

Personal Credo
Theology Proper, Christology, and Atonement

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Personal Credo: Theology Proper, Christology, and Atonement
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I. Introduction: Prolegomena

Through this credo this writer will be engaging in a biblically based theological reflection of his views concerning beliefs on the doctrine of God, the person of Christ, and the work of Christ. Three tools will be used in this reflection: the Biblical message, the theological heritage of the writer's church and the thought forms of current culture. Through utilizing these tools and valuing them in the order provided, this writer will reveal his beliefs in these areas.

The Bible, as canonized by the Church, will be utilized as the primary norm for the theological discussion of this paper. "Some Christians strive to establish the authority of scripture through elaborate proofs" (Grenz: Created, 21). This writer has simply chosen to assume the Bible's authority as a spirit produced document through which the Holy Spirit has always spoken to God's people and revealed God to us in a particular manner. The Bible is the foundational document of the Christian Church; therefore, its message remains the central resource for Christian theology in every age. This writer believes that the Bible is true and fully authoritative. "Because the Bible is given through *verbal, plenary* inspiration it is infallible and inerrant" (Grenz: Created, 172).

The theological heritage of this writer, the (Southern) Baptist Church, will also be considered and utilized to acknowledge the previous work of the church. Personal bias undoubtedly will be evident in this work and reflects the personal experiences of the writer.

Realizing the full authority of scripture this credo must begin with the understanding that God exists.

“And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.” Hebrews 11:6

II. Doctrine of God: Theology Proper

A. Definition of categories utilized

In an attempt to better understand God, theologians have utilized various categories to classify the attributes of God. These include immanent and intransitive; relative and absolute; and the natural and moral attributes of God (Erickson, 267). This writer will utilize the terms communicable and incommunicable to group the attributes of God. This will assist in communicating these attributes as well as follow the classical pattern of most reformed theologians.

Communicable attributes will be those attributes of God which the human experience bears some analogy. Incommunicable attributes are those qualities of God that find no counterpart in nature (Grenz, 118). This overview of God's attributes will begin with the communicable attributes of God.

B. Attributes of God

1. Communicable Attributes of God

a) God is Incomprehensible

As a precursor to this reflection, it is important to note that God is first and foremost incomprehensible, as Isaiah and Paul state in the following Bible passages:

“Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom.” Isaiah 40:28

“For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.” 1 Corinthians 2:11

While it is acknowledged here that no human can fully comprehend God, it is also important to realize that God can be known. While our knowledge of God is limited, we recognize that He has revealed to us many aspects of His character and plan for creation.

“but the word of the Lord stands forever. And this is the word that was preached to you.” 1 Peter 1:25 and Isaiah 40:6-8

b) God is Loving

Scripture reveals to us that God is a loving God.

“And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.” 1 John 4:16

Paul writes from a Greek perspective and utilized the word *agape*. This is the type of love that regards itself as the giving of oneself for the sake of another. Jesus, for example, spoke about the good shepherd who gives His life for His sheep (John 10:11). Love describes God’s nature through all eternity and embodies God’s response to the universe in accordance to His divine theological essence; which is love. As John states plainly,

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

Wrath becomes not an attribute of God in the light of His love. This writer would assert this definition for wrath "the way in which God’s love encounters sin can be known as wrath" (Grenz, 124). The scriptures make plain the divine love and perfect holiness of God that cannot exist alongside sin.

c) *God is perfect and holy*

God is good and perfectly holy. God's perfection is the standard for our moral character and the motivation for religious practice (Erickson, 401). Perfection relates directly to God's purity and goodness.

"Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: `Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.'" Leviticus 19:2

God's Holiness here refers to His sinless nature and desire for man to live by a similar code of conduct. The passage above appears just prior to the Decalogue.

"Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." Matthew 5:48

This passage comes just prior to Jesus' teaching on the importance of being earnest in worship and service to God and the Lord's Prayer. The flawlessness of God demands those objects or persons set aside for Him are of a similar quality (Leviticus 1:3; Matthew 5:48).

Erickson asserts there are two basic aspects to God's Holiness (Erickson, 284). First, His uniqueness; meaning He is totally separate from all creation. Secondly, the sacredness of God; which is often conveyed to objects and places associated with Him.

