

**INTRODUCTION:** Having a healthy “Christian Identity” is a rather complex topic. Most people cannot give a reasoned argument for their faith in a Trinitarian God – meaning a UNITY of Father, Son, and Spirit. Most people are unaware of their identity as a “Christian Disciple” – meaning one who is being progressively conformed to the Image of Christ who is the exact image of the Father; one who is being transformed from the inside out as an ambassador of Christ and heir of the Kingdom of God.

In addition, there are many people who confess themselves as “Christians” who may be more “Cultural Christians” – meaning they have been raised in a country whose dominant faith is Christianity, and thus presume they are Christians. Then there are the denominational variations of “Normative Christian Faith” where they have widely divergent beliefs about what being Christian really means. Thus, the need for a “Basic Christian Doctrine and Theological Understanding” has probably never been greater. Then this begs another question, with many churches and different denominations each with different doctrinal and theological interpretations about what Christian faith and practice looks like, how do we articulate a “Christian Discipleship Identity” that is both Biblically sound while still allowing for the Unity of the Spirit in the family of faith which Scripture calls us to promote? The purpose of this article is to help develop a better understanding of a more Basic Christian Doctrine and Theology.

**1) What is theology? Definitions include the following:**

- a) “If we look at the word *theology* and break it down into the two Greek words from which it is composed—*theos* (meaning “God”) and *logos* (meaning “study”), theology is ‘the study of God’.”
- b) “Theology is not a mere set of facts *about* God; instead it is experiential knowledge *of* God that grows out of a personal and intimate relationship with God.”
- c) “Christian Theology holds that while God is Sovereign and does communicate with humanity through dreams, visions, and other supernatural means; that the Bible is the only accepted standard and authority for Christian faith and practice.”
- d) “Christian theology is founded upon a Trinitarian God who consistently communicates to humanity through:
  - (1) God’s Word— meaning the written Word, the Bible.
  - (2) The living Word – meaning Jesus Christ sent into the world to proclaim the Kingdom of God and salvation for all who would receive it.
  - (3) The Spirit – meaning the indwelling Holy Spirit who seals the faith for all believers.”
- e) “Christian Theology has one solid foundation – meaning the Bible is the arbiter of the rule of faith. The proper development of Christian Theology involves the whole Bible; it cannot be extrapolated out a verse or passage out of context.”
- f) Theology thus includes:
  - i) “The study of the nature of God and His Revealed Truth, which thereby informs our faith and most importantly clarifies how God interacts with and affects all of humanity.”
  - ii) “It is man’s words expressing belief/understanding about God’s Words.”
  - iii) “Theology is different from Biblical history or church history, which focus on the *stream of events* through time [redemptive history].”
  - iv) “Theology is *developmental*, meaning it is developing over time and *experiential*, meaning it is born out of our personal life experiences.”

- (1) “A young man’s theology is often different from an old man’s theology – as God has shaped the person over time in the life-long process of sanctification... as the Spirit forms Jesus’ nature and character in our inner-life.”
  - (2) “Theology is ideally a balanced combination of Biblical Literacy – knowing the mind of Christ through the Scripture [IQ], and Spiritual Formation – knowing the heart of Christ through relational connection and dependence [EQ].”
  - (3) “Theology is necessarily experiential – until you have tasted God, you can’t know He is Good. Until you have relied on God, you can’t know He is faithful.... Etc.”
  - v) Theology has a profoundly *personal* aspect, as well as a *corporate* aspect:
    - (1) Since each believer has a different set of life experiences, and since God intervenes and interacts with each of us as individuals, we will each have a personal experience of God that will vary somewhat from others. Making room for these differences is an important aspect of maintaining unity of the faith within the Christian community.
    - (2) Corporate worship includes joining with others who generally share a similar knowledge of, appreciation for, application of, and expression of... the God we worship.
    - (3) It is not by accident that the New Testament writers stressed *unity in love* as the defining evidence of spiritual maturity. A mature Christian sees and appreciates the subtle differences in faith of other believers... discerning the presence of God’s Spirit of Truth.
- 2) There are Different Schools of Theology – these include the following:
- a) Historical theology – studies what was held to be true through the developing history of the church. It is the progress of church belief in motion.
  - b) Biblical theology – relies on exegesis to draw out what the Scriptures say about God. Every writer of Scripture had their own specific theological perspectives that influence their writing. Biblical theology explores these nuances within their context in Scripture.
  - c) Systematic theology – takes specific issues or points of doctrine and attempts to place them in a cohesive structure that develops a comprehensive view of God. Because it is topical rather than positional, systematic theology is more prone to eisegesis [reading a particular meaning into the text], than Biblical theology which relies on exegesis [drawing out the intended meaning from the specific context (micro-exegesis) with an eye toward how it fits into the framework of all Scripture (macro-exegesis)].
  - d) Apologetic theology – has to do with presenting a reasoned understanding of faith in the context of a non-believing audience who are frequently hostile to faith. Apologists seek to develop a compelling faith argument for God.
  - e) Pastoral or Practical Theology – deals with Christian leaders explaining [teaching & training] and expanding [evangelism] for the Kingdom of God through service to the faith community in the Name of Christ.
- 3) What does theology and doctrine really do?
- a) A balanced and well-articulated Theology provides a filter through which personal thoughts of God are developed, directed, and focused.

