

EDITORS' EDITION

WE BELIEVE

A Statement of Faith



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THE SCRIPTURES

God and Revelation¹

Our eternal, transcendent, all-glorious God, who forever exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is by his very nature a communicative being.² He both creates³ and governs⁴ through his words and has graciously revealed himself⁵ to humanity⁶ in order to commune with us.⁷ He has revealed himself through creation and providence in ways plain to all people, leaving no one without a testimony of himself.⁸ He also revealed himself through specific words, that we might come to a fuller knowledge of his character and will,⁹ learning what is necessary for salvation and life.¹⁰ Through the medium of human language,¹¹ which is suitable and adequate for communication with those who bear his image, God has preserved in Holy Scripture the only authoritative and complete revelation for all humanity.¹²

¹ This paragraph roots the idea of revelation in the nature of God, thus pointing to both the plausibility of revelation as well as the biblical connection between revelation and God's Word and the *purpose* of revelation. It then includes explicit language about general revelation (which is absent from our current SoF; cf. WCF 1.1) and special revelation, with its more particular purpose of bringing us into a saving relationship with God. The paragraph also emphasizes the legitimacy (indeed, the necessity given God's creational decisions) of verbal language between God and humanity. This point counters the common idea (finding new expressions in neo-Barthianism and postmodern theological projects) that language is a function of human finitude (an evolutionary idea) and is by definition ambiguous, erroneous, and, as a result, a barrier to revelation rather than an aid. Instead, human language is a function of God's image in man and, far from being inadequate (or even incidental), is a suitable and necessary medium for special revelation.

² Gen 1:3; John 1:1; 17:5; Heb 3:7.

³ Gen 1; Ps 33:9; 147:18; 148:5; Col 1:15-17; Heb 11:3.

⁴ Ps 29; Lam 3:37-38; Isa 46:8-11; Col 1:15-17; Heb 1:3.

⁵ Deut 29:29; 1 Sam 3:21.

⁶ Gen 1:26; Gen 2:15-17.

⁷ Acts 17:24-27.

⁸ Gen 3:8-9; Ps 19:1-6; Hos 2:20; John 10:14-15; Acts 14:17; Rom 1:19-21.

⁹ Ps 19:7-11.

¹⁰ 2 Tim 3:15-17; 2 Pet 1:3-4.

¹¹ Exod 32:16; Heb 1:1-2.

¹² Rev 22:18-19.

The Origin of Scripture¹³

All of Scripture is breathed out by God,¹⁴ being accurately delivered through various human authors by the inspiration and sovereign agency of the Holy Spirit.¹⁵ We therefore receive the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments as the perfect, infallible, and authoritative Word of God. With the fullness of revelation given in Christ and his completed redemptive work, no new normative revelation will or need be given until Christ returns.¹⁶ In its original manuscripts, the whole of Scripture (and all its parts) is inerrant—without error in all it affirms.¹⁷ Because there is one divine author behind all of Scripture, we are able to arrive confidently at a harmonious, doctrinally unified understanding of the whole. Furthermore, God in his loving providence has determined to preserve his Word as pure and trustworthy throughout history,¹⁸ just as he guided the early church in discerning and identifying the canon of Scripture he inspired.

¹³ Here we stress the divine source of Scripture itself, mediated to us via inspiration, and the resultant character of Scripture as infallible and inerrant. The language captures both plenary and verbal inspiration and therefore precludes any notion of “partial” inspiration in which inspiration is limited to, e.g., the ethical or religious portions of Scripture. By affirming that all of Scripture carries these qualities, we require that our pastors agree that the Bible, in its entirety, is itself the word of God. It does not “become” the word of God through encounter or mystical experience (a la Barth), and there exists no canon within the canon. Moreover, the redemptive-historical logic of the notion of canon is included here: Scripture is “redemptive revelation,” and the canon closed with the completion of the apostolic witness to Christ’s redemptive work. Standard language linking inspiration to the autographs is important given the Bible’s own teaching about inspiration. We also affirm the ability to arrive at a harmonious and unified understanding of truth, which counters views that undervalue systematics or elevate the diversity of human authors to the exclusion of the overall unity of Scripture. All Scripture carries God’s authority, and he relates to us through his words and promises, such that to encounter Scripture is to encounter God and his truth through his covenantal action of revelation. Finally, we recognize God’s special providence, both in preserving Scripture for us (contra critics such as Bart Ehrman) and in sovereignly leading the church to recognize God’s words. Here we signal the self-attesting nature of God’s words (more of which will be said below under “The Reception of Scripture”): the church does not create the canon, but we recognize and receive God’s revelation and, with God’s help, work to faithfully preserve the message of the gospel (2 Tim 2:2; 3:14-17; 2 Pet 1:19-21).

¹⁴ 2 Tim 3:16; 1 Thess 2:13.

¹⁵ 2 Pet 1:19-21.

¹⁶ Heb 1:1-2; Rev 22:18-19.

¹⁷ Ps 119:160; Prov 30:5-6; John 10:35.

¹⁸ Ps 12:6-7; Mark 13:31.

The Attributes of Scripture¹⁹

Believers live by every word that comes from the mouth of God.²⁰ The Word of God is therefore necessary and wholly sufficient for knowing the Father's love in Christ, experiencing his glorious plan of redemption, and being instructed in the way of fruitful and godly living.²¹ The Word of God is clear, and everything we need in order to know, love, and fellowship with God can be plainly understood through ordinary means, without appeal to any human authority.²² Although not all Scripture is equally plain, when its intended meaning is misunderstood, the fault lies not in the clarity of God's communication but in the recipient.²³ Scripture alone is our supreme and final authority and the rule of faith and life. The Scriptures must not be added to or taken away from, and all creeds, confessions, teachings, and prophecies are to be tested by the final authority of God's Word.²⁴

¹⁹ The section covers key attributes of Scripture (necessity, sufficiency, clarity/perspicuity, authority, and completeness/finality), which are not merely boilerplate but are critical theologically and pastorally. Theologically, because God's words partake of his attributes, they also share in his perfections; moreover, God's Word is able to fulfill the purposes for which he has established it in our lives. Pastorally, these traditional attributes guard against numerous related errors. The statements on necessity and sufficiency echo WCF 1.6 in specifying their respective scope, which is fundamentally redemptive. This extends, however, to "the way of fruitful and godly living," which conveys Scripture's sufficiency to address all issues related to human life and wholeness, thus ruling out any illegitimate narrowing of Scripture's authority to only matters of religion or spirituality, as sometimes occurs when psychology or other fields of human knowledge are presented as necessary and authoritative to truly understand human struggles. Similarly, clarity is addressed in terms of Scripture's purpose—what is clear is "everything we need to know, love, and fellowship with God," and not necessarily everything in God's Word (cf. 2 Pet 3:16). "Without appeal to human authority" rules out the Roman Catholic insistence that tradition and/or the magisterium is necessary for the true interpretation of Scripture. Scripture's authority is expressed in traditional terms, as is the completeness of Scripture (cf. esp. WCF 1.6, "Unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men," and 1.10).

²⁰ Matt 4:4.

²¹ Rom 10:13-17; 2 Tim 3:15-17.

²² Deut 30:11-14; Ps 19:7; 119:130; Acts 17:11.

²³ Luke 24:25; John 8:43.

²⁴ Rev 22:18-19.

The Reception of Scripture²⁵

We come to know that the Bible is God’s Word through Scripture’s own self-attesting authority²⁶ and by the work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness through the Word in our hearts.²⁷ As the Scriptures are preached and read,²⁸ the Spirit delights to illuminate our minds so that we understand, cherish, and obey his Word.²⁹ God’s intended meaning is revealed through the intentions of the inspired human authors, rendering the truth of God’s Word a fixed, historical reality. Therefore, the Bible is to be prayerfully interpreted according to its context and original intent, with due regard to the progressive nature of revelation and the collective interpretation of believers through the ages.³⁰ Ultimately, Scripture interprets Scripture, and the meaning of each text must be understood in light of the whole. As we devote ourselves to God’s Word,³¹ we commune with God himself and are fortified in faith, sanctified from sin, strengthened in weakness, and sustained in suffering by his unchanging revelation in Scripture.³²

²⁵ This section places our SoF squarely in the Reformed tradition by noting the way in which Scripture’s own authority and the Spirit’s work function in our recognition and acknowledgment of Scripture’s divine source and authority. “As the Scriptures are preached and read” stresses the ongoing nature of illumination, making it clear that the Spirit’s illuminating work takes place through Scripture and not through ecclesiastical authority or revelations/impressions apart from Scripture. The statement also guards against views that drive a wedge between the Word of God and the Bible, that denigrate the words of the human authors of Scripture, that decouple “truth” from Scripture’s propositions, that limit the Bible’s truth to (some of) its ideas or to its general “message” but not necessarily its specific words, etc. Rather, it is the very words of Scripture that are God-breathed, and we have access to God’s Word only through the words of the Bible’s human authors. Meaning and truth are therefore fixed (as is the Bible’s authority) and are not a matter of human subjectivity, however challenging interpreting that truth may be. Noting the church’s historical understandings of Scripture guards against misunderstandings of *sola Scriptura* and avoids the danger of individualistic or faddish interpretation. The paragraph concludes with an affirmation and celebration of what the Word of God does in us and through us.

²⁶ 2 Pet 1:17-19; Luke 16:29-31; Heb 4:12-13.

²⁷ 1 Cor 2:14; 2 Cor 3:14-16; Ps 119:18, 27, 34, 73.

²⁸ 1 Tim 4:13; 2 Tim 4:1-2.

²⁹ Ps 19:7-11; James 1:22-25.

³⁰ 2 Tim 2:15.

³¹ Deut 6:6-7; Ps 1:1-2; 119:1; Josh 1:8.

³² Isa 50:4; 55:10-11; Jer 23:29; John 17:17; Acts 20:32; Rom 15:4; 1 Thess 2:13; Heb 4:12.

THE TRIUNE GOD³³

The Nature of God³⁴

There is only one³⁵ true and living God,³⁶ who is infinite in being,³⁷ power,³⁸ and perfections.³⁹ God is eternal,⁴⁰ independent, and self-sufficient, having life in himself with no need for anyone or anything.⁴¹ He is spirit,⁴² transcendent and invisible,⁴³ with no limitations or imperfections,⁴⁴ immutable,⁴⁵ and everywhere present with the fullness of his being.⁴⁶ His knowledge is exhaustive, including all things actual and possible, so that nothing—past, present, or future—is hidden from his sight.⁴⁷ God is not divided into parts, but his whole being includes all of his attributes: he is entirely holy,⁴⁸ loving,⁴⁹ wise,⁵⁰ just,⁵¹ good,⁵² merciful,⁵³ gracious,⁵⁴ and

³³ The sub-headings under “The Triune God” represent a change from our previous SoF, which contained separate headings for each person of the Trinity. Although containing many good and right things, the paragraphs seemed overburdened with content less pertinent from a systematic theological standpoint, particularly given that our SoF now functions confessionally for our pastors.

³⁴ This paragraph unfolds who God is in his exclusive, exalted nature. It progresses generally from God’s attributes to his actions, moving from his self-existence, to his transcendence, to his sovereignty, and to his knowability. The paragraph reflects standard orthodox formulation, although in places greater specificity seemed called for in light of certain contemporary errors. God’s exhaustive knowledge (the adjective being an important one in recent debates) and self-sufficiency in his knowledge is stressed, to the exclusion of forms of Arminianism, including open theism, that deny God’s knowledge of man’s future choices and render his plans conditional on human actions (this will be more fully addressed under the heading “God’s Sovereign Purposes”). The unity of God’s being and attributes (the simplicity of God) precludes contemporary views that pit one attribute of God against another (e.g., God’s love against his holiness and justice). God as “the infinite fountain of being” affirms a vital aspect of his generative nature that counters abstract, solitary notions of God that lead, e.g., to deistic conceptions that make him remote or sterile. This reality is tied to other doctrines such as the eternal generation of the Son, again countering single-person deities such as Allah of the Qur’an; indeed, the absence of such a God renders the act of creation itself unintelligible. The final sentence counters postmodern claims (and forms of neo-Barthianism) of a radical divine transcendence that makes true knowledge of God impossible. The fact that we cannot know God exhaustively does not mean we cannot know him truly; through revelation we can have true and authentic knowledge of God.

³⁵ Deut 6:4; 1 Cor 8:4-6; 1 Tim 1:17.

³⁶ Jer 10:10; John 17:3; 1 Thess 1:9.

³⁷ Exod 3:14; Job 11:7-9.

³⁸ Ps 24:8; Matt 19:26.

³⁹ Matt 5:48.

⁴⁰ Ps 90:2; Rev 1:8.

⁴¹ Ps 50:10-12; 102:25-27; Acts 17:24-25.

⁴² John 4:24.

⁴³ Rom 1:20.

⁴⁴ Ps 18:30.

⁴⁵ Mal 3:6; James 1:17.

⁴⁶ Jer 23:23-24; Ps 139:7-10.

⁴⁷ Isa 42:8; 1 John 3:20.

⁴⁸ Ps 99:9; Rev 15:4.

⁴⁹ 1 John 4:8.

⁵⁰ Ps 104:24; Rom 16:27.

⁵¹ Deut 32:4; Rom 3:25-26.

⁵² Ps 106:1; Luke 18:19.

⁵³ Exod 34:6; 2 Cor 1:3.

⁵⁴ Ps 103:8; 1 Pet 5:10.

truthful.⁵⁵ Our God is the infinite fountain of being⁵⁶ who created all things,⁵⁷ and all things exist by him and for him.⁵⁸ He is supremely powerful to perform all his holy and perfect will, ruling over his creation with total dominion,⁵⁹ righteousness,⁶⁰ wisdom,⁶¹ and love.⁶² In his transcendence, God is incomprehensible in his being and actions, yet he reveals himself such that we can know him truly and personally.⁶³

The Holy Trinity⁶⁴

The one true God eternally exists as three persons—Father,⁶⁵ Son,⁶⁶ and Holy Spirit⁶⁷—infinitely excellent and all-glorious. Each person is fully God, sharing the same deity, attributes, and essential nature, yet there is but one God.⁶⁸ Each person is distinct, yet God is not by this distinction divided into three parts, natures, or gods. The Father has always existed as Father, the unbegotten fountain of all life.⁶⁹ The Son has always existed as Son, eternally begotten of the Father, uncreated and without beginning, of one essence with the Father.⁷⁰ The Holy Spirit has always existed as Spirit, eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son, and of one essence with them.⁷¹ The Godhead thus exists in a perfect unity, indivisible as to nature and substance, yet inseparably distinguished as persons who enjoy a fullness of fellowship and love.⁷²

⁵⁵ Ps 12:6; Prov 30:5; Titus 1:2.

⁵⁶ Ps 36:9; John 5:26.

⁵⁷ Gen 1:1; Ps 33:6, 9; John 1:3.

⁵⁸ Rom 11:36; Col 1:16.

⁵⁹ Ps 115:3; 66:7.

⁶⁰ Ps 9:8; 36:6.

⁶¹ Ps 104:24; Rom 16:27.

⁶² Exod 34:6; Ps 119:64.

⁶³ Ps 145:3; 1 Cor 2:10-12; Rom 11:33; Col 1:10; Jer 9:23-24.

⁶⁴ This section sets forth basic Trinitarian orthodoxy and therefore precludes a number of historical errors, e.g., (a) Arianism, which denies the full deity of the Son and the Holy Spirit (including a subordinationism that makes Christ inferior to the Father, and adoptionism, in which Jesus only became God's son at his baptism, not to mention a bald Unitarianism); (b) modalism (including Oneness Pentecostalism), which denies distinct persons within the Godhead, viewing the persons as merely roles the one God plays in history; and (c) tritheism, which construes the three persons as different gods. The paragraph ends by noting the fellowship that exists within the very being of God, which both reinforces his independence from creation and guards his immutability in the act of loving created beings: God is by his very nature love, and therefore relational, in himself. Therefore, he does not change from a unipersonal, solitary God (in whom there cannot be said to be an “others-focused love”) to one who loves his creatures (a problem in, e.g., Islam’s conception of Allah).

