

## Terms Used in Theology

The study of theology is the highest and most rewarding pursuit anyone can do in life. I pity the foolish people whose desire is to ski down a mountain slope, or jump out of an airplane with a parachute, or dive into the waters over coral reefs, or seek other such adventures and experiences, when vastly, immeasurably more fulfilling is to know the infinite Creator God and the principles by which He rules. We obviously can't undertake a study of theology here in one Sunday School lesson. But to encourage readers to get started studying theology, as well as to help us to follow Christ with greater understanding of biblical truths, I offer this glossary of terms (with annotations to show how relevant theology is).

**Ad intra** – The characteristics or operations of God expressed eternally within or among the Persons of the Trinity; **ad extra** refers to the works of the Persons of the Trinity as expressed toward creation, particularly regarding the redemption of a lost humanity. Thus, election is an *ad extra* work of the Father, humiliation is an *ad extra* work of the Son, and regeneration an *ad extra* work of the Spirit. Nevertheless, see Inseparable Operations, below. The fellowship and love within the Trinity (*ad intra*) are why fellowship and love are to characterize believers, and the priorities of the Persons (*ad extra*) while maintaining equality (*ad intra*) are why Scripture sets roles for men and women.

**Adoption** – As a result of faith in Christ, the believer is made a permanent member of God's family as an adult son with the privileges and responsibilities that attend sonship. Thus, for example, a son has access to his father. A son is to honor and obediently serve his father. And a son's character should be that of his father. Adoption is one of the most precious of the benefits of the atonement that Christ effected. God brought the nation of Israel also into sonship after delivering them from Egypt; presumably that was an adoption; sonship is why ethnic Israel has a glorious future when Christ returns.

**Amillennialism** – The view that when Christ returns, there will be no literal thousand-year kingdom on earth; believers are taken to heaven and the world ends; we go directly into the eternal state. **Post-millennialism** is the view that we're in the kingdom now, during this Church age, Christianizing and civilizing the world and, when this era ends, Christ will return and the eternal state ensues. Neither of these traditions see Israel restored in the future; they suppose that, due to Israel's rejection of Christ, those O.T. prophecies have been transferred to the Church. See Pre-millennialism below

**Anthropology** – The systematic study of all that the Bible teaches about humanity. **Hamartiology** is the study of the Bible's teaching regarding sin; **soteriology** is the study of all that the Bible teaches about salvation; **pneumatology** is the study of the Holy Spirit; **ecclesiology** is the study of all the Bible teaches about the church; etc.

**Antinomianism** – The heretical notion that it isn't necessary to obey the law of Christ or any law of God. Jesus uses this word in Matthew 7:23 (translated "lawless ones"), stating that persons who refuse to obey Law are not in relationship to Him and aren't going to be in heaven, regardless what religious practices they carry out. The term **license** is related to antinomianism, meaning freedom to live as one pleases. The opposite to license and antinomianism is obedience to Christ's teachings, instructions and commands. (See Galatians 6:2 and 1 Corinthians 9:21). Just because we're saved by grace thru faith and have the promise of eternal life doesn't mean we're absolved of pursuing godly lives, which God has revealed in His Word we're to live. Christian **liberty** means Christ has freed us from the enslaving power of sin; it does not mean that we're free from the responsibility of obeying Christ. **Legalism** is obeying a standard, whether from Scripture or a human invention, to exalt oneself and/or to gain salvific merit. But adhering to a standard, especially the many laws that are in the Word of God, out of love for God and for His glory is never legalism.

**Apostasy** – This term means "falling away" and refers to professing Christians who deliberately turn away from Christ, from biblical Christian doctrine, and from a biblical lifestyle. Apostates continue to profess being Christians, but they cannot repent and return. Scripture predicts an increase in apostasy toward the end of the Church age. **Heresy** is different: It is doctrinal error either due to ignorance of Scripture or Satan's influence; the person espousing the contrary opinion, doctrine, or practice may still be a believer.

**Arianism** – A heresy claiming that the Son was generated by the Father and so came into existence at a point in time; that the Son is therefore not fully deity, nor is the Holy Spirit. The biblical term, "begotten," (John 3:16,18) refers to the Son being of the same substance or (better) essence as the Father; it does not refer to generation. And the phrase "firstborn over all creation" \*Col 1:15) refers to authority, not to coming into existence at a point in time. Jehovah's Witnesses are Arianists.

**Arminianism** – Tradition or belief system that rejects certain tenets of Calvinism; it holds that man has the innate ability to exercise faith, to do good, and that a person can lose salvation but then regain it if desired. Arminians also heavily stress our freedom to make choices. See Calvinism below. The Synod of Dort (1619) condemned Arminianism, but it's prevalent in the church today anyway. Methodists, Nazarenes, and Assemblies of God are examples of denominations that are Arminian.

