

Basic Doctrines

The following basic doctrines are listed alphabetically. They should be incorporated into your lecture as indicated on the suggested outline.

The Bible

The Bible is a collection of 66 writings by more than 40 human authors. It is God's special and unique written revelation of Himself to human beings and, as such, its words are not only the words of the human authors, but also the very words of God (2 Timothy 3:15-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21). It is without error (in the original manuscripts) because God cannot err or lie (Numbers 23:19; 2 Samuel 22:31; Proverbs 30:5; John 17:17). Therefore, the Bible never affirms anything that is contrary to fact. It is consistent, meaning it tells one great story, the story of redemption, and it does not contradict itself. God promises to work through the Bible to accomplish His purposes, including the salvation of the lost (Isaiah 55:10-11; 1 Peter 1:23-25; Psalm 119).

The Church

The Church is the company of God's redeemed people. It is called the body of Christ of which He promised to build (Matthew 16:18) and of which He is the head (Ephesians 5:23). It is a building firmly established upon the foundation of the apostolic teaching (Ephesians 2:20). It is a temple in which God is worshipped (Ephesians 2:21). It is the bride of Christ, whom He loved and for whom He died (Ephesians 5:25). Theologians speak of the Church invisible (meaning the company of all the redeemed who are known to God) and the church visible (meaning the company we see here on earth). Not all members of the church visible belong to the true, invisible Church, for not all members of the visible church are born again. But all true Christians should take part in a visible Christian fellowship (Hebrews 10:25).

Covenants

In biblical language a covenant is a promise of God made to an individual or group, frequently accompanied by a sign. It can be conditional ("if you do A, then I will do B") or unconditional ("I will do B regardless of what you do"). An example of the first is God's covenant with Israel, known as the Deuteronomic Covenant (Exodus 19:3-6; 24:1-8; Deuteronomy 29:1-30:3). God promised to bless the people if they would obey His commandments. God's covenant with Abraham is an example of the second. God said He would make Abraham into a great nation and bless all people through His offspring, the Messiah – no strings attached (Genesis 12:1-3). We should be grateful that the promises attached to the coming and work of the Messiah were unconditional. (See also Genesis 6:18; 9:8-11; 17; 2 Samuel 7:1-16; Jeremiah 31:31-33; Hebrews 8:6, 8; 9:15; 12:24; Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25.)

The Cross for a Believer

Jesus did not make His call to discipleship easy. On the contrary, He stressed the cost of following Him, showing it meant full obedience and the renunciation of all contrary plans that one might prefer to make for oneself. One way Jesus spoke about this was to talk about the cross, saying, for example, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23). This is necessary for faithfully following Jesus; it is not optional (Luke 14:27). No one who refuses to take up their cross and follow Jesus can be a Christian. It is personal; no one can do it for you (Matthew 16:24). It is voluntary; no one is forced to take up the cross. A person must take it willingly (Matthew 19:21-22). It is mortal; the cross is meant to kill all selfish desires or ambition. We must die to self here if we would bear eternal fruit (John 12:24-26).

Election

People are so ruined by sin that they are unable to respond by faith even to the preaching of the gospel unless God is first at work in them to give them the ability to respond (John 6:44). Before the creation of

the world and before they had done anything, God chose those who would respond in faith. (See Ephesians 1:3-14; 2 Timothy 1:9.) However, God's sovereignty in election does not negate each person's responsibility to believe. When God draws people, He works through their individual faith (Matthew 11:25-30; John 6:37-40).

Eternal Security

Eternal security means that because we have been saved on the grounds of Christ's perfect work in dying for our sins, and according to God's eternal purpose in our election, our salvation is sealed, or guaranteed, by the Holy Spirit dwelling within us. (Ephesians 1:13-14; John 10:27-30). We say, "Once saved, always saved." The Bible says, "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6). We must not think this means we can sin as we will and still presume to be saved men and women. If we are saved, we have a new nature that will always lead us in the way of righteousness. If we are not moving in that direction (although not perfectly in this life), we cannot have assurance that we are truly saved, regardless of what may be our profession. That is why the Bible can also say with utter consistency, "Make your calling and election sure" (2 Peter 1:10) and "He who stands firm to the end will be saved" (Matthew 10:22).

