

- 1) **INTRODUCTION** – The reality of what constitutes a “Normative Christian Theology” has been debated through the ages. How perfect does your theology actually have to be? The Apostle Paul makes a strong case in training his protégés Timothy and Titus of the necessity of thinking properly about God with “Sound teaching” and “sound doctrine” – 1 Timothy 1:10; 4:16; 2 Timothy 4:3; Titus 1:9; 2:1. Some options teachers/preachers employ are over simplistic, others are over complicated. Many teach that unless you model “their” theology that you’re in danger. There are many articles on theology under the “Biblical Literacy-Theology” path, and simpler studies under the “Leadership Development – Discipleship Studies” path. One of the best-case options for a normative theology can be found in the “Early Church Creeds.” An online resource may be found at [www.rca.org/resources/nicene-creed](http://www.rca.org/resources/nicene-creed) which offers a concise list of basic Christianity. There are three basic creeds with the Nicene being the best known and accepted, followed by the Athanasian Creed and the Apostles Creed. There are also a number of “confessions of the faith” of the early church that are also included on this website. It is important to have a personal understanding of the basic beliefs of Christianity, so disciples know when they are standing on firm ground, and when they are on thin ice. There are far too many people teaching a variety of theological positions, that it is important to understand what is true and what is acceptable and differentiate these from what is false. The balance of this article will take a brief look at Christian Heresies that have plagued the Church through the ages and how to identify them. Quoted sources identified by endnote and edited for content and clarity by AD.
- 2) **DEFINITION OF HERESY<sup>i</sup>** – In Hellenistic Greek the term *hairesis* from which *heresy* is derived, originally referred to a philosophical school or followers of the teachings of Aristotle, Plato, or Stoicism. The use of *heresy* in Judaism was similar, and used in identifying the sects of the Pharisees, Sadducees, or the Essenes. *Heresy* as it appears in the New Testament is colored by this cultural background. Heresy is at first used neutrally in Acts 24:5; 26:5; cf. Acts 5:17; 15:5; 28:22 – but the term is also used in the New Testament in a specifically Christian context with a derogatory sense, relating to divisions within the church which threatened its unity as in 1Corinthians 11:19; Galatians 5:20; cf. Titus 3:10. The problem of *heresy* as it was to be later defined over against *orthodoxy*, shows itself earliest in the New Testament in 2 Peter 2:1 referring to false teachers who will “introduce destructive heresies” – specifically in their denial of Christ. The letters of Paul and John also reveal early pressure on the Christian Church to resist **doctrinal error** within its ranks particularly with rise of *pre-Gnosticism* and persecution from outside the church as in Colossians 2:8-23; 1 John 2:22; 4:2 f.; 2 John 7 ff.
- a) In the early church the concept of **heresy as theological error** predominated, although when it was used at first in the context of the Cyprian on the Novatians, “heresy” and “schism” within the church, were not always distinguished (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:18 f.). From the late second century onward however, “heresy” usually meant doctrinal error and/or departure from the know accepted articles of faith. While “schism” usually implied dissent from the church for any reason contrary to the approved orthodox position. Schisms were usually tolerated while heresy would get you thrown out of the

church. The term “Orthodoxy” came to mean compliance with the official church position on articles of faith, while “Heterodoxy” mean being at odds with “any opinions or doctrines at variance with an accepted orthodox position”.