**Aseity** – God is self-existent; He is independent of His Creation, autonomous, As an infinitely perfect Being, nothing in creation adds to his Person. God is self-sufficient; He has no needs that Creation will satisfy. He does not need our worship. Atheists ignorantly or foolishly suppose God needs people to worship Him, which they refuse to do. God wants us to worship, love and serve Him, because

He knows it's the most fulfilling thing we can do. God is not and cannot be blessed in any way. God's creational desire is to share His infinite Person with us, that we may be wondrously blessed. It's an expression of His goodness. Even when we're glorified we will not—and cannot—be God. Also, God is eternal and He alone is able to create both time and matter out of nothing. He is the uncaused cause of all existence. And this: Only God is free; He can act as He pleases according to His holy will. No other being in all creation has such freedom.

**Atonement** – Inclusive term used for all that Christ accomplished by His life, death and resurrection to save lost humanity. Because the cross is so important in Christianity, we easily forget that we're saved by Jesus' righteous, obedient life as much as by His death. See Justification, below. And the resurrection is equally essential because it's His resurrected life imparted to us that is our eternal life. The term, redemption (see below), is often used similarly to atonement. Christ's "passion" is another term often used. Atonement necessarily involves sacrifice of a life to be effected. Atonement was essential and what God initiated so that we sinners can enter into relationship with a holy God.

**Baptism** – Many applications in Scripture, but it's mainly immersion in water for spiritual cleansing as initiation into a new identity. John's baptism was to prepare a repentant people for what was then an imminent kingdom. Christian baptism identifies the believer as in Christ. Both types of baptism assume that undergoing the rite indicates a commitment to righteousness. Water suggests cleansing from sin, but it also has significance in O.T. prophetic writings anticipating eschatologic regeneration.

**Baptism of the Spirit** – The action of the Holy Spirit that permanently unites a believer to the Body of Christ, occurring at the moment of exercise of faith in Christ. The phrase could be translated *in* the Spirit, *by* the Spirit, or *with* the Spirit. The "filling" of the Spirit is different; it's a special enabling of the believer, subsequent to conversion, for special service. Neither the baptism of the Spirit nor the filling of the Spirit have anything to do with the ability to speak in "tongues."

**Calvinism** – The tradition or belief system that emphasizes God's sovereignty, human inability to be saved apart from God's enabling grace because of our sin nature, and once saved, the person will necessarily persevere in faith. The TULIP acronym stands for Total depravity; Unconditional election; Limited atonement; Irresistible grace; and Perseverance of the saints. Unlike the Arminian position on free will, Calvinists hold that God sovereignly controls our will, yet somehow without making us into robots, so that our choices conform to His decrees, and somehow without being the cause of sin and evil. Presbyterians and Christian Reformed are examples of Calvinist denominations.

**Canon** – The collection of books that have been recognized by God's people as being Scripture and thus authoritative. The Holy Spirit is responsible for influencing Israel and the Church to recognize which works are included in the canon. Protestants do not identify as canonical certain books that the Roman Catholic Church does (the so-called Apocrypha).

**Cessationism** – The view that the miraculous gifts of the Spirit (tongues, healing and prophecy) ceased with the writing of the New Testament; the non-miraculous gifts however persist. **Charismatic** refers to the belief that all the miraculous gifts are for today. The early church rejected Montanism, a holiness movement claiming that the Holy Spirit continues giving new revelation; the orthodox belief is that revelation for the Church is in Scripture. The Montanist notion however persists today in some traditions of the Church.

**Church** – The body of all believers in Christ; an assembly of believers gathered together for fellowship, mutual caring, edification and instruction. The notion that a building is a church is not biblical, nor that the church assembles for worship. See worship, below. As Jesus described in the Kingdom parables (Matthew 13), there will be professing or nominal Christians in the church as well as those who bear fruit, as well as those who are false; the Church is this era's expression of the Kingdom that Jesus described. (See Kingdom, below.) The church can be understood as either local or universal, the latter including all saved people everywhere throughout the Church age.

**Compatibilism** – The view that God's sovereignty is compatible with human freedom to make choices. Augustine said that God gives humans "the dignity of causality." **Determinism** in contrast holds that human choices are determined by forces or conditions external to or independent of the person. Human freedom however is not absolute, as some suppose. And the measure of freedom that we have is, sadly, corrupted by our fall into sin with its enslaving sin nature. See depravity, below. Some understanding of philosophy gives depth to theology.

**Complementarian** – The view that men and women are equal in value before God but that the role of women is to complement that of men in their functions in the church; church government, preaching and teaching is for men. **Egalitarianism** in contrast holds that women have the same roles in the church as do men and that husbands and wives must mutually submit to each other.

**Covenant** – Legal term referring to an agreement between God and man involving promises, privileges and responsibilities within a relationship. God sovereignly initiates the biblical covenants, and they are (arguably) all unconditional (the Sinai covenant requires obedience for blessing). The New Covenant is explicitly for Israel not the Church, although the Church receives certain of its blessings in anticipation of its fulfillment. The term covenant also refers to a theological system or tradition that holds that all biblical history is divided into discrete covenants, as opposed to dispensationalism (which, see below). Thus, in the Reformed tradition, there are

the Covenant of Redemption, the Covenant of Works, and the Covenant of Grace. The biblical covenants include, for example, the Abrahamic, the Sinaiatic (or Mosaic), the Davidic and the New Covenant.