Faith

The Bible defines faith in Hebrews 11:1 ("Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see"). Faith is simply belief, faith and belief being two English translations of what is only one word in Greek (*pistis*). Faith is believing God and acting on it. It is necessary to stress the last part of that definition, however, because we must not think that saving faith is mere intellectual assent. The demons have this kind of belief (James 2:19), but they tremble before it. They are not saved. Saving faith involves three elements: first, content (for belief is always in something), specifically, the content of the gospel concerning salvation (Matthew 16:16; John 1:12; 3:16; Acts 4:12; 16:31); second, a personal, loving trust in one's heart in Jesus Christ, who is a person and who first loved us (John 1:12; 3:16; 6:37; Acts 16:14); and third, a commitment to repent and follow Christ (Matthew 11:28-30; Luke 9:23; 14:25-27; Acts 3:19; 20:21; Romans 12:1-2). This last element is refused by many because it means giving up control of our lives and acknowledging the lordship of Christ over our thoughts and actions.

Fulfillment of Prophecy

Hundreds of biblical prophecies have been fulfilled, and there are many more awaiting fulfillment. Fulfilled prophecy proves that the God of the Bible is the true God. The only way prophecy can be repeatedly and accurately fulfilled is if the God who reveals future events also governs history to see that things come to pass. Only the true God does that (Isaiah 46:9-10; 2 Peter 1:21). Fulfilled prophecy proves the Bible is God's Word, because the accurate forecast of a future event must come from God and not from mere man, who cannot see the future (Deuteronomy 18:21-22; Isaiah 44:25; 46:9-10). More than 20 Old Testament predictions were fulfilled within one 24-hour period at the time of Jesus Christ's crucifixion. (See Matthew 5:17.)

God the Father

The first person of the Trinity is God the Father, the Creator and Sustainer of all things, and the Judge of all. He has eternally been the Father of the Son, the second member of the Trinity, and He condescends to be the Father of all who believe in Him. (See Isaiah 64:8; Malachi 2:10; Galatians 4:6; Ephesians 1:3-4.)

God the Son

The Son of God is the second person of the eternal divine Trinity and, as such, always existed. But He took a human form (John 1:14), becoming the man we know as Jesus Christ, at a specific moment in history. He remains the unique God-man forever. Philippians 2:5-11 describes how He humbled Himself to do this, becoming subject even to death for our salvation, as a result of which God has given Him a name above

every name “that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow” (verse 10). The Bible teaches that He will return to this earth to take His own people home with Him to heaven and to bring about the final judgment of this world. (See Matthew 16:27; 26:64; Acts 1:4-11; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11; Titus 2:11-14.)

Grace

Grace is God’s favor to the utterly undeserving. It is something we cannot earn; for if we could earn it, it would not be grace (Ephesians 2:8-9). It is part of the most important doctrinal emphasis of justification by grace through faith alone (Romans 3:21-24). It means we are saved on the basis of God’s unmerited favor toward us in Christ, which we cannot earn by good works but can only receive by believing His Word when He tells us of it (Romans 4:1-8).

The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is the third member of the Trinity. Wherever the Lord Jesus Christ is being lifted up and glorified and people are coming to Him in true faith, there the Holy Spirit is present and at work (John 15:26; 16:14). Every believer receives the Holy Spirit when he or she believes in Jesus Christ (Romans 8:9; 1 Corinthians 6:19; 12:13). In fact, it is the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit that makes belief possible (John 16:7-15). This is the true “baptism with the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:13). By definition it occurs only once. The New Testament, especially the book of Acts, also speaks of a “filling” of the Holy Spirit, which may occur repeatedly (Ephesians 5:18; Acts 2:4 with 4:8 and 4:31). But what marks this “filling” is increased spiritual power in ministry and in faithful, verbal witness to Jesus as the Savior. Testimony follows every reference in Acts to a filling of an individual or group by the Holy Spirit.

