

A Christian Theology By Tom Schmidt

The following paper was originally written for my ordination panel in the summer of 2012 at Redeemer Fellowship Church in St. Charles. It is an attempt to explain my theological positions. I hope that it is thoroughly biblical, God-exalting, Christ-centered, and gospel-focused. If any of this is contrary to the biblical testimony, I warmly welcome godly correction. To God be the Glory!

1. Bible and Revelation

He is there and He is not silent. This statement is the title of a work by the 20th century Christian thinker Francis Schaeffer¹ and expresses the Christian conviction that God truly exists and truly *communicates* with His creation. This communication takes place both in nature and through the Bible—the Bible being the authoritative and final measurement (canon) of our faith. A Christian should seek to understand the Bible, which is wholly true and without error; such an exegetical pursuit—one that is best served with tools of historical-grammatical exegesis and theology—should occur with a complete reliance on the Holy Spirit to illuminate texts.

God's revelation to the world occurs through what theologians refer to as general revelation (through creation) and special revelation (through the Bible). Creation shouts God's awesome creative power and pours forth speech about His majestic glory (Ps 19:1-6). Paul expresses an awareness of general revelation and claims that the "invisible attributes" of God—"namely, his eternal power and divine nature"—have been "clearly perceived" by all so that everyone is accountable before God and without excuse (Rom 1:20). General revelation is enough to know about God's "power, wisdom, righteousness, goodness, and justice, as well as human responsibility,"² but it tells us nothing about God's saving grace; for this, special revelation is required. Special revelation is God's inspired word (the Bible). This revelation informs us of God's mercy, grace, and triune nature. Through hundreds of years, many Spirit-filled individuals, and a variety of genres, cultures and settings, God has revealed Himself to humanity and has made known His gracious plan to redeem a fallen race for His glory.

What is the character this special revelation? God's special revelation was inspired by the Holy Spirit (2 Tim 3:16) and is infallible (true and reliable) and inerrant (without errors).³ Inspiration is best understood as a process whereby God speaks through a human being, who retains their personality, and inspires the very *words* which are written. It is completely from God and at the same time completely a human composition.⁴ These words are God's *very* words and carry His authority; since this is the case, they are true (infallible) and are free from errors (inerrant) in their original autographical form.

The Bible is a Christian's final and authoritative measurement of faith. It is a closed book, and no other books may be added to it, and no words may be taken away from it (Rev 22:18-19). As

¹ Francis Schaeffer A., *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: A Christian Worldview, A Christian View of Philosophy and Culture* (vol. 1 of *He Is There and He Is Not Silent*; 1972; repr., Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1982).

² Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2011), 149.

³ "The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy"

http://65.175.91.69/Reformation_net/COR_Docs/01_Inerrancy_Christian_Worldview.pdf

⁴ This is a rejection of the overly-simplistic notion of 'dictation theory,' which argues that the authors of Scriptures were merely vessels that dictated the words that the Holy Spirit gave *completely apart* from the factors of humanity personality, social setting, genre, and other human influences. We must avoid this view of inspiration if we hold to inerrancy, as did the writers of the "Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy." Scripture is completely inerrant, inspired, and authoritative while also being at the same time completely a human product.

God's word to humanity, the Bible is the arbiter of theology and reality, and thus it ought to be carefully studied and highly valued. When a person studies God's word, every tool should be employed to understand each passage. This is done by employing the tools of original languages, grammar, historical context, systematic theology and historical theology. These elements should be coupled with a complete dependence on God, who sends the Holy Spirit to help His people understand the Scriptures via illumination. Illumination is the act of God the Holy Spirit helping a person to understand Scripture, its relevance and application.⁵

Special revelation is the foundation for all of our theology. It is this foundation which allows us to build a systematic theology and better hold in our minds an understanding of God's person. This leads to our next topic: theology proper.

2. Theology Proper

An exploration of theology proper begins with a look at God's triune nature and attributes (communicable and incommunicable). The fact that God is a Trinity is a mystery, but true knowledge can be gleaned and articulated. Likewise, God's attributes give us a glimpse into his personhood, but our knowledge will always be limited. Despite our human limitations, we are still able to express *true*—though not comprehensive—knowledge about the Divine.

