

INDEX

<u>The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture</u>	Page 2
The Bible is the inspired Word of God.	
<u>God as the Holy Trinity</u>	Page 4
God is revealed to us in different ways through one or all of His three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.	
<u>God in Relationship with Creation</u>	Page 6
God created everything and is the only One worthy of our worship. He continues to rule over all creation.	
<u>Humanity - Original Righteousness and Fall into Sin</u>	Page 8
Humans were originally created righteous in God's holy and loving image. We fell from righteousness and now require God's grace to restore our relationship with Him.	
<u>Jesus Christ - Incarnation of the Eternal Word</u>	Page 10
Jesus Christ is both fully God and fully human.	
<u>Jesus Christ - His Atoning Work</u>	Page 12
Jesus Christ died on the cross so that we may have a pathway to a restored relationship with God.	
<u>Salvation by Grace Through Faith</u>	Page 14
Our salvation depends solely on God's grace.	
<u>Sanctification and the Work of the Holy Spirit</u>	Page 16
God continues to transform us into the likeness of Christ as we grow in faith.	

THE INSPIRATION AND AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

The Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are God's uniquely revealed and written Word, inspired and illuminated by the Holy Spirit, and are the church's first and final authority in all areas of faith and life, including, but not limited to, theological doctrine, mission, church order, character, and ethical behavior.

The Bible speaks to us with the authority of God himself. Jesus Christ is Lord of the church, and He rules the church through the written word of Scripture. We seek to understand, love, follow, obey, surrender, and submit to God's Word – both Jesus Christ (the living Word of God), and the Scriptures (the inspired, written Word of God, which bears true and faithful witness to Jesus Christ).

Scriptures

Psalm 119:105; Isaiah 40:8; Matthew 4:4; I Thessalonians 2:13; II Timothy 3:16-17

Confessions

Scots Confession Ch. XIX, 3.19

Second Helvetic Confession, 5.001, 5.003, 5.010

Westminster Confession of Faith, Ch. I

Larger Catechism 7.113-114

Confession of 1967, 9.27-9.30

We further affirm . . .

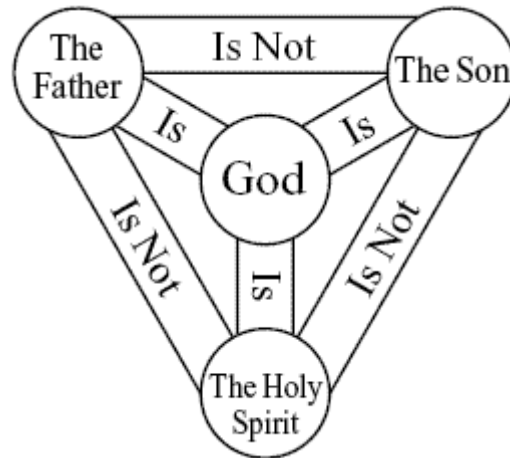
- that any doctrine concerning what is to be believed or how we are to live must be read with the doctrine in one hand and the Scriptures in the other hand,
 - that biblical authority supersedes any human authority, cultural norm, or ideology, and the primary voice to which the church should listen is that of the Lord Jesus Christ as expressed in Scripture,
 - that revelations asserted to be from the Spirit of God may not be separated from the Spirit-inspired words of Scripture and must be consistent with them.
 - In discerning whether a doctrine is true doctrine or false doctrine, we subscribe to the Declaration of Barmen's exclamation: "Try the spirits whether they are of God! Prove also the words . . . whether they agree with Holy Scripture and with the Confessions of the Fathers. If you find [they] are speaking contrary to Scripture, then do not listen to [them]! But if you find that [they] are taking [their] stand upon Scripture, then let no fear or temptation keep you from treading with [them] the path of faith and obedience to the Word of God, in order that God's people be of one mind upon earth. . ." (8.04)
- as historical fact: the witness of Scripture to the incarnation, birth, ministry, miracles, death, resurrection, ascension of Jesus Christ and the promise of His return (as, for example, summarized in I Cor. 15:3-7 and Acts 10:38)
- that the Jesus Christ we follow is none other than the Person, the Work, the Will of Jesus Christ as revealed and attested for us in Holy Scripture.
- that all of Scripture is God's inspired, written Word.