Idolatry

An idol is something within creation that is inflated to function as a substitute for God. It may be an object, a person, an activity, a sport, a role you play, an institution or organization, an idea, a pleasure, a hero, your family, your work, even your work for the Lord – anything that can become a substitute for God. It does not have to be a full-sized replacement for God; it may be only a part of your life. Idolatry is not necessarily a denial of God or His existence. An idol may even be made out of something that is a good thing in its own right. As soon as loyalty to anything or anyone leads us to disobey God, we are in danger of making it an idol. (See Exodus 20:4; Colossians 3:5.)

Judgment of Believers and Unbelievers

The Bible speaks of many kinds of judgment. The book of Revelation is full of them. The chief kinds of judgment are: 1) punitive judgment upon the unregenerate for their many sins (Romans 1:18, 28; 2:1-16; Hebrews 9:27; Acts 17:31); and 2) evaluative judgment upon believers as to how well they have served Christ as His disciples in this life (Romans 8:1; 14:10; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 2 Timothy 4:8). The evaluative judgments are sometimes spoken of as rewards and should encourage believers to faithful obedience and good works throughout their lives (1 Corinthians 3:14; 15:58; 2 Corinthians 5:10). The punitive judgments are described as being dreadful and are set forth in Scripture as a warning to sinners to flee to Jesus Christ. Punitive judgments will be endured in a conscious condition and forever (Luke 16:19-31; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10; Revelation 20:15). This doctrine is offensive to many people, but it helps to remember that judgment establishes true value or worth. Judgment proves that who we are and what we do matters.

Justification

Justification is the gracious act of God in forgiving and declaring righteous the sinner who believes in Jesus Christ (Romans 3:24-28). God did not close His eyes to our disobedience and pretend we did not sin (justification is not “just-as-if-I’d-never-sinned”). God’s holiness required Him to punish our sin. Jesus bore the penalty by dying for our sins and was raised to life for our justification (Romans 4:25; 5:9). Justification is a legal term. In our justification, God, the just judge, pronounces our sins forgiven and pronounces Christ’s righteousness as ours. Rather than being condemned for sin, believers are declared

morally righteous in God's sight and, therefore, we do not have to pay the penalty for past, present or future sins (Romans 8:1-4). As judge, God removes believers' guilt because Christ took the place of guilt for all who believe (Romans 5:18-19; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 3:6). God does not give believers credit for keeping His law personally; He gives them credit for being united by faith to Jesus Christ, who kept His law perfectly as their representative. Believers are justified unto life, a new life that reflects Christ's righteousness (Romans 5:17-18). Justification is God's one-time, irreversible act of being declared righteous, not a process of being made righteous over time. "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1).

Kingdom of God

The Kingdom of God is a theme found throughout the Bible. In the New Testament we find the phrases Kingdom of Heaven, Kingdom of God and other synonyms 61 times in the Gospels (Matthew 19:23-24). All describe God's sovereign rule and reign throughout the course of human history. The Old Testament does not use these phrases yet gives clear evidence of God's established rule over all creation and all earthly kingdoms (Genesis 1; Daniel 7:14, 27). God promised King David that his descendant, the Messiah, would reign forever over a Kingdom with no end (2 Samuel 7:16). The Kingdom of God is a present reality: God rules and reigns over all (Revelation 11:15). However, Jesus taught us to pray, "Your Kingdom come" (Matthew 6:10). The Kingdom of God "comes" as the gospel is shared and people embrace the reign and rule of God in their lives. Thus, the Kingdom of God is both now and not yet, inaugurated but not fully consummated. The Kingdom will be fully realized in a future day when the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ comes in all its fullness at the end of history (Revelation 19:11-16). Then Jesus will be seen clearly as King of kings and Lord of lords (Philippians 2:10-11; 1 Timothy 6:15; Revelation 1:7; 19:16).