**Creation** – God brought into existence out of nothing (*ex nihilo*) all that there is in time and space, both this physical world and the invisible spiritual world. He did it by His Word (called *fiat* creation) in 6 literal days about 6,500 years ago. The very fact that something exists is, logically, proof that God is there. All other explanations are absurd. The theological implications of creation are extensive; for just one: Because God is Creator, He has the right to dispose of all creatures according to His holy will, and He has the right to command how creatures are to live in His house. Scripture's origins' narrative is true and authoritative because it came from a holy God; He does not lie, so He is trustworthy. Adopting the origins' narrative that science offers is not merely foolish, it denies inerrancy (which, see below); re-interpreting the text to accommodate science's narrative is deliberately idolatrous. The noetic effect of sin (see Sin, below) is why billions of years and evolution are widely accepted, NOT because science has demonstrated them to be empirically true.

**Death** – Ending of biological life brought on by the entrance of sin. It is a separation in multiple respects: separation of the soul from the body, of the person from his family and community, and of the person from God's presence, unless the person is in Christ (see Gospel, below), in which case death is (or should be) a joyful entry into God's presence and a new type of existence. All humans will be raised to life; death does not bring anyone's existence to an end. Unbelievers are raised to experience a second death, which is eternal separation from God in hell.

**Deism** – The heretical view of God that holds that He created but then abandoned creation to run by itself with no further involvement; God is unconcerned with circumstances or events. **Theism** is the biblical view of God, that He is transcendent (see below) yet also immanent, continuously and sovereignly involved in His Creation with a holy will and purposes for all creatures and events. **Pantheism** is the heretical view that the physical world itself is deity; it rejects a transcendent God. Probably many nominal Christians are more deists than theists. Many scientists are pantheists; Einstein identified as a pantheist, so did Carl Sagan. Anyone who holds to nature being able to bring life into existence on its own, an attribute of deity, is thus a pantheist.

**Depravity** – God's view that man, in his totality of being (mind, emotions, and especially the will) is corrupted by innate (inherited, inborn) sin and incapable of merit. Man is therefore unable to do good, to obey God, or to exercise faith apart from God's intervening grace. See Sin, below. Depravity's noetic effect (that is, on the mind) profoundly affects modernity in that unbelievers, rejecting Scripture, cannot think clearly about anything spiritual and cannot understand truth, so by default lapse into fantasies and delusions, including even solipsism!

**Dispensationalism** – System that views all biblical history occurring in discrete eras or stages during which God relates to humans in different ways; primarily it sees Israel as distinct from the Church and that Israel will be restored during a future, literal, earthly 1,000-year long kingdom. All dispensations end in failure. In all dispensations, God manifests grace; supposing that the O.T. era was one of law but the N.T. era is one of grace is false. The dispensations include Pre-Flood, Patriarchal, Israel, Church, Millennium, and New Heavens and New Earth, although each of these can be further subdivided.

**Election** – God's sovereign choice, made prior to creation, of certain persons who would be saved by faith in Christ. See also predestination below. The Nation of Israel also is elect, chosen from among the nations on earth for God Himself. Election is entirely by God's grace and not on the basis of merit. If not for election, because of depravity, no one ever would or could be saved. Some evangelical traditions (mis)understand election merely to mean that God fore-knew who would be saved, or that election refers only to ministry.

**Eschatology** – The systematic study of all that the Bible teaches about the future. From the viewpoint of those in the Old Testament eras, we are now in what for them would be the eschaton, the era of the future. The great importance of the study of eschatology is this: In whatever era we live, God expects His elect to live according to or in light of revelation given and promises made regarding the future. Thus, believers are to live now as if they were already sanctified and glorified. Also, knowing the judgments of the Tribulation and the Great White Throne judgment motivates us (or it should, anyway) to commit to doing Gospel outreach now.

**Evangelism** – The proclamation of the Gospel to unbelievers. It is the one duty (repeatedly) enjoined on the Church. There is an enablement of the Spirit to do this (Ephesians 4:11), and every believer should be witnessing, publicly or privately, out of love for Christ and concern for the unsaved. Gospel outreach is a privilege in that by doing it we join God in His *missio dei*, bringing fallen and lost humanity back to Himself, the great theme of all biblical history.

**Faith** – Trusting obedience; confidence in something God said or promised that results in obedience. **Belief** or believing is synonymous with faith. A commitment differentiates biblical belief from our modern use of the word, which is a mental or intellectual acceptance of the truthfulness or likelihood of something. The Gospel demands faith/belief in the Person and work of Christ as revealed in Scripture for salvation. Biblical faith establishes a relationship between the one who exercises faith and deity and, if it is genuine faith, it results in a changed life. James Chapter 2 is essential to understanding biblical faith/belief.