- b) The existence of schisms and heresies in the early church encouraged the formalized definition of the faith by the councils which resulted in the creeds, and also in affirming the accepted canon of the New Testament. The diversity of belief at the local levels of the early church in the second century, was such requiring that “orthodoxy” and “heresy” being defined even if at first they were tolerated to a certain degree.
  - c) The early Fathers regarded heterodoxy as sinful. This view of the moral aspect of heresy strongly influenced medieval Scholastic thought on the subject; although the terms “faith” and “heresy” acquired at the same time a wider meaning, both related generally to Christian life and conduct, and not only to the denial of revealed truth as taught by the church (e.g. Thomas Aquinas). In more recent times heresy has come again to denote a strictly doctrinal heterodoxy which deserves **Censure** and in some cases **Excommunication** by the church.
- 3) **CENSURE**<sup>ii</sup> – A theological censure is a doctrinal judgment by which a Church council or leadership judges certain teachings as being detrimental to accepted community faith or morals. Specific theological censures are divided into three groups according as they bear principally upon 1) the import, or 2) the expression, or 3) the consequences – of objectionable propositions or actions.
- a) **A proposition is branded *heretical*** when it goes directly and immediately against an accepted, revealed or defined article of the faith; and it is *erroneous* when it contradicts only a certain theological conclusion or truth that may be clearly deduced from two premises, such that – 1) an article of faith, or 2) a known and accepted value or truth are compromised.
  - b) **A proposition is ambiguous** when it is worded in such a manner as to present two or more conclusions – 1) that which is clearly objectionable, 2) that which is critical or petty when otherwise acceptable words are made to express objectionable thoughts, 3) that which is evil-sounding when improper words are used to express otherwise acceptable truths, and 4) that which is offensive when verbal expression would rightly shock the sense and delicacy of faith.
  - c) **A proposition is objectionable** when it falls into the third category false teachings or actions that include being 1) derisive of the faith, 2) defacing the character or beauty of God or the Church, 3) deliberately subversive of the hierarchy of leadership, 4) destructive of governments in which the church operates, 5) scandalous, pernicious, or dangerous to the morals of constituents, 6) blasphemous and or leading to idolatry, superstition or sorcery), 6) arrogant or harsh in manner or church speech. This third group of censures are directed against such propositions as those that would imperil faith and practice in general, including the Church's calling and authority, its unity of government and hierarchy, its civil society, its morals in general, or the virtues inherent in proper faith expressed in Christian values - namely kindness and humility in particular.
- 4) **EXCOMMUNICATION**<sup>iii</sup> – This involves varying degrees of exclusion from the community of the faithful

because of error in doctrine or lapse in morals. The term *excommunicatus* first appears in ecclesiastical documents in the fourth century. Discipline in the first century church generally followed the Jewish model employing the “threefold warning” as recommended for an offending believer in Matthew 18:15-17, meaning the increasing hierarchy of: 1) private [rebuke], 2) before two or three witnesses [censure], and 3) before the whole assembly [excommunication]. This threefold approach conforms to accepted Jewish cultural practice.

- a) The origin of excommunication in Christian terms is normally theologically traced to the saying of Jesus about “*binding and loosing*” in Matthew 16:19 (to Peter) and 18:18 (to the disciples; cf. John 20:23). Even if such legislation were relevant at the time when the Evangelists [Gospel writers] wrote, there is no need to regard it as a post-Easter invention. Paul advocates degrees of sanctions to deal with offenders in the church, ranging from social deprivation (2 Thessalonians 3:10,14 f.) to full exclusion from the community (1 Corinthians 5:13; cf. v. 5 and 2 Corinthians 2:5-11). The punishment in this case, was the responsibility of the whole assembly to enforce (1 Corinthians 5:4) and intended for the good of both the offender and the church (vv. 5- 7; cf. 1 Timothy 1:19 f.). With the growth of the church, the problem of the authority to excommunicate also arose (cf. 3 John 9 f.).
- b) In the early Christian community, excommunication as such (“hand over to Satan,” 1 Corinthians 5:5) implied complete removal and isolation from the faithful. By the fifteenth century, a distinction had been introduced between excommunicates who were to be shunned for gross error (the *vitandi*) and those who would be tolerated (the *tolerati*) and were excluded only from participation in the sacraments. This distinction still operates in the Roman Catholic Church. However, in modern Protestant circles and despite the Anglican canons, formal excommunication is rarely imposed.

**5) TRINITARIAN CHRISTOLOGICAL HERESIES<sup>iv</sup> - the following list is a brief summation of known heresies about the Person and Nature of the Trinity and how they may be identified, the proponents of these thoughts and dates they were originally developed, the formal judgment against the proponents, and finally additional thoughts related to the particular heresy:**

Heresy	Description	Origin	Official Judgment	Additional Information
<u>Adoptionism</u>	Belief that Jesus was born as a mere human or a non-divine man, who was supremely virtuous and that he was adopted later as "Son of God" by the descent of the Spirit on him.	Propounded by Theodotus of Byzantium, a leather merchant, in Rome 190 AD, later revived by Paul of Samosata	Theodotus was excommunicated by Pope Victor, and Paul was condemned by the Synod of Antioch in 268 AD	Alternative names: Psilanthropism and Dynamic Monarchianism. Later criticized as presupposing Nestorianism (see below)
<u>Apollinarism</u>	Belief that Jesus had a human body and lower soul (the seat of the emotions), but a divine mind.	Proposed by Apollinaris of Laodicea (died 390 AD)	Declared to be a heresy in 381 AD by the First Council of Constantinople	