- that Scripture is God's Word, spoken in diverse cultural situations in the past and, yet, continues to be true and applicable in a changing world and in every form of human culture in the present and in the future. (based on Confession of 1967, 9.29)
- that the Church 'reformed and reforming' is bound "according to the Word of God and the call of the Spirit." (G-2.0200)
- that the peace, unity, and purity of the church be established on the authority of Scripture and the supremacy of Jesus Christ.

Questions for further conversation and self-understanding:

1. *Inerrant, infallible, trustworthy, authoritative* – is there a good word or phrase that best describes for you the inspiration and authority of Scripture?
2. Explain the authority of Scripture in your own words.
3. What does the Bible say about its own authority?
4. What disciplines and habits of Bible reading and study do you observe?
5. What experiences have you had in Bible study, leading a Bible study, or teaching the Bible? (Reference G-6.304, "They should cultivate their ability to teach the Bible.")
6. Which of our confessions best expresses your own doctrine of biblical authority?
7. The Westminster Catechism says, "the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the Word of God, the only rule of faith and obedience." Do you agree with that statement of biblical authority? Do you consider Scripture "the only rule" of faith and obedience? In your view, are there other words of God from other sources than Scripture that carry comparable authority – such as the inner witness of conscience or personal revelation from the Spirit, or scientific research or holy writings from other religions?
8. Can you recite the 10 Commandments? Where can you find them in the Bible? Where is the Shema? ("The Lord is my shepherd.") Where is the Lord's Prayer? To which Gospel would you refer to find the birth narrative of Jesus, the Great Commission, the Great Commandment, the Sermon on the Mount, the Parable of the Good Samaritan, the Parable of the Prodigal Son, the story of the raising of Lazarus? Which New Testament book is primarily an exploration of the relationship between law and gospel? Which New Testament book explores in detail how Christ fulfills the Old Covenant system of priesthood and sacrifice? Where can you find "the fruit of the Spirit," the "armor of God," the famous "love chapter" ("love is patient . . ."), the passage about Christ emptying Himself and "every knee shall bow," the gallery of Old Testament heroes of faith? Where is a good description of the deity of Christ . . . the meaning of Christ's death . . . the importance of Christ's resurrection . . . and justification by faith?

GOD AS THE HOLY TRINITY



We worship Yahweh, the one and only living and true god who is revealed in the Bible and who is the source of all life, glory, goodness, and blessedness. The one and only God is triune.

With the holy catholic church in all ages, we confess the Mystery of the Holy Trinity – that there is one GOD alone, infinite and eternal, Creator of all things, the greatest good. God is one substance and yet distinct in three persons – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

When the Old Testament speaks of GOD, it speaks of the triune God, for there is no other. All three persons are present at creation, at the flood, at the exodus and throughout salvation history.

Scriptures

Genesis 1:1, 3, 26; Exodus 3:14; 6:3; 20:2-3,4-6; Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah 45:5-6; Matthew 1:23; 3:17; 17:5; 28:19; Mark 1:10-11; Luke 1:35;3:22; John. 1:1; 1:3,14, 32; 3:8; 10:30; 14:9, 26;15:26; 13ff; Acts 1:7-8; II Corinthians 5:18-19; Ephesians 1:7-14; 2:18; 5:26; Philipians 2:6-11; Colossians 1:16; I Thessalonians 5:23; Hebrews 11:1; I John. 2:1

Confessions

Nicene Creed 1.1-1.3
 Scots Confession 3.01
 Second Helvetic Confession 5.015-5.018; 5.032
 Westminster 6.011; 6.013; 6.022; 6.043-6.044; 6.051
 Larger Catechism 7.119-7.121
 Confession of 1967 9.07
 Brief Statement of Faith 10.1

We further affirm . . .

- that nothing separates the three persons of God. God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one as a divine community who live with and for and in one another in mutual openness, freedom, and self-giving love. This divine community is the model of all genuine human community. God revealed

Himself as love. (I John 4:8,16) "God is love" makes no sense apart from the Trinity, for only a community of persons can be love itself.