- i) **Positively:** Theology may help keep our understanding and developing thoughts about God on track – e.g.: God is Loving and Good; hence any conclusions I may derive to the contrary can be presumed as in error.
  - ii) **Negatively:** Theology may keep us from experiencing a more vital relationship with God – e.g.: as with the Scribes and Pharisees who rejected Jesus because He didn't do what they expected Him to do. Among other things, the Jewish leaders expected the Messiah to immediately overthrow the world powers and establish the Millennial Kingdom with the Jews ruling the world from Jerusalem. They expected this would happen when He entered Jerusalem, hence the Triumphal Entry – Matthew 21:1-11. Instead, Jesus was the “Lamb of God” who suffered and died to free the world of sin; this was not part of their theological Messianic agenda.
  - b) Proper Theology and doctrine helps keep us centered on Christ's Messianic work to fulfill Isaiah's prophecy of the Messianic liberation of God's people from the curse of sin and death... a reflection of Moses' liberation from Egypt through the Passover and journey to the Promised Land – Isaiah 61:1-3; Luke 4:14-21.
  - c) There are different doctrinal positions that different denominations and churches take which mature Christian leaders need to understand as what constitutes normative faith in that community.
  - d) For the purpose of this study we will look at two of the most ancient Christian Creeds that have served to both distinguish proper doctrine and promote unity within the church – the Apostles Creed and the Nicene Creed.
- 4) **A proper approach to theology begins with:**
- a) Competence in knowing the Scriptures – this involves the whole story of redemptive history... too many Christians build a theology on one verse or another pulled out of context, rather than seeing how they fit within the flow of the whole of Biblical revelation.
  - b) Informed study of background information on history, culture, linguistics, etc. This allows us to better understand Scripture from the context of what the original hearers of God's message would have understood.
  - c) Competent understanding of hermeneutical practices – meaning knowing how Scripture informs and communicates, and then overcoming the language, historical, and cultural distances over time.
  - d) Understanding that each person will have a slightly different theological position because of their own relational experience with God and how their world view has shaped their perspective.
- 5) **What can be known about God?**
- a) It is limited to what He has revealed about Himself:
    - i) **General Revelation** – God is revealed in His creation and reflected in humanity – Imago Dei... Psalm 19; Romans 1:18-21.
    - ii) **Special Revelation** – God revealed Himself directly to humanity:
      - (1) **Normative Special Revelation** – Scripture... this is the “Definitive Authoritative Revelation.”