An important insight can be derived from a brief study on the Hebrew word for holy. The Hebrew term **קדוש** (holy) was also utilized when referring to separating metals and to the purity of gold or silver. Other connotations for this word were marked off or withdrawn from or cut off (NIDOTTE, 776). Thus the separateness of God is certainly an indicator of His holiness. With the separateness of God duly noted, one can begin to understand more clearly Erickson's second assertion. When a holy and separate God comes into contact with a specific place, we see that "Each encounter with God is an experience of the one God who is always and in every circumstance both Holy and

loving” (Grenz: Community, 116). God’s perfection and Holiness are attributes that highlight the greatness of God, when we compare the God revealed in scripture to the universe that He has made. It is appropriate to react to God’s holiness, His separateness, in awe, silence and reverence. “Let them praise thy great and terrible name! Holy is He!” (Ps. 99:3).

d) God has complete knowledge and wisdom

Unlike humans, God's knowledge is complete and His understanding is immeasurable (Ps. 147:5). God knows all things possible and actual. God has this knowledge in Himself and does not obtain it from any other sources (Heb. 4:13). It is always complete and always present in His mind. The omniscience of God means that he has total knowledge; past present and future. The wisdom of God means He acts in the light of correct values. Knowing all things, God knows what is good (Rom. 11:33). Psalms 104:24 describes God's works as having been made in wisdom.

e) God is righteous and trustworthy

The righteousness of God is that perfection by which He maintains Himself as the Holy One over against every violation of His holiness. Psalm 19:7-9 states:

"The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous. "

This means God commands us to do only what is right and this will have a positive impact on the believer who obeys. The righteousness of God also means His actions are in accordance with the law that He Himself has established (Gen. 18:25).

The veracity or faithfulness of God is connected to His righteousness and speaks to the perfection of God's virtue. He is always true in His inner being, in His revelation, and in His relation to His people. He is eternally faithful in the fulfillment of His promises. This attribute has also been called God's faithfulness. Paul speaks of the God "who never lies" (Titus 1:2). Jesus also speaks of the word of God as being "truth" (John 17:17, 19). These passages affirm that God does not and will not lie. Lying is contrary to the nature of God. God keeps all His promises (1 Thessalonians 5:24).

f) God's will and power are sovereign

This may be considered from two different points of view, namely, His sovereign will and His sovereign power. The will of God is represented in Scripture as the final cause of all things (Ephesians 4:11 & Revelation 4:11). Deuteronomy 29:29 defines the secret and the revealed will of God. The former is the will of God's decree, which is hidden in God and can be known only from its effects. The latter is the will of His precept which is revealed in the law and in the gospel.

g) God is merciful

God's mercy is His tenderhearted loving compassion for His people. God's mercy sees man as miserable and needy. The Psalmist said, "As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him" (Psalm 103:13). While Paul states in Ephesians 2:4, 5, "But God, being rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ." We clearly see the greatest expression of God's mercy upon the condition of man is seen in the sacrifice of His son for the atonement of man's sin.

2. Incommunicable attributes

a) The independence or self-existence of God.

God's existence does not depend on anything outside of Him; it never has and never will. Paul denies that God needs anything or is served by human hands (Acts 17:25). He is, regardless of whether anything else is. God is not aloof, indifferent or unconcerned in relationship to His creation. We are fortunate and favored to have been chosen to exist by God. There always has been, there is, and there will always be God.

b) The immutability of God.

Some theologians also refer to this aspect as the constancy of God. The scriptures refer to God in many places as unchanging. Psalms 102 contrasts God's nature with the heavens and the earth: "They perish but thou will endure." James 1:17 says, "there is no variation or shadow due to change." God will act exactly as He has promised and believers can always rely on that. This idea of an unchanging God has been challenged through current movements such as open theism. In the book "The Openness of God," a group of theologians suggest the following: "According to the open will of God, or free will theism...free actions logically cannot be known with certainty in advance" (Pinnock, 151). These theologians thus insist that God has created a world in which He is 'surprised' by the outcome of human choices. Meanwhile others such as Millard J. Erickson assert that God's knowledge of all that will occur in the future, including the free actions of human agents, does not prevent Him from genuinely feeling emotions such as love and pain. Thus the incarnation was made possible due to the impassability of God (Erickson: What, 224).

c) The infinity of God

God is not subject to limitations; He is infinite. God is unlimited and He is unlimitable. God's infinity can be viewed from several angles; God is omnipresent and everything that is appears before Him. God is everywhere (Immanent) and nowhere (Transcendent). Nowhere meaning God is above creation and not a part of creation. God is also infinite in relationship to time (Eph. 3:21). God is infinite in knowledge and power (Matt. 10:29); He is omnipotent and fully omniscient (Heb. 6:18).

d) The simplicity of God.