⁶⁵ John 6:27; Titus 1:4.

⁶⁶ John 1:1; 8:58; Col 2:9.

⁶⁷ Heb 9:14; 1 Cor 3:16; Acts 5:3-4.

⁶⁸ Deut 6:4; Isa 45:21-22.

⁶⁹ Rom 11:36; Eph 4:6.

⁷⁰ John 1:1-4; 10:30; Heb 1:3, 5.

⁷¹ John 15:26; Gal 4:6.

⁷² John 3:35; 14:31; 17:24.

The Relations and Actions of the Trinity⁷³

The persons of the Trinity, being one in nature, are also inseparably united in their external works,⁷⁴ such that to deal with one person is to deal with the Trinity as a whole.⁷⁵ Yet within this unity there are distinctions in the way the divine persons relate to each other and to creation,⁷⁶ although there is no difference in essence or attributes. Within the Godhead, the ordered relations among the persons are eternal yet without any inequality. In the works of creation, providence, and redemption, the persons fulfill roles consistent with their eternal relations: the Father originates, the Son accomplishes, and the Spirit completes.⁷⁷ Nevertheless, the three, thus distinct, are neither divided nor mixed, are of one and the same essence, are equal from all eternity, and are worthy to be worshipped as the one God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.⁷⁸

⁷³ This paragraph moves from the ontology or inner life of the triune God (*ad intra*) to his external actions (*ad extra*). While stressing the distinctions between the persons, it guards against unduly separating them, as is often the case in popular conceptions of the Trinity that stress (or prefer) one person of the Trinity over another. The opening statement expresses the orthodox notion that God's outward works (*opera ad extra*) are indivisible and common to the three persons due to their subsistence in the one divine nature, while the second sentence expresses the complementary truth of the order and distinction of the acts of the persons and the appropriation of specific actions to each person. Implicit here is the mutual indwelling of the persons of the Trinity (*perichoresis* or *circumcession*) that binds the persons and their actions together. The section also affirms that the respective roles of the persons are not merely functions of the incarnation but are eternal, rooted in what is often called their “personal properties” tied to the divine processions, although their being and essence is the same; i.e., the “ontological” Trinity is mirrored in the “economic” Trinity. These twin realities of “equality of being” and “difference in role” are critical in avoiding, on the one hand, the subordinationist heresy in which one person is inferior to the others, and on the other hand a Sabellianism in which the persons are completely interchangeable. In light of recent controversies, this statement should find equal acceptance among those who affirm the Son's eternal subordination (or, perhaps better, submission) of *role* (not being) and those who are uncomfortable with that language. In any event, Scripture compels us to account both for the equality of the persons and for the eternally ordered relations between them.

⁷⁴ Gen 1:2; John 1:3; 5:19.

⁷⁵ John 10:38; 14:9-11.

⁷⁶ Gen 1:1, 2; Heb 1:2.

⁷⁷ John 3:16; 6:38; 15:26; Rom 8:13; Gal 4:4; Heb 10:5-7.

⁷⁸ Rev 5:12-14.

GOD'S SOVEREIGN PURPOSES⁷⁹

God Ordains All Things for His Glory⁸⁰

From all eternity, God sovereignly ordained all that exists and all that occurs in his creation,⁸¹ in order to display the fullness of his glory.⁸² God's plans are efficacious, always coming to pass,⁸³ and they are universal, encompassing all the affairs of nature,⁸⁴ history,⁸⁵ and individual lives.⁸⁶ These decrees are an exercise of his free,⁸⁷ unchangeable,⁸⁸ wise,⁸⁹ and holy will.⁹⁰ Yet God, in his foreordination, is not the author of sin,⁹¹ nor do his decrees negate the will of his creatures, who act with the power of willing choice in accord with their nature.⁹² His ordaining and governing all things is compatible with his creatures' moral accountability⁹³ such that God never condemns a person unjustly.⁹⁴ Therefore, all persons are responsible for their actions, which have real and eternal consequences.⁹⁵

⁷⁹ This portion of the SoF helps establish it as a more broadly Reformed document that celebrates God's sovereignty, not simply in salvation but over all things, and his glory as the ultimate purpose for everything. It therefore serves to bridge the sections on God's person ("The Triune God") and his relations with created reality ("Creation, Providence, and Man"). In addition, it provides a natural and appropriate place to address election, which in the previous SoF was treated under the heading "Man's Response to the Gospel"—an arrangement that seems inadvertently to stress man's response over God's prior decision.

⁸⁰ This section addresses the decree of God in ordaining all that exists and comes to pass, stressing the purpose of God's glory in all things. The statement describes an exhaustive sovereignty that allows for no competing authority, contingencies (i.e., events that, after God decreed them, could be otherwise), or exceptions. Further, the section stresses God's absolute freedom, which lies at the core of the decree and is in keeping with his transcendent nature. Such statements preclude other formulations of God's sovereignty and knowledge, e.g., Arminianism (God foreknows but does not foreordain all that comes to pass), open theism (God does not have exhaustive knowledge of the future), and process theology (God's nature is temporal and changes over time; therefore, he knows only what is knowable at any point in time). The next sentence guards against a strict, fatalistic determinism, preserving the integrity of a person's choices, which are free in the sense of being willing choices yet are in accord with one's nature—they are not free in the sense of being independent of God's sovereign rule or our own nature. The statement thus expresses a philosophical compatibilism, which upholds both divine sovereignty and human responsibility, and a corresponding compatibilist view of human freedom that excludes libertarian freedom. Although we do not explicitly address it here or in the next section, the qualification of human freedom in this paragraph implicitly excludes most formulations of a doctrine of middle knowledge, which affirm libertarian freedom for human beings.

⁸¹ Ps 33:11; Isa 37:26; Eph 1:11.

⁸² Rom 11:36; Exod 14:17-18; Ps 19:1.

⁸³ Ps 33:11; Isa 46:9-10; 55:11.

⁸⁴ Job 37:6-13; Col 1:16-17.

⁸⁵ Ps 33:10-11; Prov 21:1.

⁸⁶ Prov 16:9; 20:24; Ps 139:6.

⁸⁷ Rom 9:15.

⁸⁸ Num 23:19; Heb 6:17.

⁸⁹ Rom 11:33.

⁹⁰ Eph 1:11.

⁹¹ James 1:13; 1 John 1:5.

⁹² Acts 2:23; Rom 9:14-24; Phil 2:12-13.

⁹³ Rom 3:19.

⁹⁴ Dan 4:37; Rom 1:20.

⁹⁵ Luke 10:28; John 3:16.

God's Grace in Election⁹⁶

God in his great love, before the foundation of the world, chose those whom he would save in Christ Jesus.⁹⁷ God's election is entirely gracious⁹⁸ and not at all conditioned upon foreseen faith, obedience, perseverance, or any merit in those whom God has chosen.⁹⁹ His decision to set his saving love on the elect is based entirely on his sovereign will and good pleasure.¹⁰⁰ The number of God's elect is fixed for eternity, and no one who has been chosen by God will be lost.¹⁰¹ In the mystery of his will, God passes over the non-elect,¹⁰² withholding his mercy and punishing them for their sins as a display of his holy justice and wrath.¹⁰³

As God has appointed the elect to glory,¹⁰⁴ so has he foreordained all the means necessary to carry out his saving purposes.¹⁰⁵ Those whom he has predestined are redeemed by Christ,¹⁰⁶ effectually called to faith by his Spirit, justified, adopted, sanctified,¹⁰⁷ and kept by God's power to the end.¹⁰⁸ God does all of this in order to demonstrate his mercy to the praise of his glorious grace.¹⁰⁹

⁹⁶ This section deals specifically with the doctrine of election, which affirms that God chose certain and specific individuals to inherit eternal life. Its location under the larger heading here indicates that it is not an isolated doctrine. It is the exercise of God's sovereign rulership over the world and those he created. Important aspects of this election are then described. It is eternal, occurring before (if we may so speak) we or even the world existed; it is gracious, based upon no merit in the elect, which excludes the Arminian view that God's election is based upon foreseen faith (his foreknowledge of our choice to believe), but solely upon the good pleasure and mercy of God. Although it will be dealt with more fully in a later section, the connection of election to the ultimate perseverance of the elect is also noted. This sentence holds election to be an absolute (not conditional) decree, and it also specifies that God chose specific individuals, not merely a category of persons, for eternal life. Finally, this paragraph also addresses the status of the non-elect relative to God's decree. Rather than explicitly expressing a double decree of election and reprobation (which treats the two decrees as virtually parallel; cf. Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.21.5), the statement explains reprobation in terms of preterition—God's “passing by” of the non-elect (cf. Second Helvetic Confession, WCF, and Augustine). Such an approach seems to better reflect the asymmetry between election and reprobation—God actively and positively brings about the salvation of the elect (they are saved solely by his grace), but he does not actively and positively bring about the damnation of the non-elect (they are justly condemned because of their sins).

The second paragraph articulates the critical connection between the goal of election and the means to that goal: those whom God elected to salvation he also appointed to receive that salvation through Christ's redeeming work, which is applied to us by the Holy Spirit. No one will be saved apart from faith in Christ or the other means God has established, such as sanctification and perseverance. Such statements protect the doctrine of election from numerous distortions and misunderstandings including, especially, inclusivist notions of salvation (e.g., Pinnock's “wider hope” and Rahner's “anonymous Christian”).

The final paragraph addresses the intended function of the doctrine of election—it is not a speculative, flattering, or polemical doctrine but rather one intended to elicit humility, gratitude, and worship in the hearts of God's people.

⁹⁷ Acts 13:48; Eph 1:4-5; 2 Tim 1:9.

⁹⁸ Eph 1:6; 2:8-9; Rom 11:5-8.

⁹⁹ Rom 9:11-18; 1 Cor 1:26-31.

¹⁰⁰ 2 Tim 1:9.

¹⁰¹ John 10:25-29; Rom 8:29-30; 11:5-8.

¹⁰² Rom 9:17-22; Jude 4; Rev 20:15.

¹⁰³ Rom 9:22; Rev 19:1-5.

¹⁰⁴ Col 3:4; Rom 8:29-30.

¹⁰⁵ Rom 9:22; Rev 19:1-5.

¹⁰⁶ 1 Thess 5:9-10; Titus 2:14.

¹⁰⁷ Rom 8:30; Eph 1:5; 2 Thess 2:13.

¹⁰⁸ 1 Pet 1:5.

¹⁰⁹ Eph 1:6, 12, 14.

Although attended with mystery, the doctrine of election should not produce speculation, introspection, apathy, or pride¹¹⁰ but rather humility, gratitude, assurance, evangelistic passion, and eternal praise for the undeserved grace of God in Christ.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Deut 29:29; Ps 131:1; Rom 9:20.

¹¹¹ 1 Cor 1:26-31; Eph 1:5-6, 12; 1 Thess 1:2, 4; 2 Thess 2:13; 2 Tim 2:10.

CREATION, PROVIDENCE, AND MAN¹¹²

God Creates and Rules All Things¹¹³

In the beginning, the triune God freely created out of nothing the universe and everything in it by the word of his power, all for his own pleasure and the display of his glory.¹¹⁴ God declared the entirety of his creation to be very good,¹¹⁵ and even in its fallen state it tells of his greatness¹¹⁶ and is to be delighted in¹¹⁷ and stewarded for his glory.¹¹⁸ As supreme Creator, God is separate from and transcendent over all he has made.¹¹⁹ As sovereign Lord, he is present with his creation to sustain all things,¹²⁰ govern all creatures, and direct all circumstances in accord with his holy and loving will.¹²¹ In everything God supremely acts for his glory¹²² and for the good of his

¹¹² The next section of the SoF moves from the person of God to his works of creation, his providence, and, as the paramount subset of the doctrine of creation, anthropology. This heading represents a significant change from the previous SoF, which only included a section on “man,” subsuming in brief form creation and providence under “God the Father.” Moreover, this arrangement, including the next section on sin, allows for a more thorough treatment of anthropology than the previous SoF, whose treatment of man was devoted mainly to sin, to the exclusion of more fundamental aspects of the doctrine and its implications (e.g., the previous SoF only dealt with manhood/womanhood in its section titled “The Church”). In addition, this new arrangement affords the opportunity to address issues of particular cultural relevance, such as biblical manhood and womanhood, gender, human sexuality, and marriage and singleness (which is especially important now that our SoF is functioning confessionally for SG pastors). In sum, this new section treats this important area of doctrine more comprehensively and in a way that both reflects biblical proportions and addresses contemporary concerns.

¹¹³ This section, with its intentional echo of Gen 1:1, affirms God’s creation of all things, thus reflecting the Bible’s metaphysical dualism in which God is separate from, and the cause of, all created reality. The first sentence establishes some critical parameters: God created *freely*, so the creation is a product of God’s will and not a necessity (e.g., it is not a pantheistic emanation); God created *out of nothing*, indicating a distinction in essence between God and the world; *by the word of his power* both identifies the instrument of creation and implies God’s authority in creating; and the final phrase highlights the ultimate goal of creation. By specifying God’s direct creation, the statement denies any form of theistic evolution that distances God from the work of creation. It likewise guards against a false view of transcendence (such as deism) that bars God from acting within his world. The paragraph goes on to affirm the goodness of God’s original creation, thus addressing any forms of spiritual-material dualism that deny the goodness of the latter realm. Although the section articulates an orthodox view of God’s direct, intentional, and sovereign creation as reflected in Gen 1 and affirmed throughout Scripture, it refrains from taking a specific position on, e.g., the age of the earth or the meaning of “day” (*yôm*) in Gen 1, thus allowing for a (circumscribed) range of views on such issues that are held by conservative commentators and consistent with a high view of Scripture.

Next, the paragraph states the key entailment of the doctrine of creation—God relates to all things as Creator to creature, which counters opposing worldviews such as pantheism, panentheism, materialism, and more modern theologies that equate God’s being with the world, history, etc. (Pannenburg and others). Moreover, creation establishes God’s lordship over all things, which introduces here the doctrine of providence. God’s providential rule extends to all things, thus eliminating dualistic views that place any other being or impersonal force in opposition to God’s control of the universe as well as theologies that limit God’s sovereignty to make room for libertarian constructions of free will. Finally, the statement ends pastorally by describing the appropriate effect the doctrine of providence should have on us.

¹¹⁴ Gen 1; Ps 19:1; 33:6; John 1:3; Col 1:15-17; Heb 11:3; Rev 4:11.

¹¹⁵ Gen 1:31.

¹¹⁶ Ps 19:1-6; Rom 1:20.

¹¹⁷ Ps 111:2; 1 Tim 4:4.

¹¹⁸ Gen 1:26, 28; Ps 8.

¹¹⁹ 1 Kings 8:27; Isa 6:1; 66:1.

¹²⁰ Ps 145:15; 147:8-9; Luke 12:24; Heb 1:3.

¹²¹ Eph 1:11; Rom 8:28-29.

¹²² Isa 43:7; Eph 1:6, 12.

people in Christ,¹²³ granting us great comfort and unshakable hope in God's love, wisdom, and faithfulness to us in this life and in eternity.¹²⁴

Man's Creation in God's Image¹²⁵

God created man, male and female,¹²⁶ in his own image¹²⁷ as the crown of creation and the object of his special care.¹²⁸ God directly created Adam from the dust of the earth,¹²⁹ and Eve from Adam's side,¹³⁰ as the parents of the entire human race.¹³¹ They were created to know and glorify their Maker by trusting in his goodness and obeying his word.¹³² God gave them dominion over all creation, to fill, subdue, and steward the earth as his representatives.¹³³ All human beings are likewise made in the image of God.¹³⁴ Despite the effects of the fall on sinful humanity,¹³⁵ all people remain God's image bearers, capable of fellowship with him and possessing intrinsic dignity and value at every stage of life from conception to death.¹³⁶ Redemption in Christ progressively restores fallen men and women to their true humanity as they are conformed to the image of Christ.¹³⁷

¹²³ Gen 50:20; Rom 8:28; Eph 1:22.