- that only in the coming of Jesus Christ, do we understand fully that, in God, there are three persons.
- that each member of the Trinity shares alike in certain attributes: truth, power, goodness, mercy, glory, majesty, authority. There are other attributes commonly used which distinguish one person from the other:
 - God the Father is the cause, the origin, and the beginning of all things visible and invisible. God is Creator.
 - God the Son is the Word, the wisdom and the image of the Father (terms the Bible uses only for the Son and not for the Father or the Holy Spirit.) God is Savior and Redeemer.
 - God the Holy Spirit is the eternal power and might proceeding from the Father and the Son. God is Sanctifier or Sustainer.
- that the works of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are indivisible. We may distinguish between God's work as Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer or Sanctifier, but the will and the work of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit cannot be separated or set over against each other. They can be understood only in light of each other and their agreement with each other, for the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one God.
- that the Trinity is always a concept which is beyond our understanding. We see as "in a mirror dimly." (I Corinthians 13:12)
- that the Bible's familiar triad of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is the primary Name by which we are to understand both the transcendent and the immanent nature (Acts 17:28) of God in the Trinity. God is Father (Parent). Yet, God is beyond male or female. Because of our limited understanding, God reveals Himself to us by speaking of Himself in specific and gendered language throughout Scripture. Thus, God stoops to our weakness, to our small understandings.
- that while other religions may not be without virtue, may indeed hold some validity, and in some ways may be in accord with Christianity, only in Jesus Christ and in the Trinity, does God provide for us the fullness of truth.

Questions for further conversation and self-understanding:

1. What do you believe about the doctrine of the Trinity – and why is it important?
2. Some theologians have proposed replacing Father, Son, and Holy Spirit with Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer or Comforter. Please explain whether this is a valid reformulation of the Trinity.
3. Of the world's major religions, only Christianity seems to be trinitarian. Other religions are either radically monotheist (Judaism and Islam) or polytheist (animism, Hinduism). How is Christianity's revelation of God fundamentally in harmony with or different from these other major religions?
4. Many claim that Christians, Jews and Muslims worship the same God of Abraham. How does your belief about the Trinity inform your response?

GOD IN RELATIONSHIP WITH CREATION

Creation/Providence/Sovereignty/Grace/Worship.

Creation: In the beginning, God created the universe and everything in it for the manifestation of His glory, eternal power, wisdom, goodness and love.

Providence: God is the sovereign ruler of creation, working all things according to the counsel of His all-knowing, all-powerful, ever-present and righteous will. In gracious providence God continually upholds, directs, oversees, and governs all creation.

Sovereignty: In sovereignty, God has seen fit to accommodate free will among moral creatures, resulting in both good and evil. Nevertheless, God is in no way the author of evil or sin, but continues to govern creation in such a way as to cause “all things to work together for good for those who love God and are called according to His purpose” (*Romans 8:28*). God opposes all evil and triumphs over it to restore creation to complete fulfillment of His glorious will.

Grace: God is love. In grace God chooses to show love and mercy. When we were dead in sin, God made us alive with Christ, saving us by grace through faith, as a sheer gift of sovereign love.

Worship: Only the triune God is worthy of worship. In all aspects of our lives, we respond to God by intentionally seeking, declaring, exploring, celebrating, and submitting to His righteous and gracious authority over all of creation. We respond to God both individually and corporately “to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.” (*Shorter Catechism 7.001*)

Scriptures

Genesis 1:1; Exodus 20:2-3; Psalm 103:1; 146:2; 148; John 3:16; Romans 5:5; Romans 8:28; Ephesians 2:8-10; Colossians 1:8-17; Hebrews 10:25; I John 4:8, 16; Jude 1:25; Revelation 4:11

Confessions

Heidelberg Catechism 4.001; 4.094

Shorter Catechism 7.001

Larger Catechism 7.214-7.215

Confession of 1967 9.35-9.37

We further affirm . . .