God is not composed of various parts, and for that very reason God is not subject to division. God is spirit; He is not composed of matter and does not possess a physical nature (John 4:24). The attributes of God are never in opposition or conflict as the person of God is ultimately governed by His good and perfect will. God's simplicity is not meant as a disparagement, but an opportunity to marvel at the wonder of His immensity and complete unity.

C. Name and Trinity

The Baptist faith and Message contains the following regarding God and God the father:

God

There is one and only one living and true God. He is an intelligent, spiritual, and personal Being, the Creator, Redeemer, Preserver, and Ruler of the universe. God is infinite in holiness and all other perfections. God is all powerful and all knowing; and His perfect knowledge extends to all things, past, present, and future, including the future decisions of His free creatures. To Him we owe the highest love, reverence, and obedience. The eternal triune God reveals Himself to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, with distinct personal attributes, but without division of nature, essence, or being.

God the Father

God as Father reigns with providential care over His universe, His creatures, and the flow of the stream of human history according to the

purposes of His grace. He is all powerful, all knowing, all loving, and all wise. God is Father in truth to those who become children of God through faith in Jesus Christ. He is fatherly in His attitude toward all men.

Evident in this text and in the preceding list of attributes is the assertion that God has an established personality. Exodus 20:7 compels us to treat the name of God with the utmost respect; this great respect indicates the personality of God. God is plainly to be treated as a being and not an object or force. God is a person to be loved for what He is. There are many names of God given to us in scripture; these are not to be confused with the divine trinity.

Several scripture references link the three persons of the trinity together in unity and equality. At the great commission (Matt. 28:19-20) one should note that "name" is singular although all three persons are included. This formula became part of the early church and is found in the *Didache* 7.1-4 (Tyson, 23). As noted previously, there is no division among the person of the trinity.

D. God's Work

Creation is the work of the triune God. While the Old Testament attributes the creative act simply to God, the New Testament provides a greater understanding of the fully revealed distinctions of the trinity. The role of the Holy Spirit in creation is evident in scriptures such as Genesis 1:2 and Psalm 104:30. Scripture shows that while the Father brought the universe into being; the Spirit and the Son have played roles in fashioning it and carrying out the details of its design. "Creation is from the Father; it is through the Son and by the Spirit" (Grenz, 342). Creation in the proper sense refers to bringing into reality the whole of physical being as well as spiritual being other than God. Every heavenly being, angel, demon and the heavenly realm itself were created by God.

God also has a continuing relationship with His creation; this can be referred to as the providence of God. God continues to preserve the existence of His creation and guides to His intended purposes. We are in God's care and therefore can face the future confidently knowing that all things are not happening merely by chance. God preserves His creation and maintains its existence. Colossians 1:17 says, "He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together." However, the writer of Hebrews speaks of the Son as "upholding the universe by His word of power" (1:3).

God's governing activity is universal; it extends to all matters and He alone has worked to provide the only possible solution to resolve the sin of mankind. "We know that in everything, God works for good for those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28). There are no limits on whom or what our God can use. The following section on Christology will further reflect on the greatest work of God, in the person of Jesus the redeemer and Son of God.

III. Christology

A. Introduction

Christology generally seeks to answer the following questions. First, who is Jesus and secondly, what did Jesus accomplish? This section will focus on the first of these questions while the concluding section of this work (Atonement) will focus on the work of Christ. The Baptist faith and Message has the following to say regarding the identity and mission of Christ:

"God the Son

Christ is the eternal Son of God. In His incarnation as Jesus Christ He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. Jesus perfectly revealed and did the will of God, taking upon Himself human nature with its demands and necessities and identifying Himself completely with mankind yet without sin. He honored the divine law by His personal

obedience, and in His substitutionary death on the cross He made provision for the redemption of men from sin. He was raised from the dead with a glorified body and appeared to His disciples as the person who was with them before His crucifixion. He ascended into heaven and is now exalted at the right hand of God where He is the One Mediator, fully God, fully man, in whose Person is effected the reconciliation between God and man. He will return in power and glory to judge the world and to consummate His redemptive mission. He now dwells in all believers as the living and ever present Lord."

Utilizing this writer's Christian heritage can be a first step to answering the questions at hand (Jenkins, 96). However the importance of these issues deserve a more detailed look into scripture. When articulating beliefs regarding the person and work of Christ, the central affirmations of the Christian faith are being examined.