¹²⁴ Rom 5:3-5; 8:31; Phil 1:6; 1 Pet 4:19; Jude 24.

¹²⁵ This section begins the important discussion of anthropology by locating mankind in the created order and, being made in God's image, as the pinnacle of God's creative acts. The direct creation of Adam and Eve is affirmed, opposing both evolutionary views of man's origins and metaphorical readings of Gen 2, and thereby preserving the vital Adam-Christ typology of redemptive history. The statement also affirms the ongoing, post-fall reality of man as God's image, thus providing a theological grounding for the dignity and worth of all human beings. By specifying "all human beings" at "every stage of life," the statement also provides a foundation for contemporary discussions of medical ethics, abortion, end-of-life issues, etc. The final sentences link the *imago Dei* with man's spiritual capacity for relationship with God, acknowledging this as the highest purpose for human existence and thus the true purpose of life. Humanity's capacity to know and be known personally by God also provides the grounds for our evangelistic mandate to all people. The section concludes by noting the effects of our redemption on our status as God's image bearers (the next section of the SoF will deal with the fall and its effects).

¹²⁶ Gen 1:27.

¹²⁷ Gen 1:26-27; 9:6.

¹²⁸ Ps 8:4-8.

¹²⁹ Gen 2:7.

¹³⁰ Gen 2:22.

¹³¹ 1 Cor 15:22, 45-49.

¹³² Gen 2:16-17; Eccles 3:11; Isa 43:7; Rom 1:19-21.

¹³³ Gen 1:26, 28.

¹³⁴ Gen 9:6; James 3:9.

¹³⁵ Rom 3:23; Eph 2:1; 4:18; Col 1:21.

¹³⁶ Ps 139:13-16; Jer 1:5; Rom 14:8; James 3:9.

¹³⁷ Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18; Eph 4:24; Col 3:10.

Man as Male and Female¹³⁸

Men and women are both made in the image of God and are equal before him in dignity and worth.¹³⁹ Gender, designated by God through our biological sex, is therefore neither incidental to our identity nor fluid in its definition, but is essential to our identity as male and female. Although the fall distorts and damages God's design for gender and its expression,¹⁴⁰ these remain part of the beauty of God's created order. Men and women reflect and represent God in distinct and complementary ways, and these differences are to be honored and celebrated in all dimensions of life. To deny or seek to remove these differences is to distort a fundamental way in which we glorify God as male and female.

Marriage, Sexuality, and Singleness¹⁴¹

Biblical manhood and womanhood enrich human flourishing in all its dimensions. God instituted marriage as the union of one man and one woman who complement each other in a one-flesh union¹⁴² that ultimately serves as a type of the union between Christ and his church.¹⁴³ This remains the only normative pattern of sexual relations for humanity. Husbands are to exercise headship sacrificially and with humility,¹⁴⁴ and wives are to serve as helpers to their husbands, willingly supporting and submitting to their leadership.¹⁴⁵ Together these complementary roles bring joy and blessing to each other and display the beauty of God's purposes to the world. Single men and women are no less able to enjoy and honor God and no less important to his purposes. They also are to give expression to God's image in distinct and complementary ways, flourishing as his image bearers and bringing him glory in their singleness.¹⁴⁶

¹³⁸ The SoF here takes up the issue of complementarianism, which historically was largely taken for granted but in recent decades has become a much-debated doctrine. Besides such contemporary debates, the mention of "male and female" in the foundational statement of humanity's creation warrants this inclusion. The section goes on to address the implications of our creation for gender and its expression, both of which are rooted in creational realities. The section ends by affirming the goodness of male/female distinctions and their role in our capacity to glorify God.

¹³⁹ Gen 1:27; 9:6; Gal 3:28; James 3:9.

¹⁴⁰ Gen 3:16-19.

¹⁴¹ This final section was added to address implications of manhood and womanhood for human relations and sexuality. This provides the opportunity to address and define both marriage and normative sexual relationships. In addition, basic biblical affirmations concerning husband-wife relations are affirmed in order to prevent distortions and misunderstandings as well as to celebrate the blessings God designed for marriage. Finally, in order to preclude the misunderstanding that gender matters only in marriage or that those who are not married are in some way lacking, the statement affirms the beauty, nobility, and potential fruitfulness of singleness.

¹⁴² Gen 2:18-25.

¹⁴³ Eph 5:31-33.

¹⁴⁴ Eph 5:25-30; Col 3:19; 1 Pet 3:7.

¹⁴⁵ Gen 2:18; Eph 5:22-24; Col 3:18; 1 Pet 3:1-2.

¹⁴⁶ E.g., 1 Cor 7:6-8; Luke 2:36-37

MAN'S SIN AND ITS EFFECTS¹⁴⁷

The Origin of Sin¹⁴⁸

God originally created man innocent and righteous, without stain or corruption.¹⁴⁹ In this state, Adam and Eve enjoyed a fullness of life in communion with God, delighting in him and his righteous will yet capable of transgressing.¹⁵⁰ Despite these privileges, they were led astray by Satan¹⁵¹ and willfully sinned against their Creator by doing what he had forbidden.¹⁵² In their rebellion they doubted his character, rejected his authority, and disobeyed his word.¹⁵³ Man's trespass of God's command¹⁵⁴ brought enmity with God¹⁵⁵ and the curse of death.¹⁵⁶ Because God had established Adam as the representative head of the human race,¹⁵⁷ his sin was imputed to all his descendants, bringing guilt, condemnation, and death to humanity.¹⁵⁸ Therefore, we are all by nature corrupt¹⁵⁹ and inclined to evil from conception.¹⁶⁰

¹⁴⁷ In standard systematic theological fashion, this section of the SoF follows the treatment of creation and man with a presentation of the doctrine of sin. The treatment is a key consideration in a biblical worldview and must account for sin in a way that preserves both the sovereignty and integrity of God and the responsibility of man. This section addresses the entrance of sin into God's good world, the nature of sin, and the spread of sin to all humanity and the creation as a whole in basic Reformed terms, including the doctrine of original sin.

¹⁴⁸ This paragraph addresses the entrance of sin into the world. It begins by re-articulating God's original design of man, noting that prior to sin, Adam and Eve were morally pure and capable of obedience to God's commands. Here we briefly describe what man enjoyed in the garden to help articulate just what was lost through sin. The presentation also insists on the veracity of the Gen 1-3 account, Adam and Eve as real people and the parents of the human race, and the fall as a historical event. The reality of Satan's deception demonstrates that sin *entered* the world (as opposed to being an essential part of man), thus preserving the integrity of man's creation in God's image and also emphasizing that Adam and Eve were moral agents responsible for their decisions. The description of their sin takes special note of how their trespass was related to God's person and character (as are all subsequent sins) and explains the immediate consequences of their rejection of God's law. The section includes a variety of words to describe sin in order to capture something of the breadth of biblical imagery (and thus the dimensions of human sin) associated with the concept. The section concludes by establishing the covenantal (and thus representational) headship of Adam over the human race, which provides the framework for the spread of sin and its consequences, including the twin aspects typically encompassed in the doctrine of original sin—guilt and the corruption of human nature—to all his posterity.

¹⁴⁹ Gen 1:27, 31; Eccles 7:29.

¹⁵⁰ Gen 2:7-9, 15-17.

¹⁵¹ Gen 3:13; 2 Cor 11:3.

¹⁵² Gen 3:6-7.

¹⁵³ Gen 2:17; 3:1-6.

¹⁵⁴ Gen 3:17; Rom 5:18-19.

¹⁵⁵ Gen 3:8-10; Isa 59:2.

¹⁵⁶ Gen 2:16-17; Rom 5:12.

¹⁵⁷ Rom 5:12-19; 1 Cor 15:22, 49.

¹⁵⁸ 1 Cor 15:21-22; Rom 5:12-18.

¹⁵⁹ Gen 6:5; Job 14:4; 15:14; Jer 17:9; Eph 2:3.

¹⁶⁰ Ps 51:5; Gen 8:21; Rom 3:23.

The Effects of Sin¹⁶¹

From the inherited corruption of humanity¹⁶² arise all the sins that we commit.¹⁶³ All people are now by nature enemies of God,¹⁶⁴ living under the power of Satan,¹⁶⁵ subject to the curse of the law,¹⁶⁶ and deserving of eternal punishment.¹⁶⁷ Moreover, the whole nature of man has been corrupted by the fall, and no part of man is untainted by sin.¹⁶⁸ Although fallen people remain in the image of God¹⁶⁹ and manifest the virtues of common grace, they are incapable of pleasing God,¹⁷⁰ meriting his favor,¹⁷¹ or freeing themselves from their bondage to sin.¹⁷² Their hearts are hardened,¹⁷³ their understanding is darkened,¹⁷⁴ their consciences are corrupted,¹⁷⁵ their spiritual sight is blinded,¹⁷⁶ and their deeds are evil.¹⁷⁷ Therefore, all people are dead in sin and without hope apart from salvation in Jesus Christ.¹⁷⁸

The curse of the fall corrupted not only mankind but the entire created order, subjecting the world to futility, decay, and death.¹⁷⁹ Both the cursed creation and moral evil produce calamity, suffering, hostility, and injustice in the world.¹⁸⁰ The groaning of the created order reminds us of our fallenness and causes us to long for the redemption of all things under Christ.¹⁸¹

¹⁶¹ This paragraph begins with an affirmation that actual transgressions proceed from the corrupt nature we inherited from Adam. All sin reflects the corruption of the human heart; we sin because we are sinners. The statement of who mankind now is by nature counters Pelagianism and the standard worldview of our age, which assumes mankind's goodness, guarding against the belief that we are born either morally neutral or morally good. The phrase "living under the power of Satan" affirms that sin is tied to the work of Satan and involves a demonic dimension. The doctrine of total depravity is then explained in a manner that guards against misunderstanding: it is not that man is as bad as he could possibly be, but that sin affects every part of our being. Total depravity results in total inability (contra Arminianism), which is affirmed in terms of fallen humanity's inability to please God or free ourselves from bondage to sin. Salvation in Jesus Christ is introduced as humanity's only hope.

The second paragraph affirms that the consequences of sin reach beyond humanity and result in a world of frustration, bondage, and decay. The cursed creation refers to the theological category of natural evil, which has in view disasters and disease that are not directly connected to personal sins or personal choice. Moral evil refers to sin. Hostility and injustice capture the horizontal and relational consequences of the fall. The statement concludes with a note of hope, affirming that in Christ all sin and evil will finally be defeated and all things will be made new.

¹⁶² Rom 5:12; Eph 2:3.

¹⁶³ Ps 14:3; 51:1-5; 58:3; James 1:14; Matt 15:19.

¹⁶⁴ Eph 2:3; Rom 5:10; 8:7.

¹⁶⁵ John 8:44; Acts 26:18; 2 Tim 2:26; 2 Cor 4:4; 1 John 5:19; Eph 2:2.

¹⁶⁶ Gal 3:10; Rom 4:15; Deut 28:45.

¹⁶⁷ Dan 12:2; Matt 25:46; Rev 20:14-15; Rom 1:32; 6:23.

¹⁶⁸ Gen 6:5; Rom 3:10-18; 7:18; Eph 2:3; Jer 17:9.

¹⁶⁹ Gen 9:6; James 3:9.

¹⁷⁰ Rom 8:8; Heb 11:6.

¹⁷¹ Isa 64:6; Rom 3:20; Gal 2:16.

¹⁷² John 8:34; Eph 2:1-2.

¹⁷³ Eph 4:18; Matt 13:15.

¹⁷⁴ Rom 1:18-23, 28; Eph 4:18.

¹⁷⁵ Titus 1:15; 1 Tim 4:2.

¹⁷⁶ 2 Cor 4:4; John 9:39; Rom 11:8.

¹⁷⁷ Isa 64:6; John 3:19; Col 1:21.

¹⁷⁸ Eph 2:12-13.

¹⁷⁹ Gen 3:14-19; Rom 8:19-25.

¹⁸⁰ Eccles 4:1; Matt 24:7; John 16:33; Titus 3:3.

¹⁸¹ Rom 8:22-23; 1 Cor 15:24-25; Heb 2:8; Rev 21:4.

THE PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST

Incarnation and Two Natures¹⁸²

In the fullness of time God the Father sent his eternal Son,¹⁸³ the second person of the Trinity,¹⁸⁴ into the world as Jesus the Christ.¹⁸⁵ He was conceived by the Holy Spirit¹⁸⁶ and born of the

¹⁸² This approach is framed more salvation-historically than our previous Statement of Faith, beginning with the coming of Christ and indicating God's sovereign plan via the sending language. The incarnation is also framed in Trinitarian terms. The phrasing highlights, first, the eternal Son's preexistence: he is the *eternal Son*, by which is intended that he has always held that relationship and thereby is, as ancient theologians argued, "true God of true God," thus contradicting both Arianism and modalism as well as modern theologies that emphasize a radical immanence in which God dwells with Christ in a special, prototypical way to which we may all attain—a moral, not metaphysical, divinity. Also highlighted is the identity of the incarnate man as "Jesus Christ," thus distinguishing the Son in his ontological equality with God from the incarnation and execution of his office as mediator (cf. WCF 8.3). His full humanity is stressed by the placement in the historical context of the incarnation, thus echoing ancient creeds (Apostles') and councils (Constantinople, Ephesus), as well as by clearly articulating his fully human nature. This leads to the union of natures in the one person (*enhypostasia*), stressing the integrity of each nature as well as their inseparable union, using language reminiscent of Chalcedon, thereby precluding the main historical heresies that, by turns, change the divine into the human or, vice versa, merge the divine and the human into a third substance, or mix the natures in a way that confuses them (e.g., against Apollinarianism, "a fully human nature"; against Nestorianism, the two natures are joined "in one person"; against Monophysitism/Eutychianism, "two whole, perfect, and distinct natures" that are "without confusion, mixture, or change"). This clear distinction between "nature" and "person" is critical in avoiding faulty reasoning, moving either from two natures to two *persons*, or from one person to one *nature*, and so including it here prevents a multitude of potential errors. Scripture is clear: "The *Word* became flesh" (John 1:14), thus stressing that it is the person of the Son/Word who has added to himself a human nature and thus now and forevermore subsists in two natures. Finally, the paragraph concludes by linking Christ's person with his work: the former is necessary for and was "configured" (if one may so speak) for the accomplishment of the latter. The two-nature doctrine is not merely an abstract, static reality but was the means by which God effected salvation for his people. This section also addresses the relationship between Christ's person, natures, and actions, and the manifold questions and errors that derive from these. By specifying that Christ acts through both natures in ways appropriate to each, the statement explains how he can on the one hand "hold all things together by the word of his power" (Heb 1:3; cf. Col 1:17), work nature miracles, etc., and on the other hand hunger, thirst, grow weary, and die. It also emphasizes the biblical truth that it is *persons* who are active agents or subjects, not *natures*, so that the person of the Son, in obedience to his Father, acts in and through both of his natures (on this point, WCF 8.7 is perhaps vulnerable to misunderstanding when it says this of Christ's divine and human natures: "each nature *doing* that which is proper to itself"). This distinction of actions proper to each nature in Christ in turn precludes a number of erroneous formulations, e.g., viewing Christ's two natures from blending into one (as Monophysites have done); docetic tendencies (Jesus only *appeared* to be human); kenotic views, in which Christ divested himself of divine attributes (and thus always and only acted as a man); and adoptionistic views, in which Jesus the man was brought into a special relationship with God (reminiscent of much modern theology). Articulating this also distinguishes the statement from more widely held views from which Reformed theology departs, including, e.g., Lutheranism's *communicatio idiomatum* (in which attributes of Christ's divine nature were communicated not merely to his *person* but also to his human *nature*, resulting, e.g., in the idea of the ubiquity of Christ's human nature) and the idea of the coinherence of the two natures in Roman Catholic theology, whereby Christ's humanity is elevated to such an extent that such things as "human development" in Christ (intellectually, morally) are obviated. In sum, this section addresses some of the most challenging aspects of Christology and aspects that have given rise to major errors and, as a result, crucial historical articulation and clarification concerning the person of Christ.