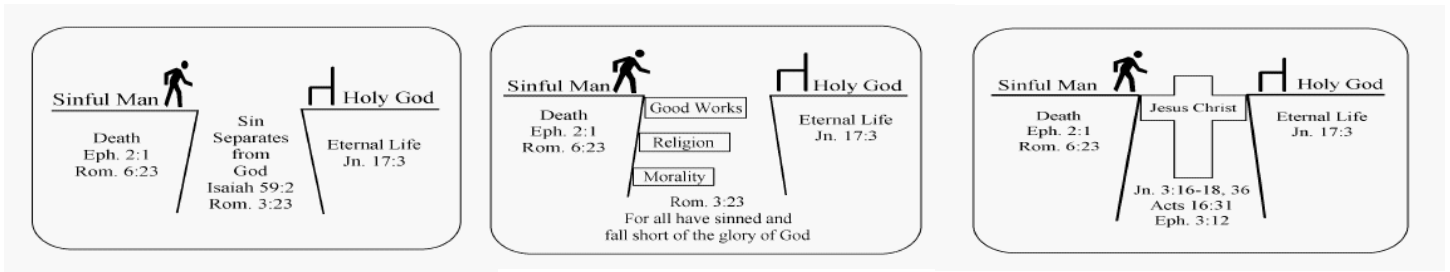
- that God is known to us by self-revelation in God’s creation, in His providential care for His people throughout history, in Scripture, and ultimately in Jesus Christ, in whom the fullness of God is revealed as a human being.
- that God is personal, not impersonal; that God is intimately involved in and cares about God’s creation-- creation’s operation and creation’s unfolding.
- that God is the one to whom we belong and, claimed as God’s own, we are called to live lives of wholehearted worship.
- that belonging to God brings comfort (4.001) and poses challenges (4.094) (Ex 20:2-3) (7.214-7.215).

- the reality of evil in the world, and yet, that in Christ, “nothing can separate us from the love of God.” (Rom 8:38-39)

Question for further conversation and self-understanding:

1. How have you experienced God in your life?

HUMANITY—ORIGINAL RIGHTEOUSNESS AND FALL INTO SIN



Human beings were created by God in His own image – in true righteousness and holiness – to know, love and obey God and be righteous stewards of the creation. As bearers of God’s likeness, humans are called to live in relationships of service and compassion – both a privilege and a responsibility which give human beings dignity and worth. When we live in unity with God and other people, life is self-affirming and self-fulfilling.

However, our earliest forebears, instead of acknowledging, worshiping, and obeying God, became disobedient and brought sin and death to themselves, future generations, and all creation. As a result of this fall into sin, there is now radical brokenness and corruption in human nature.

Sin is failing to perform the will of God as expressed in Scripture. It is living outside the purpose for which God created us and results in broken relationship with God and with others. Sin begets sin. Every part of our human being – our personality, intellect, emotions, will, motives, virtues and actions – is corrupted by sin. Even our best and noblest actions are contaminated by sin, that is the result of, and results in, loss of communion with God.

Humans, originally free and righteous, are now crippled and defective. We are sinful by nature, by influence, by choice and by action. No human effort can fully resolve or redeem this condition.

As a result, human beings are in bondage to sin and subject to God’s holy judgment. We are in dire need of an intervening grace and redeeming salvation which comes to us through Jesus Christ.

Scriptures

Genesis 1:26-27; Genesis 3:1-19; Psalm 5:4; 51:5; 139:13-16; 143:2; Isaiah 47; Isaiah 64:6; Jeremiah 17:9; Matthew 7:21-23; 15:19-20; John 8:44; Romans 1; 3:10-23; 5:12-19; 6:18-19, 23; 7:18-23; 8:7-8; Ephesians 2:1-3; Philippians 3:7-8; I John 1:5, 8-10

Confessions

Scots Confession 3.03
 Heidelberg Catechism 4.005, 4.006, 4.010
 Second Helvetic Confession 5.037; 5.041; 5.043-5.051
 Westminster Confession of Faith 6.014, 6.016
 Shorter Catechism 7.014 – 7.020

Larger Catechism 7.135 - 7.137

Confession of 1967 9.08; 9.11-13; 9.20

Brief Statement of Faith 10.3

We further affirm . . .