Humanity: Creation and Purpose

People are part of God's created order. But unlike matter, plants or even animals, people are made for eternal fellowship with their Creator (1 Corinthians 1:9; 2 Corinthians 13:14; 1 John 1:1-7). This is our greatest purpose and blessing. Conversely, the loss of this fellowship is our greatest tragedy. The first chapter of Genesis states that mankind is made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27), and the second chapter stresses that people are made for fellowship with God. To be made in God's image means to be we represent God on the earth. Being made in God's image implies that people are made personal, moral and spiritual beings. God's purpose for people is to glorify Him and enjoy Him forever (Isaiah 43:7; Acts 17:28).

Humanity: Fall and Judgment

The story of mankind's fall is told in Genesis 3, which also shows the nature of the temptations that led to the fall – doubting God's goodness, questioning His word, desiring to be "like God." After the fall, Adam and Eve (the literal, original human pair) show some of the effects of sin by hiding from God and by blaming others for their own transgressions. God judged Adam and Eve in specific and distinct ways, but the chief judgment was the penalty of death, which God had said would befall them if they ate of the forbidden tree. Spiritually they died and no longer had intimacy with God. They also became subject to death and aging so that eventually they died physically as well (Genesis 3:19). Adam's sin caused all to inherit a sinful nature. The effects of sin (spiritual and physical death in all humanity) are only overcome by the work of Christ (Romans 3:9-20; 5:12-14; 6:23). In Him we are "born again" (John 3:3, 7; 1 Peter 1:3) and made alive to God (Ephesians 2:5; Colossians 2:13; 2 Corinthians 5:17). In Christ we will also eventually receive a renewed body patterned on the resurrection body of our ascended Lord. (See 1 Corinthians 15:42-44; 49-57; Philippians 3:21; 1 John 3:1-3.)

Millennium

"Millennium" comes from a Latin word meaning "thousand years." References to a thousand-year period occur in the English Bible only in the first six verses of Revelation 20. Revelation 19-22 seems to describe the millennium as a thousand-year physical reign of the Lord Jesus Christ as King over the entire earth at

the very end of this period of human history. This reign is prior to the last judgment, the creation of a new heaven and earth and the entrance of believers into the eternal or blessed state. The millennium is a point upon which many sincere believers disagree. Amillennialism, meaning “no millennium,” says there is no distinct, physical thousand-year reign at all. Rather, the word is to be understood symbolically as descriptive of this present church age in which Christ rules in the hearts of His people until He returns. Then He ushers in the new heaven and new earth. Postmillennialism, meaning “after the millennium,” says the 1,000 years is a golden age on earth that is a result of the worldwide, transformational spreading of the gospel. Afterwards, Jesus Christ returns. Premillennialism, meaning “before the millennium,” says Jesus Christ returns and establishes an earthly rule for 1,000 years (or a long period of time) during which time Satan is bound. After Satan’s release and a final battle, Jesus judges the dead and inaugurates the new heaven and new earth. Furthermore, many premillennialists hold that numerous biblical prophecies, particularly Old Testament prophecies of the Jewish people, require a future fulfillment in the millennial age (Isaiah 2:1-4; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Romans 11:25-27). The basis for the premillennial position of Bible Study Fellowship is a chronological reading of Revelation 19-22, together with the expected fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies regarding the future of the Jewish people. (See Revelation 20:1-6; 21; 22.)