¹⁸³ John 3:16; Gal 4:4.

¹⁸⁴ John 1:1-2; Heb 1:3.

¹⁸⁵ Matt 1:21.

¹⁸⁶ Luke 1:35.

virgin Mary,¹⁸⁷ taking on himself a fully human nature with all its attributes and frailties, yet without sin.¹⁸⁸ In this union, two whole, perfect, and distinct natures were inseparably joined together in the one person of the divine Son without confusion, mixture, or change. Our Redeemer acted in and through both his human and divine natures,¹⁸⁹ in ways appropriate to each, with both natures being preserved and neither diminished by the other. Yet both his human and divine natures are united and find expression in the one person of the eternal Son.¹⁹⁰ Thus our Lord Jesus Christ, God the Son incarnate, is fully God and fully man, able to be our all-sufficient savior and the only mediator between God and man.¹⁹¹

Earthly Life and Ministry¹⁹²

As God's incarnate Son, our Lord Jesus Christ inaugurated the kingdom of God,¹⁹³ fulfilling God's saving purposes¹⁹⁴ and all Old Testament prophecies about the One to come:¹⁹⁵ he is the Seed of the woman,¹⁹⁶ the Seed of Abraham,¹⁹⁷ the Prophet like Moses,¹⁹⁸ the Priest after the order of Melchizedek,¹⁹⁹ the Son of David,²⁰⁰ the Suffering Servant,²⁰¹ and God's appointed Messiah.²⁰² As such he was anointed by the Holy Spirit²⁰³ and lived a sinless life²⁰⁴ in complete obedience to his Father.²⁰⁵ Jesus entered into full human existence, enduring the common infirmities, temptations, and sufferings of mankind. He perfectly revealed the character of God,²⁰⁶ taught with divine authority and utter truthfulness,²⁰⁷ extended God's love and

¹⁸⁷ Matt 1:23; Luke 1:34.

¹⁸⁸ John 1:14; Heb 2:16-17; 4:15.

¹⁸⁹ Mark 4:35-41; 11:12; Luke 2:52; 6:6-10.

¹⁹⁰ John 1:14; Heb 1:1-3.

¹⁹¹ Acts 4:12; 1 Tim 2:5.

¹⁹² This paragraph advances from the incarnation to address Jesus' ministry. The first sentence moves from a summary of paragraph one to a connection between Christ's earthly ministry and the antecedent revelation of the Old Testament. Although not comprehensive, major OT ideas/themes/titles that fill out both his identity and role are included, and in so doing (a) enrich the presentation by referencing the biblical-theological, whole Bible testimony concerning him, and (b) give further support to both Christ's divinity and humanity. Then some of the main facts of his earthly ministry are listed, affirming the veracity of the gospel narratives, preventing any false dichotomy between the historical Jesus and the "Christ of faith," and exemplifying the expression of his divine and human natures.

¹⁹³ Mark 1:15; Matt 12:28.

¹⁹⁴ Isa 53; Acts 4:12; Rom 3:21-22; 2 Cor 1:20.

¹⁹⁵ Luke 24:44; John 5:39.

¹⁹⁶ Gen 3:15; Rom 16:20.

¹⁹⁷ Gen 15:18; 17:8; Matt 1:1, Gal 3:16.

¹⁹⁸ Deut 18:15; Acts 3:22-26.

¹⁹⁹ Ps 110:4; Heb 5:5-6.

²⁰⁰ 2 Sam 7:16; Matt 1:1; 22:42-45.

²⁰¹ Isa 53:3-6; Mark 10:45.

²⁰² Dan 9:25-26; Matt 16:16.

²⁰³ Matt 3:16.

²⁰⁴ Heb 2:16-17; 4:15.

²⁰⁵ John 5:19; Phil 2:8.

²⁰⁶ John 1:14, 18; 14:9-11; Heb 1:1-3.

²⁰⁷ Mark 1:22; John 12:49-50; 14:10-11.

compassion,²⁰⁸ and demonstrated his lordship through the working of miracles²⁰⁹ and the exercise of divine prerogatives.²¹⁰

Death, Resurrection, and Reign²¹¹

Having fully obeyed his Father in life, our Savior was also obedient unto death.²¹² He was crucified under Pontius Pilate, dying a substitutionary death for the sins of his people.²¹³ He was buried and arose bodily from the dead on the third day,²¹⁴ vindicating his identity and saving work as God's Messiah²¹⁵ and guaranteeing the defeat of death, our future resurrection, and the glorification of our physical bodies.²¹⁶ Forty days later Jesus ascended bodily to heaven,²¹⁷ where he is now enthroned at the right hand of God,²¹⁸ reigning over all things,²¹⁹ and interceding for his people as their Great High Priest.²²⁰ One day he will return to judge all people and angels,²²¹ putting all his enemies under his feet and dwelling with his people forever.²²²

²⁰⁸ Matt 9:36; Mark 6:34; John 13:1, 34; 14:21.

²⁰⁹ See, e.g., Matt 8:1-17; Mark 2:1-12; Luke 7:11-17; John 2:1-11.

²¹⁰ Matt 11:27; Mark 2:5-12; John 9:39; 10:9, 11; 20:28-29.

²¹¹ In a way similar to the former paragraph, this section articulates the facts of Jesus' death and subsequent acts, bearing witness to them in language reminiscent of historic creeds/confessions (Apostles' Creed, Nicene Creed, Second Helvetic Confession, WCF). The section alludes to a number of important ideas: Christ's work was not arbitrary but part of God's plan, the centrality and significance of the cross and resurrection, and the implications of his ascension and session, which will culminate in his victorious return.

²¹² Phil 2:6-7.

²¹³ Isa 53:5-12; 2 Cor 5:21; Rom 3:24-25; 1 Pet 3:18.

²¹⁴ Matt 28:1-10; Mark 16:1-18; Luke 24:1-12; John 20:1-10; 1 Cor 15:3-4.

²¹⁵ Acts 2:32-33; 4:10; 13:32-39; 17:31; Rom 1:3-4; 4:25.

²¹⁶ 1 Cor 15:20-57.

²¹⁷ Luke 24:50-53; Acts 1:9.

²¹⁸ Acts 2:33; 5:31; 7:55-56; Rom 8:34; Eph 1:20; Heb 1:3; 8:1; 10:12.

²¹⁹ Matt 28:18; John 17:2; Heb 1:3.

²²⁰ Heb 4:14; 7:25; 10:21.

²²¹ Matt 25:31-32; Rom 2:16; 2 Tim 4:1.

²²² 1 Cor 15:25-27; Heb 2:8.

THE SAVING WORK OF JESUS CHRIST²²³

The Humiliation of Christ in His Saving Work²²⁴

In the entirety of his life and death, Jesus Christ humbled himself²²⁵ to serve as our mediator²²⁶ in obedience to his Father’s saving purposes.²²⁷ As the second Adam,²²⁸ his sinless life²²⁹ of wholehearted obedience to God’s law obtained the gift of perfect righteousness²³⁰ and eternal life²³¹ for all of God’s elect.²³² In his substitutionary death on behalf of his people,²³³ Christ offered himself by the Spirit²³⁴ as a perfect sacrifice, which satisfied the demands of God’s law by paying the full penalty for their sins.²³⁵ On the cross, Christ bore our sins,²³⁶ took our punishment,²³⁷ propitiated God’s wrath against us,²³⁸ vindicated God’s righteousness,²³⁹ and

²²³ Whereas the prior section on Christology surveyed (in the second two paragraphs) the biblical witness concerning Christ’s life/death/resurrection/reign, this section deals with the significance of his work as our Savior, in particular with the heart of Christ’s saving work, the atonement. The section utilizes the traditional categories of the “states” of Christ—his humiliation and exaltation, which presents Christ’s work in a temporal-historical fashion reflecting early formulations such as Phil 2:5-11 and 1 Tim 3:16—but adds an additional subsection dealing with the actual accomplishment of Christ’s atonement.

²²⁴ Under the traditional heading of Christ’s humiliation, this first subsection treats the life and death of Christ, noting the Reformed emphasis that Christ’s whole life/death was one of humility and suffering. This avoids restricting Christ’s atoning work to his death, instead viewing his life/death as a single whole, all of which was substitutionary in nature. In addition, the specific purpose of his incarnation was to fulfill God’s saving plans as the mediator between God and man (we are *not*, however, limiting Christ’s mediatorial role to his human nature, as Roman Catholicism has at times done, the effect of which was to open the door to saints also mediating for believers; the prior section, under “Incarnation and Two Natures,” precludes this view by noting that Christ “acted in and through both his human and divine natures”). Reference is also made to the covenantal nature of Christ’s work (“the second Adam”), of which Scripture often speaks relative to Christ’s person/work (e.g., Gal 4:4: “born of woman, born under the law”; Rom 5:12ff.; 1 Cor 15:21ff.); Christ came not only to bear our punishment but also to obtain for us righteousness and life. The paragraph goes on to reference what is often categorized as Christ’s active and passive obedience (without explicitly using these labels, as they can introduce confusion: fundamentally, Christ’s obedience is indivisible). Against those who would deny the imputation of Christ’s righteousness, we are affirming that Christ’s perfect obedience fulfilled a righteousness that is imputed to believers (e.g., Rom 4:2-6; this will be filled out in the section “The Gospel and the Application of Salvation by the Holy Spirit”). Against those who would deny the substitutionary nature of Christ’s death, this paragraph articulates the penal substitutionary nature of the atonement. In order to explicate this and to articulate the multifaceted nature of the cross, the paragraph references a range of biblical descriptions of Christ’s work, encompassing expiation (“bore our sins”), penal substitution (“took our punishment”), propitiation (“appeased God’s wrath”), God’s justice (“vindicating God’s righteousness”), redemption by ransom (“purchased our redemption”), and reconciliation. All of this is to the end of fulfilling God’s ultimate purposes of dwelling in communion with his people forever.

²²⁵ Phil 2:6-8.

²²⁶ 1 Tim 2:5; Heb 9:15; 12:24.

²²⁷ John 4:34; 5:30; 6:38.

²²⁸ Rom 5:14; 1 Cor 15:45.

²²⁹ 2 Cor 5:21; Heb 4:15; 1 Pet 2:22.

²³⁰ Rom 5:17-21; 2 Cor 5:21; Phil 3:9.

²³¹ John 3:14-16; 5:24; Titus 3:7; 1 John 5:11.

²³² John 6:37; 10:29; Eph 1:3-5.

²³³ Isa 53:4-6, 12; Matt 20:28; 2 Cor 5:21.

²³⁴ Heb 9:14.

²³⁵ John 19:30; Rom 8:1; Heb 1:3.

²³⁶ 1 Pet 2:24.

²³⁷ Gal 3:13.

²³⁸ Rom 5:9.

²³⁹ Rom 3:25-26.

purchased our redemption²⁴⁰ in order that we might be reconciled to God²⁴¹ and live with him in blessed fellowship forever.²⁴²

The Efficacy of Christ's Saving Work²⁴³

God the Father was pleased to accept Christ's sacrifice as a complete atonement for sin, raising him to new life²⁴⁴ and vindicating his identity and work as the Messiah.²⁴⁵ For those who place their faith in Jesus Christ, God's righteousness requires no further sacrifice for sin,²⁴⁶ nor is there any human achievement or merit to be added to Christ's accomplishment.²⁴⁷ The atoning work of Christ is wholly efficacious,²⁴⁸ securing the full salvation of all the elect by purchasing the forgiveness of sins,²⁴⁹ the gifts of faith and repentance,²⁵⁰ eternal life,²⁵¹ and every other blessing

²⁴⁰ Rom 3:24; Eph 1:7.

²⁴¹ Rom 5:10; 2 Cor 5:18; Col 1:22.

²⁴² Ezek 37:27; John 17:3; Rev 21:3.

²⁴³ This subsection takes up issues related to the extent of Christ's satisfaction, beginning with a general statement of the acceptance of Christ's sacrifice and his vindication. The paragraph then states the exclusivity of Christ's satisfaction as the basis for our salvation; i.e., salvation is all by grace, through faith. In keeping with the description of Christ's death in the prior paragraph, the statement asserts that Christ's death was an all-powerful atonement that doesn't merely make salvation possible, but it secures "the full salvation of all the elect." This strikes at the nature of Christ's death, including both its achievement and the divine intention behind it. The statement thus articulates the view that Christ's death was an actual atonement that truly (not provisionally) paid for sins and efficaciously (not hypothetically) obtained salvation for God's people. Although the phraseology is not used, this does not exclude those who want to affirm that Christ's work was *sufficient* for all but *efficient* only for some (e.g., Calvin, Turretin, Ursinus, Witsius; in this way the statement is similar to WCF, which leaned toward a strict particularism but certainly did not deny the "sufficient-efficient" formulation). However, the statement would exclude a range of other views, e.g., (a) Christ died with the intention of saving all, and all will be saved (universalism); (b) Christ died with the intention of saving all, conditioned only on their acceptance (i.e., a provisional atonement, characteristic of Arminianism); and (c) Christ died for all without exception, but salvation is applied only to the elect (a form of hypothetical universalism as advocated by Moyse Amyraut—"Amyraldianism"). Because the latter view distinguishes between the intent of the atonement and the application of salvation, the *nature* of the atonement is thus changed: Christ did not necessarily suffer divine wrath against sins. Against these views, the statement (1) affirms that the atonement was effective and not merely provisional (it actually atoned for the sins of, and satisfied God's wrath toward, the elect); (2) affirms a coherence between God's intention for Christ's death and the actual salvation that is granted (contra the uncoordinated decrees of Amyraldianism); (3) holds together the accomplishment of salvation and its application; (4) coordinates the doctrine of election with the nature of Christ's death; and (5) is fully consistent with the penal substitutionary nature of Christ's death. To protect the nature of Christ's death as described here, the statement also notes that Christ's death secures faith/repentance, a necessity if salvation is not to be left hanging on a decision for Christ. The efficacious nature of Christ's death does not, however, limit the extent of its proclamation. Therefore, the statement insists that the gospel be proclaimed to all people, as it is the sole and sufficient means of salvation—a crucified and risen Savior has been provided. This preserves the infinite worth of Christ's atonement as the Son of God, the exclusivity of salvation in Christ, the mandate of the church to proclaim the gospel, and the importance of human responsibility of responding in faith to the offer of salvation in Christ.

²⁴⁴ Acts 3:15; 13:30; Rom 10:9; 1 Cor 15:15.

²⁴⁵ Acts 2:22-36; 4:10-12; Rom 1:3-4.

²⁴⁶ Rom 3:25-26; 5:9; Heb 10:10.

²⁴⁷ Rom 3:27; 1 Cor 1:29-31; Gal 6:14; Eph 2:9; Phil 3:7-9.

²⁴⁸ Col 1:20; Heb 7:25; 9:12-14; 1 John 1:7.

²⁴⁹ Matt 26:28; Luke 24:47; Acts 10:43; Col 1:14.

²⁵⁰ Jer 31:33; Ezek 36:26-27; Eph 2:8-9; Phil 1:29.