**Glorification** – The final step in the redemption of believers when, resurrected (or raptured), they are transformed into the image and likeness of Christ to be with Him forever. Our salvation then will be complete, and we'll be fully sanctified. When Christ returns to earth, glorified saints will be with Him. God's goal for human life is wholeness, achieved in the future at our glorification, not merely to go on living indefinitely. **Exaltation** in contrast refers to Christ's state of resurrection, ascension to heaven, session at God's right hand, and Return, after His humiliation (incarnation, suffering, atoning death and burial).

**Gospel** – The good news that God freely and lovingly offers salvation or rescue from the power of sin, the guilt of sin, and the wrath that sin deserves by faith in the Incarnate Son, the Lord Jesus, the Jewish Messiah, who lived the righteous life that God demanded of humanity, died as our substitute taking the penalty sin demands, rose from the dead so that His resurrected life can be imparted to believers, and ascended to heaven sending the Holy Spirit to indwell and empower believers to pursue an obedient, Christ-like life that is pleasing to God and that serves God as He revealed. Those who believe the Gospel, having been justified (see justification, below) enter God's presence when they die and eternally enjoy the blessedness of being with God. In its essence, the Gospel is an invitation to eternal fellowship with the living God.

**Grace** – God's unmerited goodness toward those who deserve only condemnation. We're saved by grace and we live by grace. **Mercy** is different, it's God's goodness in not giving sinners what they deserve, or it's His goodness toward those in distress of some sort. **Common grace** refers to the blessings that come to all people from God apart from salvation, thus, for example, God sends rain on the just and the unjust. See providence, below. It is erroneous to suppose that grace characterizes the Christian era, whereas Law characterized the O.T. era. Every aspect of our salvation, election, justification, reconciliation, regeneration, adoption, baptism of the Spirit, union with Christ, and more – it's all by grace; because until we die, are raised and glorified, we're still offensive sinners with an ugly sin nature inside that seeks to control us.

**Hermeneutics** – The study of how properly to interpret Scripture. Principles have been identified by which to interpret Scripture, and these are readily available in books on the market so that whoever reads a Bible can be certain of understanding correctly the text. The Holy Spirit illuminates the text for the prepared reader. **Exegesis** employs hermeneutics to determine what Scripture says; **exposition** is making known what Scripture says based on prior exegesis. **Eisegesis** puts in the text what the reader wants it to say, so it's a failure to submit to the Word of God.

**Hypostatic union** – Perfect union of deity and humanity in the Person of Christ. Uniquely Jesus has two natures yet He is one Person. The union persists during His exaltation and beyond. The early church struggled with the biblical teaching on the Person of Christ (as well as the nature of the Trinity), and a number of heresies erupted that had to be condemned. Finally the Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D. affirmed the Nicene creed as orthodox doctrine.

**Immutable** – Unchanging, unchangeable; God is infinitely perfect, and cannot therefore be more or different in any way; the term refers also to God's unalterable faithfulness to His promises in Scripture. He can, however, change His attitude toward or His way of relating to humanity according to His holy will or decrees. So, for example, we don't take a lamb to church on Sundays to sacrifice on an altar. **Impassible** is related, meaning God doesn't have passions that result in a change in His Being. He experiences human-type emotions in response to events on earth, such as anger, joy, delight, sorrow, etc, but they are within His holy will or decrees. The incarnate Son, in His human nature, wept at Lazarus' death, experiencing real misery, reflecting God's love and mercy.

**Impeccability** – Christ Jesus not only did not sin, He was not able to sin. The virgin birth of Christ is an absolutely necessary and fundamental doctrine because it assures His impeccability and therefore His capacity to be a sin-bearer. The obverse of impeccability is just as essential: He was perfectly righteous.

**Impute** – To reckon or to apply to one's account, to think that something belongs to someone; thus God imputes Christ's righteousness to us as part of justification, although in fact we were not and are not righteous. Similarly, our sins were imputed to Christ who bore the penalty that sin deserves on the cross. See Justification below. Although righteousness is imputed to us, we nevertheless are obliged to fulfill righteousness in this life.

**Inerrancy** – The Bible contains no errors; it declares truth. Scripture ultimately derives from God so it conforms perfectly to reality and it is therefore authoritative. Just because God used fallible creatures to pen Scripture doesn't mean Scripture may contain errors; God superintended the writing so that what He wanted written was written. **Authority** means God holds us accountable for Scripture controlling our minds, values, priorities, behavior, indeed, our lives. When Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, He defeated Satan using Scripture; Satan had to submit to the authority of God's Word! **Infallible** is not as strong a term, meaning Scripture won't lead us astray when it speaks to our faith and how we practice it. **Plenary** refers to all the words of Scripture. Note: Scripture does not *contain* truth, it *is* truth. The reason it's essential to hold to inerrancy is, as creatures, we need to humbly submit to God, and we encounter God in His Word. For inerrancy to be meaningful, we must first treasure truth; if truth is irrelevant, then so is inerrancy, and so is God.