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Heresy	Description	Origin	Official Judgment	Additional Information
<u>Arabici</u>	Belief that the soul perished with the body, and that both would be revived on Judgement Day.	Founder unknown, but associated with 3rd-century AD Christians from Arabia.		Reconciled to the main body of the Church after a council in 250 AD led by Origen.
<u>Arianism</u>	Denial of the true divinity of Jesus Christ. Argued Jesus had taken various specific "forms" but all agreed that Jesus Christ was created by the Father, that he had a beginning in time, and that the title "Son of God" was a courtesy one.	The doctrine is associated with Arius (250–336 AD) who lived and taught in Alexandria, Egypt.	Arius was first pronounced a heretic at the First Council of Nicea, he was later exonerated as a result of imperial pressure, but was finally declared a heretic after his death. The heresy was finally resolved in 381 AD by the First Council of Constantinople.	All forms denied that Jesus Christ is "consubstantial with the Father" and proposed alternatives either "similar in substance", or "similar/dissimilar" in specifics as the correct alternative.
<u>Docetism</u>	Belief that Jesus' physical body was an illusion, as was his crucifixion; that is, Jesus only seemed to have a physical body and to physically die, but in reality he was incorporeal, a pure spirit, and hence not being physical he could not physically die.	Tendencies existed in the 1st century, but it was most notably embraced by Gnostics in subsequent centuries.	Docetism was rejected by the Ecumenical Councils and mainstream Christianity, and largely died out during the first millennium AD.	Gnostic movements that survived past that time, such as Catharism, incorporated Docetism into their beliefs, but such movements were destroyed by the Albigensian Crusade (1209–1229 AD).
<u>Luciferians</u>	Strongly anti-Arian sect in Sardinia	Founded by Lucifer Calaritanus a bishop of Cagliari	Deemed heretical by Jerome in his <i>Altercatio Luciferiani et orthodoxi</i>	
<u>Macedonians or Pneumatomachians ("Spirit fighters")</u>	While accepting the divinity of Jesus Christ as affirmed at Nicea in 325, they denied divinity of the Holy Spirit which they saw as a creation of the Son, and a servant of the Father and the Son.	Allegedly founded in the 4th century AD by Bishop Macedonius I of Constantinople, Eustathius of Sebaste was their principal theologian.	Opposed by the Cappadocian Fathers and condemned at the First Council of Constantinople.	This is what prompted the theological addition of "And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life, Who proceedeth from the Father, Who was with the Father and the Son is equally worshipped and glorified, Who spake by the Prophets", into the Nicene Creed at the second ecumenical council.

Heresy	Description	Origin	Official Judgment	Additional Information
<u>Melchisedechians</u>	Considered Melchisedech an incarnation of the Logos (divine Word) and identified him with the Holy Ghost.		Refuted by Marcus Eremita in his book <i>Eis ton Melchisedek</i> ("Against the Melchisedekites")	It is uncertain whether the sect survived beyond the 9th century AD. They were probably scattered across Anatolia and the Balkans following the destruction of Tephrike.
<u>Monarchianism</u>	Presented an overemphasis on the "indivisibility of God" the Father at the expense of the other "persons" of the Trinity leading to either Sabellianism (Modalism) or to Adoptionism.			Initially seen as stressing the "monarchy" of God in Eastern theology as a legitimate way of affirming his oneness. It also affirmed the Father as the unique source of divinity. It became heretical when pushed to the extremes indicated.
<u>Monophysitism or Eutychianism</u>	Belief that Christ's divinity dominates and overwhelms his humanity, as opposed to 1) the Chalcedonian position which holds that Christ has two natures, one divine and one human; or 2) the Miaphysite position which holds that the human nature and pre-incarnate divine nature of Christ were united as one divine human nature from the point of the Incarnation onwards.	After Nestorianism was rejected at the First Council of Ephesus, Eutyches emerged with diametrically opposite views.	Eutyches was excommunicated in 448 AD. Monophysitism and Eutyches were rejected at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD. Monophysitism is also rejected by the Oriental Orthodox Churches.	
<u>Monothelitism</u>	Belief that Jesus Christ had two natures but only one will. This is contrary to the orthodox interpretation of Christology, which teaches that Jesus Christ has two wills (both human and divine) corresponding to his two natures.	Originated in Armenia and Syria in AD 633	Monothelitism was officially condemned at the Third Council of Constantinople (the Sixth Ecumenical Council, 680–681 AD). The churches condemned include the Oriental Orthodox, Syriac, Armenian, and Coptic and the Maronite church	