²⁵¹ John 3:16; 5:24; 6:40; Acts 13:48; Rom 5:21; 6:23; 1 Tim 1:16.

that comes to God's people.²⁵² As the sole and sufficient atonement for sin,²⁵³ Christ's saving work is to be proclaimed to all people without exception as the only means of reconciliation with God.²⁵⁴ There is no other mediator between God and man than our Savior, Jesus Christ,²⁵⁵ and he will receive with redeeming love all who come to him in faith.²⁵⁶

The Exaltation of Christ in His Saving Work²⁵⁷

The exaltation of Christ in his resurrection, ascension, and reign reveals the full glory of his mediatorial work.²⁵⁸ Raised by the power of God,²⁵⁹ Christ triumphed over sin, death, and Satan,²⁶⁰ and, as the firstfruits of the new creation,²⁶¹ gives eternal life to all who are united to him by faith.²⁶² Having ascended to the Father's right hand,²⁶³ Christ pours out the Spirit on his people²⁶⁴ and intercedes on their behalf²⁶⁵ as a Great High Priest,²⁶⁶ constantly advocating their cause²⁶⁷ and granting them access into God's presence.²⁶⁸ As the exalted Lord, Christ reigns with all authority as universal king²⁶⁹ and head of his church,²⁷⁰ governing the affairs of men and nations²⁷¹ and empowering his people to be victorious over sin and Satan.²⁷² The consummation of Christ's saving work will occur when he returns to judge the world in righteousness,²⁷³ deliver the kingdom to his Father,²⁷⁴ and receive eternal worship as King of kings and Lord of lords.²⁷⁵

²⁵² 1 Cor 2:21-23; Eph 1:3; 1 Pet 1:3.

²⁵³ Acts 4:12; Heb 7:27; 9:26.

²⁵⁴ Matt 28:19-20; Luke 24:47; Acts 17:30; Rom 10:14-17; 15:20.

²⁵⁵ 1 Tim 2:5.

²⁵⁶ Matt 11:28; John 6:37; Rev 5:9.

²⁵⁷ This final subsection affirms the reality that Christ's work extends beyond the cross into his exalted state as risen Savior and Lord. The paragraph covers the four steps of his exaltation—resurrection, ascension, session, and return—and speaks of the significance of each. One should note that, although the statement does not organize this section as a whole under the categories of prophet/priest/king, this section in particular demonstrates the implications of Christ's offices in his work.

²⁵⁸ Eph 1:20-23; Col 1:18-20; Rev 5:5-14.

²⁵⁹ Acts 2:24; Rom 1:3-4.

²⁶⁰ John 12:31; Eph 1:20-21; Col 2:13-15; Heb 2:14-15.

²⁶¹ 1 Cor 15:20, 23.

²⁶² John 5:21; 6:40, 54; 1 Cor 15:45.

²⁶³ Acts 1:9; 2:33; Eph 4:8.

²⁶⁴ John 3:34; Acts 2:33.

²⁶⁵ Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25.

²⁶⁶ Heb 4:14-15.

²⁶⁷ 1 John 2:1.

²⁶⁸ Rom 5:2; Eph 2:18; 3:12.

²⁶⁹ Matt 28:18; Eph 1:22.

²⁷⁰ Eph 1:22; 5:23; Col 1:18.

²⁷¹ Rev 1:5; 17:14; 19:16.

²⁷² Eph 6:10-11; 1 John 5:4-5.

²⁷³ Acts 17:31; Rom 2:16; 2 Tim 4:1.

²⁷⁴ 1 Cor 15:24.

²⁷⁵ Rev 17:14; 19:16.

THE PERSON AND WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT²⁷⁶

The Person of the Holy Spirit²⁷⁷

The Holy Spirit is the third person²⁷⁸ of the Trinity, who proceeds eternally from the Father²⁷⁹ and the Son.²⁸⁰ He is equal in deity, attributes, and nature with the Father and the Son,²⁸¹ and with them is to be worshipped and glorified. The Spirit manifests God's active presence in the world, giving life in God's creation²⁸² and new creation.²⁸³ Existing forever with the Father and the Son, the Spirit is the agent of all blessing to God's creatures and makes possible communion with him.

The Work of the Spirit Prior to Christ's Coming²⁸⁴

The eternal Spirit was present at the beginning of God's creation,²⁸⁵ carrying out the creative word of God²⁸⁶ and giving life²⁸⁷ to all things. In God's work under the old covenant, the Spirit was present with God's people²⁸⁸ to consecrate, deliver, guide, and grant saving faith in the

²⁷⁶ This section introduces the Holy Spirit in broad terms, first in terms of his identity and then his work in the old and new covenants. The length of the subsections reflect the proportionality of biblical revelation, which unfolds more of the Spirit's person and work as salvation history progresses. Note: given the distinctiveness of Sovereign Grace's pneumatology among Reformed evangelicals, more specific aspects of the Spirit's work in empowering our lives and ministry will be treated in a later section of the SoF.

²⁷⁷ This paragraph summarizes general biblical teaching on the person of the Holy Spirit. It begins by relating the Holy Spirit to the other two persons of the Trinity, then proceeds to how believers ought to relate to the Holy Spirit, and finally to how the Holy Spirit brings believers into relationship with the triune God. The paragraph follows the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed in describing the Holy Spirit as one who "giv[es] life," who together with the Father and the Son is to be "worshipped and glorified." In doing so, it repudiates the Macedonian heresy, which was opposed trenchantly by the Cappadocian Fathers and condemned as heresy by the First Council of Constantinople for its denial of the divinity of the Holy Spirit. It follows the Western tradition in including the *filioque*, "and [from] the Son," to describe the double procession of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit's general role of manifesting the presence of God in both creation and new creation is stressed.

²⁷⁸ Scripture teaches that would-be followers of Christ ought to be "[baptized] in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt 28:19), which implies the equal authority and dignity of the name of the Holy Spirit, which represents his person. Moreover, Scripture consistently attributes to the Spirit characteristics and activities that properly belong to a person, e.g., Isa 63:10; Matt 12:24; Luke 12:12; John 14:26; Acts 5:3-4, 9; 7:59; 13:2-4; 20:28; Eph 4:30; 2 Cor 3:17-18.

²⁷⁹ Prov 1:23; Isa 42:1; Luke 11:13; John 14:16-17, 26; 15:26; 1 Cor 2:10-12; Gal 3:5; 1 John 3:24.

²⁸⁰ John 5:21; cf. John 6:63; 15:26; 16:7, 13-15; Acts 2:17-18, 33; Rom 8:9-11; Gal 4:6; 1 Pet 1:11; John 15:26.

²⁸¹ Lev 11:45; cf. Ps 51:11; 19:2; 139:7; 143:10; Isa 40:13-14; 63:1-11; Mic 3:8; Mark 10:18. See also Neh 9:20; Acts 1:8; Rom 1:4; 1 Cor 2:10-11; Titus 3:5; Heb 9:14; Rev 4:8.

²⁸² Gen 2:7; 6:3; Job 33:4; 34:14-15.

²⁸³ John 3:1-15; 6:63; 7:37-39; Rom 8:11.

²⁸⁴ In treating the Spirit's work under the old covenant, this paragraph moves from his role in creation to his activity in various stages of God's redemptive work in the Old Testament. It prepares for the following section by accentuating the fact that all the institutions and offices of the old covenant are *types* prefiguring the ultimate revelation of Jesus Christ, the *antitype*.

²⁸⁵ Gen 1:2.

²⁸⁶ Ps 33:6, 9; 104:30.

²⁸⁷ Job 33:4; 34:14-15; cf. Isa 32:14-17.

²⁸⁸ Deut 32:11-12 (cf. Isa 31:5; Gen 1:2); Ps 51:10-12; Isa 63:7-13; Hag 2:5; Zech 4:6.

promises of God.²⁸⁹ He empowered prophets to reveal God's Word,²⁹⁰ appointed elders to render judgment,²⁹¹ raised up judges to bring deliverance,²⁹² anointed priests and kings as his representatives, and inspired the record of old covenant revelation.²⁹³ Through all the institutions and offices of the Old Testament, the Spirit's work pointed to the ultimate revelation of God through his Son, Jesus Christ.²⁹⁴

The Work of the Spirit in Christ and the New Covenant²⁹⁵

The Spirit's work in the new covenant centers on Christ and the church. It is by the Spirit that Jesus Christ was conceived and born of a virgin,²⁹⁶ anointed to fulfill his earthly ministry,²⁹⁷ empowered to offer his life as a sacrifice,²⁹⁸ and raised in resurrection power.²⁹⁹ After Christ ascended to the Father's right hand, the promised Holy Spirit descended at Pentecost and ushered in the new era of the Spirit's fullness,³⁰⁰ indwelling believers and empowering them for life and service.³⁰¹ The Spirit glorifies Christ and bears witness to him, convicting the world concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment.³⁰² He inspired the record of new covenant revelation³⁰³ and makes it effective in people's hearts through the gift of regeneration.³⁰⁴ He illuminates God's Word to his people,³⁰⁵ assures them of God's love,³⁰⁶ comforts them with his presence,³⁰⁷ intercedes on their behalf,³⁰⁸ and sanctifies them in conformity to the image of Christ.³⁰⁹ The

²⁸⁹ Gen 15:6; cf. Gal 3:5-6; Heb 11:8-10.

²⁹⁰ Matt 22:43; Acts 1:16; 2 Pet 1:21.

²⁹¹ Num 11:16-17, 25.

²⁹² Judg 3:9-10; 6:34; 11:29; 13:24-25; 15:14.

²⁹³ 1 Sam 10:9; 16:13; 2 Chron 24:20; 2 Tim 3:16.

²⁹⁴ Heb 1:1-2; 7:23-24; 9:12; Matt 5:17-18; Mark 7:18-19; Luke 24:27; John 2:19, 21; 4:21, 23; 5:39, 46; Rom 10:4; 2 Cor 1:20.

²⁹⁵ This paragraph describes the Spirit's work under the new covenant, first in connection with Christ and then with his body, the church, thus illustrating the Christocentric nature of the Spirit's work. This progression also emphasizes the reality that the same Spirit who worked in and through Christ now works in and through the church. The Spirit is "another Helper" (John 14:16) like the Son, whose descent coincided with the ascent of the Son (John 16:7; Eph 4:7-16). With reference to Christ, the paragraph notes the Spirit's pervasive work from incarnation to resurrection, along with his ongoing work of glorifying and bearing witness to Christ through conviction, inspiration, gospel proclamation, and the results thereof. With reference to the church, the section describes the Spirit's multifaceted ministry to believers in Christian life and service. The paragraph concludes by noting the eschatological dimension of the Spirit's work in believers.

²⁹⁶ Matt 1:18-20; Luke 1:35.

²⁹⁷ Isa 11:1-3; 61:1; Matt 3:16; 12:28-32; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22; 4:16-21; John 1:32-34; Acts 1:2; 10:38; Heb 2:4.

²⁹⁸ Heb 9:14-15.

²⁹⁹ Rom 1:4; 8:11; 1 Pet 3:18-20.

³⁰⁰ John 14:2-4, 16, 25-26; 16:5-7; Acts 1:4, 8; 2:1-4, 16-21, 33.

³⁰¹ Luke 4:16-21; John 6:63; 16:13-14; Acts 1:8; 2:17-21; 1 Cor 12-14; Rom 14:17; 1 Tim 4:14; 1 Thess 5:19-21.

³⁰² John 16:8-11.

³⁰³ John 14:17, 26; 16:13-15; 1 Cor 2:10-13; 2 Tim 3:16-17; 2 Pet 3:15-16; 1 Tim 5:18; cf. Luke 10:7; Matt 10:10; Deut 25:4.

³⁰⁴ John 3:5-8; Titus 3:5.

³⁰⁵ Eph 1:17-18; 1 Cor 2:12-14.

³⁰⁶ Rom 5:5; Gal 4:6; Eph 3:16-19.

³⁰⁷ John 16:7; Acts 9:31; 2 Cor 3:17-18; 13:14.

³⁰⁸ Rom 8:26-27; John 16:7.

³⁰⁹ Rom 8:13; 2 Cor 3:18; Gal 5:22-23.

Spirit is the bond of our union with Christ,³¹⁰ the seal of our salvation,³¹¹ the firstfruits of our redemption,³¹² and the guarantee of our inheritance.³¹³

³¹⁰ Eph 4:3; 1 Cor 12:12-13; Gal 4:6.

³¹¹ 2 Cor 1:21-22; Eph 1:13; 4:30.

³¹² Rom 8:23; 1 Cor 15:20, 23.

³¹³ Eph 1:13-14; cf. 2 Cor 1:22; 5:5.

THE GOSPEL AND THE APPLICATION OF SALVATION BY THE HOLY SPIRIT³¹⁴

The Gospel³¹⁵

The gospel is the good news of Jesus Christ and all that he did in his life, death, resurrection, and ascension to accomplish salvation for humanity.³¹⁶ Therefore, the gospel is not a human action or achievement but rather an objective, historical, divine achievement³¹⁷ that remains true and unchanging regardless of human opinion or response. The gospel stands as the core message of the Bible, which in all its parts testifies to God's saving acts culminating in the person and work of Christ.³¹⁸ This good news is the power of God for salvation for all who believe,³¹⁹ providing hope for the lost³²⁰ and abiding comfort and strength for the believer.³²¹ There is no salvation apart from Jesus Christ, for there is no other name given under heaven by which we must be saved.³²²

³¹⁴ This section moves the SoF into categories of soteriology. Logically, it follows the general section on the Holy Spirit and details the Spirit's work in applying the salvation accomplished by Christ. While the earlier section "The Saving Work of Jesus Christ" described the nature of Christ's work, this section begins by establishing the gospel as the message of that work—a message that is the means by which Christ's work becomes effective in one's life and that therefore is to be proclaimed to all people. The section then proceeds to lay out the various components in the application of salvation, from general call (gospel proclamation) all the way to glorification.

³¹⁵ Since the application of salvation begins with the general call of the gospel, this subsection defines the substance of the gospel message. The objective, concrete, unchanging nature of the gospel as the message of Christ's accomplishment of God's saving purposes is stressed. The paragraph also notes the centrality of the gospel in salvation history as well as in revelation; the former points to the nature of God's actions in history (having as their *telos* the work of Christ), and the latter points to the nature of Scripture as redemptive revelation. Both of these have hermeneutical implications, and together they validate Sovereign Grace's self-conscious gospel-centrality. The next sentence notes that the gospel functions for both non-believers and believers, implying the *ongoing* importance of the gospel for the believer's spiritual well-being. In stressing the power of the gospel to save and the mandate to proclaim the gospel, this subsection prepares for the actual application of salvation in the following sections. The paragraph ends with a statement of the exclusivity of salvation in Christ.

³¹⁶ Rom 3:23-26; 1 Cor 15:3-5; Rev 1:5; 5:5, 9-12.

³¹⁷ Rom 1:3-4; 1 Cor 15:3-5.

³¹⁸ Luke 24:44-47; John 5:39; 1 Pet 1:10-12.

³¹⁹ Rom 1:16.

³²⁰ Matt 4:16; Acts 4:12; Rom 1:16.

³²¹ Rom 5:1-5; 8:31-39; 2 Cor 1:3-5.

³²² Acts 4:12.

Effectual Calling, Regeneration, and Conversion³²³

God commands the gospel to be proclaimed to all people everywhere,³²⁴ but all people are spiritually dead and unable to respond to this saving news.³²⁵ Therefore, God graciously and effectually calls to himself those he chose to save in Christ.³²⁶ Through the proclamation of the gospel, the Holy Spirit regenerates the elect and brings them into a living union with Christ, bestowing new spiritual life,³²⁷ opening their eyes to see God's glory in Christ,³²⁸ and enabling them to respond to the gospel in faith and repentance.³²⁹ With a renewed heart and mind,³³⁰ we receive Christ and rely fully on him for salvation, turning from our sinful, self-seeking way of life to love and follow Christ in joyful obedience.³³¹ Only those who respond to the gospel in this way will be saved,³³² yet even this response is a gift of God's merciful grace, ensuring that he alone receives the glory for our salvation.³³³

³²³ This section describes a Reformed soteriology, which roots salvation in the sovereignty of God. The realities of our depravity, including both corruption and spiritual inability, necessitate a prior work of God to enable us to respond to the gospel, and so the paragraph describes the effectual call of God that accompanies the gospel call and the miracle of regeneration that gives us new life, enabling us to believe and repent. The paragraph notes that the new life given to believers comes by virtue of their union with Christ, from which all the benefits of the gospel flow. God's sovereignty in salvation does not abrogate human responsibility to respond to the gospel, and so the section describes this response in terms of faith and repentance. The paragraph concludes by noting both the necessity of our response to the gospel as well as God's work in enabling this response, and thus it embodies the compatibilism that characterizes the biblical witness. The final clause notes the biblical purpose for sovereign grace (God receives exclusive glory for our salvation, e.g., Eph 2:8-9) and thereby highlights the doxological implications of a Reformed soteriology.