- (2) Non-normative Special Revelation – Spiritual insights, dreams, visions, prophetic revelations, words of knowledge, etc. These are elements always to be tested in light of Scripture and discerned to be conforming and reliable accordingly. These elements should never be in conflict with Scripture.
- b) It is important to realize that God's Self-Revelation is often limited to our own ability to properly understand what He has revealed. Perception is foundational for believing, and misperception inevitably equates with distortion and misunderstanding.
  - c) It is limited to our personal knowledge and experience of His revelation. This is why theology is developmental, as we learn more and experience more we see a bigger and more complete view of God.
  - d) The principal element of all revelation – is God Himself. God engages us through the revelations He has provided – General Revelation and Special Revelation are the point of which God is engaging humanity to encourage relational intimacy with Himself, not merely knowledge about Him.
- 6) What do we accept as “Approved Doctrine and Theology” about God? Only what His Scriptural revelation has clearly revealed about Himself. The Scriptures have revealed much about God through 1) Attributes of God – which are perfect qualities or known characteristics revealed about God; and 2) Names of God – which attest to specific aspects of His Nature. For the purpose of this study, we'll focus on God's known attributes. This list includes the following:
- a) Incommunicable Attributes of God: these are attributes that are true only of God, and there are no analogies for humanity to relate to from a common experience though we may conceptualize about them.
    - i) God is Spirit – He has no material body. The word 'spirit' is usually translated as 'wind' or 'breath' (John 3:6-8; 4:24).
    - ii) God is One – Unity of a Trinitarian God – there is only One God, and there is no other like Him (Isa 44:8).
    - iii) God is Eternal – He has no beginning or end (Ps 102:25-27).
    - iv) God is Independent – God does not owe His existence upon anyone or anything else.
    - v) God is Infinite – There are no limits to His existence.
    - vi) God is Immutable – He does not change (Ps 102:27).
  - b) Communicable Attributes of God: these are attributes of God that humanity has in some lesser measure. Thus, these attributes that those we possess to some degree as a reflection of having been created in the Image of God (Imago Dei). Because of Imago Dei we can relate to these attributes somewhat, although only God has these in perfect measure. More importantly, God expresses these attributes perfectly, continually, and in complete balance with all His attributes with no inconsistency. Humanity expresses them imperfectly, sporadically, out of balance, and incompletely. As we progress in our Spiritual growth through the life-long process of Discipleship and Sanctification where we are becoming more like Jesus in nature and character (Imago Christi). As a reflection of the “Image of God,” we exhibit these characteristics in some measure:
    - i) God has a will – a desire and purpose to work things out for the Good for those God loves and are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28). God desires certain things and not

others and He requires certain actions and not others to occur. These are expressions of His Sovereignty expressed in three senses:

- (1) “Determinative Sense” – God causes things to happen out of His Sovereign Right (Eph 1:11).
  - (2) “Permissive Sense” – God allows things to happen that are not in conflict with His will (Acts 2:23).
  - (3) “Prescriptive Sense” – God expresses His preference for specific responses from His creatures through Scripture and our conscience which is not forced or coerced (Ps 143:10).
- ii) God is All-powerful – He not only has a Will, but He has the complete Capacity to realize and enforce it (Ps 115:3; Rev 1:8).
  - iii) God is Just – He acts in accordance with His own sense of justice, emerging from His own standard of Perfection. In regard to humanity, He encourages love and transformational life, He punishes sin and disobedience, and He rewards faithfulness and obedience.
  - iv) God is Good – God is the highest expression of goodness and always acts beneficially toward His creation (Acts 14:17), and especially toward His own people (Ps 73:1).
  - v) God is Love – God Loved the world because He created it, He continues to act out of love even when the world does not respond in a loving manner (John 3:16; Eph 5:25).
  - vi) God is Grace – God’s unmerited love for humanity is an expression of His Goodness.
  - vii) God is Mercy – God’s response to the pitiful human condition, which is the effect of humanity’s rebellion against God, is to provide help and comfort that we could not provide for ourselves.
  - viii) God has Dominion – He is the Lord of lords and King of kings – He rules heaven and earth, and will do what He deems to be good and right, and is not answerable to anyone (1 Sam 3:8; Acts 17:25).
  - ix) God is Knowledge – He knows the past, present and future, and nothing is hidden from Him. Humanity can learn and know but because we are caught in the stream of time in the out-working of redemptive history, our knowing is necessarily incomplete.
  - x) God has Self Existence. His revealed name – “I Am that I Am” – He always was and always will be God (Gen 21:33). To a lesser degree we are who we are alive in Him through His Spirit have a distinct identity, which is different from other created beings.
  - xi) God is Omnipresent – He is everywhere at once; while we are confined in one place at a time in an historical context.
  - xii) God is Omniscient – He knows everything and sees everything at all times; nothing is hidden from Him; we can know things and see things, but our perceptions are limited.
  - xiii) God is Omnipotent – He is powerful and capable of doing anything, except that which conflicts with His other basic attributes (e.g. because He is Good, He cannot be evil).
  - xiv) God is Sovereign – He is in control and is free to do anything He Wills – restrained only by His Character and Nature, and such limitations that He voluntarily imposes upon Himself (Gen 9:13-16).
- c) **Humanity now on earth are described in The Amplified Bible as:**  
“For our knowledge is fragmentary (incomplete and imperfect), and our prophecy (our teaching) is fragmentary (incomplete and imperfect). But when the complete *and* perfect (total) comes, the incomplete *and* imperfect will vanish away (become antiquated, void, and