Heresy	Description	Origen	Official Judgment	Additional Judgment
<u>Nestorianism</u>	Belief that Jesus Christ was a natural union between the Flesh and the Word, thus not identical to the eternal divine Son of God.	Advanced by Nestorius (386–450 AD), Patriarch of Constantinople from 428–431. The doctrine was informed by Nestorius' studies under Theodore of Mopsuestia at the School of Antioch.	Condemned at the First Council of Ephesus in 431 and the Council of Chalcedon in 451, leading to the Nestorian Schism.	Nestorius rejected the title Theotokos for the Virgin Mary, and proposed Christotokos as more suitable. Many of Nestorius' supporters relocated to Sassanid Persia, where they affiliated with the local Christian community, known as the Church of the East. Over the next decades the Church of the East became increasingly Nestorian in doctrine, leading it to be known alternately as the Nestorian Church.
<u>Patripassianism</u>	Belief that the Father and Son are not two distinct persons, and thus it was God the Father that suffered on the cross as Jesus.			Similar to Sabellianism or Modalism.
<u>Psilanthropism</u>	Belief that Jesus is "merely human" and either that he never became divine, or that he never existed prior to his incarnation as a man.		Rejected by the Ecumenical Councils, especially in the First Council of Nicaea, which was convened to deal directly with the nature of Christ's divinity.	<u>See Adoptionism</u>
<u>Sabellianism</u> also known as <u>Modalism</u>	Belief that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three "characterizations" of one God, rather than three distinct "persons" in one God.	First formally stated by Noetus of Smyrna c. 190 AD, refined by Sabellius c. 210 who applied the names merely to different roles of God in the history and economy of salvation.	Noetus was condemned by the presbyters of Smyrna. Tertullian wrote <i>Adversus Praxeam</i> against this tendency and Sabellius was condemned by Pope Callistus.	Alternative names: Patripassianism, Modalism, Modalistic Monarchianism

**6) CONCLUDING THOUGHTS:**

- a) This list of heresies is not exhaustive but presents many of the major issues the church was compelled to identify and act against to protect the orthodoxy and integrity of the faith. Christian leaders understand that Trinitarian Theology has always been complex and messy. However, human efforts throughout history to attempt to simplify Trinity or redefine who God has revealed Himself to be in Scripture thankfully has been pretty much fruitless. Heresies usually began as an attempt to respond to a philosophical complaint. The rise of Modalism [AKA Sabellianism] was intended to answer the problem of how God could be “One” as the Jewish Shema declared “Behold O’ Israel that the Lord your God is One” and yet be experienced as “Three distinct Persons” in the doctrine of the Trinity. It is important to remember that when Jesus came He also taught to correct humanities understand on the Nature and Person of God, and how humanity must respond to Him. Where the Scripture is clear, we need to teach with authority; where the Scripture is less clear, we need to teach with caution. Jesus taught that God was Three persons... Father, Son and Spirit. Teaching something else is wrong theology, no matter how well intended. The apostle John explained the necessity of Jesus being the Promised Messiah... the God/man – In 1 John 4:2-6 he wrote “By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the *spirit* of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world. You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world. They are from the world; therefore they speak *as* from the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.”
- b) Through the ages Church leaders have strenuously taught Biblical Literacy specifically to define and conform its leaders in Theological Orthodoxy. These efforts have kept mainstream Christianity relatively normative and consistent through the centuries. The stability and general unity of Christian beliefs on the main articles of faith amid the cultural and denominational dichotomies through time is really quite remarkable. The rise of the non-denominational church movement in the past fifty years or so with their independence from denominational oversight and often lack of theological conformity, has certainly complicated unity and orthodoxy in the local church, but this has not yet broken or diluted the basic standards for faith. Most church leaders decry the lack of Biblical Literacy among modern believers, unfortunately their efforts to encourage vigorous discipleship have been deficient. Much more needs to be done by the church along the lines of training disciples as lay leaders, which is one of the main priorities of Authentic Discipleship.
- c) Another particularly difficult complication for orthodoxy and unity is the rise of secular socio-cultural intrusion into the faith. Christianity from the outset was a counter-cultural movement within Judaism. Today’s culture has become so pervasive that it has penetrated the church and to a degree undermined the authority and veracity of Scripture. However, the Spirit continues to indwell



believers and unify the faithful.