³²⁴ Matt 28:19-20; Luke 24:47; Acts 17:30; Rom 10:14-17; 15:20.

³²⁵ John 6:44; Eph 2:1-3, Col 2:13.

³²⁶ Rom 8:30; 1 Cor 1:24; Eph 4:4.

³²⁷ John 3:5-6, 8; 6:63; 2 Cor 3:6; Rom 10:14-17; Titus 3:5..

³²⁸ John 16:13-14; 2 Cor 3:16-18; 4:4, 6.

³²⁹ Eph 2:8-9; Phil 1:29.

³³⁰ Rom 12:2; 1 Cor 2:16; Eph 4:23.

³³¹ 1 Thess 1:9.

³³² Acts 4:12; Col 1:23.

³³³ Eph 2:8-9; Phil 1:29; 1 Cor 1:26-29.

Justification and Adoption³³⁴

In their union with Christ, believers freely receive all the benefits of the gospel.³³⁵ Those whom God effectually calls to himself, he justifies in Christ,³³⁶ forgiving all of their sins³³⁷ and declaring them righteous and acceptable in his sight.³³⁸ This declaration is judicial, addressing not our nature but our status with regard to God's law;³³⁹ it is definitive, being neither gradually gained nor able to be lost;³⁴⁰ and it is gracious, a free gift of God's righteousness based on nothing worked in us or by us, but received freely by faith.³⁴¹ The sole ground of our justification is the righteousness of Christ, whose life of perfect obedience is imputed to us and whose substitutionary death on our behalf completely satisfies the demands of God's justice toward our sins.³⁴² Those whom God justifies, he adopts into his family, granting them the full status, rights, and privileges of beloved sons.³⁴³ As God's children, we receive his name,³⁴⁴ enjoy access into his presence,³⁴⁵ experience his care and discipline,³⁴⁶ and eagerly await the glorious inheritance he promises his own.³⁴⁷

³³⁴ This subsection describes the forensic (justification) and familial (adoption) aspects of our salvation. As with all the benefits of salvation, these derive from our union with Christ. Justification is described in its two main aspects, forgiveness of sins and receiving a positive status of righteousness before God. The paragraph carefully preserves the forensic nature of justification, which addresses not our nature but our legal status before God, and thus excludes transformative views of justification (e.g., “justification as liberation”), inclusionary definitions of justification (i.e., “God’s declaration that we belong to the covenant community”), etc. This declaration is also definitive—the final, eschatological declaration brought forward into time—and is thus not an ongoing declaration of actual righteousness that can be lost (as in, e.g., Roman Catholicism). The section also affirms the imputation of Christ’s righteousness as the basis of justification, against views that deny imputation (e.g., views that identify our faith *as* righteousness) or render it unnecessary by redefining righteousness (e.g., righteousness = covenant membership). In addition, by linking “righteousness” to Christ’s obedience, the statement preserves the individual nature of justification (as opposed to merely corporate understandings) and protects its substitutionary basis (against views that abstract justification from categories of sin and guilt). Finally, in addition to our being made right before God, we enjoy the blessings of adoption, by which we are joined to his family and experience all the love and benefits that entails.

³³⁵ Eph 1:3.

³³⁶ Rom 8:29-30.

³³⁷ Rom 4:7; Col 1:14; Heb 8:12.

³³⁸ Rom 3:26; 5:19; 2 Cor 5:21.

³³⁹ Acts 13:39; Rom 3:26; 8:1-2.

³⁴⁰ Rom 3:28; 4:6.

³⁴¹ Rom 3:22-26; 5:15-17; 1 Cor 1:29; Eph 2:8-9.

³⁴² Rom 3:22-26; 1 Cor 1:29; 2 Cor 5:21; Eph 2:8-9.

³⁴³ Rom 8:15, 23; Gal 4:4-7; Eph 1:5; 1 John 3:1-2.

³⁴⁴ Num 6:27 (cf. Matt 28:19); Deut 28:10; 2 Chron 7:14; Acts 11:26; 2 Tim 2:19; 1 Pet 4:14, 16.

³⁴⁵ Rom 5:2; Eph 1:18.

³⁴⁶ Heb 12:5-11.

³⁴⁷ Rom 8:23-26; 1 Pet 1:3-5.

Sanctification, Perseverance, and Glorification³⁴⁸

As the all-sufficient Savior, Christ also sanctifies his people, cleansing them from the impurity of sin and setting them apart for God and his service.³⁴⁹ The renewing work of the Holy Spirit breaks their bondage to sin and Satan and raises them to new life, enabling believers to put sin to death and grow in likeness to Christ.³⁵⁰ Sanctification is therefore both a definitive act of God³⁵¹ and a progressive work of the Spirit.³⁵² Believers must persevere in faith and obedience in order to be saved.³⁵³ Yet this perseverance is also a gift of God in Christ, who preserves his own and keeps them safe forever.³⁵⁴ The ultimate goal of sanctification is our full conformity to Christ's image, which will finally come when believers are raised physically with Christ in glory, freed from sin and exulting in the presence of God forever.³⁵⁵

³⁴⁸ In describing the final aspects of the application of salvation, the paragraph begins with sanctification, detailing both our initial, definitive sanctification (which is what the term “sanctification” in the NT typically refers to) and our ongoing, progressive sanctification; theologically and experientially, the former leads to the latter. (Note: while progressive sanctification is mentioned here, given its importance to daily Christian living and contemporary distortions a later section in the SoF will take up the topic more fully). Next, the necessity of perseverance is noted, along with God’s preservation of his people that makes it possible. The paragraph concludes with glorification at Christ’s return as the final goal of our ongoing growth in godliness.

³⁴⁹ 1 Cor 1:30; Eph 5:25-26; Heb 10:10, 14.

³⁵⁰ Rom 6:6-7, 18; 7:6; 8:12-13; Gal 5:1.

³⁵¹ Heb 10:10, 14.

³⁵² 2 Cor 7:1; Phil 2:12; 1 Tim 6:11; 2 Tim 2:22; Heb 12:14.

³⁵³ Matt 10:22; 24:13; Mark 13:13; Col 1:23; Heb 3:14.

³⁵⁴ Rom 8:29-30; 1 Cor 1:8; 1 Thess 3:13; 1 Pet 1:5; Jude 24.

³⁵⁵ Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18; 1 John 3:1-3.

THE EMPOWERING MINISTRY OF THE SPIRIT³⁵⁶

The Filling of the Spirit³⁵⁷

When Christ ascended, he poured out the Holy Spirit on the church, ushering in a greater experience of God's presence and power among his people.³⁵⁸ The Spirit transforms hearts by the miracle of regeneration³⁵⁹ and indwells all believers in abundant, new covenant measure.³⁶⁰ The Spirit also desires to fill God's people continually with increased power for Christian life and witness.³⁶¹ To be filled with the Spirit is to be more fully under his influence,³⁶² more aware of his presence,³⁶³ and more effective in his service.³⁶⁴ All Christians, therefore, must continually seek to be filled with the Spirit³⁶⁵ by living and praying in such a way that invites the Spirit's work among us, actively longing for God to accomplish his gracious purposes in us and through us. The filling of the Spirit brings to God's people a deeper knowledge of Christ,³⁶⁶ an increased desire for holiness,³⁶⁷ a stronger commitment to unity and love, a greater fruitfulness in ministry, and a deeper gratitude for our salvation.³⁶⁸

³⁵⁶ While earlier sections of the SoF have addressed the Spirit's role in applying salvation, this section addresses the ongoing work of the Spirit in its empowering and experiential dimensions. Given the distinctiveness of Sovereign Grace's pneumatology vis-à-vis other Reformed and evangelical bodies, such a section is important in order both to define and to encourage this aspect of the Spirit's work. Because of the particular importance and daily relevance of the Spirit's work in sanctification, a later section addressing sanctification more fully will be added to the SoF under the heading "Life in Christ."

³⁵⁷ This first subsection lays the foundation for a robust pneumatology that imbues all the Christian life with the Spirit's enabling and empowering presence. The paragraph begins by noting the connection between the ascension of Jesus Christ and the giving of the Spirit, thus linking the Spirit's work today to the Christ-event and presenting the increased fullness of the Spirit as a mark of the new age that has dawned in Christ. In short, the Spirit's powerful work not only marks the inauguration of the church age but characterizes it. The statement then affirms that "all believers" are indwelt by the Spirit, avoiding the creation of a two-tiered Christianity or a false dichotomy among believers. The important role of the filling of the Spirit is then stressed, noting both the availability and importance of this experience for all believers. The paragraph gives a general description of what it means to be filled with the Spirit and also celebrates the fruit of this filling. It should be noted that this section does not dictate a particular position on the "baptism in the Holy Spirit." For many years now, our SoF has allowed for a range of views on this issue, including both Pentecostal/charismatic views that see Spirit baptism as subsequent to, or at least distinct from, conversion (minus the insistence on tongues as "initial physical evidence") and so-called third-wave views that see the baptism of the Spirit as part of conversion under the new covenant. As this allowance has proven both wise and workable, we opted not to take a stance on certain issues where continuationists differ and especially not to insist on a position that would automatically exclude any current pastors in Sovereign Grace.

³⁵⁸ Acts 2:17-18; 2:33; 10:45.

³⁵⁹ Titus 3:5; John 3:3; 1 Pet 1:3.

³⁶⁰ Ezek 36:26-27; Acts 2:38-39; 1 Cor 12:12-13.

³⁶¹ Acts 1:8; 4:8; 4:31; 13:9; Eph 5:18.

³⁶² Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-33.

³⁶³ Acts 3:19; 7:55; 19:6; Rom 8:15, 23.

³⁶⁴ Acts 4:8; 6:3.

³⁶⁵ Eph 5:18.

³⁶⁶ John 15:26; 16:13-15; Eph 3:16-19; Rom 5:5.

³⁶⁷ Rom 8:13; Gal 5:22-23.

³⁶⁸ Rom 8:15-16; Eph 5:19-20; Col 1:11-14.

The Gifts of the Spirit³⁶⁹

Christ loves the church, his body, and provides for its health and growth through the Holy Spirit.³⁷⁰ In addition to giving new life, the Spirit sovereignly bestows gifts on every believer.³⁷¹ Spiritual gifts are those abilities and expressions of God's power given by his grace for the glory of Christ and the building up of the church.³⁷² The variety of these gifts—some permanent and some occasional, some more natural and some more remarkable—reflects³⁷³ the diversity of the members of Christ's body³⁷⁴ and demonstrates our need for one another.³⁷⁵ The gifts are not to be exercised with apprehension, pride, or disorder, but with faith, love, and order,³⁷⁶ and always in submission to the authority of Scripture as the final revelation of God.³⁷⁷ With the exception of those among the apostles who were commissioned as eyewitnesses of Christ and made recipients of normative revelation,³⁷⁸ the full range of spiritual gifts remain at work in the church and are given for the good of the church and its witness to the world. We are therefore to earnestly desire and practice them until Christ returns.³⁷⁹

³⁶⁹ The importance of spiritual gifts in the New Testament, our own continuationist convictions, and the confusion that often surrounds the gifts all warrant this subsection on the gifts. The paragraph begins by placing the gifts in a biblical context as aspects of Christ's care for his church. Such a context preserves a Christ-centeredness relative to the gifts as well as an appreciation for them. This is followed by a definition of the gifts along with a statement of their general purpose. The next sentence picks up on key New Testament teachings on the gifts, including their variety and their role of promoting interdependence among members of Christ's body. By addressing the manner in which the gifts are to be practiced (faith, love, and order), we are affirming that churches must vigilantly guard against the abuse and misuse of the gifts. The paragraph then affirms the continuity of spiritual gifts, thereby excluding the view of cessationism, which holds that some classes of the Spirit's manifestations have ceased and are no longer needed by the church in the present age. The single exception to this—those “apostles who were commissioned as eyewitnesses of Christ and made recipients of normative revelation”—is acknowledged, and thus the technical sense of apostles as eyewitnesses of Christ (Acts 1:20-22) is excluded. Beyond this, the statement does not go into detail concerning offices, and in so doing this clearly makes room for an ongoing gift of apostleship (or an “apostolic gifting”) as, e.g., a pioneer/church planter and shepherd to other pastors. Written this way, the statement stops short of insisting on an “apostolic gifting” in a way that might exclude a pastor who is uncertain about this way of articulating such a gifting. Finally, given the prevalence of what might be termed a *functional cessationism* among theological continuationists, and the popularity of an “open but cautious” posture toward some of the gifts, this statement explicitly asserts the biblical mandate not simply to affirm but to earnestly desire the full range of spiritual gifts.

³⁷⁰ John 16:4-15; Eph 4:7-8, 13-16; 5:25-27.

³⁷¹ 1 Cor 12:7, 11.

³⁷² 1 Cor 12:7; 14:26; Eph 4:12.

³⁷³ Rom 12:6-8; 1 Cor 12:4-11, 28-30; 1 Pet 4:10-11; Eph 4:11-12.

³⁷⁴ 1 Cor 12:21-26.

³⁷⁵ 1 Cor 14:1; 13:1-3; 14:33.

³⁷⁶ 1 Cor 13:1-3, 14:1; 14:33.

³⁷⁷ 1 Thess 5:19-21; 1 Cor 14:29; 2 Tim 3:16; Rev 22:18-19.

³⁷⁸ Acts 1:20-26; John 14:26; 15:27; 16:13-15; 1 Cor 14:37; Gal 1:11-20; Rev 21:14.

³⁷⁹ 1 Cor 1:7; 12:31; 13:8-12; 14:1, 12.

LIFE IN CHRIST³⁸⁰

Growing in Christ³⁸¹

All believers, by virtue of their union with Christ, are progressively transformed into his image.³⁸² Although the ruling power of sin in our lives has been broken, remnants of corruption remain in our hearts that we will fight throughout our lives.³⁸³ This lifelong process of growth takes place as the Spirit empowers us to abide in Christ and strive for holiness in every area of life.³⁸⁴ Resting in Christ's finished work never renders our effort unnecessary but rather enables the joyful pursuit of loving and pleasing God.³⁸⁵ Compelled by grace, believers grow in the knowledge of God, obey Christ's commands, walk by the Spirit, mortify sin, and pursue God's priorities and purposes.³⁸⁶ Although such actions are not the ground of our salvation, they demonstrate the authenticity of our salvation and are a means by which God keeps us faithful to the end.³⁸⁷ Among the many public and private means of grace, the Word of God, prayer, and fellowship are primary instruments of our sanctification,³⁸⁸ fostering communion with God and training us together to glorify him, love others, and testify to Christ in the world.³⁸⁹

³⁸⁰ This section of the SoF addresses issues that do not fit neatly within other sections but that are fundamental to the daily life of the Christian, especially more existential issues of Christian obedience. For example, although the earlier section “The Gospel and the Application of Salvation by the Holy Spirit” addresses progressive sanctification within the *ordo salutis*, certain details and nuances (including current distortions of the doctrine) were preserved for this section. The simple structure (“Growing in Christ” and “Waiting for Christ”) allows for the emphasis on faithful Christian living as well as the ultimate basis for our hope in Christ’s return. In addition, this section reflects on the “already-not yet” tension of the Christian life, stressing both security in grace and Christian obedience, the twin realities of present blessings and suffering, etc. The section thus addresses issues that have been distinct emphases in Sovereign Grace (the intentional pursuit of godliness, application of biblical truth), that are of daily relevance for the believer (the means of grace, the reality of suffering), and that are vital to pastoral ministry.