The following categories will be used in order to explore the person of Jesus; Jesus is divine, Jesus is human and Jesus is both divine and human.

B. The person of Christ

1. Jesus is divine

The central focus of the Christian church is the recognition that Jesus is Immanuel, "God with us" (Grenz, 320). Early believers who followed Jesus believed in the Jesus they had encountered Yahweh Himself. The New Testament refers to Jesus as both God and Savior in verses such as 2Peter 1:1:

"Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours."

The confession of the divinity of Christ is central to the Christian faith. The statement that Jesus is God affirms the divine nature of Jesus and only in this context can a proper foundation for the Christian faith be made.

Even in the early church, heresies concerning the divinity of Christ were encountered. Two early heretical movements were known as the adoptionist Christology of the Ebionites and the docetic heresies. The adoptionist advocated that Jesus was merely a man who, through strict observance to the law, was justified and through this process became the messiah. Jesus was later adopted by God for the purpose of carrying out the divine program (Brown, 185). While the docetic heresies utilized the greek word *dokeo* ("to seem to appear") to assert that Christ did not have an actual human body; that he was only a spectral appearance. The docetic view asserted that if Christ suffered he was not God; if he was God, he did not suffer (Brown, 179). Neither of these views were approved by the early church and do not coincide with Biblical record.

The later Arian controversy (Brown, 115) attempted to assert the Son was not eternal (and therefore not fully divine). However the church rejected this position at the First Ecumenical Council in A.D. 325. In this way, the Council of Nicea affirmed the deity of Christ. Other heresies have attempted to dispute Christ's deity and the Christian church has continually affirmed this important aspect of the Christian faith.

1 Corinthians 12:3 tells us, "No one can say 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit." The divinity of Jesus can, therefore, be affirmed in the presence of the Lord in the form of the Holy Spirit among us today. However, there are historical implications regarding the divinity of Christ (Grenz, 324). The sinlessness of Christ as regarded by the New Testament writers (Heb. 4:15). This aspect of His divinity removes Christ from the disposition to sin that characterizes fallen humanity (1 John 3:5; Heb. 9:14; 2 Cor. 5:21). Thus the divine life of Jesus is the model for believers to emulate (1 Peter 2:21-23).

The divinity of Jesus can also be found in His claims regarding Himself. Matthew 13:41 and Luke 12:8-9 clearly show Jesus teaching His command of the angels and the kingdom of God. Passages such as Mark 2:5 display for us the ability of Jesus to forgive sin. In verse seven, the scribes recognized this as heresy; who but God Himself could forgive sin. Jesus also taught that He is Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:27-28) and that He will sit in judgment of the world (Matt. 25:31-46). Jesus exemplifies His deity in scripture passages such as John 10:30 and John 14:7-9 where He teaches us that He is one with the Father. Matthew 26:63 shows Jesus telling His accusers they will eventually fully realize His deity.

Finally, the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ asserts another basis for the confession of His deity. Even the Roman soldiers remarked, "surely He was the son of God" during the events leading to Jesus' death (Matt. 27:54). In John 5:21, Jesus makes the claim that He is in charge of life and death and then in John 11:25 tells Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he may die, yet shall he live."

The relationship of Jesus to the Father as found in scripture, makes clear the understanding that Jesus understood Himself as equal with the father and that He possessed the right to do things which only the Father has the right to do.

2. Jesus is human

The humanness of Jesus is of critical importance because only through His complete humanness can the necessary kind of intercession be made. The Council of Constantinople concluded that Jesus was fully human in A.D. 381 to refute the Apollinarian controversy that had suggested Jesus was not fully human (Brown, 185). Hebrews 2:14 asserts, "since the children have flesh and blood, He too shared in their

humanity." The humanness in which Jesus participated was certainly that of the children of Adam.

One of this writer's favorite books is entitled, "The Man Nobody Knows" by Bruce Barton. This work emphasizes the human aspects of Jesus in the human experience. Jesus was born a dependant baby and grew (Luke 2:52). He grew physically nourished by food and water. Jesus experienced hunger when fasting (Matt. 4:2) and thirst (John 19:28). He felt fatigue when He traveled (John 4:6) and encouraged support from His friends in His hour of despair (Matt. 26:36-38). Jesus had spiritual needs as well and withdrew often for times of solitude and prayer (Mark 1:35). He lived under the conditions of the human experience; He endured trials and temptations as well (Matt. 4:1-11). Even to the point of directly encountering the devil; thus none should doubt His dull humanity. Hebrews 4:15 says, "for we do not have a high priest who is not able to sympathize with our weaknesses though we have one who has been tempted in every way just as we are yet without sin."

