples in bodily form and ascended to the right hand of God the Father (AC; Acts 1:6-11). At the right hand of the Father, Jesus is the Christian's "One Mediator, fully God, fully man, in whose Person is effected the reconciliation between God and man" (BFM). In glorious triumph, he is to return bodily and will return to judge the world and complete his redemptive purposes (AC; BFM; Matt. 16:27, 24:30; Luke 21:25-28).

God the Holy Spirit: Pneumatology

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God, fully divine and eternally proceeding from the Father and Son (BFM; WC; Gen. 1:2; 2 Cor. 3:17-18). God, the Holy Spirit, has inspired the writing of the Scriptures and enables men to understand truth (BFM). The Holy Spirit aided in the incarnation of Christ and raised him from the dead (Rom. 8:9-11). God the Spirit is responsible for working in men's hearts, calling them to truth, convicting them of sin, and guiding them to righteousness (Acts 4:31; esp. 1 Cor. 2:10-14).

The Spirit calls men to Christ—enabling faith and effecting regeneration (BFM). Without the Holy Spirit, man would not know the true salvation accomplished through Jesus Christ's death and resurrection. The Holy Spirit is also the comforter of the faithful and the provider of spiritual gifts meant to aid the body of believers known as the Church of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is the enactor of Jeremiah 31:31-34 inscribing the new covenant in Christ upon the very

hearts of believers. He seals believers into the fold of God “unto the day of final redemption” (BFM).

In John 16, Jesus states, “...It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you...When the Spirit of Truth comes, he will guide you into all truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears, he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.” The Holy Spirit, as the third person of the Holy Trinity, is the communicator and guide for the Church. He is one with and equal to both the Son and the Father, and he manifests the presence of God—especially as teacher, comforter, and revealer—among the Church.

The Holy Spirit indwells believers and ushers them into righteous living. Believers are sanctified and cleansed in the name of Jesus and the Spirit (cf. 1 Corinthians 6). Because of this, theologians of the past, like Johann Gerhard and John Wesley, have sought to challenge believers to live sanctified lives. Gerhard once wrote, “because of the blessing of regeneration and the beginning of renewal, we are no less temples of the Holy Spirit. From this, you know that you must deplore and detest your sins, for the Spirit of God who dwells in you will not dwell in a body enslaved to sin” (*Handbook of Consolations*, p. 50). The Holy Spirit purifies believers from sin, enacting what Christ accomplished upon the cross, but also challenges the believer to pursue holiness. Wesley would concur but add that we only pursue righteousness in response to God’s love and that we cannot know we have God’s love and forgiveness without the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is the “voice of God” in the lives of believers and the one who beckons men to faith. As the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit is no mere “third fiddle” but an equal and equally important person of the Godhead. 1 John 3:24 states, “And it is by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit which he has given us.” Without the Spirit, no one would know the love of God or the forgiveness for sin accomplished by Jesus. The Spirit loves believers and seeks to assure all who have faith that they are the children of God. The Spirit is indeed God and the actual active presence of God in believers’ lives and throughout the world.

HAMARTIOLOGY: DOCTRINE OF SIN

Genesis 3 narrates quite clearly how sin entered the world through the disobedience of the first man—Adam (cf. Romans 5:12,19). Sin consists of acting contrarily to the nature of God, who created man to worship and glorify Himself. Sin separates all humanity from God and requires atonement for reconciliation (Romans 5:12,19). No person can live a sinless life, and all need salvation, as humanity no longer seeks after God (Romans 3:10-12). Salvation and

reconciliation exist in the personal provision (by God) of a substitutionary sacrifice found solely in the person of Jesus Christ.

SOTERIOLOGY: JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

During the Protestant Reformation, five pillars of the Christian faith were highlighted and “recaptured” by the Church. These five pillars are *sola scriptura*, *sola fide*, *sola gratia*, *solo Christo*, and *soli Deo Gloria*. The pillars of the Reformation are necessary for an accurate and proper understanding of justification from sin in God’s eyes. It is only through Scripture that one can learn about the grace of God and the sacrifice of Christ on man’s behalf and thus come to faith—and all of this for the glory of God. Only through faith in Christ and grace can one be justified from sin and saved from eternal separation from God.