**Incarnation** – The act of God the Son by which He humbled Himself and took on a human nature while retaining His deity, although emptying Himself of the glory and prerogatives of deity. See kenosis below. Incarnation means He took on humanity so as to be a second Adam, to exhibit perfect obedience and righteousness (someone in creation had to do that!), and to be able to suffer and die

as a substitute for fallen humanity. Incarnation was absolutely necessary to effect the redemption of humanity. He had to be human so we can identify with Him and so to be *in Christ*. He had to be human to fulfill the Davidic covenant and rule. His human nature is a sinless one due to the virgin birth, and it was lived in dependence on the Holy Spirit. The Incarnate Son, Jesus, as the living Word fully revealed the Father to humanity. Jesus retains His human nature although resurrected and ascended to heaven.

**Inseparable operations** – The Persons of the Trinity act together as One in all their works, although certain emphases or priorities are attributed to one or the other *ad extra*. The Persons of the Godhead have one will; there are not three gods! Thus, for example, the so-called “cry of dereliction” from the cross is false, because the Three Persons of the Trinity were involved in that act of atonement; Jesus was reciting a verse from Psalm 22 to indicate that that Scripture was being fulfilled. And this: Colossians 1:16 says that the Son created all things, yet from other Scriptures we know that the Father and the Holy Spirit were also involved.

**Intermediate state** – The supposed temporary state of the soul of dead believers awaiting the Rapture to be resurrected and taken to heaven. Paul stated however that when a believer dies he or she goes to be with the Lord. The Rich man/Lazarus parable is not meant to determine how things are when we die; anyway, that parable was based on the O.T. understanding of a *sheol*, a bipartite (righteous dead//wicked dead) place for the O.T. dead awaiting resurrection.

**Justification** – A legal expression meaning to be both forgiven of sins and declared righteous, a benefit of Christ’s redemptive work applied at the moment of belief and regeneration. It is justification that makes it possible for anyone to be in the presence of a holy God. The common expression “just-as-if-I never sinned” to explain what it means to be justified is inadequate because forgiveness alone isn’t sufficient; righteousness is absolutely necessary and we receive Christ’s righteousness by imputation. Christ must be deity to live a perfectly righteous life. The Gospel thus must include an understanding of who Jesus is, that is, His character, and not merely focus on the cross.

**Kenosis** – For the incarnation, in profound condescension, the Son emptied Himself of the independent expression of the prerogatives and glory of deity while retaining His divine nature. He did it to identify with and represent all fallen humanity. Kenosis expresses the humility and servant-hood of God, His otherwise unknowable attributes. It is not correct to say the Son did it voluntarily as that implies that the Son has a will separate from that of the Father. The Persons of the Trinity have one will.

**Kingdom** – As Creator, God rules sovereignly over all that exists. The Nation of Israel was a kingdom (see theocracy, below), during what was called the period of Monarchy, but that ended when the nation was thrown into exile. Yet, Scripture promises that Kingdom will be re-established when Christ returns and sits on the throne of David in Jerusalem and the Nation of Israel is restored. Due to Israel’s rejection of Christ at the First Advent, Jesus announced in the form of parables a new era that He termed the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 13), of which the Church is the current expression. The nature of the Kingdom is highly controversial among theologians of covenant and dispensational traditions. Christ was given all authority at His Ascension, but He doesn’t exert coercive rule over His church in this era; when He Returns, He will reveal and exercise that authority and will continue to do so in the New Creation because His Kingdom is repeatedly stated in Scripture to be an everlasting one.

**Middle knowledge** – The view that God’s knowledge is so exhaustive and total that He knows not only all that happens, all that could happen, and all that would happen if what could happen were to happen. This third form of knowledge is called counterfactual, meaning the fact is not real, but could be. An illustration of middle knowledge is in Matthew 11:21. Another term often used for middle knowledge is Molinism. Although this view has a few problems, it has great explanatory value. Thus, for but two examples: God knows that individuals who never heard the Gospel would have rejected it if they had heard it and so deserve condemnation, and likewise God knows that certain stillborns would have trusted Christ and be saved had they lived. And this, God knows that everyone of us would have disobeyed as Adam did had we been there, and so are worthy of condemnation.

**Modalism** – Heretical claim that God exists not as three Persons but as one who appears at different times in three different modes. Several heresies in the early church held to this modalist view and, though they were condemned, they forced the church to think carefully about Scriptural doctrines. At the Council of Nicea, the deity of the Son was settled, and at the Council of Constantinople the deity of the Holy Spirit was confirmed. Admittedly, there is mystery in the Trinity, and it’s only possible to know what is revealed.

**Ordinance** – A rite that God ordained for the Church to observe (e.g., prayer and Bible teaching), often of symbolic importance (eg, baptism). **Sacrament** is slightly different, meaning the ordinance also has the ability to convey grace to the believer (e.g., the Lord’s Supper). Evangelicals view “sacraments” radically different from how the Roman Catholic Church views them. Other rites, rituals, ceremonies and special festival days such as are enjoined on Jews in the Mosaic Law are called *stoichea* (in Galatians) and are not for the Church to observe.