- that sin is not only wrong 'doing'; it is also wrong 'being,' deliberate and emphatic independence from God.
- that sin is universal and inevitable, both intentional and unintentional, both individual and corporate.
- that humans are held accountable for their sinful nature and behavior; that heredity and environmental influences, although they can contribute to human defectiveness, do not excuse moral responsibility.
- that the doctrine of "total depravity" asserts that people, by nature, are not inclined or even able to love God wholly with heart, mind and strength; but, rather, all are inclined by their very essence to serve their own will and desires and to reject the rule of God.
- that sinfulness is not the basic truth of who we are; sin does not define us, but our nature is sinful.
- that humans can have the capacity to do good works because they are created in God's image and that God can use the unrighteous to do righteous acts.
- that the belief that we are basically good and self-redeemable through our own efforts, creates a barrier to our relationship with Christ and salvation through him.
- that we fully know ourselves as sinners only in relationship with God.
- that redemption is the work of God alone.

Questions for further conversation and self-understanding:

1. In the Reformed tradition, what is "sin"? What does this mean to you?
2. Discuss whether or not you consider the notion of "sin" unhelpful or obsolete.
3. How would you describe the human situation that requires a savior or salvation?
4. Do you think people are, by nature, basically good, bad, or neither?
5. John 3:16 has the phrase "shall not perish." To what does this refer?
6. A classic Reformed tenet is "total depravity." What did the Reformers understand by this doctrine? Do you consider it biblical or a pessimistic distortion of real human nature?
7. What is the origin of sin?
8. The "Brief Statement" (10.3) says: "We deserve God's condemnation." Discuss whether you agree or disagree with this assessment of human guilt.

JESUS CHRIST—INCARNATION OF THE ETERNAL WORD

This is the second great mystery of the Christian faith, affirmed by all Christians everywhere: that Jesus Christ is both fully God and fully human. Both His divinity and His humanity are corroborated by the witness of Old and New Testaments of Scripture, by Christian creeds, by history, by personal testimonies throughout the ages revealed by the Holy Spirit.

- **As to His divinity, He is the Son, the second person of the Trinity, being of one substance with the Father; as to His humanity, He is like us in having a human body, of one substance with us. He is like us in every way except for sin.**
- **As to His divinity, He is eternally begotten of the Father; as to His humanity, He is born of the Virgin Mary, conceived by the Holy Spirit.**
- **As to His divinity, His glory fills Heaven and earth; as to His humanity, His glory is shown in the form of a suffering servant, most clearly when He is lifted up on the cross.**

In the person of Jesus of Nazareth, God became flesh and blood and dwelt among us. Jesus Christ is the perfect example of what humanity was designed to be. His divinity is in no way impaired, limited, or changed by His gracious act of assuming a human nature, and His true humanity is in no way undermined by His continued divinity.

The truth of the Incarnation is that Jesus is indeed Immanuel, God-with-us, not one who used to be God, not one who has merely been sent from God. In His coming we have seen God's glory, for Jesus is the exact imprint of God's very being and in Him the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. The Incarnation of Jesus Christ is a mystery that we cannot explain, but we affirm it with joy and confidence.

Further, we affirm that the mystery of the Incarnation is ongoing, for the risen Jesus has ascended to the Father in the body and remains, now and everlastingly, fully human and fully God. We are promised that one day we will see Him face to face and know Him fully, even as He already knows us.

Scriptures

Isaiah 7:14; Isaiah 53; Matthew 1:23-25; 4:1-2; 8:24; Mark 15:39; Luke 1:31-35; 2:21-27, 52; 23:46; 24:39; John 1:1-5, 14-18; 4:6; 10:30; 11:35; 14:6-7, 19; 17:20-26; 19:33-34; Romans 5:8, 18-19; I Corinthians 15; II Corinthians 5:19; Colossians 1:15-20; Philippians 2:5-11; Timothy 2:5-(6); Hebrews 1:1-3; 7:26-27; 9:15, 27; 12:24; I Peter 2:21; I John 1; 4:2-4; Revelation 22:20

Confessions

Nicene Creed 1.1-1.2;
Westminster Confession 6.044;
Declaration of Barmen
Confession of 1967 9.07-9.08;
Brief Statement of Faith 10.2

We further affirm . . .