New Heaven and New Earth

The teaching of a new heaven and new earth is found in the Old and New Testaments (Isaiah 65:17, 66:22; 2 Peter 3:13, Revelation 21:1). The Old Testament uses the term “heavens and earth” to refer to “universe” because there is no one-word equivalent. In the beginning, God created a perfect universe. However, sin entered, and all creation was corrupted. Creation is described as groaning and waiting in eager expectation to be liberated from bondage to decay (Romans 8:20-22). God has promised to forever resolve that problem: After the final judgment, God’s people will live forever with Him in a new heaven and new earth (Matthew 25:34). Heaven and earth will be joined together, and there will be no death, suffering, sorrow or tears in this eternal Kingdom (Revelation 21:2-4). There are two views of the new heaven and new earth: replacement or renewal. The replacement view states God will replace the present world with a new act of creation. The renewal view states God will renovate or renew this present universe rather than replace it. The Greek word “kainos” used in 2 Peter 3:13 is typically defined as new in character rather than new in substance. Whether replacement or renewal, everything we were created for and have longed for will be satisfied as we see the face of God and dwell forever in His presence (Psalm 16:11; Revelation 22:1-5).

Prayer

Prayer is talking with God. We speak to Him in prayer; He speaks to us through the Bible. Prayer involves each person of the Trinity. We pray to God the Father (Ephesians 1:17; 3:14), through the Lord Jesus Christ – it is on the basis of His atonement that we come (Romans 1:8; 5:1-2; Colossians 3:17) and in the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 6:18; Jude 20). We can also pray to Jesus Christ, who is our great High Priest who sympathizes with our weaknesses (Hebrews 2:17; 4:15; Acts 7:59). Prayer is often thought of mostly as petition to God, but it often includes adoration, confession and thanksgiving. (See Matthew 6:5-15; 7:7; John 14:13-14; Philippians 4:6; 1 John 5:14-15.)

Reconciliation

Reconciliation describes a work by which parties who are at odds are made one with each other once again. As applied to salvation, reconciliation first recognizes our alienation – our sins have separated us from God and have placed us under His just wrath so that apart from Christ we face nothing but condemnation. However, God sent His own Son to bear the penalty of our sins, removing the cause of estrangement, and thus winning us back to personal fellowship with Himself (Romans 5:10; Colossians 1:19-20). In 2 Corinthians 5:18-19, Paul argues that because we have been reconciled to God through the work of Christ, we should now be agents of reconciliation for others, that is, we should be ambassadors of this, the greatest good news of all time. (See also Matthew 18:15-17; Ephesians 2:11-13.)

Redemption

Redemption is a word borrowed from the commercial world of the ancient near east (where slaves were bought and sold) and pressed into biblical service to describe how Jesus has purchased us in the marketplace of sin to set us free from sin's dreadful bondage. The story of Hosea's purchase of Gomer in the Old Testament book by his name is a wonderful example of this transaction (Hosea 3:1-2). Peter has the same concept in mind when he writes, "It was not with perishable things such as silver and gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect" (1 Peter 1:18, 19). His point is we have been set free from slavery to sinful ways of life and should therefore live as being Christ's possession. (See Romans 6:22-23; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20; Ephesians 1:7.)

Regeneration

Regeneration is that act by which the Holy Spirit puts His eternal life into a person who believes in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior (2 Thessalonians 2:13). People died spiritually at the fall described in Genesis 3 (see also Ephesians 2:1, 5-6). Since that time, all people live in spiritual deadness toward God until, by God's grace through faith, the Holy Spirit gives them new life. Regeneration is sometimes called the new birth because it takes what was once dead spiritually and causes it to be born again in newness of life. It is one aspect of a person's salvation. (See Titus 3:5; John 3:3, 7; Ephesians 2:5; Colossians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:3.)

Repentance

According to the Bible, repentance and faith go together so there can be no genuine turning to Christ in faith without an accompanying repudiation of sin. Repentance includes conviction of sin (which is God's work in us – John 16:8-11), contrition (or sorrow) for sin and conversion from sin (which means turning from it). (See Acts 20:21; Romans 2:4; 2 Corinthians 7:10; 2 Peter 3:9.)

Resurrection

The Christian doctrine of the resurrection begins with the resurrection of Jesus Christ, which is a fact of history (Acts 1:3; 1 Corinthians 15:1-23) and a proof of most other important doctrines. The resurrection of the Lord was no mere resuscitation, as if Jesus, like Lazarus, would thereafter have had to die again. The resurrection was a passing from existence in a fallen, decaying human body to existence in a glorified body, which lives forever. The doctrine of the resurrection also concerns us, however, because the Bible teaches that we, too, will be raised, as Jesus was. Because He lives, we shall live also. (See 1 Corinthians 15; Philippians 3:20-21.)