**Parousia** – The Second Coming or Return of Christ to earth, visibly, bodily and in great glory, to rule at Jerusalem for 1,000 years. The great hope and desire of all believers should be Christ’s return to vanquish His enemies and establish a Kingdom of world-wide peace and righteousness and for the physical creation to be restored to primal goodness.

**Pelagianism** – A heresy that held that humans don’t have an innate sin nature, that they can of themselves using their free will, do good, obey God, and exercise faith in Christ. **Semi-Pelagianism** holds that man does have an innate sin nature, yet still has sufficient

capacity to exercise faith, and so this isn't a heresy. Arminians are semi-Pelagian. Calvinists reject semi-Pelagianism and follow Augustine, who stated that due to human depravity, only if God in grace sovereignly causes a person to be so inclined will that one respond in faith to the Gospel (see Acts 16:14 and John 6:44).

**Predestination** – God's sovereign determination, made before creation, of the destiny of certain persons. Predestination is used in Scripture for those who are elect, not for those who are not. Another term related to both predestination and election is **foreknowledge** referring to God's sovereign intent to be in relationship to certain persons. Foreknowledge does not mean that God simply knows in advance that a person will respond with faith.

**Premillennialism** – The view that Christ will return at the end of a future 7-years long Tribulation Period of terrible judgments and then establish the promised Davidic kingdom on earth that will last for 1,000 years. At that time, ethnic Israel will be restored as the O.T. promises. An eternal state follows the Millennium. Premillennialism upholds the biblical distinction between ethnic Israel and the Church because it interprets the O.T. prophecies and promises literally, not allegorically as amillennialism does. Christ is King, but His rule (i.e., coercive rule) will not be expressed until His Return in glory.

**Prolepsis** – A literary term referring to events that occur in Scripture that anticipate or prefigure events that come later in time that are of far greater significance. For example, the Genesis flood is proleptic of the future Great White Throne judgment. Prolepsis is deeply embedded in Scripture, giving all Scripture a unique coherence, thus serving as proof that Scripture is of supernatural origin. **Retrolepsis** is the reverse, meaning a great event occurring later in time applies to the past; thus the atonement Christ effected at the cross applied to O.T. saints.

**Propitiation** – The satisfaction of God's justice and turning away of deserved wrath by means of sacrifice, i.e., by the atoning work of the Son offering Himself in the place of the sinner, so that God's favor rests on humanity. God has in ineffable grace done all that is necessary for the redemption of a fallen humanity. The Gospel is "good news" because the alienation, the estrangement, the enmity is over. Those who willfully spurn the sacrifice God has made deserve condemnation. Those who proudly suppose their goodness or good works or any other form of merit can satisfy God are not only mistaken, they offend God by saying that the sacrifice that the Son made for them was unnecessary.

**Providence** – God's goodness toward and continual involvement in His creation so that His purposes are fulfilled. We err in supposing that events occur spontaneously, or that they occur by chance. God, an infinitely wise and powerful Being, has split-second control of His entire creation. God maintains life and He maintains the orderly function of His physical world. He rules over the nations, He sends rain, He sees to it the wild animals are fed, He gives gifts to certain people, He turns evil into good. Etc. He grants us a measure of free will to make real choices, but He not only knows them but somehow controls them for His purposes.

**Rapture** – The miraculous, sudden, future removal of the Church, i.e., both resurrected dead believers and believers alive at the time, from earth to be taken directly to heaven, bringing the Church Age to an end. A Tribulation Period will then ensue. Christ then will return to earth with His glorified saints and establish the Millennial Kingdom. Other views for the timing of the Rapture include a mid-Tribulation and post-Tribulation Rapture; both are too problematic to warrant discussion.

**Reconciliation** – The enmity between God and sinners is over; fellowship can be (or is) restored. We cannot adequately grasp how important the redemption that Christ effected is for all humanity. The rebellion that broke fellowship with a holy and good God at the beginning of time has been dealt with at God's loving initiative. We can have peace with God! The hostility is ended and fellowship more intimate and deeper than what obtained in the Garden, is now available to all. Reconciliation does NOT mean, however, that all people are saved or that all will be in heaven when they die. We only receive the benefits of reconciliation by trusting in Christ. Why? Evidently, we must personally take responsibility for our sins by responding to God's offer with faith.

**Redemption** – Inclusive term used for all that Christ accomplished; it necessitates both (i) the payment of a price, viz, the horrible humiliation and life of Christ, and (ii) One who is a kinsman, which is why the Son had to, in profound condescension, take on humanity. Are we so hard-hearted that all that God did for us doesn't hold us in a tight grip of love? What was necessary for the Son to do to rescue us, ugly sinners who constantly fail, should enthrall us, fill us with wonder, and motivate us to a life of grateful service. Redemption (or salvation) is a gift. But unlike today, in biblical times, a gift was to establish or maintain a relationship; gifts were not free. Reciprocity was expected. This is why redeemed people are given responsibilities, to be fulfilled in gratitude and love. The term atonement is often used synonymously.

