

SUMMARY OF CONVICTIONS

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The Christian worldview is interpersonal. The interpersonal “category” is the ultimate frame of reference that qualifies and limits the impersonal realities that are also part of full picture. Some major aspects of Christianity are summarized below in ways that correlate with this understanding.

Scripture: Special revelation is interpersonal communication from God to mankind, available to us in written form. Although God could have chosen to relate to us in some other fashion, he spoke to most people through representatives whose messages are preserved in the Old and New Testament writings. We speak of those writings as inerrant relative to the (a) intended (b) content of (c) scripture as such.

God: The most fundamental truth about God is that he is a person rather than an idea, a principle, a force, a subjective feeling. The godhead comprised of Father, Son, and Spirit is an interpersonal unity who share the characteristics distinctive to deity; they have an interpersonal threeness-in-oneness and have sufficient distinction to meet the requirements of John 14:26—at least during “time.” That means there must be enough distinction between them for the Son to pray to the Father, for the Father to send the Spirit, and for the Spirit to be another Comforter/Advocate. Father-Son-Spirit work in complementary fashion to bring about the shared eternal purpose(s).

Ontological deity is a characteristic of the Son even during incarnation. His virgin birth was a historical event as was his empty-tomb resurrection and bodily ascension to the right hand of the Father.

The Spirit is likewise a person in contrast to a subjective feeling, a corporate atmosphere among Christ’s followers, a force field, or aura. He relates to Christians as a person; we know about his presence by revealed promise rather than by direct perception even in the case of those through whom God chose to manifest his power supernaturally (Judges 16:20).

Creation and Providence: The natural order, the universe, is distinct from God rather than being part of him, being the same as him, or being made out of him. Though different from it, God is present with, and available to, his creation. He directs it toward his purposes by natural law and providential intervention. His personal creations experience freedom within a framework, as within a broad arrow whose boundaries are established by natural limitations, supernatural intervention, and special revelation.

Anthropology: All humankind individually have the creatable image (*vs.* the ethical image), that is, the interpersonal capacity. Every person who has by degrees come to moral awareness (Romans 9:7; cp. Isaiah 7:16) has sinned personally and continues to fall short of the glorious divine standard (Romans 3:23a + b). Universal, all-pervasive sin arises from different forms of ignorance (the subjective viewpoint, factual unawareness, misunderstood good example, God’s invisibleness), evil influence (evil example, misunderstood good example, social pressure, reinforcement), and pervertible desires (physical and psychological). The results of these factors end up embedded in us by virtue of the capacity for habit formation. Sin is also easier. It is easier—though less fulfilling—to live imminently than transcendentally, eschatologically, or socially.

Salvation and Christian Growth: Salvation is interpersonal reconciliation with God (2 Corinthians 5:18-20). It is available to everyone, conditioned on identification with Jesus Christ as the only one through whom God has offered people reconciliation (Acts 4:12). Identity with Christ is deliberate, total, permanent, and exclusive of all parallel possibilities. It means aspiration to carry our obedience to the Father to the same level as Christ carried his obedience in our arena. It means commitment to him as a person and willingness to accept his lordship in everything, his purposes for our future, and his values for our living. Identification with Christ includes our sense of being on his side as well as our sense of who we are.

No one can save himself, because of what salvation is: interpersonal reconciliation. (a) The decisive act in any reconciliation is done by the person sinned against. By its very nature, (b) imperfection is impossible to overcome, and perfection is the natural standard for all cases of fellowship. (c) By sinning, we have identified ourselves with Satan/First Adam and cannot rise above the destiny pronounced upon that group. (d) We need the ongoing good influence of other persons—God and God’s people alike—to provide adequate motivational resources for overcoming lifelong sins as habits. Even then we will rid ourselves of actual imperfection, at least in this life. Finally, (e) salvation as reconciliation is based on being viewed as righteous in contrast to being righteous. Being considered righteous by God is conditioned on identity with him who is righteous, an identity we choose to trust as a basis for forgiveness and reconciliation. As in any interpersonal relationship, righteousness refers to the way the sinner is regarded by the other as conditioned on identification with the one viewing him. Within that framework, honest aspiration for righteousness is counted in place of actual accomplishment. In reconciliation with God, the Father has willed that people indicate honest aspiration for righteousness by identifying with the Righteous One and committing themselves to his lordship, values, and purposes.

Ordinances: Since salvation is reconciliation and therefore the re-establishment of interpersonal relationship, all relevant acts are interpersonal ones. Even formal acts in initial and continued identity with Christ have an interpersonal character rather than a legal one. Since the covenant is interpersonal in nature, basis, and purpose (Jeremiah 31:31-43), the ordinances of the covenant are interpersonal. Therefore, baptism is a performative act of personal identification with Christ. On the basis of that identity, God forgives sin, grants fellowship with his Spirit, and numbers us among his saved people.

The Lord’s Supper is also a performative act of worship and re-identification with him. In an interpersonal setting, formal acts have no meaning except what the doer means into them, and they can have no value aside from the performer’s intentions; hence, their validity does not depend on an administrator or rest in the sheer performance itself. Neither does their value come about in some way from legal, logical, or natural causality. The “ordinances” are operative purely as interpersonal acts.

Ethics: Moral behavior is measured relative to divine purposes as reflected in revelation and creation itself and relative to what is appropriate to persons in relationship. Christianity is not simply a moral system, but as part of its interpersonal concern it has moral standards by which persons are to conduct themselves in relational and purposeful matters.

Ecclesiology: The church is saved people serving divine purposes in the name of Christ. It is an interpersonal entity. As such, the form it may have is secondary to its constituents and mission.

Eschatology: Christ's return will be an objective, personal, visible, universal one. How his coming relates sequentially to other clear predictions and promises we are not able to say in some cases. In other words, we are wise not to consider the millennium and related events as matters of fellowship or leadership qualification, particularly since it has no clear behavioral correlates in personal living or Christian mission.

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