³⁸¹ This section fills out the more limited discussion of progressive sanctification in “The Gospel and the Application of Salvation by the Holy Spirit.” The first sentence summarizes the essential character of progressive sanctification (transformation into Christ’s image) and its fundamental ground (union with Christ). In so doing, the paragraph affirms that sanctification is not optional for the believer. The paragraph then establishes the cooperative nature of our growth in godliness, affirming the inseparable connection between the Spirit’s prior, enabling work and our responsive, intentional, and active work. First, the fundamental, already-not yet nature of our condition is affirmed. The fourth sentence then clarifies the biblical relationship between justification and sanctification and confronts the false antithesis between faith and obedience, an error that has appeared with new rigor in recent years. Genuine faith in Jesus always overflows in glad obedience of his commands. While the former is distinct from the latter, it never exists apart from the latter. Moreover, although in Christ the believer is righteous before God and fully and graciously accepted by him, the believer has a corresponding obligation and capacity to be pleasing to God in one’s life. The fifth sentence affirms the essentially gracious character of the wealth of biblical motivations for sanctification and describes our role in the process of change from a variety of biblical perspectives. We explicitly deny good works as the ground of our salvation in the sense that they never merit the divine gift of saving grace. However, we strongly affirm good works as necessary for salvation in the sense that only those who submit to Christ’s commands, as evidence of the new life they have received, will be saved. The section ends by identifying some of the most important means of sanctification as well as the doxological, relational, communal, and missional results of transformation into the image of Christ.

³⁸² Rom 6:5-11; 2 Cor 3:18; Rev 19:8.

³⁸³ Gal 5:16-18; 1 Pet 2:11.

³⁸⁴ John 15:4-8; Gal 5:16-26; Heb 12:14.

³⁸⁵ Ps 37:5, 40:8; John 15:11; Rom 6:1-4; 12:1-2; Eph 5:10; Phil 1:25; Titus 2:11-14; 1 Pet 1:13-19.

³⁸⁶ Mark 12:30-31; John 15:10; Rom 8:4; 1 Cor 10:31; 2 Cor 4:6; Col 3:5-6; 1 John 5:2-3.

³⁸⁷ Matt 25:31-46; Eph 2:8-10; Heb 3:12-14; 6:9-12; 10:19-27.

³⁸⁸ John 6:63; 17:17; Acts 2:42; Eph 4:15; 6:18; Col 3:16; 1 Thess 2:13-14; 2 Tim 3:16-17; Jude 20-21.

³⁸⁹ Matt 5:8; 1 Cor 10:31; Col 3:12-14; 1 Pet 2:9-12.

Waiting for Christ³⁹⁰

Living the Christian life involves longing³⁹¹ and waiting for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ.³⁹² Although believers are new creations in Christ and presently enjoy the blessings of his resurrection power,³⁹³ their sanctification remains partial and incomplete in this life.³⁹⁴ Furthermore, they continue to live in mortal bodies in a creation subject to futility,³⁹⁵ opposed by the world,³⁹⁶ the flesh,³⁹⁷ and the devil.³⁹⁸ The Word of God assures us that we are his beloved children,³⁹⁹ yet such an assurance does not remove the reality of suffering, sorrow, and persecution in this present age.⁴⁰⁰ The gospel enables us to rejoice in the midst of tribulations,⁴⁰¹ assured that his purposes are working for our good even in circumstances we do not understand.⁴⁰² Fixing our eyes on Jesus, we endure in faith and abound in hope,⁴⁰³ confident that a day is fast approaching when sin and sorrow will be no more.⁴⁰⁴

³⁹⁰ This section attempts to capture the “already-not yet” eschatological tension fundamental to the structure of the New Testament (and therefore to our experience of the Christian life) and to focus our individual and corporate hope on the return of Christ. The second sentence affirms the positional and existential aspects of salvation while guarding against any forms of Christian perfectionism that teach the completion or perfection of sanctification in this life. As such, the paragraph seeks to guard against both an under- and an over-realized eschatology. The paragraph proceeds to consider the effects of sin on our physical bodies and on the entirety of creation, incorporating the biblical concept of futility (especially drawing on Ecclesiastes and Romans 8). This then provides the framework from which to consider the reality of suffering in the Christian life, ensuring that suffering is not interpreted as a sign of God’s rejection but is rather an expected experience for his children in keeping with his good and wise purposes (however mysterious they may appear). The paragraph ends by affirming both the reality of suffering and lament (“in the midst of tribulations”) and the certainty of joy in our salvation through Christ in the midst of that suffering, with an eye to the day when every tear shall be wiped away.

³⁹¹ Rom 8:19, 23, 36; 1 Cor 16:22; 2 Cor 5:2.

³⁹² Titus 2:13; Jude 21; Rev 22:20.

³⁹³ John 5:24; 6:47; Rom 6:2-5; 2 Cor 5:17; Eph 1:19-20.

³⁹⁴ Phil 3:12; 1 Thess 5:23; 1 John 1:8; 3:2.

³⁹⁵ Eccles 3:11, 14; Rom 8:20-23; 2 Cor 5:1-4; 1 Cor 15:53.

³⁹⁶ 1 John 2:16; 5:19.

³⁹⁷ Gal 5:17.

³⁹⁸ Eph 6:10-12; Jas 4:7; 1 Pet 5:8-9.

³⁹⁹ Rom 8:17; Gal 4:5-6; 1 John 3:2.

⁴⁰⁰ John 16:33; Acts 14:22; Rom 8:36; 1 Pet 3:14, 17; 4:19.

⁴⁰¹ Rom 5:3; 8:23; 12:12; 2 Cor 5:2, 4; Col 1:24; 1 Pet 4:13.

⁴⁰² Isa 43:1-3; Lam 3:21-24; Rom 8:28; Phil 1:6.

⁴⁰³ Rom 12:12; 15:13; 2 Cor 1:6; 2 Tim 2:12; Heb 12:1-3; 1 Pet 2:19-20.

⁴⁰⁴ Isa 25:8; 35:10; 51:11; Rev 7:17; 21:4.

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST⁴⁰⁵

The Universal Church⁴⁰⁶

The universal church is the true, worshipping community of God’s people, composed of all the elect from all time.⁴⁰⁷ Throughout salvation history, God by his Word and Spirit has been calling sinful people out of the whole human race to create a new redeemed humanity,⁴⁰⁸ whom Christ purchased with his blood.⁴⁰⁹ With the giving of the Spirit at Pentecost,⁴¹⁰ God’s people were reconstituted as his new covenant church,⁴¹¹ in continuity with the old covenant people of God but now brought to fulfillment by the work of Christ.⁴¹² All of God’s people are united in one body⁴¹³—with Christ as the supreme, sustaining, and life-giving head⁴¹⁴—and set apart for God’s own possession and purposes.⁴¹⁵

⁴⁰⁵ In addressing ecclesiology, this portion of the SoF moves from more individual aspects of the Christian life to the corporate life of believers, thus addressing our identity as the people of God and God’s plans and purposes for the church. The relative fullness of the section reflects the importance of this area of biblical teaching in defining the life of God’s people. Issues covered here, which at times are given short shrift in doctrinal statements, are foundational to the organization of church bodies, have informed much debate throughout church history (especially since the Reformation), and have been vital to Sovereign Grace’s history. The section first defines the church, utilizing the traditional distinction between the universal church and the local church—terms which refer not to two separate churches but to differing perspectives on the one church of Christ. The section moves on to discuss the sacraments as fundamental marks of the church, then concludes with a discussion on the church’s purpose and mission.

⁴⁰⁶ This section begins with a definition of the church in its broadest sense, as the universal church. This reflects the Reformed emphasis on the fundamental unity of God’s dealings with his people throughout salvation history, including the unity that exists between the old covenant people of God and the new covenant church: God’s people have always been a worshipping community, chosen by God to represent him in all the earth for his glory. Within this overarching unity, the section also recognizes the reconstitution of God’s people as his new covenant church—the reality in which we currently live—brought to fulfillment by Christ’s person and work and marked by the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost. The final sentence affirms both the unity and the holiness of the church, which are its foundational attributes. The sentence also stresses the headship of Christ and the church’s organic union with and dependence on him for everything.

⁴⁰⁷ Heb 12:22-23; 2:12; Eph 5:25; Rev 21:2.

⁴⁰⁸ Gen 12:1-3; Exod 6:7; 19:3-6; Deut 4:10; Eph 2:11-22; Col 1:13.

⁴⁰⁹ Acts 20:28; Eph 1:7; 5:25.

⁴¹⁰ Acts 2:1-4.

⁴¹¹ Acts 2:42-47.

⁴¹² Jer 31:31-33; Rom 11:25; Eph 1:23, 2:13-22; 3:6; Heb 8:8-10.

⁴¹³ Eph 4:4-6; 1 Cor 12:12-27.

⁴¹⁴ Col 1:18; 2:19; Eph 1:22-23; 4:15-16; 5:23.

⁴¹⁵ 1 Pet 2:9-10; Lev 19:2.

The Local Church⁴¹⁶

As an expression of Christ's universal church, the local church is the focal point of God's plan to mature his people and save sinners.⁴¹⁷ Therefore, all Christians are to join themselves as committed members to a specific local church.⁴¹⁸ A true church is marked by the faithful preaching of the Word,⁴¹⁹ the right administration of the sacraments,⁴²⁰ and the proper exercise of church discipline.⁴²¹ Even true churches are imperfect: they often contain a mixture of unbelievers hidden among the true flock⁴²² and are vulnerable to theological error and moral failure.⁴²³ Yet Christ is unwavering in his commitment to build his church and will surely bring it to maturity.⁴²⁴

Christ has given the offices of elder⁴²⁵ and deacon⁴²⁶ to the church.⁴²⁷ Elders occupy the sole office of governance and are called to teach, oversee, care for, and protect the flock entrusted to them by the Lord.⁴²⁸ Deacons provide for the various needs of the church through acts of service. God gives these and other people as gifts to serve and equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.⁴²⁹ In keeping with God's created design Scripture reserves the office of elder for men,⁴³⁰ yet men and women alike belong to a royal priesthood in which each member is gifted by God to play a vital role in the life and mission of the church.⁴³¹

⁴¹⁶ This section stresses the importance of the local church, which is not only a cherished aspect of Sovereign Grace's history but is an emphasis often missing from similar doctrinal statements. Among other things, the first two sentences stress both the responsibility of Christians to join themselves to local churches (and therefore the importance of membership in a visible, distinct, and organized church) and the vital role the local church plays in God's purposes. The paragraph then specifies the marks of a true church, drawing from the traditional definition that emerged with the Reformation (preaching, sacraments, and church discipline, all biblically defined and observed). The section then acknowledges the imperfect nature of the local church: as important as biblical faithfulness is, we cannot determine infallibly the spiritual condition of every person, and so local churches may contain those who are in reality unbelievers. Recognizing that, ultimately, only the Lord knows those who are his protects us from an illegitimate idealism and a potentially unbiblical rigor in setting standards for church members. That said, Christ's commitment to build his church imbues our life and labors with faith and hope. Finally, the paragraph addresses the governance of the local church, specifying the two primary offices (elder and deacon) to which every church should aspire and stating the biblical principle of elder rule. Beyond these fundamental elements, other details of church polity are not covered here, as the committee felt these were best left to the Book of Church Order, which outlines our polity in great detail. The paragraph does note, however, that the office of elder is reserved for men. This was included because of the biblical clarity concerning the requirement, the theological implications involved, and the cultural significance surrounding this issue.

⁴¹⁷ Eph 3:10; 1 Tim 3:15; Matt 28:18-20.

⁴¹⁸ Acts 2:47; 1 Cor 1:2; 1 Thess 1:1.

⁴¹⁹ 2 Tim 2:15; 2 Tim 4:1-2; Titus 1:9.

⁴²⁰ Matt 28:19; Acts 2:38; Rom 6:3-4; Matt 26:26-28; 1 Cor 11:17-34.

⁴²¹ Matt 18:15-17; 1 Cor 5:1-13.

⁴²² 2 Tim 2:16-19; Acts 20:29-30; 2 Tim 4:10.

⁴²³ 1 Cor 3:1-3; 5:1; 1 Tim 5:20; 2 Tim 4:3-4; Rev 2:5, 14-16, 20-23; 3:2-3, 15-19.

⁴²⁴ Matt 16:18; Eph 5:25-27; Rev 19:7-9.

⁴²⁵ 1 Tim 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; Acts 14:23; 20:28; 1 Tim 5:17-18; Heb 13:17.

⁴²⁶ 1 Tim 3:8-13; Phil 1:1.

⁴²⁷ Eph 4:11-12; 1 Cor 12:28.

⁴²⁸ 1 Pet 5:1-4; Acts 20:28; 1 Tim 3:2; 2 Tim 4:1-2; 1 Tim 5:17.

⁴²⁹ Eph 4:11-12.

⁴³⁰ 1 Tim 2:12-13.

⁴³¹ Rom 16:1-16; Acts 1:14; 9:36-42; 16:14-15; 18:2; Phil 4:2-3; 1 Tim 5:9-16; 2 Tim 1:5; Titus 2:1-6; 1 Pet 2:9.

The Sacraments of the Church⁴³²

The sacraments are precious means of grace that signify the benefits of the gospel, confirm its promises to the believer, and visibly distinguish the church from the world.⁴³³ The Lord Jesus instituted two sacraments, baptism and the Lord’s Supper,⁴³⁴ for faithful observance by the church⁴³⁵ until his return.⁴³⁶ Baptism is an initiatory, unrepeated sacrament⁴³⁷ for those who come to faith in Christ that pictures their remission of sins and union with Christ in his death and resurrection.⁴³⁸ Through immersion in water in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,⁴³⁹ the believer publicly proclaims his faith in Christ and signifies his entrance into the body of Christ.⁴⁴⁰ Although commanded by Christ and a true means of grace, grace is not so inseparably tied to baptism that no one can be saved without it, or that everyone who is baptized is thereby saved.⁴⁴¹

In the Lord’s Supper, the gathered church eats bread, signifying Christ’s body given for his people, and drinks the cup of the Lord, signifying his blood shed for our sins.⁴⁴² As we observe this sacrament with faith and sober self-examination,⁴⁴³ we remember and proclaim the death of Christ, commune with him and receive spiritual nourishment for our souls, signify our unity with other members of Christ’s body, and look forward to the Lord’s triumphant return.⁴⁴⁴

⁴³² This section deals with the sacraments, one of the key marks of the church and one that historically has been a dividing line between church bodies. The opening definition notes the connection of the sacraments to the gospel and includes the Reformed emphasis on the sacraments as signs and seals, although with slightly different language. The committee sought to capture two complementary emphases here: that the sacraments are true means of grace (and not *mere* signs) and also that they are not efficacious in and of themselves, *ex opere operato*, apart from the work of the Spirit and the faith of the recipients. The paragraph then describes the two sacraments instituted by Christ: baptism and the Lord’s Supper. The statement first articulates a clear credo-baptistic position, noting baptism’s primary significance as marking the beginning of Christian life and entrance into Christ’s body through faith. Although the paragraph notes that baptism is “unrepeated” (i.e., in its intention), it does not speak to (and thus does not prohibit) cases in which, e.g., a believer is rebaptized out of a conviction that his or her original “baptism” was illegitimate. The paragraph goes on to speak of the standard baptistic mode of baptism (immersion) along with the statement being made by the subject of baptism. The next sentence seeks to uphold the vital importance of baptism (it is not optional) but acknowledges that it is not essential to salvation. The final two sentences treat the Lord’s Supper, including the significance of the elements, the purposes for its observance, and the benefits that accrue to believers through the sacrament. This fairly standard treatment of the Lord’s Supper includes two aspects of note. First, it implies the link of the sacrament to the *gathered* church (and thus it is not an individualized sacrament disconnected from the church and its discipline). Second, it embodies Calvin’s emphasis on the spiritual nourishment derived from Christ’s spiritual presence (without detailing views on the nature of his presence), against a strictly memorialist view.