Righteousness

Righteousness is a moral category, and it means just what it sounds like: "right-ness" or "upright moral conduct." But the difficulty is not in the definition; it is in the lack of true or perfect righteousness by all persons (Romans 3:9-18). As long as we measure ourselves by others' righteousness, we are able to gain a measure of self-respect or encouragement, for there always seems to be those who behave worse than we do – and that may be true. But the standard is not the imperfect standard of others but God's standard, and by that standard we all stand condemned. "There is no one righteous, not even one" (Romans 3:10). But God understands our failure and has provided His own true righteousness, a perfect righteousness, in place of the righteousness we do not have. It is given to us freely without any contribution on our part when we have faith in Jesus. This transaction is called justification, meaning we are made "right" or "just" before God on the basis of Jesus' achievement. (See Romans 1:17; 3:21-25.)

Salvation

Salvation is a comprehensive term embracing deliverance from sin's penalty, sin's power and sin's presence. That is, it has a past, present and future dimension for the Christian. The **penalty** of sin is death (Romans 6:23), which means not only physical death but also eternal, spiritual death, which is eternal condemnation

and separation from God. Jesus bore this penalty for us when He died in our place on the cross. Although Jesus is only one person and died only one death, Jesus could bear the penalty for an infinite number of sins in that He is also God, an infinite being. The sins for which Jesus died will never rise up to accuse us or haunt us again. (Psalm 103:11-12; Isaiah 38:17; Jeremiah 31:34). They are atoned for and removed from us forever. Of course, even in their forgiven state Christians do continue to sin (Matthew 6:12; James 3:2; 1 John 1:8). For these sins they must constantly seek forgiveness and cleansing, which God promises to all who confess wrongdoing (1 John 1:9). (See also Matthew 6:12; John 1:29; Hebrews 9:23-28; Ephesians 2:1-5.) This daily forgiveness is not a repetition of justification but refers to a restoration of personal fellowship with God. Salvation from the **power** of sin is the present dimension and is accomplished in a believer's life through trust in the power of the Holy Spirit working together with our obedience to God. (See Romans 6; 8:1-17; Philippians 2:13; Colossians 1:13-14.) Salvation from the **presence** of sin is the future hope of Christians. It is the condition of the believer after death, where sin will no longer be present (Hebrews 12:23).

Sanctification

Sanctification refers to the believer's progressive growth in holiness or conformity to the image of Christ (Romans 6:1-23; 8:1-17). It means being set apart for God and His work (Romans 12:1-2) and becoming more fully obedient to God in daily life. It is God's will for the believer (1 Thessalonians 4:3). It is the work of the Holy Spirit and is therefore a divine work. But it is also accomplished in us by a faithful use of prayer, Bible study, fellowship, worship and the service of God and His people in the world together with trust in the Holy Spirit to change our character. For that reason we are also sometimes said to sanctify ourselves and are made responsible for it. (See 1 Corinthians 10:31; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18; Galatians 5:16-26; Ephesians 4:27-5:31; Colossians 3:1-17.)

Satan and Demons

Satan and a large angelic force, which accompanied him in his rebellion against God and thus became demons, are not mere myth or symbol but historical fact (Luke 10:18; 2 Peter 2:4; Revelation 12:7-8). Although Satan is a terrible enemy, he is not omnipotent, as God is. He cannot do everything; in fact, he can only do what God will permit (Job 1:6-12). He is not omnipresent; he cannot be everywhere, tempting everyone at once. He can only tempt one person at one time (though his demons can be active anywhere in the world). Above all, he is not omniscient; he does not know the future except as God reveals it to us (and the demons) in Scripture. Satan is loose, but limited, and he is a defeated foe. Jesus has already triumphed over him at the cross. (See Luke 22:31; John 16:11; 1 Peter 5:8-11; 1 John 3:7-10.)