- that denying any one of the four characteristics of Jesus – the deity, the humanity, the one person, or the two natures – distorts the truth of the biblical witness regarding who Christ is.
- that Christianity’s testimony of Jesus Christ is the only true testimony.
- that this mystery of God becoming human in Christ is central to the mystery of our becoming one with God. (John 14:19: “Because I live, you will live also.”)

Questions for further conversation and self-understanding:

1. How would you summarize the core truth about Jesus Christ in the Nicene Creed?
2. According to the Nicene Creed, who is Jesus Christ – and why does it matter?
3. What Scripture passages support a Nicene Christology?
4. What is your understanding about Jesus’ eternal divine preexistence before He “came down from Heaven” and was incarnate as a human being? Referencing John 1:1-18 and Colossians 1:15-20, what do you make of these “superhuman” descriptions of Christ?
5. Christianity has Jesus. How is He a better or clearer revelation of God or Savior than is found in other religions?
6. Discuss the miracle stories of Jesus’ life – such as healing the sick, raising the dead, casting out demons – related to whether you believe they are historically true or not.
7. Discuss Jesus’ death on the cross and bodily resurrection as to whether you believe its historical accuracy or whether you believe it is a mythical formulation or “faith event” of the early church that had no actual phenomenological basis?
8. How do you understand the phrase from the Apostles’ Creed: “conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary”?
9. Reformed Christology often uses the phrase “fully God and fully human.” What is the origin of this formulation? Why is this important or not?
10. How important is Jesus to the church’s worship, proclamation, life, and mission?
11. Discuss whether you believe the Gospel accounts of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection are historically true.

JESUS CHRIST – HIS ATONING WORK

Communion with God is the very goal of our being, but it is impossible without reconciliation to God. Atonement allows God and humanity to come back together into restored relationship. The Apostle Paul reminds us that “in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself.” (II Cor. 5:19a). In His death, Jesus perfectly fulfilled the office of High Priest, reconciling sinners to the Holy God and setting them free from their bondage to sin and death to live for God in holiness and joy.

The mystery of God’s atoning work through the reconciling death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is expressed in various ways. Jesus’ death on the Cross:

- **was the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world. In this act of obedience to God’s will and love for humankind, Jesus shed His blood for the salvation of the world. The Cross became the altar on which His life was sacrificed as a substitute for ours. He was the one perfect sacrifice for sins – “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,” (Jn. 1:29).**
- **was the ransom paid to free humankind from sin and death. Christ paid the penalty of human sin and thereby became the Mediator of salvation.**
- **initiated the final divine victory over sin and death which allows us to declare, “Death has been swallowed up in victory . . . thanks be to God who gives us victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Cor. 15:54, 57)**

The good news of Christ’s death is that it bought our salvation. By the cross and resurrection, God makes all things new. (II Cor. 5:19)

Sitting in the place of honor beside God the Father, Jesus Christ continues His saving work. He is God’s living and revealed Word. He advocates and intercedes on the church’s behalf. He rules His church by Word and Spirit with love and power.

Scriptures

Genesis 3:15;14:17-20; 22:1-14; Job 19:25-26; Psalm 50:12-14; 51:17; 110:4; Isaiah 53:5-6; Matthew 1:21; 12:39; 20:28; 23:37-39; 27:50-52; Mark 10:45; 13:1-2, 14-58; 15:34; Luke 12:49-50; 29:41-44; John 1:29; 3:8; 5:28; 10:13-15; 15:2; 17:20-23; Acts 2:22-36; Romans 1:3-4; 3:21-26; 5:18-21; 6:4-11, 7:4; 23; 8:1-4, 32; I Corinthians 1:23-25; 2:2; 15:1-4, 21-22, 54-56; II Corinthians 5:17, 21; Galatians 3:13; 6:14; Ephesians 1:19-23; 5:2; Colossians 2:12,15; I Timothy 2:5-6; Hebrews 5:6,10; 6:20; 9:11-12, 26, 28; 10:10; 1 Peter 2:21-25; 3:18-22; 4:6; 1 John 2:2; Revelation 1:18

Confessions

Nicene Creed 1.2

Apostles’ Creed 2.2

Scots Confession 3.09

Heidelberg Catechism 4.031, 4.037-4.044

Second Helvetic 5.076

Westminster 6.046-48; 6.070

Confession of 1967 9.09

Brief Statement 10.2

We further affirm . . .