⁴³³ Rom 4:11; cf. Gen 17:7; Rom 6:3-4; 1 Cor 10:16-20; Gal 3:26-28; Col 2:11-14.

⁴³⁴ Matt 28:19; 1 Cor 11:23-26; cf. Matt 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:14-23.

⁴³⁵ Acts 2:42-46.

⁴³⁶ Matt 28:20; 1 Cor 11:26.

⁴³⁷ Acts 2:38-41; Gal 2:16; 3:26-27; 5:2-6; cf. Col 2:11-14.

⁴³⁸ Rom 6:3-5.

⁴³⁹ Matt 28:19; Acts 19:3-5.

⁴⁴⁰ Acts 22:16; Rom 6:3-14; Col 2:11-14.

⁴⁴¹ 1 Cor 10:1-5; 1 Pet 3:21; Rom 2:28; cf. Col 2:11-14.

⁴⁴² 1 Cor 11:23-26.

⁴⁴³ 1 Cor 11:26-30.

⁴⁴⁴ 1 Cor 11:26.

The Purpose and Mission of the Church⁴⁴⁵

As the body of Christ, the church exists to worship God,⁴⁴⁶ to edify and mature his people,⁴⁴⁷ and to bear witness to Christ and his kingdom in all the world.⁴⁴⁸ Governed by Scripture, the church gathers for the teaching of the Word,⁴⁴⁹ prayer,⁴⁵⁰ the sacraments,⁴⁵¹ congregational singing,⁴⁵² fellowship, and mutual edification through the exercise of spiritual gifts.⁴⁵³ As the Father sent Jesus into the world, so Jesus has sent his people into the world in the power of the Spirit.⁴⁵⁴ The church's mission is to make disciples of all nations, teaching them to observe all that Christ has commanded.⁴⁵⁵ We do this by proclaiming the gospel, planting churches, and adorning the proclamation of the gospel through our love and good works. There will always be a gathering of believers on earth because the Lord promises to build, guide, and preserve his church to the end of the age.⁴⁵⁶ When Christ returns, he will gather and perfect his church from every tribe, tongue, and nation as a people for his own possession, and he will dwell with them forever.⁴⁵⁷

⁴⁴⁵ This section concludes by describing the church's mission and purpose. The opening sentence describes the church in its upward (worship), inward (edification), and outward (witness) aspects. The sentence implies both the importance of the kingdom of God and its relationship to the church: while the church is not to be conflated with the kingdom, the church is called by God to bear witness to the kingdom. The paragraph then describes the church's activities when it gathers, stressing that all of the church's life is to be governed by God's Word. This list of activities is not intended to be exhaustive but rather to communicate key biblical (and historical) elements of our gatherings. Finally, this paragraph looks outward to address the mission of the church, linking it to Christ's own mission, stressing our need for the Holy Spirit, and defining that mission in terms of gospel proclamation and making disciples, reflecting the Great Commission of Matthew 28. Church planting is included as a vital expression of this mission, which not only reflects the New Testament emphasis but also helps guard against decoupling our missiology from our ecclesiology. The section concludes with an affirmation of faith in Christ's commitment to his church, along with a statement of our ultimate hope in his return.

⁴⁴⁶ Col 3:16; Eph 5:18-20.

⁴⁴⁷ Eph 4:12-13; Col 1:28.

⁴⁴⁸ Matt 28:19.

⁴⁴⁹ 2 Tim 4:1-2; 1 Tim 4:13; Eph 4:11-12.

⁴⁵⁰ Acts 2:42; 1 Tim 2:1-2.

⁴⁵¹ Rom 6:3-4; 1 Cor 11:17-34.

⁴⁵² Col 3:16; Eph 5:18-20.

⁴⁵³ 1 Cor 12:7; 14:26; 1 Thess 5:11; 1 Pet 4:10.

⁴⁵⁴ John 17:18; 20:21; Luke 24:44-49; Acts 1:5-8.

⁴⁵⁵ Matt 28:18-20.

⁴⁵⁶ Matt 16:18.

⁴⁵⁷ 1 Thess 4:16-17; 1 John 3:2; 1 Cor 15:51-52; 2 Cor 5:1; Titus 2:13-14; Rev 7:13-17; 19:6-9; 21:1-4.

THE LAST THINGS⁴⁵⁸

Death and the Intermediate State⁴⁵⁹

Death entered God's good creation as a result of Adam's sin, and now all people are subject to God's curse of death.⁴⁶⁰ Yet believers have no need to fear,⁴⁶¹ because Christ has conquered death and delivered us from its dominion.⁴⁶² Although our bodies return to dust for a time,⁴⁶³ death for the Christian has become a doorway to paradise,⁴⁶⁴ where our souls enter immediately into God's presence⁴⁶⁵ to behold and enjoy our Savior and to rest from our labors.⁴⁶⁶ In company with all the spirits of the righteous made perfect,⁴⁶⁷ we will await the redemption of our bodies⁴⁶⁸ and our full and final salvation.⁴⁶⁹ The souls of the unredeemed, however, are cast immediately into hades to experience torment⁴⁷⁰ as they await final judgment for their sins.⁴⁷¹

⁴⁵⁸ This final section of the SoF addresses eschatology, focusing mainly on doctrines that have broad agreement among believers in Christ. The first paragraph primarily addresses those things occurring to individuals at death (personal eschatology), while the second and third paragraphs deal with those events affecting the entire universe (general eschatology), with a primary focus on the decisive event of eschatology, the return of Christ.

⁴⁵⁹ This first paragraph deals with personal eschatology. Care is taken to acknowledge man's universal experience of death yet to clearly distinguish between what the redeemed and unredeemed experience in that death. For the redeemed it leads to joyous, pardoned life in the presence of God; for the unredeemed it leads to miserable, condemned life under the just judgment of God. As such, the statement affirms the reality of the intermediate state following death but preceding the resurrection of the body, and it excludes any notion of an unconscious state of "soul sleep." The labels used to describe the intermediate state for believers and unbelievers (namely, paradise and hades, respectively) draw from Jesus' usage of those terms in passages that speak of the immediate location, rather than the final destination, of each type of person (e.g., the thief on the cross, the rich man and Lazarus). Although the term "hades" can be used more generally to denote the realm of the dead (e.g., Acts 2:27, 31; esp. when translating the Hebrew *Sheol*), Jesus' use in Luke 16, along with the negative connotations of the word in Rev 20:13, render it appropriate here for the abode of unredeemed souls in the intermediate state. The concept of purgatory is negated by the finality of each one's position immediately upon death, either to rest or to torment, with no possibility of changing that outcome.

⁴⁶⁰ Gen 3:17-19; Rom 5:12; 6:23.

⁴⁶¹ 1 Cor 15:56-57; 1 Thess 4:13; Heb 2:14-15.

⁴⁶² John 11:25-26; Rom 6:8-9; Gal 3:13-14; Heb 2:14-15; Rev 5:5-6; 21:4.

⁴⁶³ Gen 3:19.

⁴⁶⁴ Luke 23:43.

⁴⁶⁵ Eccles 12:7; 2 Cor 5:6-8; Phil 1:23; Rev 6:9-11.

⁴⁶⁶ Ps 16:11; John 17:24; Phil 1:21-23; Rev 14:13.

⁴⁶⁷ Heb 12:23.

⁴⁶⁸ Rom 8:23.

⁴⁶⁹ Matt 25:31-36; Rev 6:10-11.

⁴⁷⁰ Luke 16:23-24; Rev 20:13.

⁴⁷¹ Matt 25:31-33, 41-43.

Christ's Return and the Resurrection⁴⁷²

At the appointed time known only to God,⁴⁷³ Jesus Christ will return to the earth in power and glory⁴⁷⁴ as Judge⁴⁷⁵ and King⁴⁷⁶ to whom every knee will bow.⁴⁷⁷ Christ's personal,⁴⁷⁸ physical,⁴⁷⁹ and visible⁴⁸⁰ return is the blessed hope of all who trust in him.⁴⁸¹ At the end of the age the just and the unjust will be raised as their souls are reunited to their bodies: the just to a resurrection of life, the unjust to a resurrection of judgment.⁴⁸² When the dead in Christ are raised,⁴⁸³ their perishable bodies will be redeemed and made like Christ's imperishable, glorious, powerful, spiritual body.⁴⁸⁴ Those in Christ who are alive shall likewise be changed,⁴⁸⁵ and thus will all God's glorified people forever bear the image of their Savior.⁴⁸⁶

⁴⁷² This paragraph addresses the crown of eschatology—the return of Christ. The timing of Christ's return and of the resurrection of believers and unbelievers is intentionally avoided here, those being the most disputed points in the various end-times positions. The exception is the insistence that only God knows the time of Christ's return, which would preclude any prediction of that return. The emphasis is on the triumphant and judicial nature of his return, with its attendant consequences for all individuals. The nature of Christ's return as “personal, physical, and visible” prohibits a range of views that, for example, construe Christ's return as merely spiritual (e.g., he “returned” at Pentecost via the Holy Spirit) or as invisible (e.g., Jehovah's Witnesses). Moreover, affirming his bodily return draws attention to Christ's victory over death and to the genuine fulfillment of promises that the Son of Man shall sit on his glorious throne and judge the nations (cf. Matt 25:31ff.). The statement then notes the resurrection of all mankind to be ushered in by Christ's return. A bodily resurrection is affirmed for both the just and the unjust, against any notion of a disembodied existence. The affirmation of the believer's glorious resurrection body seeks to capture both the substance and the function of this doctrine in the New Testament—to inspire eager anticipation for the redemption of our bodies (Rom 8:23). *It should be noted that no position is taken on the meaning and nature of the millennium in Revelation 20.* As has been the case in Sovereign Grace historically, this leaves room for a range of millennial views, including amillennial, historic premillennial, and postmillennial views. So, for example, while the statement does not mention a millennium in which Christ reigns on the earth prior to the final judgment (as in historical premillennialism), the general language used can accommodate such an idea (with, e.g., “end of the age” defined as the time prior to the millennium, and the assumption of a difference in time between the resurrection of believers and non-believers). However, the dispensational premillennial view, which in its classic form asserts a pretribulation rapture and a clear distinction between the church and Israel (including a difference in time between Christ's ingathering of the two groups), would find no support in this statement.

⁴⁷³ Matt 24:36, 44; Mark 13:33; 1 Thess 5:2-3.

⁴⁷⁴ Luke 21:27.

⁴⁷⁵ Ps 96:10-13; Isa 11:1-5; John 5:26-29; 2 Tim 4:1.

⁴⁷⁶ Rev 19:11-16.

⁴⁷⁷ Phil 2:9-11.

⁴⁷⁸ Acts 1:9-11; 1 Thess 4:16.

⁴⁷⁹ Luke 24:39-43; Acts 1:11; Phil 3:20-21.

⁴⁸⁰ Mark 14:61-62; Matt 24:26-27; Rev 1:7.

⁴⁸¹ Titus 2:13.

⁴⁸² John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15; 2 Cor 5:2-4.

⁴⁸³ 1 Cor 15:51-52; 1 Thess 4:15-17.

⁴⁸⁴ Rom 8:23-24; 1 Cor 15:42-49, 53; Phil 3:21; 1 John 3:2.

⁴⁸⁵ 1 Cor 15:49-53; 1 Thess 4:15-17.

⁴⁸⁶ 1 Cor 15:49.

Judgment and the Consummation⁴⁸⁷

On the last day all people will appear before Christ, who is the judge of all.⁴⁸⁸ Those who suppressed God's truth in unrighteousness and did not obey the gospel of Christ⁴⁸⁹ will suffer the righteous wrath of God⁴⁹⁰ and be justly cast into the hell of fire with the devil and his angels.⁴⁹¹ There they will experience eternal, conscious punishment according to their sins.⁴⁹² Those saved by Christ, whose names are written in the book of life, will be welcomed into the joy of their master and richly rewarded for every good work done in his name.⁴⁹³ God's glorified people will inherit the kingdom⁴⁹⁴ from which all sin, sorrow, suffering, and death will be banished.⁴⁹⁵ Christ as king will set all of creation free from its bondage to corruption,⁴⁹⁶ making new the heavens and the earth⁴⁹⁷ and establishing his eternal rule in his consummated kingdom.⁴⁹⁸ Surrounded by unimaginable beauty,⁴⁹⁹ we will enjoy unhindered communion with our triune God,⁵⁰⁰ beholding him, serving him, worshipping him, and reigning with him forever and ever.⁵⁰¹ Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

⁴⁸⁷ This concluding paragraph focuses on the eschaton and the final state of all things. The final judgment is presented as the concluding act of salvation history, bringing to account all mankind. Following Christ's return (immediately according to the amillennialist and postmillennialist; after his millennial reign on earth according to the premillennialist), he will stand as judge over all who ever lived. (The dispensational premillennial idea that distinguishes between various judgments—a judgment of the nations before the millennium, a judgment of believers' works, and a great white throne judgment of non-believers at the end of the millennium—is also excluded). Against the concepts of both annihilationism and universalism (as well as softened views of "hell" in which unbelievers are left to themselves and receive what they actually desire), an eternal, conscious, bodily punishment in hell for unbelievers is defended, a frightening reality but one strongly affirmed by Christ and a necessary entailment of God's holy justice. By contrast, resurrected believers (described in the previous section) will enjoy eternal life in a perfect, physical, redeemed new earth (as opposed to a spiritualized, non-physical existence). The language is careful to affirm both the unmerited nature of salvation ("saved by Christ") and the reality of heavenly rewards ("richly rewarded for every good work"). It is here that the SoF most clearly and appropriately affirms the cosmic dimensions of Christ's redemption: not only will the people of God be changed but the very creation itself will be freed from corruption (Rom 8:21). The language concerning the renewal of creation does not specify whether the present creation will be renewed or re-created, focusing on the outcome rather than the process—an outcome in which all the effects of sin and the fall will be removed from God's creation. This renewal combines with the language of "king/kingdom" to capture the fulfillment of biblical promises and prophecies about the kingdom of God, which broke into the world in the person of Christ (Luke 11:20) but will reach its full and permanent expression only in the new heavens and earth. The paragraph concludes on a doxological note, with the emphasis that God himself is the center of all things (Rom 11:36) and our communion with him (not merely a "heavenly existence") is the culmination of redemptive history and the apex of our hope.

⁴⁸⁸ Matt 25:31-32; Acts 17:30-31; Rom 14:12; 2 Cor 5:10; 2 Tim 4:1; Rev 20:11-15.

⁴⁸⁹ Rom 1:18-21; 2 Thess 1:8.

⁴⁹⁰ John 3:36; Rom 2:5; Eph 5:6; Rev 14:10, 19; 16:19; 19:15; 20:10.

⁴⁹¹ Matt 5:22; 13:49-50; 25:41-46; Mark 9:43-48.

⁴⁹² Luke 12:47-48; Rev 14:9-11; 20:10-13; 21:8.

⁴⁹³ Matt 10:42; 25:21-23, 31-40; 1 Cor 3:12-15; 4:5; Rev 20:12.

⁴⁹⁴ Matt 25:34; Eph 1:13-14; 1 Pet 1:3-5.

⁴⁹⁵ Rev 21:4, 27.

⁴⁹⁶ Rom 8:20-22.

⁴⁹⁷ Isa 65:17; 2 Pet 3:13; Rev 21:1, 5.

⁴⁹⁸ Matt 25:31; 1 Cor 15:24; Rev 22:1-3.

⁴⁹⁹ 1 Cor 2:9; Rev 21:9-13; 22:1-5.

⁵⁰⁰ Ps 16:11; Matt 25:35; Eph 2:6-7; Rev 21:3.

⁵⁰¹ 1 John 3:2; 1 Thess 4:17; 2 Tim 2:12; Rev 3:21; 22:3-5.

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