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SUMMARY OF THE MAJOR BIBLE DOCTRINES

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BIBL5301: ADVANCED PROLEGOMENA

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The purpose of this paper is to briefly examine and summarize the eleven major categories of doctrine as laid out in the Scriptures.¹ We will follow the standard order of these doctrines, beginning with Bibliology and ending with Eschatology, inserting Israelology before Ecclesiology.

Bibliology – The doctrine of the Bible

“The Bible”, or “the Scriptures”, is the collection of writings which God gave to humanity in order to reveal things about himself, his purposes, and his work that we could otherwise not discover on our own.

According to 2 Timothy 3:16, “Every scripture” or “all Scripture” (NASB) was “inspired by God”. This means that it came as an exhalation from God himself as a deliberate revelation from God to humanity. Additionally, Paul wrote that this Scripture “is useful” to us in several ways, specifically “that the person dedicated to God may be capable and equipped for every good work” which God had designed and prepared for his people to do long ago (see Ephesians 2:10).

Lest we think that the Scriptures are simply a compilation of “God-thoughts” done by people, and thus unreliable, Peter clarified that none of the writers came up with these things on their own, but “rather, men carried along by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2 Peter 1:20-21).

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Theology Proper – The doctrine of God

Unlike the many philosophical works available today, the Scriptures never once try to prove the existence of God. On the contrary, from the very first verse, it is assumed that the readers of the Bible know that he exists – “In the beginning God created...” (Genesis 1:1). This passage also marks the first action known about God, that he is the Creator of all things.

For a reason that is not fully explained in Scripture (and outside the ability of our total comprehension), God – though he demands to be understood as only one God – has chosen to reveal himself in three distinct persons: the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. These three persons are all equally God (and co-equal in the Godhead) yet have individual roles that they play in accomplishing God’s work. That they are distinct is clear when they all appear simultaneously at Jesus’ baptism: the Father’s voice from Heaven, Jesus in the water, and the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove (Matthew 3:17).

Christology – The doctrine of Jesus the Christ

The second member of the Divine Trinity is known by two main names, each referencing one of his two natures. His deity is referred to as “the Son” (Matthew 3:17; or “Son of God”), showing his unique relationship to the Father and complete deity.² It is this divine nature that the writer of Hebrews referenced when he wrote that Jesus is “the exact representation of His nature” (Hebrews 1:3, NASB). In his human nature he was to be called “Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21).

² In Jewish thought, “son of” did not always refer to immediate biological offspring. For instance, Jesus is called both the “son of Abraham” and the “son of David” (Matthew 1:1), though he was literally neither. Conceptually, “son of” was an indication of the relationship between the two named persons, specifically that they had the exact same nature.

Jesus came to Earth and took on complete human nature for at least three main purposes:

1. To explain God to humanity (John 1:18);
2. To search out and rescue people who are far from God (Luke 19:10); and
3. To fulfill many of the promises God made to his people throughout the Scriptures (Luke 4:21).

By completing all of those things, he fulfilled his ultimate purpose – bringing glory to God (John 17:4). Jesus is currently in Heaven assisting Christians by accepting our prayers and praying to the Father on our behalf (Hebrews 2:17-18; 4:14-16; 7:25).

Pneumatology – The doctrine of the Holy Spirit

The third member of God’s Triune Deity is referred to throughout Scripture as the “Holy Spirit” or, simply, “God’s Spirit”. That the Spirit is a personal member of the Godhead (instead of an impersonal divine force or power) is shown in the facts that he can make intelligent, rational, willful decisions (1 Corinthians 12:11) and that he has an emotional state that can be affected by human behavior. For instance, he can be grieved (Ephesians 4:30), and he can retaliate when lied to (Acts 5:3).

Jesus told his disciples that the Holy Spirit would take Jesus’ place as the member of the Godhead who would be alongside them³ as they carried out the work he would assign to them. It was also the Holy Spirit who would empower and enable them to do that work (Acts 1:8 and 1 Corinthians 12:4-11).

The Holy Spirit is also God’s guarantee that he will fulfill his promise of the final redemption of his people. In Ephesians 1:13-14, Paul states that Christians are somehow

³ The Greek word traditionally translated “Comforter” or “Helper” in John 14:16 is παράκλητος which means literally, “one called alongside”. A good definition is “one who appears in another’s behalf” (BDAG).

“marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit, who is the down payment of our inheritance, until the redemption” actually occurs.

Angelology – The doctrine of angels

Angels are spiritual, asexual beings (Matthew 22:30), created by God, probably at some point before the Genesis 1 creation.⁴ As the basic definition of ἄγγελος assumes, an angel is primarily a servant or messenger of God, carrying out whatever is commanded of him (Hebrews 1:13-14).