Finally, Jesus suffered physically and died, just like everyone else. John 19:34 tells of the spear that pierced His side to test whether he was truly deceased. This test confirmed death. John recounts His personal relationship with Jesus in 1 John 1:1:

"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched--this we proclaim concerning the Word of life."

John actually saw, heard and touched the Christ!

One final comment on the humanity of Christ can be seen in Jesus' own favorite term for himself, the "son of man." Paul attests to this in 1 Timothy 2:5 when he says, "There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Jesus

Christ." Jesus slept, cried, loved and bled; if He was not human than no one ever has been (Erickson, 712).

3 Jesus is divine and Human

This assertion observes there was absolutely no duality in the thought, action or purpose of Jesus. The work of Jesus assumed both His humanity and His deity; one unified person whose acts are human and divine is viewed in the scriptural portrayal of Jesus. John 3:13 states, "no one has ascended into heaven but he who descended from heaven, the son of man." This makes it plain to us that Jesus was both earthly man and preexistent divine being who became incarnate. There is no suggestion anywhere in scripture that these two natures took turns in directing His activity.

C. The work of Christ

The ministry of Jesus is inherent to His identity (Grenz, 425). His personhood as previously established has already in many ways spoken of His work. His fulfillment of the Old Testament hope and prophecies as well as His teaching, healing and miracles heralded in of the kingdom of God (Luke 11:20). These are dwarfed, however, in the recognition that He was sent to die and be resurrected for the atonement of sin. These functions of Christ have been classically known as the revealing, ruling and reconciling work of Christ. His sacrifice for the church was His greatest work and will be covered in the concluding section of this work.

IV. Atonement

A. Introduction

The Southern Baptist Faith and Message has the following to say regarding salvation and grace:

"Salvation

Salvation involves the redemption of the whole man, and is offered freely to all who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, who by His own blood obtained eternal redemption for the believer. In its broadest sense salvation includes regeneration, justification, sanctification, and glorification. There is no salvation apart from personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord.

A. Regeneration, or the new birth, is a work of God's grace whereby believers become new creatures in Christ Jesus. It is a change of heart wrought by the Holy Spirit through conviction of sin, to which the sinner responds in repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Repentance and faith are inseparable experiences of grace.

Repentance is a genuine turning from sin toward God. Faith is the acceptance of Jesus Christ and commitment of the entire personality to Him as Lord and Savior.

B. Justification is God's gracious and full acquittal upon principles of His righteousness of all sinners who repent and believe in Christ. Justification brings the believer unto a relationship of peace and favor with God.

C. Sanctification is the experience, beginning in regeneration, by which the believer is set apart to God's purposes, and is enabled to progress toward moral and spiritual maturity through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in him. Growth in grace should continue throughout the regenerate person's life.

D. Glorification is the culmination of salvation and is the final blessed and abiding state of the redeemed.

God's Purpose of Grace

Election is the gracious purpose of God, according to which He regenerates, justifies, sanctifies, and glorifies sinners. It is consistent with the free agency of man, and comprehends all the means in connection with the end. It is the glorious display of God's sovereign goodness, and is infinitely wise, holy, and unchangeable. It excludes boasting and promotes humility.

All true believers endure to the end. Those whom God has accepted in Christ, and sanctified by His Spirit, will never fall away from the state of grace, but shall persevere to the end. Believers may fall into sin through neglect and temptation, whereby they grieve the Spirit, impair their graces and comforts, and bring reproach on the cause of Christ and temporal judgments on themselves; yet they shall be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation."

The presentation of these statements in their fullness is meant to most fully represent the theological views of the SBC. While many of the definitions above are widely accepted by orthodox Christianity, there are areas in which Baptists have both historically differed on and also been misrepresented. The intention of this writer is not to span gulfs or ease tensions between theologians, but rather draw from these differences a clear explanation of atonement.

First, however, the roles of various factors must be viewed in order to fully comprehend this writer's understanding of the atonement. The nature of God is perfect and complete in holiness. God cannot reside alongside sin. The status of God's law defines a definite link between sin and liability to punishment (Rom. 6:23). This means punishment is inevitable rather than merely possible (Erickson, 803). The total depravity of the human condition (Rom. 7:5) guarantees punishment. This does not mean that humans are entirely insensitive to matters of conscience, but rather man cannot save himself or extricate himself from his sinful condition (Erickson, 784). These three factors now clearly explained show the need for atonement.