superseded). When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; now that I have become a man, I am done with childish ways *and* have put them aside. For now we are looking in a mirror that gives only a dim (blurred) reflection [of reality as in a riddle or enigma], but then [when perfection comes] we shall see in reality *and* face to face! Now I know in part (imperfectly), but then I shall know *and* understand fully *and* clearly, even in the same manner as I have been fully *and* clearly known *and* understood [ by God]. 1 Corinthians 13:9-12”

**Thus, “Personal Revelations” in particular, must always be secondary revelations and tested by the accepted Scriptural standard.**

- i) Scripture teaches there are ‘supernatural manifestations’ that continue in the modern world, and that not all that is spiritual is good or from God. We are required to ‘test’ all such manifestations to understand from whence they derive.**
- ii) Personal revelations will never be in disagreement with Scriptural revelations.**
- iii) Personal revelations will often challenge individuals into a deeper commitment or relationship with God – these must be validated and supported by Scripture.**

**7) There are theological conundrums that exist – These are mysteries that will only be resolved in Heaven, such as:**

- a) If God is Good and all-powerful, why does He allow suffering and evil to exist?**
- b) If God is omniscient and all knowing, and knows everything I’m going to do before I do it, then how can I have free will? If I don’t have free will how can I chose right from wrong and accept responsibility for my choices? If I don’t have free will, is God then the author of evil? Is Jesus then the right hand of God, and Satan the left hand? Normative Christian Theology dictates that God’s Sovereignty and humanity’s free will somehow co-exist and are both in play.**
- c) If God is omnipresent, how could Jesus be a true man in time and space and true God? Normative theology dictates that Jesus is both God and man... it is a mystery but to deny it is heresy.**
- d) If God is omnipotent, couldn’t He make a rock so big He couldn’t move it? Couldn’t He just make me love Him or forgive me outright and secure my eternity in that manner? Without my response to His offer of Grace? What makes sense from our human perspective doesn’t necessarily hold in God’s Eternal Perspective.**

**8) Theology is not something you simply read out of a book:**

- a) Theology happens and develops because you experience something in your life that makes no sense, that causes you to cry out to God “help me make sense of this!”**
- b) As we wrestle with such thoughts and issues asking God to help us understand, our theology develops and becomes uniquely our own.**
- c) As a consequence of our limited understanding and perception, some aspects of theology or Scripture are not readily understandable until we are placed in a position that forces us to wrestle with an experience which then provides a context for understanding.**
- d) You can be taught “systematic theology” – that is a system of a “pre-developed and pre-promulgated theological thought that is taught by a certain teacher, school of theology, or denomination.” However, the systemic approach may make some sense in the confines of**



the academic exercise in which it is learned, but it will not become your personal theology until you wrestle with these issues before God in your own life in the context of the entire work of Scripture. Only then do you gain an authoritative voice that enables you to teach others in a compelling manner.