- that no single understanding of the atonement can explain the breadth and depth of the mystery of salvation through Jesus Christ.
- that Christians are saved from death, hell, and the bondage of sin; Christians are saved to be one with God in the body of Christ.
- that a doctrine of atonement should not present the grace and judgment of God as conflicting with each other.
- that the work of atonement is based on God's gracious initiative, but it also calls for a human response.
- that the atoning work of God in Christ has significance for individuals, society and all creation.

Questions for further conversation and self-understanding:

1. What is your understanding of the atoning work of Christ?
2. Scripture speaks variously of Christ's atonement – He died for our sins (I Cor. 15:3); He who knew no sin became sin on our behalf (II Cor. 5:21); He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins (I Jn. 2:2); He took the punishment for our sins and to satisfy God's righteous anger (Rom. 3:25); He suffered to bring us to God (I Pet. 3:18); on the cross He took upon Himself the curse for our wrongdoing (Gal. 3:13); He gave His life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). What do you understand by these phrases? How true or helpful are they? What do they mean to you personally?
3. How central is the death of Christ to the Christian message?
4. How does the death of Christ accomplish our salvation?
5. What is your personal relationship to the cross of Christ?

SALVATION BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH

Salvation is God's gracious work through Jesus Christ to reclaim humankind and all creation from sin and the eternal consequences of sin. God's grace is an unmerited gift received solely through faith in Christ. This faith "is not of our own doing; it is the gift of God – not the result of works. . ." (Eph. 2:8-9) There is nothing we can do to earn this amazing gift. (Rom 4:4; Eph. 2:1-9) No amount of good works or obedience to the commandments, the law, is sufficient, itself, for salvation.

Justification makes us right with Christ. In justification, we are freed from guilt and penalty and made one with Christ. This gift is given freely to sinful people through faith alone. Our sins are forgiven and God considers us to be righteous.

Both justification and faith have been given to us as gifts. It is God who justifies, not faith. Faith is only the given channel through which we receive this benefit. Therefore, we are justified *by* grace *through* faith. Faith is *not* some sort of "good work" by which we attain our own salvation. (We are not saved *by* faith but *through* faith.)

Faith is the work of the Holy Spirit that enlivens us to accept the message of salvation as true and to trust God to apply this salvation to us. Faith is "certain knowledge . . . (and) . . . wholehearted trust" (Heidelberg, 4.021), that is created in us by the Holy Spirit and the Word of God.

Scriptures

Genesis 15:6; Mark 10:45; John 3:16-17; 14:6; Acts 4:12; 13:48; Romans 3:20-28; 4: 2-4ff, 25; 5:1; 5:10-11; 8:1-4; 8:15-17; 8:31-39; 10:9-17; 12:3; I Corinthians 15:1-4; II Corinthians 1:20; 5:19ff; Galatians 2:16-21; 3:13; 4:4-7; 5:3-6; Ephesians 2:1-9; Philippians 1:29; Colossians 1:13-14; II Thessalonians 3:2; Titus 1:1; 2:11-15; Hebrews 11:1; I John 4:10

Confessions

Heidelberg Catechism 4.020-21, 4.060-64
 Second Helvetic Confession 5.106-1113
 Westminster Confession of Faith 6.078-80
 Shorter Catechism 7.001
 Brief Statement of Faith 10.4

We further affirm . . .