**Regeneration** – The work of God in the person who exercises faith in Christ, giving new life, Christ's resurrected life; being "born again," being "converted." Without regeneration a person is not saved, regardless what that person professes. A person who has experienced regeneration expresses it by a changed life. A person who has been regenerated also bears fruit. The First Letter of John states evidences of regeneration.

**Repentance** – A change of mind that results in a change in a person's life; it characterizes the believer's life as a Spirit-enabled, on-going process of willfully putting off the old, unregenerate man and putting on the new, by obedience to the Word of God. We err in

supposing that repentance is only what we do in coming to Christ, although it is that too. Repentance is closely related to, and necessary for, sanctification (which, see below).

**Resurrection** – A rising from the dead to a new kind of embodied life that continues forever. The resurrection of Christ enables His resurrected life to be imparted to believers by the Holy Spirit. All humans will be raised from the dead, although those who are not in Christ will face judgment and a second death, which is eternal separation from the presence of God in hell. Positionally, we're already resurrected; God expects us therefore to live in the here-and-now a resurrected kind of life, one that's holy and filled with peace, joy and love.

**Revelation** – God is transcendent, an infinite spirit Being. So therefore He is unknowable to us, finite creatures, unless He reveals Himself. He has done that, taken the initiative, so we can know Him, know His will for us, and know His great purposes. God reveals Himself in a limited way in nature. Without having Scripture, the pre-Socratic Greek philosophers were able to reason from all that exists that there must be a transcendent God who brought the world into being. Using logic they were even able to know some of His attributes. More specifically and more comprehensively, God reveals Himself in His Word, that is, Scripture. Scripture is necessarily a condescending work of God, so it contains many anthropomorphisms. Scripture represents God! That means we encounter Him there. God has also revealed Himself in the Person of the Incarnate Son, the Living Word. God speaks! Do we listen? Do we care?

**Righteousness** – Always acting in a right (or good) way toward others, defined by God's revealed standards and commanded by God of all humanity. Christ's righteousness is imputed to us in justification, yet we're to practice it by the Spirit's enabling power.

**Holiness** refers to being separate from sin and from all that is profane, common or vulgar, as well as referring to God's ineffable and majestic attribute of moral perfection and goodness.

**Salvation** – An inclusive term for everything that God did and will do in love, wisdom and justice to save people from death and condemnation, from sin's power, from selfishness and from alienation to eternal life, justification, sonship and glorification. It entails the forgiveness of sins and deliverance from the powerful grip of Satan. It is possible only by being in a faith relationship with the Incarnate Son, who takes us to the Father for everlasting fellowship. Salvation carries with it privileges (prayer, for example) and responsibilities (obedience to Christ, for example). The term is sometimes (mis)used to refer to the act at a point in time that a person makes a decision to trust Christ; our salvation however is not complete until we're glorified and like Christ.

**Sanctification** – The process by which a believer in Christ actually becomes progressively more holy, godly, Christ-like, mature or righteous, thru the enablement of the Spirit and by obedience to the Scriptures. At the cross, Christ obtained for us sanctification, and when we're glorified we'll be completely sanctified, but in this life from the moment of conversion on until we die, we're responsible to live progressively more holy lives. It doesn't happen passively, automatically or spontaneously; we have to actively work at it. It necessarily involves obedience to the Word and yielding to the Spirit. The flip side of sanctification is **mortification**, the deliberate putting off of sin. God's will for a believer is sanctification.

**Session** – The present priestly work of Christ sitting at the right hand of God in heaven interceding for us, awaiting His Return in glory. To sit at God's right hand is an honor only Christ is worthy of. Christ is God's beloved. To sit at God's right hand also indicates the supreme authority He has. The gift to believers of the indwelling Holy Spirit is a result of that authority. Theologians differ as to Christ's present role as King, supposing that His kingdom is spiritual; traditional dispensationalists leave His work as King for the Return and establishment of the millennial Kingdom.

**Simplicity** – God is not a composite or a compound of attributes, but a unity of Being. God is not the sum of His attributes. Everything God does is fully consistent with all His attributes. Thus, for example, He is infinitely just and infinitely loving at the same time. He is a completely integrated Being. Although some acts of God feature one attribute more than others, it is an error to single out any one attribute, such as His holiness or His love, and place greater importance on it than on others.

**Sin** – Everything that is contrary to God's character is sin. God is morally perfect, that is, He is holy, and all that He does is good and right. Man, whom God made in His image, i.e., endowed to reflect God's character, has been commanded to adhere to righteousness and holiness too. So sin is also defined as lawlessness, i.e., refusal to obey God's standards. Justice requires that God punish sin. "Original sin" refers to our sin nature, universal within humanity, not sin's origin. Sin originated with Satan but entered humanity at the Fall (Genesis 3), so that all humans since Adam (except Christ) have a sin nature, which is a force that enslaves and controls; sin is essentially rebellion against God. Sin affects the entire person, i.e., our minds, will and affections. The noetic effect of sin is inability to think clearly about God; we deliberately distort His Word and fill our minds and lives with other things than God or His will. Although we may possess certain civic virtues, we are not able to not sin. Only the indwelling Holy Spirit enables believers to not sin. The Spirit-empowered deliberate effort to not sin out of love for God is mortification.