At some point near the beginning, one particular angel, the highest of all angels, Lucifer, rebelled against God and tried to dethrone him in a celestial coup (Isaiah 14:12-14; Ezekiel 28:11-19). Of course, he failed, was relieved of his duties, and took a third of the angels with him in his continuing war against God (Revelation 12:4). God created a special place, called the lake of fire, to be the final punishment for the Enemy and his angels (Matthew 25:41).

In addition to the messenger angels (such as Gabriel, Luke 1:19, 26; Daniel 9:21), there seem also to be other types or categories of angels mentioned in Scripture: seraphs (Isaiah 6:6), cherubs (Ezekiel 28:14), and warrior led by Michael, the archangel (Revelation 12:7; Jude 9).

Anthropology – The doctrine of mankind

Unlike the rest of creation, humans were made after God’s own image (Genesis 1:26-27), so we, too, are primarily spiritual beings (Genesis 2:7; John 4:24) and share many of God’s own characteristics (such as intellect, emotion, and will). Being the highest of the natural creation (but lower than the angels, Hebrews 2:7, 17), God set humans up as managers over his creation

⁴ In Job 38:4-7, there are beings called “the morning stars” and “the sons of God” who were present at creation and celebrated as they watched when God “laid the foundation of the earth”.

(Genesis 1:26-30) to control and take care of it. He also commanded us to multiply and cover the whole earth (Genesis 1:28; 9:1).

However, even though God's human creation was perfect, he was not God, and he was not complete because he was alone (Genesis 2:18), and humans were created for relationship – with God himself and with other humans.

God knew that even though Adam and Eve were perfect people living in perfect relationship with him, they could not figure out life on their own. They were created to be dependent. God had to explain who they were and what they were to do with their lives. They did not need this help because they were sinners. They needed help because they were human.⁵

Hamartiology – The doctrine of sin

The most common Greek word translated “sin” is ἁμαρτία, which BDAG defines simply as “a departure”. This makes sense even from a humanistic viewpoint as we respond negatively against actions that “depart” from what we consider to be normal or polite or culturally-acceptable. When the standards from which we depart are God's, the stakes are even greater.

Sin first appeared in Heaven when it “was discovered in” Lucifer (Ezekiel 28:15). From that day, he made it his goal to destroy what God had created “very good” (Genesis 1:31), and he chose to do it by turning God's prize creation, humans, against God. Genesis 3:1-7 tells the short, but tragic, story of how easily the Enemy accomplished his goal.

From the very beginning God had made it clear to humans that the result of sin would be a curse called “death” (Genesis 2:17; cf. Romans 6:23). This death took on two forms: 1) *physical*, the gradual decay of the physical body and its return to dust (Genesis 3:19) and 2) *spiritual*, the immediate spiritual separation of each individual person from God (Genesis 3:8) and the loss of their right standing and relationship with him (Romans 1:18; 3:10-12).

⁵ Paul David Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2002), 40. Quoted in Mark Driscoll and Gerry Breshears, *Doctrine: What Christians Should Believe* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 117.

At the same time the human nature was infused with a natural inclination to sin, sometimes called a “sin nature”. This sin nature has been passed on from father to child to every human from the time Eve conceived Adam’s firstborn son, causing us all to be “children of [God’s] wrath” who live to serve our sinful selves (Ephesians 2:1-3; 1 John 2:15-17). God’s blanket statement is that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

Soteriology – The doctrine of salvation

Fortunately for us, the doctrine of sin is not the end of the story. Instead of completely deserting us to our sinful natures and the destruction we would bring upon ourselves (which he could have done, Romans 1:18-32, and which he apparently did regarding the angels), God chose to rescue people, offering complete deliverance from sin and death.

While the method people have used to show their acceptance of this salvation has changed over the millennia, the terms of salvation have remained the same: complete faith in God and his promise. In his treatment of the subject in a letter to the Christians in Rome, Paul referenced a simple statement in Genesis 15:6, making it the foundational principle of salvation: “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness” (Romans 4:3, NASB).

Essentially, Paul’s point was that, long before the system of animal sacrifices that could only cover sin (not remove it, Hebrews 10:4), the right standing before God that we had lost through sin could be recovered by an individual’s faith in God. Although he knew nothing of *how* God would fulfill his promises, Abraham chose to exercise faith that God *would* fulfill them. And that is all God has ever required.