The Baptist Faith and Message notes that salvation consists of four movements: regeneration, justification, sanctification, and glorification. In this doctrinal statement, the ideas of regeneration and justification go hand in hand as one’s “new birth” is accomplished only by faith and evidences the justification of one from his life of sin. According to the Reformation tradition, this is seemingly correct. Ephesians 2 is quite clear regarding justification by faith through grace. Paul writes here that there is no manner by which a man might save himself through his actions. Only through the grace of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, can one find justification from sin and eternal salvation.

In the Old Testament, one learns that the great patriarch of Israel, Abraham, was counted righteous only because of his faith and not due to his accomplishments (Gen. 15:6). In Habakkuk 2:4, the Scriptures state that “the righteous shall live by faith.” Paul, in Romans, takes up this idea and notes this about the Gospel of Jesus Christ: “...in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith’” (Rom. 1:17). Paul sees the Gospel as the definitive source of justification, and faith in the Gospel as the means for its reception.

In Genesis 3, the fall of man is depicted, illuminating the fact that everyone on the earth is corrupt in sin. Paul elaborates on this at the beginning of Romans chapter 3, where he clarifies that no one is righteous or sinless. Everyone needs justification in the eyes of God, and no person can accomplish justification by their own means. This is where justification by faith alone comes into play. In Galatians 3, Paul relays that it is only through faith in Christ that one might receive the Spirit in faith, and this only after expressing faith in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. To understand this idea more readily, one must observe what Paul has written in

Romans 3:21-26 especially, “For there is no distinction: for *all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.*”

In Hebrews chapter 11, the Bible includes a great list of the faithful throughout salvation history. Each of the figures represented was alive during the Old Testament period and never knew the fulfilled promise of God in the person of Jesus Christ. That is not the case for humanity today. The promise of redemption and justification has been entirely fulfilled in Jesus Christ, and he has fully satisfied man’s sin debt in God’s eyes (WC). One needs only to trust in Him to receive this promise. It is like in the Gospel of John, which reads, “whoever believes in the Son has eternal life” (John 3:36). It also holds, however, that “whosoever does not obey the Son shall not see life” (John 3:36). Obedience for eternal life is indeed obedience in faith—trusting the Word of God—and recognizing that justification is only through faith in him who offered himself for the sake of all man’s sins—namely, Jesus Christ.

ECCLESIOLOGY: DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH

Regarding the Church, it is necessary to acknowledge that it is comprised universally of “all of the redeemed of all the ages, believers from every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation” (BFM). It must be noted that it is further divided into local congregations, which gather together to participate in the ordinances and hear the Word preached. The local church is most often referenced in the New Testament writings (cf. Acts 5:11; 8:1; 11:26; Romans 16:5, etc.).

Those of the Church are “associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel; observing the two ordinances of Christ, governed by His laws, exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His Word, and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth” (BFM). The Church exists under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and is held accountable to the precepts of His Word in Scripture.

THE ORDINANCES:

Baptism:

Baptism is a sacred act in obedience of faith—a “divine ordinance” (according to Luther). It is a holy faith practice instituted in the Word of God, representing the cleansing of sin by the sacrifice, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As the Baptist Faith and Message states, baptism consists of immersing the believer in water in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy

Spirit. It represents the believer's death to sin, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus (BFM).

Calvin writes in his *Institutes* that through baptism, God exhibits the "grace of deliverance" from sin. He elaborates that baptism is a symbolic release from the condemnation of sin and notes that the "sway of sin is abolished," allowing one to enter into covenant community with the Church. Calvin's view is meaningful and powerful but must be reserved for professing believers. Baptism depicts God's mercy and forgiveness and is necessary as an act of public obedience for every believer desiring to join the Church.

Communion, or "The Lord's Supper":

The Baptist Faith and Message briefly state that the Lord's Supper (Communion) is "a symbolic act of obedience whereby members of the church, through partaking of the bread and the fruit of the vine, memorialize the death of the Redeemer and anticipate His second coming" (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:23-26). To be sure, partaking of the Lord's Supper is to obediently memorialize what Christ Jesus has accomplished on humanity's behalf. One must also recognize that the Holy Spirit nourishes the Body of Christ (the Church) through the Lord's Supper by granting blessed remembrance, inspiring devotion (looking forward to Christ's triumphant return), and promoting unity. The Lord's Supper should be practiced regularly in accordance with Scripture.