The Second Coming of Christ

One of the most frequent doctrines in the New Testament is that Jesus will return to earth. According to Scripture, the second coming of Christ will be physical, sudden, visible and unexpected. It will include the bodily resurrection of the dead and the final judgment. (Christ's earthly reign during the millennium will precede the final judgment). (See John 14:3; Acts 1:11; Mark 13:26; Luke 12:40; 1 Corinthians 15:23; 2 Peter 3:10; Revelation 20:1-15.)

Sin, Its Character and Universality

Sin is any lack of conformity to the will of God. It is an outrage against God and a source of untold harm to ourselves and others. It subjects us to the wrath of God (John 3:36; Romans 1:18-20; 2:5). It has eternal consequences (Romans 6:23). The Bible teaches that all are sinners and sin has so pervaded human nature that "there is no one righteous, not even one: there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God" (Romans 3:10-11). That is, it has affected our moral, intellectual and volitional capabilities, so that all fall short of God's standards, fail to understand the gospel even when it is explained and flee from God rather than trying to seek Him out, as we should. When we understand the character and universality of sin, then we can understand the necessity for and appreciate grace. (See Romans 5:12-21; James 1:13-18; 2:10; 1 John 1:8-10.)

The Sovereignty of God

God is sovereign, which means God is in control of His universe and determines the outcome of all things according to His own wise purpose. He has absolute authority and rule over His creation (1 Chronicles 29:11-12; Psalm 47:7). Nothing is outside the scope of God's rule (Ephesians 1:11). He controls and guides all events for His glory and for our good (Romans 8:28-29). God does not adjust His plans according to the events of human history nor does He wait to see what people will decide before He decides what He will do, though He does respond differently when people pray or do not pray, and when people obey or disobey. God's decrees govern history (Daniel 4:34-35; Acts 2:23; 17:24-27). This includes the calling of those who will be saved by Him (Romans 8:29-30; Ephesians 1:4; 1 Peter 1:2). Knowing that God is sovereign (in control) gives us fuller understanding of all other doctrines and gives comfort and security in difficulties and temptations (Romans 8:31-39).

Substitution

The word *huper* is a preposition meaning "on behalf of" or "in another's place." *Huper* is the chief Greek term for expressing the principle of substitution, and substitution is one of the main salvation concepts in the Bible. We are saved because God sent the Lord Jesus Christ to die *huper* ("on behalf of") us or "in our place." He stood in our place, as a sinner, and bore the full force of the wrath of God for our transgressions (2 Corinthians 5:21; Isaiah 53:6; Romans 3:25; Hebrews 2:17). As a result, we are able to stand before God "as Christ" and be seen in His righteousness. (See John 1:29; 1 Thessalonians 5:9; Hebrews 2:9; 9:28; 10:10; 1 Peter 2:24; 3:18.)

Suffering

Suffering is the experience of physical, mental, emotional or spiritual pain and/or distress. Suffering entered the world as a consequence of the fall of Adam and Eve and will be eternally abolished in the new heaven and new earth (Genesis 3; Revelation 21). Until then, suffering is inevitable for all people. Suffering may come directly from God, Satan, our own sinful choices or as a natural consequence of living in a broken world with natural disasters, decaying physical bodies or interactions with other fallen people (Amos 3:6; Job 1:9-12; Luke 9:38-42). Sin can result in suffering for an individual or nation either through God's direct judgment/punishment or as a natural consequence of sin (Joel 2:12-14; Romans 1:18-32). However, not all suffering is the direct result of sin (John 9:1-3). Some possible reasons for suffering include loving discipline, purification and/or an increased intimacy with Jesus Christ while other reasons for suffering remain mysteriously hidden (Proverbs 3:12; Romans 5:1-5; Philippians 3:7-10). Regardless of the type, purpose or reason of the suffering, no suffering is outside of God's sovereign rule (Isaiah 45:7). Rather, God is able to use it for good (Genesis 50:15-21; Romans 8:28). Although the Bible does not give a complete explanation for suffering, the fact God allows suffering cannot mean God does not love us. His love is clearly demonstrated by sending His Son for our salvation. The Lord Jesus Christ is the suffering Servant who bore our sorrows, sins and God's wrath on the cross. By His wounds we are healed (Isaiah 53). God has promised the suffering of His people will eventually end (Revelation 21:4). Until then, believers should expect to share in the suffering of Jesus Christ as a result of taking up their cross and following Him in a hostile world (Mark 8:34-35; Romans 8:17-18; Colossians 1:24).