- 9) God alone is Truth Personified... we are not God – we have only an incomplete grasp of His Truth. Thus, we need to recognize the relative importance of the truths we hold – and we need to restrain our presumptions to maintain the Christian bond of unity in love – John 17:23; Romans 15:5; Ephesians 4:3, 13; Colossians 3:14.
- a) In essential things – unity
  - b) In non-essential things – tolerance
  - c) In all things – charity
- 10) Theological Safeguards – This is an ***EXTREMELY IMPORTANT TOPIC*** about how we distinguish between what we know and what we think we know about what is true. “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 our 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) Certain – “Things I would Die For” – these are the essentials of faith... the fundamental truths of the Christian faith; denying any of these would constitute a “Deal-Breaker” and essentially indicate you are not a Christian.
    - i) The Trinity or Triune God – God existing as One 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 us.
    - iv) The inspiration and authority of Scripture – man could not go to God and discover Truth; therefore God had to come to man and reveal Himself. Scripture is God’s Self-Revelation to humanity... a long love letter.
    - v) The virgin birth of Jesus – Scripture taught that He would be born of a virgin, this is a major Biblical sign.
    - vi) Jesus sinless life on earth – Scripture taught that Jesus must be sinless to be the acceptable propitiation before God.
    - vii) Jesus substitutionary death as the atonement for all Sin – Sin is “Wrong Being” not merely “wrong doing” which gets to the core of our broken nature after the Fall. We know 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 Perfection.
    - viii) Jesus bodily resurrection and conquest over Sin and death. If there was no resurrection, there is no Christianity. Jesus is the First Fruit and the New Adam of humanity.

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

- ix) Jesus bodily return as Lord of Lords at the end of times – to collect the faithful, to judge the wicked, and to restore creation to perfection.
- x) Justification by Grace alone – the works of sinful man cannot 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 organic union of Believers (Organism), represented in the local church. This is profoundly different from the corporate meeting place (organization) of the local church which as an institution is part of the Fallen Human condition.
- xii) Eternal Life – for Christ Followers (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 from God in hell.
- b) Less than Certain – "Things I would Divide For" – having accepted the above as the basis of normative faith, there are still important issues that are often sufficiently foundational that we would divide community over – these are such things as divided Paul and Barnabas [Acts 15:39], and form the basis of most denominational differences." These things could be factors preventing a unified service of the body of believers, but not render believers unfaithful to their Lord Jesus. Often, an argument can be made for either side of these issues.
  - i) Arminianist's 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, while Calvinists believe grace is irresistible, etc.
  - ii) Both may divide from Pentecostals over the nature and timing of the baptism of the Spirit and the impartation and use of spiritual gifts, and the appropriateness of expressing spiritual gifts as part of regular corporate worship services.
  - iii) Does God now speak only through scripture or does He continue to employ personal [prophetic] revelation that is consistent with scripture? In 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 are they in fact the seal of membership into the covenant community?
    - (1) Is baptism necessary for cleansing sin? Is baptism appropriate for children? What is the age of accountability?
    - (2) What are the appropriate elements of communion? Is it appropriate to have communion in secular places? Etc.
    - (3) Are these and other sacraments representational of a Spiritual reality? Or are they an actual and necessary Spiritual reality to sustain the Spirit within the believer? [Such as trans-substantiation or con-substantiation of communion elements]
  - v) What are the priorities of the church community – winning the lost? Discipling? Social justice? Worshiping God? Etc. In what proportion should ministry focus on each?
  - vi) What is the responsibility of leadership of pastors, elders, deacons, and staff – and who is responsible for the work of ministry and equipping the saints?
  - vii) What is the appropriate day of service? What does the Sabbath actually mean in the modern church? Is "Sabbath Rest" still vital or obsolete?
  - viii) What style or form of church service is appropriate – liturgical? Expositional? Celebrative? Homiletic? Who is to be involved in weekly presentations – lay and clergy, clergy alone?