In all of existence there is only one God. This one God (Deut 6:4) is three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Father is God (Is 46:9) and is not the Son or the Holy Spirit. The Son is God (John 1:1) and is not the Father or the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is God (Ps 139:7-8) and is not the Son or the Father. One in essence/substance but three in persons, this is the Christian God. Each person has a distinct ministry, but works in complete unity with the others. The Father sends, the Son proceeds, and the Spirit empowers the Son and carries on God's work on earth. Matt 28:18-20 testifies to both the threeness and the oneness of God:

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (ESV)

Notice how the disciples are to baptize in the name (singular) of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

This shows a theological understanding of God as one, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Evidence of God's triune nature is intimated in the OT,⁶ but is progressively more evident and clear in the NT.⁷ Perhaps the clearest witness to this can be seen in an examination of the Apostle Paul's writings—here one finds a consistent trinitarian conception of God.⁸ Though the word Trinity is

⁵ Creeds and traditions are also very important, though do not carry the same authority as the Bible. *Sola scriptura* implies that the Scriptures alone are the revelation and word from God, but the Reformers also highly valued the creeds and tradition as helpful interpreters.

⁶ Gen 1:26, Ps 110, Dan 7

⁷ Matt 3:16 (Father, Son and Holy Spirit), Rev 1:4-5 are particularly helpful texts.

⁸ 1 Thess 1:4-5: Father loves, Gospel about Jesus, power and conviction in the Holy Spirit; 2 Thess 2:13: Father chooses, Jesus loves and Spirit sanctifies; 1 Cor 1:4-7: Father prayed, Jesus is revealed and Spirit empowers the gift; 1 Cor 2:4-5: power in God, message about Jesus and Spirit makes it convincing; 1 Cor 2:12: Jesus is given, Spirit we received, Father gives; 1 Cor 6:11: Justified by God, sanctified by the Spirit, washed by the Spirit; 1 Cor 6:19-20: Spirit indwelling, Jesus is the price, Father gave the body; 2 Cor 1:21-22: Father establishes and strengthens, Christ is the instrument, Spirit seals and anoints; Gal 3:1-5: Father gives Spirit, Jesus was crucified, Spirit makes complete; Rom 8:3-4: Father justifying, Jesus saves, Spirit transforming us; Rom 8:15-17: Father gives Spirit, Jesus is our co-heir, and Spirit testifies with us and leads in prayer; Col 3:16: worship given to Father, Message is about Jesus, Spirit empowers our worship songs; Eph 1:17: Father of glory, Lord Jesus Christ, Spirit provides wisdom; Eph 2:18: Father to be reached, through Jesus and empowered by the Spirit; Eph 2:20-22: Temple built for God for the Father, through Jesus, by the Spirit; Phil 3:3: Serve

nowhere to be found in the Bible, the concept certainly is, and the doctrine should be embraced by all orthodox Christians.⁹

What is this triune God like? The Scriptures inform us that God has both communicable attributes which he shares with us, and incommunicable attributes which are unique to his nature and essence. God's incommunicable attributes include his eternal nature, immutability, omnipresence, independence, and unity.¹⁰ His communicable attributes include: holiness, spiritual, goodness, love, mercy, peace, beauty, patience, faithfulness, justice, etc. God is the source of life and all of reality. As our glorious king, God is sovereign over all of creation and rules everything for the praise of His glory.

3. Christology

The Christian faith derives its name and hope from Jesus, who is the Christ (Messiah). Jesus, as a member of the Trinity, is divine and dwelt with the Father and Spirit before time began; at the proper time, he came to earth as a human and fulfilled the ministry of Israel. A proper understanding of Jesus's person, ministry, and divine identity is vital for every Christian.