The Old Testament word for atonement literally means to "cover." Through Old Testament sacrifices, one was delivered from sin by the interposing of something between his sin and God. The sin of the sinner was transferred to the sacrifice through a confession of guilt. The spotlessness of the sacrifice was a requirement of God as was the sacrificial system. Isaiah 53 is a key scripture that binds the spotlessness of Jesus as the Lamb of God to the Old Testament prophecy concerning the messiah. The humanity of Jesus means that His atoning death is applicable to human beings (Gal. 4:4-5). Jesus is

an infinite being who did not have to die, therefore His death can serve to atone for all of mankind.

B. Four images of atonement

The atonement becomes a sacrifice Hebrews 9:6-15 likens the work of Christ to the Day of Atonement in the Old Testament. The death of Christ also becomes a propitiation for sin, whereby God's wrath against our sinfulness (Rom. 1:18) is covered so that the love of God can be granted us (Rom. 3:21-26). Further, the atonement is substitutionary and Christ did actually take our place. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." The fact that Jesus was the sacrifice in our place only highlights our need for His work. The final aspect of atonement, although alluded to already, is the reconciliation that this brings between God and man. Now because sin has been completely handled through the sacrifice (repentance), covering (appeasement) and substitution (penalties made); those that have faith in Christ are fully welcomed into the very presence of God in a reconciled environment without fear of wrath. Of these views of atonement it is this writer's belief that substitutionary atonement is the most valuable of these aspects as it highlights the importance of the death of Christ as the only means of salvation. Also, the security given the believer in this relationship with God is heightened as man realizes that only God himself dying could meet the needs of those who are totally depraved. We must always be grateful for what was done for us.

"This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." 1 John 4:10

B. The ascension of Christ

Christ did not just die; it is vital to recognize that His resurrection displays for us the triumph over death. Jesus truly has conquered sin and thus provided a way to new life. The ascension of Christ involves His return to resume His proper place with the Father. Jesus Himself on several occasions foretold of His return to the father (John 6:62;14:2;12;16:5;10;28). Luke provides accounts of the actual ascension (Acts 1:6-11). As Christ returned to His Father's side, we are informed by scripture of the reasons for this departure and the ongoing work that Christ continues to perform.

C. The Session of Christ

There is a continuing incarnation. In 1 Timothy 2:5 Paul says, "There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." Jesus seated at the right hand of God (Acts 2:33-36), continues to mediate for us. Jesus once in session, sent us the Holy Spirit; He had made it clear to His disciples that He had to leave them in order to carry out His work (John 14:2-3). In sending the Holy Spirit, Jesus' teaching was made internal (John 14:7) and now Jesus could truly be with His disciples and all believers forever (Matt. 28:20). Jesus seated at the right hand of God should not be seen as a state of rest or inactivity, but rather as a symbol of authority and active rule. The right hand is the place where Jesus is constantly making intercession with the Father on our behalf (Heb. 7:25).

V. Conclusion

Through the reading and research of this work, this writer was delighted to see Baptists have consistently affirmed the great historic orthodox formulations of the councils of Nicea and Chalcedon as well as other critical moments concerning both salvation and faith of the 16th century Reformation era.

Baptist confessional activity has sought first to demonstrate not difference from but continuity with non-Baptist communities of faith on many doctrinal matters from the person and work of Christ to the doctrine of God to justification by grace through faith alone (George, 341).

While Baptist theologians have had differences in defining the elect and differed on calvanistic and sublapsarian interpretations regarding the definitions of God's providential care for man, one current that was found to be consistent by this writer was the persistence of the saints. Repeatedly men like W.A. Criswell state, "Once saved, always safe" (George, 247). Millard Erickson speaks of the elect as persevering to the completion of their sanctification which is glorification (George, 329). In these assertions, comfort is found in the Baptist support for this writer's firm conviction that the perfection of the sacrifice made for our sin and the position and work of our high priest makes certain that no individual who truly turns from sin to accept Christ as Lord and savior could ever lose a salvation that is based on the promise of God and not the weakness of man.

Through this credo, a biblically based theological reflection of this writer's views concerning beliefs on the doctrine of God, the person of Christ, and the work of Christ have been shared. The tools used in this reflection were: the Biblical message, the theological heritage of the writer's church and the thought forms of current culture. Through this process the writer's knowledge and use of these tools has grown and his beliefs in these areas have been tested, strengthened and encouraged to grow.

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