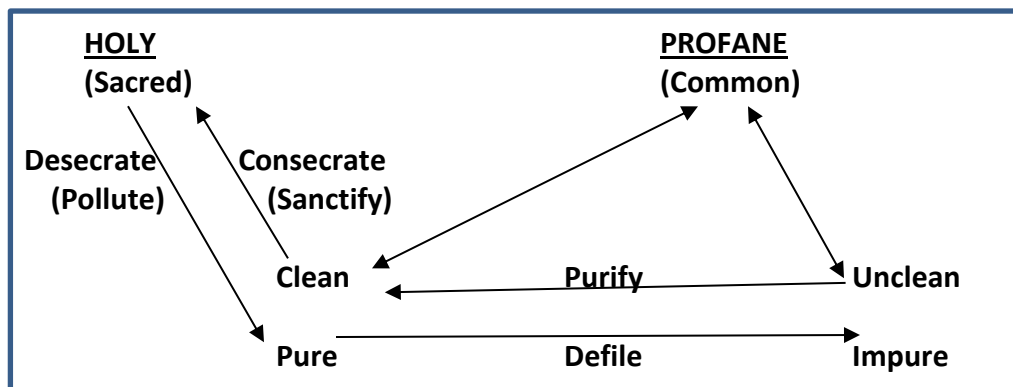


- ix) What is the nature of Heaven and Hell? Are there seven levels of each? Is Hell mere separation from God, or does eternal torment or annihilation await the unrepentant?
- c) **Uncertain – “Things I would Debate For”** – these are the uncertain things we wrestle with inside a church body of believers 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 be effectively argued from either position, so there is no unequivocal correct choice, more usually these constitute the 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 – 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 and God’s Sovereignty work out? 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 Jesus existing simultaneously as “fully God” and “fully man” work out?
  - v) What is the role of women in the church? Are women pastors, elders, or deacons appropriate? Can women preach and teach the congregation? Is the relationship between women and men ‘Complementarian’ or ‘Egalitarian’? Or both?
  - vi) What is the 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? Will the world continue to degrade until the end?
  - vii) Is peace possible in our Fallen state? Is it a reasonable objective for the church to pursue?
  - viii) What extent should the church participate in compassionate ministries in the community?
  - 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) **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. This category focuses on helping the faith community avoid anything that would separate the body into “us” and “them” groups – including social cliques, haves and have nots, etc.

- i) 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.
- ii) 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 and hip-hop? Etc.
- iii) What are the appropriate behavioral characteristics of believers – is it OK to smoke? To drink? If acceptable in moderation, what constitutes moderation? Is it OK to eat meat?
- iv) What appearance characteristics are appropriate in church – long hair? Dyed hair? Piercings? Tattoos? Short dresses? Shorts on men, Etc.
- e) A careful evaluation of each of these levels of certainty can help the faith community keep the main thing the main thing... namely Jesus born, ministered, crucified and raised again to the Glory of God. It is shameful when we treat lesser things as primary things.

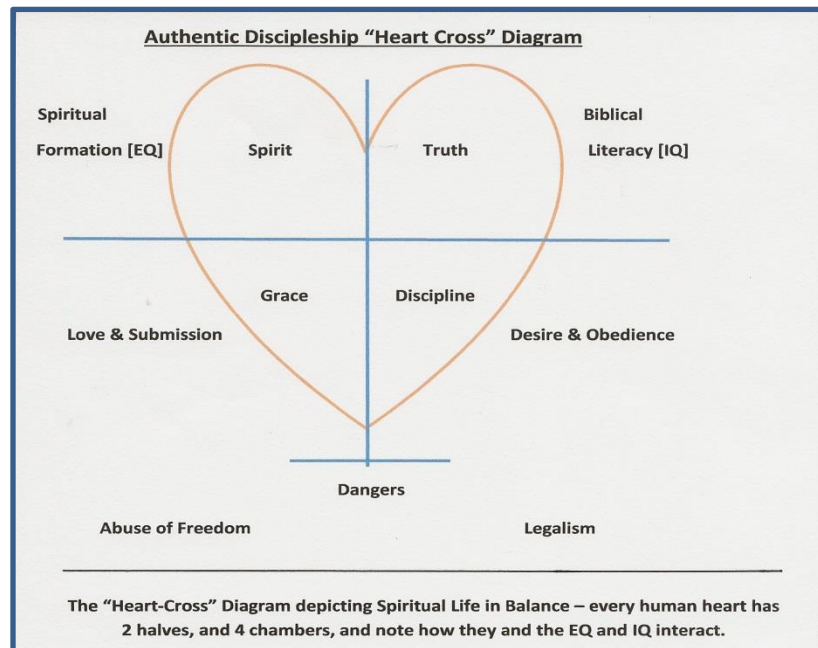
### 11) Old Covenant and New Covenant Theology – Contrasted Diagrammatically:

- a) The Shape of Old Testament Thought – Revolved around the movement between the “Holy” and “profane” aspects of the material world. This was the understanding of Jesus Disciples and the Jewish leaders they interacted with based on The Law. The Law was a different type of Grace. Paul says the Law was only capable of conviction and condemnation and was focused on life in the Promised Land, and that it was only a “caretaker” of humanity as they waited for the Messiah to come. The Grace of Jesus was built upon the foundation of Old Testament Law but was fundamentally superior because Grace is capable of healing, freedom, and transformation. Also, the Law was based on a view of eternity that was more focused on life on earth at the present Fallen and unredeemed nature. The Grace Jesus initiated in the New Covenant in His Life, Death and Resurrection is infinitely better.
- i) A Pictorial Representation of The Segregated View of Old Testament Theology:

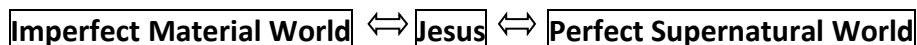


- ii) This was the Old Testament world view that was prevalent when Jesus came and taught.
- iii) Jesus had to correct His disciple’s errant thinking with a drastically different concept of what was clean and unclean – see Matthew 15:1-20.
- iv) Peter struggled with this even after Pentecost – this was the nature of the sheet descending with all manner of “unclean food” on it – Acts 10:11-15.

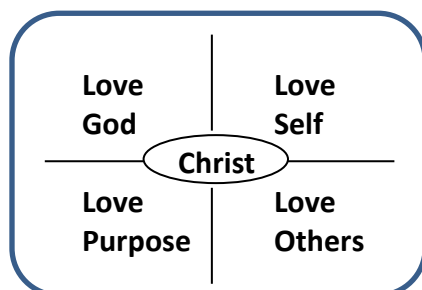
- b) **The Shape of New Testament Thought** – has several pictorial views that apply, because it is a rather complicated view in contrast to the Old Testament view. What follows are four different views which help us understand important differences that Jesus taught, and also help us understand why the Jews of His day had such a hard time grasping and accepting the New Covenant:
- i) An integrated view of NT Theology – note the balance of Spirit and Truth, and Grace and Discipline Jesus taught about in the story of the “Woman at the Well” in John 4:1-42



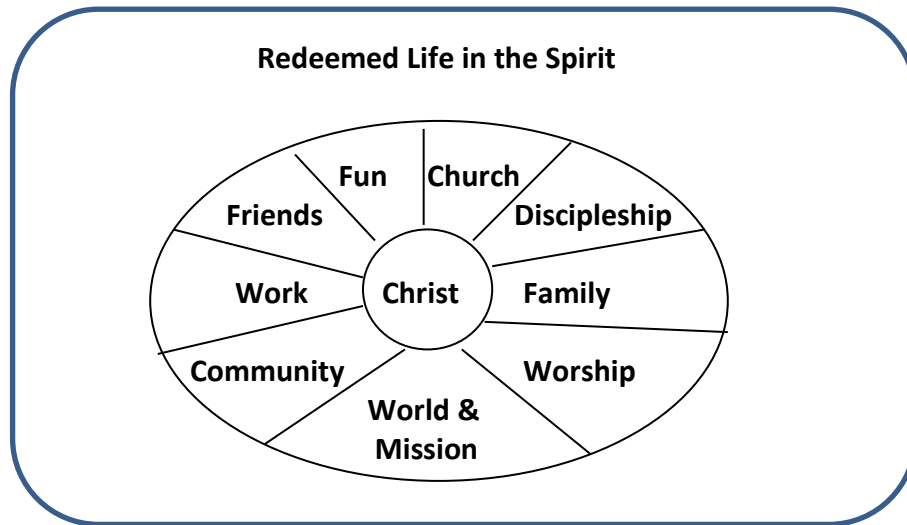
- ii) **The Bridge View** – Jesus is the Bridge that moves us from death in the material world to Life in Eternity through Faith. It is a transformational model... we become something we were not before; we are invited into the Spiritual Life we couldn't have entered before.