- that the total sinfulness of human beings means that everyone needs Jesus Christ as his or her Savior.
- that while we would hope that all would be saved, our understanding from Scripture is that faith in Jesus Christ alone is the way to salvation.
- that, though this is not always perceived, salvation is an immediate and real experience.
- that salvation is a reality that embraces both our earthly existence now and the promise of an eternal life with God.
- that salvation results in forgiveness of sins, new life, peace, hope, perseverance in suffering, joy and freedom from dark spiritual forces.
- that salvation of the human soul is not the only concern of the Christian; the Christian's first concern is to glorify God.

- that, once saved, nothing can separate us from the love of God, for we are one with Christ, members of His body.
- that justification/salvation is an act of God that is complete and final, that God's forgiveness is complete and permanent.

Questions for further conversation and self-understanding:

1. Many regard the doctrine of "justification by grace through faith" to be the central Reformation tenet. What does that mean?
2. What is true faith?
3. What is the relationship among Christ's death on the cross, my faith, and justification?
4. What is the difference between justification and salvation?
5. Do people need to be saved? What does salvation mean?
6. What do you make of the Bible's many declarations that Christ is the unique and sole Mediator and Savior (such as John 14:6, I John 5:11-12, and Acts 4:12)? Based on the Bible and our Reformed confessions, what is your conviction concerning the salvation of all people? Is there salvation apart from Christ?
7. A person is uncertain whether he or she is a Christian or "saved" and turns to you for help. What would you explain or do that corresponds to your own understanding of the gospel and salvation?
8. What is the gospel of Jesus Christ?
9. What is your understanding of heaven and hell?
10. Are all religions essentially different but equally valid paths to God?

SANCTIFICATION AND THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Sanctification is the ongoing process through which the Holy Spirit transforms us, making us more like Christ. The indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in the individual and collective life of believers increases holiness, righteousness, power and love.

Though Christians are marred by sin and imperfect until Christ returns, the Holy Spirit allows us to experience the power of the kingdom of God by transforming the believer, the church, and the world. The Spirit connects us to the life of Christ and unleashes within us the saving power of Christ's life, death, resurrection, and glory.

Scriptures

Matthew 5:8; Romans 6:4-5; 8:5-11; 8:29; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 6:11; 13:10-12; II Corinthians 5:17-20; Galatians 5:22-25; Philippians 2:12-13; II Thessalonians 2:13; II Peter 1:3

Confessions

Scots Confession 3.12

Westminster Confession of Faith 6.075-6.077

Shorter Catechism 7.035

Larger Catechism 7.18

Barmen Declaration 8.14-15

We further affirm . . .

- that our total perfection does not occur in this lifetime. (I Corinthians 13:10-12)
- that Jesus Christ is the only way to justification and sanctification through the power of the Holy Spirit.
- that the dominant motive for the Christian life (good works) is gratitude.
- that in justification, sin is pardoned; in sanctification sin is subdued.
- that the goal of the Christian life is not to be forgiven, but to be transformed into the image of Christ.
- that sanctification is a continual process and is never complete in human history, only in glory.
- that "it is necessary that we be pure, but this is an imputed purity inasmuch as we borrow it from Jesus Christ. There is also an actual purity which is the goodness which God works in us. This shows itself by its effects, for God renews us by His Holy Spirit and corrects our evil affection. In short He lives in us and rules in us." (Calvin)
- that the visible attributes of a true Christian life are what Scripture refers to as the fruit of the Spirit which includes "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." (Gal 5:22-23)

Questions for further conversation and self-understanding:

1. Reformed theology historically holds a doctrine of total depravity. What do we believe about the possibility of real change, transformation, and holiness in this life? Describe the individual, social, and cosmic/universal dimensions of this understanding of sanctification.
2. Should a Christian really expect to see and experience a spiritual dimension to their life? Why? What, specifically?
3. What is holiness? How do we grow in holiness? Is it possible to attain moral and spiritual perfection in our present life?

4. Are the miraculous gifts of the Spirit listed in I Corinthians 12-14 available to the church today? If so, how should they be exercised by the body of Christ?
5. What is the difference between “imputed purity” and “actual purity?”
6. What is the Christian’s motive for good works? Why bother with good works if salvation is by faith?