- d) False teachers and false prophets have also always plagued the church, and we are grateful for the efforts of Godly leaders through the ages who have worked to maintain normative theology through vigorous discipleship which has helped to preserve the identity and witness of the church. Biblical Literacy is a key part of discipleship in keeping individuals and the church properly aligned, and needs to be vigorously encouraged within the church. The church should return to a more rigorous “Sunday School” format for adults to be trained in the basics of the faith to maintain orthodoxy in the congregation.
- e) Some of the heresies listed above may be found in various modern churches, such as modalism and neo-Gnosticism. Some schisms also continue in the church... including theological preferences, church leadership preferences, and interpretative differences. Some things are primary, some things are secondary and tertiary, and other things are individual preferences from which we are free to decide. All of this makes it all the more incumbent on believers to assume personal responsibility in knowing what they believe, why they believe it, and what our local churches believe and teach in remaining compatible with core beliefs. The following section deals with “Theological Safeguards” all disciples and church leadership should be aware of.

- 7) **THEOLOGICAL SAFEGUARDS** – This is an ***EXTREMELY IMPORTANT TOPIC***. **“Learning to Distinguish Between Degrees of Certainty”** is an article by Gerry Breshears<sup>1</sup> [Dean of Theology, Western Seminary – Portland Campus] using Romans chapter 14 as A clarion call, he reasons that there are so many things that we cannot “Know” thus it is wise to place these thoughts in a hierarchical context to promote unity and harmony in the Church:
- a) **Things that are Certain – “Things I would Die For”** – these are the essentials... the fundamental truths of the Christian faith; denying any of these would constitute committing a heresy. These Dr Breshears considers a “Deal-Breaker” for normative faith and essentially indicate you are not a Christian.
    - i) The Trinity or Triune God – God existing as One God in three co-eternal Persons.
    - ii) The incarnation of the second Person of the Trinity – the Fully God/fully man, Jesus – and accepting we do not understand all the details on how this works out... but that God does.
    - iii) The Third Person of the Trinity – the Holy Spirit actively indwelling all believers through the ages and leading each into conviction, knowledge, and righteousness – Who forms Jesus’ nature, mind, character, and heart within all redeemed believers.
    - iv) The inspiration and authority of Scripture – man could not go to God and discover Truth; God had to come to man and reveal Himself. Scripture is the means through which God chose to reveal Himself.
    - v) The virgin birth of Jesus... Scripture taught that Messiah-Jesus would be born of a virgin... a major sign. We don’t know all the details of how this transpired biologically, but we accept it by faith.

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<sup>1</sup> Roberts, Randal: Editor. 1999. Lessons in Leadership. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications



- vi) Jesus sinless life on earth... Scripture taught that He must be sinless to be the acceptable propitiation before God.
  - vii) Jesus substitutionary death as the atonement for all Sin for all time – Sin is “Wrong Being” not merely “wrong doing” – it gets to the core of our human nature after the Fall. Christian understand that we are not who we were intended to be, in complete honesty and in some way or another we all know we are deficient. Sin is “missing the mark” of God’s intended perfection.
  - viii) Jesus’ bodily resurrection and conquest over Sin and death. If there was no Cross and Resurrection, there is no Christianity. Jesus is the First Fruit and the New Adam of humanity.
  - ix) Jesus’ bodily return as Lord of Lords at the end of times – to collect the faithful, judge the wicked, and restore creation to perfection.
  - x) Justification by Grace alone – the works alone of sinful man are insufficient save him; only God’s provision of Grace through Jesus puts us in right standing with God.
  - xi) The Church as the Unified Body of believers – the worldwide Organism of Spirit indwelt Believers throughout history represented in the local church... this is profoundly different from the organization of the local church which as an institution is part of the Fallen Human condition.
  - xii) Eternal Life – for believers [God’s people] our future is in Heaven as redeemed Sons and Daughters of God; for the wicked, unrepentant, and unregenerate there will be eternal separation in hell.
- b) Things that are Less than Certain – “Things I would Divide For” – having accepted the above as primary conditions of being a “Christian”, these things in this second group are important issues that are often sufficiently foundational that we would divide local fellowship over – these are such things as divided Paul and Barnabas [Acts 15:39], and form the basis of most Christian denominational differences.” These secondary things could be factors preventing a unified service within the body of believers, but not necessarily render believers unfaithful to their Lord Jesus. Typically, a good argument can be made for either side of these issues.
- i) Arminianists will often divide from Calvinists over the issue of sanctification, predestination, and free will. Arminianists argue that man has a choice to accept or refuse grace, as necessary to be accountable before God. Calvinists believe grace is irresistible and pre-determining meaning humans have no choice but to fulfill God’s plan to either accept or reject Him.
  - ii) Both Arminianist and Calvinist may divide from Pentecostals over the nature and timing of the baptism of the Spirit and the impartation and use of spiritual gifts, the dispensational appropriateness of gifts throughout redemptive history, and their appropriateness as part of regular worship services.
  - iii) Dispensationals may argue that God now speaks only through scripture, while non-dispensationals may argue whether God continues to employ personal [prophetic] revelation that is consistent with scripture? Groups may also argue about what forms is this personal revelation proper for use in discipleship or in worship services?
  - iv) Both baptism and communion are accepted as signs of the New Covenant in Jesus, but how and when they are employed and what they signifies varies by church traditions.
    - (1) Are they in fact the seal of membership into the covenant community?
    - (2) Is baptism necessary for the cleansing sin? Is baptism appropriate for children or only adults? What is the age of accountability?

- (3) What are the appropriate elements of communion? Is it appropriate to have communion in secular places? Etc.
- (4) Are these and other sacraments representational of a Spiritual reality? Or are they an actual and necessary reality [such as trans-substantiation and con-substantiation of communion elements]?
- v) What are the priorities of church – winning the lost? Discipling? Social justice? Worshiping God? Etc. In what proportion should ministry focus on each?
- vi) What is the responsibility of elders, deacons, & staff – and who is responsible for the work of ministry and equipping and sending the saints into their mission field?
- vii) What is the appropriate day of service? What does the Sabbath mean in the modern church?
- viii) What style or form of church service is appropriate – liturgical? Expository? Celebrative? Homiletic? Who is to be involved in weekly presentations – lay and clergy, clergy alone?
- ix) What is the nature of Heaven and Hell? Are there 7 levels of each? Is Hell mere separation from God, or eternal torment?
- c) **Things that are Uncertain – “Things I would Debate For”** – these are the uncertain things we wrestle with inside a church body of believers or denomination – this wrestling may be prolonged or even painful at times, but we do it while maintaining regular fellowship, joining together in worship and proclamation and acceptance as brothers and sisters.” These are things which may often be effectively argued from either position, so there is no unequivocal clear and obvious choice, more usually they are our church-community preference that should not be allowed to interfere with the unity of the body and their corporate service. [There is a great resource on exploring these issues in a non-judgmental evangelical fashion – Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology, Gregory Boyd and Paul Eddy, Baker Academic, 2002.]
  - i) Inspiration of Scripture – inerrant or infallible? Does it apply only to the original text or to our current text?
  - ii) Providence – is God absolutely sovereign or does He limit His control? How does free will & God’s Sovereignty work out? Accepting God as Sovereign, is history closed, semi-open, or open?
  - iii) Foreknowledge – if God knows everything I will ever do, how can I be free to choose?
  - iv) Did Jesus possess all the attributes of God in the flesh including the incommunicable ones, or did He purposefully set aside some attributes of God? How does “fully God” and “fully man” work out?
  - v) What is the role of women in the church? Are women as pastors, elders, or deacons appropriate? Can women preach and teach the congregation? Is the relationship between women and men ‘Complementarian’, ‘Egalitarian’, or both?
  - vi) What is the proper role of church in the community? In the society? In the culture? In the political process? In the world? Is God waiting for the church to prepare the world for the return of Messiah as post-millennials believe? Will the world continue to degrade until the end as pre-millennials believe? Or is the A-millennial position more appropriate?
  - vii) Is peace possible in our Fallen state? Is world peace a reasonable objective for the church to pursue?