**Soul** – Term that refers to a person, or to the supernatural, immaterial or transcendent aspect of a person's being; often used interchangeably with spirit although some theologians find a distinction between soul and spirit. At creation, God breathed into man, so something of God's Being is in us, and it's expressed in the fact that we were made to exist eternally; thus all humans are

raised from the dead. It is error to impugn the body aspect; we are a unity of being. God made us to be embodied creatures and in the resurrection we'll have bodies, albeit a new kind of body.

**Subordinationism** — The erroneous view that the Son is eternally subordinate to the Father; most evangelicals see the Son's subordination as necessary during His incarnation for the redemption of humanity, but reject the eternity of it. Unfortunately, the controversy between complementarians and egalitarians over the correct biblical relationship between men and women has made subordinationism a current issue among some prominent theologians.

**Theocracy** — Form of human government in which God Himself rules. All nations are theocentric. The Creator God chose the nation of Israel to be His people, whom He would rule and bless. Israel's monarchy was a theocracy in which the king served as God's vice-regent, and the Law and the prophets conveyed God's will to the king as well as to the people. The failure of the Monarchy was due to the refusal (or inability) of the kings or the people to obey God, not due to failure of God's rule, and that failure should be understood as within God's sovereign and holy will. The pagan nations all had their own gods and believed that a nation would prevail in warfare over another depending on the power of their respective gods. Israel was conquered by pagan nations in the will of God to discipline His people, not because God was incapable of protecting them.

**Theodicy** — The attempt by philosophers and theologians to understand or explain the presence of evil in a world created by a good God. Atheists routinely claim the existence of evil means there cannot be a Creator God, although they never explain why there's also good in the world. (God is infinitely good and the source of all that is good, even the awareness of "good.") The most common explanation offered for evil is that God allows it in order to accomplish some greater good (citing Genesis 50:20), although that doesn't fully satisfy thoughtful people.

**Theophany** — A miraculous appearance of God to certain persons in the Old Testament era, such as in Joshua 5:13. A theophany is not to be confused with the Incarnation.

**Traducianism** — the view that a person's soul came into existence at Creation but joins the body at the time of conception; in contrast, "**creationism**" holds that God creates a new soul at the time of each person's conception. This controversy is unresolvable from Scripture and is irrelevant to our lives. Whichever is true doesn't change the fact that abortion is the deliberate taking of human life.

**Transcendent** — Beyond that which is material or physical; supernatural. God is infinitely greater than, and totally independent of, His physical creation. God is not limited by time or space; He is spirit. There could be no physical world if there were no transcendent God; there'd be only nothing. Creation demands a transcendent Being for it to happen. So does providence require a transcendent Being. **Immanent** means that God is also present in and intimately involved with His creation. All creation is totally dependent on God for its continued existence.

**Union with Christ** — The benefit of redemption that we're eternally united with Christ so that He dwells in us and we in Him; He takes us to God to participate in some way in the Godhead. Our union with Christ also means we participated with Him at the cross, so that we died with Him and then rose with Him to newness of life. Union with Christ means the atonement needs to be understood not only as vicarious but participatory. Union with Christ, along with adoption and glorification, is the believer's most precious and most profound salvation blessing.

**Universalism** — The heretical view that all people eventually will be saved, a notion either based on the atoning work of Christ or that God is love. This heresy repudiates a literal hell for unsaved persons. It also repudiates **annihilationism**, which holds that there is no eternal existence after death due to the annihilation of the soul either at biological death or at some point after death. The destiny of the unsaved is indeed horrible to contemplate, and that should motivate believers to commit to Gospel outreach, rather than supposing heretical notions such as universalism.

**Vicarious** — Substitutionary; one person taking the place of another. Penal substitution refers to Christ at His death taking the punishment we deserve for sin. His righteous and obedient life similarly substitute for our unrighteousness and disobedience.

**Worship** — A term that (arguably) refers to fulfilling the biblical first and greatest commandment, viz, to love God with all one's being. Worship means to attribute worth, to hold in highest honor; it need not involve creeds or rituals. Idolaters worship the product of their hands (or minds), so their "worship" really reflects themselves. In contrast, to worship the God of the Bible is to reflect Him, His character or His Person. Worship in the New Testament era is in spirit and truth, meaning not localized to time and place as it was in the O.T. era, but rather by pursuing one's life to the glory of God.

There's lots more, but I hope the above creates a desire to study theology. Charles Ryrie's, "Basic Theology," is excellent. It's readable and at just the right length (500+) pages. Ryrie's, "A Survey of Bible Doctrine" (paperback, Moody Press) is short (under 200 pages) yet clear and concise, a great way to begin studying theology. Wayne Grudem's text is daunting at over 1,000 pages, but a terrific reference. Nothing opens our mind to wondrous and thrilling truths more than the study of theology. Nothing — *nothing* — is greater in life than to know God and to enjoy Him.