This understanding begins with an acknowledgement of Jesus' deity. Jesus shares in the same divine essence as God the Father and the Holy Spirit; he is God (John 1:1; Phil 2:6). As one who is God, Jesus was worshipped (Matt 14:33), claimed preexistence (John 8:58), exercised divine authority (Matt 7:28-29), forgave sins (Luke 7:48) and was understood by the early Christians as possessing the very identity of YHWH, the God of Israel (Rom 10:13 quoting Joel 2:32). Because Jesus is God, he possesses the attributes of God (omnipresence, omnipotence, eternal, omniscience), and in his preexistence state the world was made through him (Col 1:16).

Jesus was not only fully God, he was also fully human. God the Son became a man and dwelt among humanity. While the incarnation is a mystery, we must say that Jesus was fully human and at the same time fully God—this is known as the hypostatic union. He possessed the same essence as God and the same essence as humanity, yet these two natures were not confused, changed, divided, or separated: Jesus possessed two natures, but was one person. As a man, Jesus grew in wisdom (Luke 2:52), aged (Luke 3:23), experienced temptation (Mark 1:13), yet he never sinned (Heb 4:15).

Jesus was not only a human, but his messianic ministry fulfilled the purposes of Israel. He descended physically from Israelite heritage in the line of David (Matt 1, Rom 1:3) and was the fulfillment of Messianic prophecies (Is. 53, Ps 110, Mic 5:2). He came humbly (Zech 9:9; Matt 21:5), revealed God (John 1:14), preached the good news of his kingdom (Mark 1:15), healed the sick and cast out demons (Mark 5). In his ministry, which was performed in the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 3:22; 4:1), he performed the purposes of Israel and taught authoritatively about the kingdom of God, about sins and about redemption (Matt 7:28). As Israel's suffering servant (Is 53), Jesus went to the cross and took the wrath of God upon himself—this was the payment for humanity's sins (Rom 3:23-36; 2 Cor 5:21). Three days after his death, Jesus rose victoriously from the grave and appeared to his disciples for forty days (Acts 1:3) before ascending back into heaven. One day Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead (2 Tim 4:1) and he will transform every believer's body to be conformed to his glorious resurrected body (Phil 3:20-21). Jesus inaugurated his

Father, glory in Christ, worship is fueled/empowered by the Spirit; Rom 5:1-8: Father poured out his love, Christ was sacrificed, Spirit mechanism for receives love; Gal 4:4-6: Father sends the Son, The Son is the offering, Spirit indwells us; Titus 3:4-7: God pours out the Spirit, Jesus is Savior, Spirit washes/regeneration (taken from Christian Theology Notes: Wheaton College Winter Term 2012, Dr. Barbeau).

⁹ The Council of Nicea in 325 and Constantinople in 381 were extremely helpful in providing the language we use to speak of God's triune nature.

¹⁰ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan 1994.)164-183

kingdom on earth, and all who are joined to him become part of people of God, or spiritual Israel (Gal 6:16). God's people continue Jesus' ministry and seek to make disciples of every nation (Matt 28:18-20) as God's light to the nations (Isa. 51:4).

Jesus then is the God-man who came to save humanity from sin, death and the wrath of God. He is our example, our Lord, our God, our Savior, our Christ, and our Hope.

4. Pneumatology

The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. A biblical account of the Holy Spirit includes an embrace of His deity and personhood, an acknowledgement of His ministry in the OT and the NT, and a belief in His ministry today in the life of the church and the world. We must not overlook the Holy Spirit or misunderstand His ministry.

As the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit is fully divine and worthy of worship. He is present both within the OT and NT (Gen 1:2; 6:3; Ps 51:11; Is 63:10-11; Matt 1:18). The Holy Spirit is sent from the Father and the Son, and possesses personhood—He can be grieved (Eph 4:30) and blasphemed (Matt 12:31). In the OT, the Holy Spirit partook in the works of creation (Gen 1:2), and equipped, inspired, and led judges, prophets and psalmists (Judg 3:10; 1 Sam 10:6; Ezek 2:2; Ps 51:11). In the NT, the Holy Spirit empowered Jesus for ministry and raised him from the dead (Rom 1:4). Following the ascension of Jesus into heaven, the Holy Spirit filled and equipped the apostles and the early church for ministry (Acts 2).

Christians today experience the ministry of the Holy Spirit and are brought to spiritual life through His work of regeneration (Tit. 3:5; Rom 8; Gal 3:22-23). Another part of the Holy Spirit's ministry is through spiritual gifts, which are "any ability that is empowered by the Holy Spirit and used in any ministry of the Church" (Rom 12:6-8; 1 Cor 7:7; 12:8-10, 28; Eph 4:11).¹¹ These gifts include, but are not limited to, prophecy, tongues, administration, healing, leadership, and mercy; these gifts have been experienced throughout church history and have continuing relevance today.¹² When a person has been converted he/she receives the *baptism of the Holy Spirit* (Matt 3:11; 1 Cor. 12:13),¹³ and is *indwelt*—the permanent residing of the Holy Spirit in a believer—(John 14:17; Rom 8:9; 1 Cor 3:16) and *sealed* (2 Cor 1:22)—the guarantee that a Christian has been brought under the ownership of God until he/she dies or Christ returns—by the Holy Spirit. While the Holy Spirit will never abandon a true Christian, every Christian must seek to be *filled* with the Holy Spirit (Eph 5:18). This filling results in the fruit of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5:22-23). A Christian can seek to be filled with the Holy Spirit through prayer, obedience to the Holy Spirit's leading, complete submission to God's will, and full reliance on the Holy Spirit's power.

5. Angelology and Satanology

Now that our triune God has been discussed, it is appropriate to explore the topic of angels and demons. Where did they come from and what do they do? What are they?

First, let us look at angels. Where did they come from? These spiritual beings were created by God (Gen 1:31) and were made to do God's will on earth as ministering messengers (Gen 16:7; 1 Ki 19:7; Heb 1:14). These beings perform different assignments. Praising God (Is 6), rescuing God's people (Dan 6:7), and delivering messages (Acts 8:26) are some of their more frequently mentioned tasks in Scripture. Angels do not fully understand the gospel (1 Pt 1:12), but long to look

¹¹ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1016.

¹² It is my belief that gifts like healing and speaking in tongues have *not* ceased (cessationist position) but have continued. Yet we must hold that the authoritative writing of Scripture ceased with the Apostles.

¹³ This is a rejection of charismatic doctrine that 'baptism of the Holy Spirit' refers to a later event in a believer's life.

into this mystery. These beings are good and remain holy (Mark 8:38); in this way, they are very much different from Satan and the demons.

Satan and demons are created beings and, like God's angels, were created good. At some point—at a time which the Bible is silent on but must have occurred between Gen 1:31 and Gen 3:1—they rebelled, became demons and were cast out of heaven and God's presence. Satan is the head of the demons (Job 1:7-27; 1 Chron 21:1; Zech 3:1; Matt 4:1). Demons labor to pervert and destroy God's works (especially God's people).¹⁴ Though they wreak havoc, death and destruction, they are limited in their power and are ultimately doomed to destruction (Rev 20:7-10). Demonic influence is present today; it is the force behind idols (1 Cor 10:20) and every anti-Christian doctrine (1 Tim 4:1). Individuals can come under personal demonic oppression and be under considerable sway of demons through a willful decision to sin and rebel against God, and also through more direct invitations to demons (Satanism). A Christian can never be possessed by a demon, because sin has no dominion over Christians (Rom 6:14, 4, 11). Christians can rebuke demons and cast them out in the name of Jesus and through prayer (1 Cor 12:10; 2 Cor 10:3-6; Eph 6:12; Luke 10:19).