As time progressed, God revealed that a human would come – ultimately found to be Jesus – a sinless Savior who would be able to take our sin upon himself and trade our sin for a

brand new heart, a brand new nature, and a brand new right standing before God that would come about through a series of torture and his death (see Isaiah 53:6; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21; Ezekiel 36:26; Romans 5). In his divine wisdom, this is how God chose to rescue sinful people while still holding to his own law that sin demands death.

Those who have been rescued are immediately joined to the Divine Rescue Team (the Church) and tasked with sharing the story of this offer of deliverance to all people in all nations (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15) in order to fill up God's house with people (Luke 14:23). It is God's desire that every person would be saved (John 3:16; 1 John 2:2; 1 Timothy 2:3-4; 2 Peter 3:9), though it seems obvious that it will not happen (either by his own design, Romans 9:14-18, or because of the rebellious nature of mankind, Matthew 23:37).

Israelology – The doctrine of Israel

Although not traditionally listed as a separate doctrinal category, the Biblical teachings regarding Israel comprise so much of the text of Scripture that a separate section is warranted.

Israel has long been called "God's chosen people" or "the people of God" because those were terms God himself used of them (see Isaiah 43:20 and Hebrews 11:25). However, God was clear that he did not choose the nation or people based on anything inherent to themselves, but rather because of three specific promises he had made to their ancestors (Deuteronomy 7:7-8), namely to Abraham and David.

1. Promise of spiritual blessings (Genesis 12:1-3; Jeremiah 31:31-34)
2. Promise of physical land (Genesis 15:17-21; Deuteronomy 30:1-10)
3. Promise of a literal kingdom (Genesis 17:19-21; 2 Samuel 7:8-16)

Due to a national rejection by Israel of him as her long-awaited Messiah (Matthew 12:22-45), Jesus began to prepare his disciples for their work as the foundation of a new entity that would include both Jews and Gentiles, until the time God would levy his judgments upon national Israel for the purpose of reconciling her back to himself (Zechariah 13:7-9).

Ecclesiology – The doctrine of the Church

Never mentioned or even hinted in the Old Testament, the Church was a brand new body predicted (Matthew 16:18; 18:15-17) and established (Acts 2) by Christ. In fact, the Church was such a radical departure from what people thought God was going to do that Paul called it a mystery that God deliberately kept hidden until he revealed it in the New Testament times (Colossians 1:25-26).

While the Church-at-large is comprised of all Christians (Jews and Gentiles alike) from Pentecost A.D. 32 until an unknown future point in time (at the Rapture), it is represented by smaller congregations, usually called “churches”, all over the world. God designed these congregations to be led by elders and served by deacons for the purpose of training and equipping Christians to further God’s work of making more Christ-followers (Matthew 28:18-20; Ephesians 4:11-13; 1 Timothy 3:1-13).

Eschatology – The doctrine of the End Times

Chafer notes that “over one-fourth of the books of the Bible are avowedly prophetic, and, in the actual text of all the Scriptures, at least one-fifth was prediction at the time it was written.”⁶ While many of those predictions have been fulfilled literally, many are still waiting to

⁶ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1993), 4:256.

be carried out. Due to the nature of predictive prophecy, there are many disagreements about when and how the prophecies will be fulfilled, and even if they already have been.

In short, the prophetic timeline as we understand it may be delineated as follows:

1. The world will not get better on its own but will instead get progressively worse until Jesus returns (2 Timothy 3:1-9).
2. Jesus will come to collect the Church and take her with him back to Heaven for the reward ceremony for the saints (John 14:1-4; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 1 Corinthians 3:10-15)
3. Those remaining on the Earth will suffer a time of great destruction, primarily designed to be a judgment on unbelieving Israel. Though many will turn to God over the course of these seven years, many more will follow Antichrist to their eternal doom (Revelation 6-19; Daniel 9:24-27; Matthew 24-25)
4. At the end of the Tribulation Jesus will return to do battle with Antichrist, condemning him and his False Prophet to eternity in the Lake of Fire (Revelation 19:20) after which Jesus will spend 75 days to clean up the Earth and make the preparations necessary to begin his promised earthly rule (Daniel 12:11-13).
5. Jesus will set up a literal kingdom for 1,000 years in fulfillment of his promise to David (2 Samuel 7:8-16), during which time the Old Testament and Tribulation saints will be resurrected and Satan will be banished to the abyss so that he cannot tempt the people of the earth (Revelation 20:1-6).
6. At the end of the 1,000 years Satan will be released to lead one final insurrection against Jesus. He and his hoard will fail with the result that Satan will be sent forever to the Lake of Fire along with all unbelievers from all time (Revelation 20:7-15).
7. God will finally re-create the Heavens and the Earth, bringing the New Jerusalem down to Earth for his people to live in and enjoy his presence forever (Revelation 21-22).

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