- viii) What extent should the church participate in compassionate ministries in the community? Is it acceptable if it doesn't have a redemptive influence? Is relieving pain and suffering a worthwhile objective apart from redemptive influences?
- ix) In what order should the church service present liturgical, expository, celebrative, and intercessory components? In what form should they occur and in what proportion?
- x) We believe that Jesus did not possess a "sin nature" – otherwise He could not have been the perfect sacrifice to atone for sinful humanity. But to what extent was Jesus tempted as a man? Was he tempted by something, but never gave into it? Could He be fully man and not have been tempted? Did He ever lie to His mom or dad or do the normal stuff kids do? Etc.
- d) Things that are Preferences – "Things I would Decide For" – these are the *adiaphora* of Romans 14-15 – areas of belief and behavior about which there is no law, only our personal preferences. These are where the Bible warns us about judging – where acceptance is a virtue and legalism a real danger." Body life should always promote unity, acceptance, tolerance, long suffering, etc. within a redemptive framework.
  - i) Avoid anything that would separate the body into "us" and "them" groups – such as social cliques, or haves and have nots, etc.
  - ii) Avoid contentious or divisive intrigues or controversy – the body should deliberately and purposefully "make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification" – Romans 14:19. The worst of these things center on spiritual and leadership abuse over others.
  - iii) What form of music should be presented – for centuries the voice alone was the norm, then accompaniment by organ or piano was allowed. Later acoustic guitars became acceptable, now electric guitars and drums and rock style music have gained acceptance, what about rap & hip-hop? Etc.
  - iv) What are the appropriate behavioral characteristics of believers – is it OK to smoke? To drink? Is acceptable in moderation, what constitutes moderation? Is it OK to eat meat?
  - v) What appearance characteristics are appropriate in church – long hair? Dyed hair? Piercings? Tattoos? Short dresses? Shorts and flip-flops on men, Etc.
  - vi) The church has always been a counter-cultural organization. To what extent is it necessary to maintain certain standards of historical decorum and to what extent are new-wineskins necessary for the church? See this excellent article by Billy Graham on the necessity of the church as a counter-cultural standard - <https://billygraham.org/decision-magazine/march-2011/be-separate/> .
- 8) In closing out this article, I'd like to call your attention to a remarkable passage in the Gospel of Luke. Beginning in Luke 17:20, Jesus is found answering the question of what will be the sign of the times when the Kingdom of God will arrive resulting in the New Heaven and Earth. The teaching is stunning and concludes with what seems an odd almost rhetorical question in Luke 18:8b, "However, when the Son of Man returns, will he find faith on the earth?" It seems evident that Jesus expected the Church to remain "salt and light" to successive generations, but accepted that at some point it would be either less visible or less effective. One thing I believe is clear... Jesus challenged His followers to be prioritized by the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. This is a reminder of the church's high calling:

**The Great Commandment in Matthew 22:37-40 -**

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and Greatest Commandment. And the second is like it, Love your neighbor as yourself. The Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

**The Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20 -**

“Then Jesus came to them [His disciples] and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore *go and make disciples of all nations*, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and *teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you*. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

The Great Commandment is a reminder to the church of the priority of knowing and loving God; the Great Commission is a directive to the church to evangelism (the ‘Go’) and discipleship training (the ‘teaching’ and ‘obeying’).

I believe than when we fail to keep these priorities clearly identified and alive in the church, that we tend to lose the priority and vibrancy of our faith. God, for reasons unknow to me, has decided to work through Fallen humanity to redeem His people. When we fail to remain true to His calling, faith as it was intended to be slowly becomes unrecognizable... and increasingly irrelevant. In watering down the truths we hold to render the faith more acceptable to the world culture, we risk robbing the Gospel of its convicting bite.

Pray for a revival! And act as though it has come! It comes down to individuals heeding and obeying God’s call [invitation] on our life. For more information available on the AD website, see this article on Spiritual Vitality for more on this critical subject - <http://www.authenticdiscipleship.org/pdfs/2-spiritual-formation/Spiritual%20Disciplines/SF%201.5%20Prayer%20Practicum%203%20-%20Developing%20Spiritual%20Vitality.pdf>

The following articles were used in this article, and were edited for content and clarity by AD:

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<sup>i</sup> Article from Zondervan’s New International Dictionary of the Christian Church

<sup>ii</sup> Article from Wikipedia The Free Online Encyclopedia

<sup>iii</sup> Article from Zondervan’s New International Dictionary of the Christian Church

<sup>iv</sup> Article from Wikipedia The Free Online Encyclopedia