6. Anthropology and Hermeneutology

The Bible has much to say about creation, humanity, and sin. Concerning creation, the Bible teaches that the "heavens and the earth" were created by God (Gen 1:1). To be faithful to the Bible we must affirm that the cosmos is not some product of empty chance and atheistic evolutionary process; rather, we must affirm that God has created the universe *ex nihilo* (out of nothing) for His glory and purposes. While we must believe that God is the Creator of everything, we err when we use Genesis 1—read through our own modern scientific conception of the world—to understand specific scientific details of the creative process. Genesis 1 was not written to instruct us regarding science; it was written to inform us about God who created the world. It is best to consider the days of Genesis 1 as solar days but to view the whole week as a *figurative* picture of YHWH's creative activity and ruling Sabbath rest. This is known as the "framework interpretation" and leaves room for different views on the age of the earth.¹⁵

Regarding humanity, the Bible teaches that humans were made in the "image of God" (Gen 1:27). This means that humans are in some way distinct from all of God's creation as they bear God's image. The differences are seen in what Francis Schaeffer describes as the "mannishness of man": "aspects of man, such as significance, love, rationality and the fear of nonbeing, which mark him off from animals and machines and give evidence of his being created in the image of a personal God."¹⁶ Every human bears the image of God and this gives him/her dignity and worth, no matter how corrupt or fallen they may become.

The Bible teaches that humans were made good but have fallen into sin. Grudem rightly defines sin as "any failure to conform to the moral law of God in act, attitude, or nature."¹⁷ Some "sin is objective, some subjective;"¹⁸ sin corrupts, perverts, pollutes, progresses, distorts, deceives, and is rooted in folly.¹⁹ The wages of sin is separation from God (Gen 3:24), death—physical and spiritual—(Rom 3:23) and condemnation. The original sin of Adam has affected every human (Rom

¹⁴ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 415.

¹⁵ Such a view is argued by reformed theologian Meredith Kline and pastor Tim Keller. It is well articulated here by Lee Irons: <http://www.opc.org/OS/html/V9/1c.html#NOTES>

¹⁶ Francis Schaeffer A., *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: A Christian Worldview, A Christian View of Philosophy and Culture* (vol. 1 of *The God Who Is There*; 1968; repr., Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1982), 201.

¹⁷ *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1994), 490.

¹⁸ Cornelius Plantinga Jr., *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1995), 20.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 30, 44, 53, 105, 121.

5:12) and all are born sinful from birth (Ps 51:5).²⁰ We are all totally depraved and completely unable to choose what is righteous on our own (Rom 3). Everyone is a slave to sin and spiritually dead to God (Rom 6).

Humanity is in need of savior—a savior from the effects of sins and from the guilty judicial verdict that leaves humans under the wrath of God.

7. Soteriology

Salvation from sin, death, and condemnation has come from God Himself. To be “saved” is our greatest need and is a work of our triune God: God the Father planned; God the Son went; and God the Holy Spirit empowered the Son and applies the Son’s work to those in the world. Romans 3:23-26 is an excellent passage which speaks this *gospel* reality. As humanity was dead in its sins, God brought about justification by his grace as a gift through the redemptive work of Jesus. Jesus was put forward as a substitute and took the penalty for humanity’s sins—he bore the wrath of God (propitiation); now, by faith, humans can receive Christ’s righteousness and be considered righteous before God. This is a completely gracious event apart from any human merit (Eph 2:8-9). A person experiences this redemption by becoming a Christian—through repenting of sin and trusting in Jesus’ finished work on the cross (Rom 10:9-10). This is the gospel. The gospel is good news and is to be believed upon conversion and throughout a believer’s life.

Many theologians understand there to be a *logical* order in which a person experiences salvation. Before a person is ever born, God *elects* some to be saved (chooses particular individuals) and *foreknows* these individuals (personal knowledge) who will experience *redemption* (deliverance from the bondage and filth of sin) and *reconciliation* (the act of becoming right or restored in relationship). After election comes the gospel *call*, whereby a person hears the gospel proclaimed. Then God *regenerates* a man (Titus 3:5) by the Holy Spirit; this is the act of God which makes a spiritually dead person alive. A person is then *converted*—experiencing conviction of sin (new awareness of one’s own guilt and transgression of God’s holy laws) and faith in Jesus. This leads to *justification*: the legal action of God declaring a person forgiven and a righteous in God’s sight (through a possession of God’s righteousness). After this is *adoption*: a person becomes a member of God’s family. Then is *sanctification*: a life of growing progressively in holiness. A Christian experiences a life of sanctification while being *preserved* by God to remain in the faith until the end of their life, at which point comes *glorification* (the reception of glorified sinless bodies).

8. Ecclesiology

The Church is the “community of all true believers for all time.”²¹ It is the people of God, formed by God for the purposes of God for the glory of God. The origin of the church lies within the redemptive and creative purposes of God. In the OT, God called Israel to be a people who would bring glory to His name, hold to His laws, offer pleasing worship, and be a light to the nations. When Jesus—the true Israel—came to earth, he founded the church by calling and choosing 12 disciples/apostles. These apostles—by the power and leading of the Holy Spirit—proclaimed the gospel and God added to their numbers. This church was the continuation of Israel, and is the true people of God today (Gal 6:16). Other important images which describe the church are the body of Christ (Rom 7:4; 1 Cor 12:27) and the bride of Christ (Rev 19:7).

While Jesus remains forever the true head of the church (Eph 5:23), there are certain patterns of leadership present in the NT which are normative for church life today. Scripture

²⁰ Original sin.

²¹ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*.

frequently speaks of elders who exercise authority and leadership over the flock (1 Pe 5:1, 5; 1 Tim 4:14).²² I believe the best and most biblical form of church government is a plurality of elders. These elders must meet biblical requirements (1 Tim 3) and ought to provide support and protection for the elder who exercises the role of pastor. Another leadership role within the church is that of deacon. Deacons minister in different ways (administration, mercy, helps) but do not exercise the same oversight and authority as elders. I believe that, within leadership, a complementarian position is the most faithful to the biblical witness (1 Tim 2).

Jesus has ordained the church to carry out the tasks of baptism and communion. These ordinances, also known as sacraments, are signs and channels of God's grace for those who are Christians. Baptism is rightly conferred on those who believe (believer's baptism) as a symbol and public declaration of the new life which God has brought about in a person's life. Communion is the symbolic act that brings to remembrance Christ's body and blood which were offered on the cross for the forgiveness of sins. These ordinances are not required for a person's salvation, but they are the natural response of obedience for a person who has come to faith in Christ.

9. Eschatology

The final topic of this paper is eschatology and the afterlife. A Christian has hope in the face of physical death. This is because Jesus, our great God and Savior, has come to earth, died as a man, and was raised three days later by the Holy Spirit. Since Jesus died and rose again—thereby defeating death itself—a Christian can have confidence that death is not the final word. When a Christian dies, he/she is instantly in the presence of Jesus—to die is to gain and be with Christ (Phil 1:21). As the thief on the cross, who professed faith in Christ, was assured of being in Jesus' presence upon his death (Luke 23:43), so can the Christian hope to be in the presence of God upon death. The saints join the cloud of witnesses (Heb 11) and partake in the worship our triune God in heaven.

As Christians here on earth, we are promised that Jesus will one day physically return to earth (1 Thess 4). When Jesus returns, the end will truly be consummated and the dead will rise. Those who are true believers will spend eternity in glorified bodies on the new earth in the presence of the Jesus forever (Rev 21-22). Non-Christians will spend eternity in conscious torment of hell. Until that glorious day, Jesus' reign continues on the earth through the church.²³

Conclusion

This then is an account of my theological convictions. I know that it is only by God's grace that I have come to believe and grow in the faith, and that it is only by His grace that I will continue to love God and grow in my understanding of theology. If my theology at any point has strayed from the full counsel of God's word, I warmly welcome godly correction.

Now we see as in a mirror dimly and our theology can be sullied by stains of pride, unredeemed notions of sinful culture, and particular biases due to our surroundings. How glorious will the day be when we finally see clearly—as one who sees face to face—and no longer have to battle against temptation, the lies of Satan, and our sinful flesh. Until then, let us run hard the race before us, rely fully on the Holy Spirit, fill ourselves with the delights of knowing God, deny every unholy passion, and take up our cross for the glory of Jesus Christ. Come Lord Jesus Come!

²² I understand bishops and overseers to be synonymous with the term "elder".

²³ I hold to the Covenant amillennial position.