The Trinity

No one fully understands the Trinity, which is not surprising because this doctrine deals with the innermost nature of God's very being. The best we can do is try to understand what the Bible tells us of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, and try to relate the three persons of the one Godhead without making mistakes or distortions. This is what the church tried to do in the first four centuries of its existence. It concluded that there is but one God, which the Bible clearly teaches, but that He exists in three entities, which the church called "persons." Although they are distinct persons, both the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are every bit as much God as God the Father is. All work together with one mind in all

things. In terms of emphasis, we usually say God the Father was principally active in the creation of the world and in planning the great drama of salvation; the Lord Jesus Christ was principally active in achieving this salvation by His death and in reigning over the Church, His body, as the Church's Lord; and the Holy Spirit is principally active in calling men and women to faith in Christ, in empowering them for witness and ministry, and in making them increasingly like Christ through the work of sanctification. (See Ephesians 1:3-10; Colossians 1:15-23; Hebrews 1:1-4; Genesis 1:2; Isaiah 63:8-10; Matthew 28:18-20; Luke 1:35; John 14:7-10; 2 Corinthians 13:14.)

Works

If Ephesians 2:8-10 could be understood by all Christians, most controversies about works would be avoided. That passage mentions works twice, once in verses 8 and 9 ("It is by grace you have been saved ... not by works, so that no one can boast") and once in verse 10 ("For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works"). The first verses refer to justification, and in justification works are excluded. No one can be "saved" (in the sense of justified) by human works. In Galatians, Paul even pronounces a curse on anyone who would dare to teach differently (Galatians 1:8-9). On the other hand, in verse 10, Paul speaks about works to be done by one who has already been justified, and in this case works are absolutely necessary, for they are ordained by God for all who are born again. If there are no works, there is no new life. A sincere profession of faith followed by a changed life with good works, not a mere profession alone, is the only real proof of a person's salvation. (See also Romans 11:6; Galatians 2:16; 2 Timothy 1:9; Titus 3:4-8; James 2:14-18; 2 Peter 1:5-11.)

Wrath of God

God's wrath is the manifestation of His hatred of sin, wickedness and all who defy Him. God's wrath reflects His holy desire and action for justice and righteousness to prevail. There are six terms in the Old Testament and 20 in the New Testament that describe God's negative reaction to people who steadfastly oppose Him and disregard His call to repent. God's wrath is seen in the plagues of Egypt and the destruction of Pharaoh's army (Exodus 15:7), and against Israel when the people constructed and worshipped the golden calf (Exodus 32:35). In the New Testament, God's wrath is expressed as a judicial action against those who sin against Him (Luke 21:22-24; Romans 1:18-20, 2:5-6; Revelation 6:16). God's wrath does not include the idea of "getting even" or "paying back" for rebellion and, therefore, cannot be compared to people's anger. Instead, the passion of God is moved by His overwhelming concern for purity and total opposition to all that attacks His holiness and love. All people have a sin nature and deserve the eternal wrath of God as His just response to their sin. Therefore, God's wrath is the greatest problem people face. However, Jesus provided salvation and rescue through His work of bearing God's wrath on the cross in our place. The blood of Jesus shields all who trust in Christ's atoning sacrifice (Romans 5:9, 8:1; Ephesians 2:3-5). Believers are delivered from God's wrath now and forevermore (1 Thessalonians 1:10).