- iii) **The Relational View – The Power of Faithful Focus** – from a book by Dr Charlie Self. Through a personal relationship with Jesus, the Spirit becomes the integrator of love and how it plays out first in my life, and second in community in my purpose of advancing the Kingdom of God.



- iv) **The Holistic View – Integration of a Christ Follower’s life based upon today’s issues in a context of faith. Note that it includes a balanced view of our place in the world, and that Jesus is the central figure whose holistic integration of life is brought about by the indwelling Spirit:**



- c) **Major Theological Development – from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant has to do with an understanding of God as Trinity.**
- i) **Jesus revealed God as Three in One – Father, Son & Spirit. In looking back at the Old Testament, we can now see the Trinity throughout the text beginning with the creation story.**
  - ii) **However, the Jews did not have a clear understanding of this, and though many Jews hold that Jesus was a Rabbi and Prophet, they could not hold to the theology of the Trinity and the divinity of the Messiah. They understood Messiah in terms of a political or even social reformer, although king David wrote of Messiah as Lord and God.**
  - iii) **For Christ Followers (believers), Jesus is the Capstone, the crowning achievement that all of Redemptive History had been building towards.**
  - iv) **For those who don't follow Christ [non-believers], Jesus remains the Stumbling Block because humanity is bent toward wickedness and self-interest, preferring the "darkness to the light" they struggle with the concept of submission to God on His terms so they may be saved and healed.**

**12) The Creeds – for the purpose of this study, we will look only at the major two Creeds – both of which nicely explain the basics of Christian Theology:**

- a) **The Apostles Creed – *This creed is called the Apostles' Creed not because it was produced by the apostles themselves but because it contains a brief summary of their teachings. It sets forth their doctrine "in sublime simplicity, in unsurpassable brevity, in beautiful order, and with liturgical solemnity." In its present form it is dated no later than the fourth century. More than any other Christian creed, it may justly be called an ecumenical symbol of faith, and dates to 390 AD, and is still in use by a number of denominations including – Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Anglican, Episcopal, Presbyterian, Methodist, and Congregational.***

- i) I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.
- ii) I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried he descended to hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty. From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.
- iii) I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy “Catholic Church [*that is, the true Christian church of all times and all places*], the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

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- b) **The Nicene Creed** – *The Nicene Creed, also called the Nicaeno-Constantinopolitan Creed, is a statement of the orthodox faith of the early Christian church in opposition to certain heresies, especially Arianism. These heresies, which disturbed the church during the fourth century, concerned the doctrine of the trinity and of the person of Christ. Both the Greek (Eastern) and the Latin (Western) church held this creed in honor, though with one important difference: the Western church insisted on the inclusion of the phrase "and the Son" (known as the "filioque") in the article on the procession of the Holy Spirit; this phrase still is repudiated by the Eastern Orthodox Church. In its present form this creed goes back partially to the Council of Nicea (A.D. 325) with additions by the Council of Constantinople (A.D. 381). It was accepted in its present form at the Council of Chalcedon in 451, but the "filioque" phrase was not added until 589. However, the creed is in substance an accurate and majestic formulation of the Nicene faith. This translation of the Greek text was approved by the CRC Synod of 1988.*

- i) We believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.
- ii) And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, begotten from the Father before all ages, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made; of the same essence as the Father. Through him all things were made.
- iii) For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven; he became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and was made human.
- iv) He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate; he suffered, died, and was buried.
- v) The third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures. He ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
- vi) He will come again with glory, to judge the living and the dead. His kingdom will never end.
- vii) And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life. He proceeds from the Father and the Son, and with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified. He spoke through the prophets.
- viii) We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church. We affirm one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look forward to the resurrection of the dead, and to life in the world to come. Amen.

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Below is a picture of the Christian Family Tree... One Faith in many denominations and traditions:

