

# THE211 - INTRODUCTION to THEOLOGY: A Pentecostal Perspective ALSOM

## ORIENTATION:

**Instructor:** Dr. Stephen Todd  
 Ordained Minister, Assemblies of God  
 PhD, Assemblies of God Theological Seminary (Evangel University)  
 MDiv, Beeson Divinity School (Samford University)  
 BA, Southeastern University

**Course Description:** This is designed to be a very brief overview of theology. The course will briefly describe the great creeds of the Christian faith, the nature and categories of systematic theology, the nature and aspects of biblical theology, the Pentecostal contribution to theology, and the Assemblies of God confession of faith: The Sixteen Fundamental Truths.

## CREEDS and CONFESSIONS

The Great Creeds of the Church are very ancient. Their roots extend to the second generation after the Apostles (AD 150).

The word “creed” comes from the Latin word “credo” which means “I believe.”

They grew from what was called “The Rule of Faith”, a statement of belief that the earliest churches used to determine whether a teaching or teacher was true or false, apostolic or a new innovation. (Not all of the earliest churches had copies of Scripture.)

The Creeds are concise explanations of what all Christians believe about essential doctrines. All true Christian churches can affirm the great Creeds.

Most churches and Christians have recited the Apostles’ Creed at some point in their weekly service for almost 2,000 years.

The confessions and doctrinal statements of today’s churches were influenced by the ancient creeds of the church. The creeds developed from the Rule of Faith, which was a statement of essential beliefs the early Christians used to determine who was following in the legacy of the Apostles and who was introducing new or incorrect teachings.

The Creeds were not attempts to explain Christian beliefs in detail, but were concise statements about the essential doctrines. Two of the oldest and most well-known are the Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene Creed.

Most creeds were developed by the local bishops for the use of teaching essential Christian beliefs to the members of the church. They would learn the creeds and recite them in a Q&A format at their baptism.

As theology developed and more heterodox (not conforming with orthodox/accepted doctrine) and heretical (rejection or contrary to orthodox doctrine) arose, the creeds had to become more detailed in order to defend against these wrong teachings.

### ***The Apostles' Creed (AD 150+)***

“I believe in God, the Father Almighty,  
 creator of heaven and earth.  
 I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,  
 who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
 born of the Virgin Mary,  
 suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
 was crucified, died, and was buried;  
 he descended into death.\*  
 On the third day he rose again;  
 he ascended into heaven,  
 is seated at the right hand of the Father,  
 and will come again to judge the living and the dead.  
 I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
 One holy church,\*\*  
 the communion of saints,  
 the forgiveness of sins,  
 the resurrection of the body,  
 and the life everlasting. Amen.”

*In AD 150-175 there would have been thousands of  
 men and women declaring the Apostles' Creed ...*

*whose parents had heard the Apostle John, and  
 whose grandparents had heard Peter and Paul, and  
 whose great-grandparents had heard Jesus.*

This Creed is the most ancient creed (statement of belief) in the Christian church.

\* “Descended into death” – most translations will say descended into hell, but for the early church this phrase meant the place/realm of the dead, not hell as we understand it today (a place of eternal punishment).

\*\* “One holy church” – most translations will say “the holy catholic church”, but this term meant universal church, not the more narrow (specific) Roman Catholic church as we understand it today.

### ***The Nicene Creed (Creed of Nicaea AD 325 / Nicene Creed AD 381)***

**We believe in one God,**  
 the Father almighty,  
 maker of heaven and earth,  
 of all things visible and invisible.  
**And in one Lord Jesus Christ,**  
 the only Son of God,  
 begotten from the Father before all ages,  
 God from God,  
 Light from Light,  
 true God from true God,  
 begotten, not made;  
 of the same essence as the Father.  
 Through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation  
 he came down from heaven;  
 he became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary,  
 and was made human.  
 He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate;  
 he suffered and was buried.  
 The third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures.  
 He ascended to heaven  
 and is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
 He will come again with glory  
 to judge the living and the dead.  
 His kingdom will never end.

**And we believe in the Holy Spirit,**

the Lord, the giver of life.  
 He proceeds from the Father and the Son,  
 and with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified.  
 He spoke through the prophets.

**We believe in one holy and apostolic church.**

**We affirm one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.**

**We look forward to the resurrection of the dead,  
 and to life in the world to come. Amen.**

**The Nicene Creed** is more detailed than the earlier Apostles' Creed because the Nicene Creed was used to combat an early heresy called Arianism, which denied the divinity of Christ. Thus, the section on Jesus was formulated to defend Jesus' divinity and humanity, which entailed using a more precise statement than that contained in most earlier creeds.

"from the Father and the Son" – some translations may put ("and the Son") in parentheses or omit it altogether. This is because it wasn't in the original version of the text and is not accepted by Eastern Orthodox Christians. The reason it was inserted in the Western/Latin tradition is because it helped to defend the deity of all members of the Trinity.

*(NOTE: The Chalcedonian Creed (AD 451), and the Athanasian Creed (AD 500) followed later to address specific heresies that had arisen. They were expansions of the Nicene Creed and were more detailed in their explanation of the incarnation and the divine and human natures of Jesus. The latter is named after Athanasius, the great early church Father who was the greatest defender of the orthodox teaching of Scripture about the Triune God against the heresy of Arianism.)*

*(NOTE: There were other early heresies that attacked the deity of Jesus. One such said that the divine nature did not come upon Jesus until the coming of the Spirit at his baptism. The orthodox teaching of Scripture was that Christ was divine from conception. The most precise way to state that was to call the Virgin Mary the "theotokos" or "God-bearer," a term first used in the mid-200's. The Council of Ephesus in AD 431 decreed that **Mary** is the **Theotokos** because her son **Jesus is both God and man: one divine person with two natures (divine and human) intimately and hypostatically united**. This was most succinctly stated by beginning to call Mary the "Mother of God", not as an exaltation of Mary, but as a statement of the deity of Jesus from the moment of his conception. Jesus Christ was God even in his mother's womb. "Theos" means "god" and "tokos" means "bring forth / bear out". Mary "brought forth" her first-born son, who was fully God and fully man from conception, through his birth, death, resurrection, ascension, and forevermore. "Theotokos" was never intended to mean Mary was the mother of God the Father, or of the pre-incarnate Son. The term was a Christological statement about the Incarnation of the Son. (contra Nestorius and the Nestorian heterodoxy.)*

*All of the Creeds and teachings like "theotokos" are examples of Christians theologizing: Doing Theology.*

*Explaining the meaning, implications, and correlations of the revealed Word of God, written and incarnate. Doing theology is essential to the correct understanding of Scripture and the survival of sound doctrine.*

Creeds are very ancient, they are universally affirmed by all Christian churches (with very minor variations), and **they stand above the "Confessions" of individual "denominations."**

Creeds deal with "cardinal" or universal, non-negotiable Christian doctrines.

Confessions or confessional statements are relatively new documents, written to state the unique positions of a denomination on particular doctrines. **Confessions stand below Creeds in importance.** Confessions *must* agree with the Creeds on cardinal doctrines but may also state particular positions not mentioned in the Creeds on other doctrines.

Where creeds are universally accepted, confessions tend to be specific to denomination or tradition. The creeds deal with cardinal, or essential, doctrines that define Christian belief.

Typically, confessions are written to express the particular beliefs of a specific denomination, and they will be more detailed and/or thorough than the ancient creeds.

Confessions began to be written after the Reformation as different groups wanted to define what they believed, and most Protestant denominations will have some form or confession to which they adhere. Some of these are short and simple (basically restating the creeds), while others are longer and much more detailed.

**But remember, confessions must agree with the creeds on cardinal doctrines.**

*A Confession or Confessional Statement may contradict the Confession of other denominations on particular matters but will agree with them on matters contained in the great Creeds.*

The Assemblies of God Sixteen Fundamental Truths (AGSFTs) is a confession (confessional statement). It agrees with the Creeds on matters contained therein, but also mentions doctrines not explored by the Creeds.

The AGSFTs stands on the work of thousands of Christian scholars of the past 2,000 years – ancient, Catholic, Reformed, Evangelical – and the confessions they created. *Our theology flows directly from, and depends upon, the theological and confessional work of all who went before us. Our AGSFTs were not divinely revealed to the Pentecostal founders of the AG. They are not inspired, they are not inerrant, they are not infallible, and they are not permanent.*

Not all confessions will agree because not all denominations believe exactly the same thing. So long as neither belief contradicts the cardinal doctrines then both are acceptable, even if you think one is more correct than another.

The AGSFTs is a confessional statement, not a creed. It agrees with the creeds on essentials, but sometimes provides further explanation on a topic.

Our statement is not a unique thing but is a statement particular to us that was influenced by the beliefs and creeds of the church and by the confessions of other denominations.

The Southern Baptist Convention's Baptist Faith and Message (SBCBFM) is another example of a Confession.

Although worded slightly differently, it agrees with the AGSFTs on most matters: Scripture, God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Man, Sin, Salvation, The Church, etc.

The two confessions differ on their explanation of Grace (security of the believer) and the Second Coming, and so forth.

They agree on all matters to which the great Creeds speak.

***One example of a difference in the SBCBFM and the AGSFTs is their statements on eschatology or last things. Like most confessions, the SBCBFM adheres closely to the Creeds. ...***

Here is what the creeds had to say about eschatology...the study of last things, or the last days—the return of Christ, final judgment, new creation.

The creeds say – Jesus will return, he will judge all people, we'll be resurrected, and there will be eternal life with Jesus.

***The Apostle's Creed ...***

*I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,*

*who ... will come again to judge the living and the dead.*

*I believe in ... the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.*

***The Nicene Creed ...***

*We believe in ... one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God,*

*He will come again with glory to judge the living and the dead.*

*His kingdom will never end.*

*We look forward to the resurrection of the dead,*

*and to life in the world to come. Amen.*

The Creeds are all very general in their statements on the Second Advent because the Church Fathers all realized that Scripture is capable of very different interpretations in many of the eschatological passages.

*The Christian church has never universally agreed on the details of eschatology.*

The more that a particular denomination's confession becomes narrow and detailed on one of the topics covered in the Creeds, the more that denomination defines itself as **sectarian**.

***One example of a difference in the SBCBFM and the AGSFTs is their statements on eschatology or last things. Like most confessions, the SBCBFM adheres closely to the Creeds. ...***

**X. Last Things**

God, in His own time and in His own way, will bring the world to its appropriate end. According to His promise, Jesus Christ will return personally and visibly in glory to the earth; the dead will be raised; and Christ will judge all men in righteousness. The unrighteous will be consigned to Hell, the place of everlasting punishment. The righteous in their resurrected and glorified bodies will receive their reward and will dwell forever in Heaven with the Lord.

[Isaiah 2:4; 11:9; Matthew 16:27; 18:8-9; 19:28; 24:27,30,36,44; 25:31-46; 26:64; Mark 8:38; 9:43-48; Luke 12:40,48; 16:19-26; 17:22-37; 21:27-28; John 14:1-3; Acts 1:11; 17:31; Romans 14:10; 1 Corinthians 4:5; 15:24-28,35-58; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Philippians 3:20-21; Colossians 1:5; 3:4; 1 Thessalonians 4:14-18; 5:1ff.; 2 Thessalonians 1:7ff.; 2; 1 Timothy 6:14; 2 Timothy 4:1,8; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 9:27-28; James 5:8; 2 Peter 3:7ff.; 1 John 2:28; 3:2; Jude 14; Revelation 1:18; 3:11; 20:1-22:13.](#)

Notice, the Southern Baptists say...Jesus will return to earth to judge us, the dead will be raised (resurrected), then eternal life with God. This adheres very closely to the Creeds.

***Because of the religious-cultural context within which the AG was formed, the AGSFT is more detailed and narrow, diverging from the Creeds in the specificity of its claims. The reason is that the Pentecostal movement including the AG arose in that part of American evangelicalism which was influenced by a new way of interpreting Scripture that was invented in the 1830's.***

**The reason the AGSFT is more detailed and sectarian than the Creeds, the SBCBFM, and most Protestant confessions is ... DISPENSATIONALISM.**

**Dispensationalism** is a scheme of interpreting the Bible that was invented in the 1830's by cessationist British pastor John Nelson Darby.

Darby divided human history into dispensations of time (7 or 8), each beginning a new method of God's dealing with humanity.

Each dispensation ends badly, and God starts over in the next dispensation.

Dispensationalism is, by definition, cessationist.

His scheme created two separate plans of salvation for Israel and the Church.

**Dispensationalism was never taught in the history of the church until the 1830s.**

**It introduced several completely new ideas:**

- The successive Dispensations through time, as opposed to the Covenantal Epochs (of Grace). (The succession of covenants in Scripture marked different stages in redemption history, not new ways of dealing with humanity. The "dispensations" invented by Dispensationalism marked off completely new ways of God's dealings with humanity.)
- Israel and the Church as completely distinct peoples of God with separate plans. This is something not consistent with the NT.
- The complete cessation of all supernatural ministry of the Holy Spirit at the end of the Apostolic Age (something very few people had taught before).
- The "Church Age" is a parenthesis in God's dealing with humanity. It's really all about Israel.
- The Second Coming will be in two stages, a secret "rapture" of the Church, followed 7 years later by a public "revelation" of Christ at his return to earth.
- The time between the "rapture" and the "revelation" of Christ is a 7 year period of first peace and then great tribulation.
- Christians will be persecuted by a personal antichrist with absolute worldwide power.
- The Jews will rebuild their temple and fully install the O.T. sacrificial system.
- The Jewish Temple and sacrificial system will be utilized by the Jewish people throughout a literal 1,000 year millennium and will be acceptable to God.

Within this system of thought Scripture is interpreted in a "literalistic" way, with little regard for types or figures of speech or genre of literature. Thus, all of the O.T. and N.T. prophecies and apocalyptic passages must be interpreted in a literalistic manner rather than according to their literary genre and historical contexts.

Three popular study Bibles were written with this point of view – the Scofield, the Dake, and the Ryrie study Bibles. These should **not** be used or encouraged. Today they are never recommended by our AG universities.

From 1830 through the 1950's, Dispensationalism grew in popularity within American Evangelical churches. It was never as popular overseas and was never believed by even a majority of American Evangelicals. Dispensationalism has always been a small, sectarian minority within the Christian church as a whole.

The following churches have never been Dispensationalist:, Methodist, Anglican, Catholic, Orthodox, Reformed, Lutheran, most Presbyterians, and most Baptists. The largest number of Dispensationalists were independent Baptist Fundamentalists and the Pentecostals, with a minority found among other Baptists groups and a few Presbyterians.

Because Pentecostalism largely arose among Evangelicals who happened to be mostly Dispensationalist, some of the earliest Pentecostals were Dispensationalist. Others were interpreted Scripture in the accepted covenantal manner. Therefore, they were Premillennial, Postmillennial, or Amillennial.

Since the 1960's, Dispensationalism has been dying among its own scholars.

Today, very few seminaries remain openly dispensational. Almost all Evangelical and Pentecostal scholars reject Dispensationalism, with its unique doctrines, and are premillennial or amillennial in their eschatology.

The Dispensationalist scheme of eschatology was, and still is, popular in Pentecostalism, though almost no Pentecostal / charismatic (P/c) scholars believe in it. Most P/c scholars interpret Scripture according to redemptive historical biblical theology. Therefore, they are premillennial or amillennial in their eschatology.

At one point in time the last few statements in the AGSFTs were explicitly dispensationalist, but *that terminology and explicit teaching has been removed.*

However, your textbook and most of the more popular level (written for the average lay person) Pentecostal theology books still promote a modified dispensationalist perspective. But know that the current AGSFT does not require any specific eschatological position, and the AG allows some freedom of belief in this area so long as one does not make an issue out of it.

**The last four points of the AGSFT, all dealing with eschatology, are as follows ...**

### **“13. The Blessed Hope**

The resurrection of those who have fallen asleep in Christ and their translation together with those who are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord is the imminent and blessed hope of the Church (1 Thessalonians 4:16,17; Romans 8:23; Titus 2:13; 1 Corinthians 15:51, 52).

### **14. The Millennial Reign of Christ**

The second coming of Christ includes the rapture of the saints, which is our blessed hope, followed by the visible return of Christ with His saints to reign on the earth for one thousand years (Zechariah 14:5; Matthew 24:27,30; Revelation 1:7; 19:11-14; 20:1-6). This millennial reign will bring the salvation of

national Israel (Ezekiel 37:21, 22; Zephaniah 3:19, 20; Romans 11:26, 27) and the establishment of universal peace (Isaiah 11:6-9; Psalm 72:3-8; Micah 4:3,4).

### **15. The Final Judgment**

There will be a final judgment in which the wicked dead will be raised and judged according to their works. Whosoever is not found written in the Book of Life, together with the devil and his angels, the beast and the false prophet, will be consigned to everlasting punishment in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death (Matthew 25:46; Mark 9:43-48; Revelation 19:20; 20:11-15; 21:8).

### **16. The New Heavens and the New Earth**

"We, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness" (2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21 and 22)."

*The AG, because of the context in which we developed our doctrine, was more detailed when we spoke about eschatology. Where the creeds and some other confessions concluded eschatology in just a few lines, we separated it into 4 points. **And, these 4 points have changed over the years.** If you want to see the original statement, you can look in *Bible Doctrines*, by William Menzies and Stanley Horton. But here you are seeing the current edition of these points.*

Do notice that we also speak about resurrection, the return of Christ to earth for judgement, and eternal life with God.

## **THEOLOGICAL DIVERSITY WITHIN THE ASSEMBLIES of GOD**

*(NOTE: See Appendix 1 at the end of these notes for the great diversity among AGSFTs around the world.)*

There has always been diversity of perspective on some matters in the Assemblies of God, including eschatology. Because so many AG scholars and leaders have known that there is a lot of ambiguity in Scripture on this issue of eschatology, the AG permits some liberty of belief on eschatology. The General Council Bylaws make this clear. ...

### **ARTICLE IX. DOCTRINES AND PRACTICES DISAPPROVED**

#### **B. LIST OF DOCTRINES AND PRACTICES DISAPPROVED**

##### **Section 3. Eschatological Errors**

*(Paragraphs "a" through "d" then list so-called "errors" ... Restitution of All Things, Date-Setting, Post-Tribulational Rapture, Amillennialism) ...*

**e. Credentials jeopardized if made an issue.** We recommend that those ministers who embrace any of the foregoing eschatological errors refrain from preaching or teaching them. Should they persist in emphasizing these doctrines to the point of making them an issue, their standing in the Fellowship will be seriously affected (Luke 21:34–36; 1 Thessalonians 5:9,10; 2 Thessalonians 1:4–10; Revelation 3:10,19,20).

Because there has always been diversity of belief on eschatology, the AG has chosen to allow some liberty of belief in this area. Also, the details of the last days are not cardinal doctrine. Note the word "recommend" rather than "require", the phrases "preaching or teaching", "persist in emphasizing", etc.

A minister would have to be majoring on his differing eschatological perspective to the point of causing problems in his / her local church, and "persist" in doing so after being asked to stop making this such an emphasis in his ministry before his or her standing in the Fellowship would be seriously affected.

Biblically, the only aspect of eschatology that is considered cardinal doctrine is that about which Scripture is very clear: **That Christ will return, we will be resurrected, and the righteous will live with God for eternity in the New-Heavens-and-New-Earth.**

Differences in eschatology only becomes an issue for an AG minister if the minister makes this a big deal in her/his preaching and teaching, meaning you are regularly emphasizing these things in your preaching even after you've been asked to "tone it down". Believing something different than the official position is permitted, and even preaching on it some is accepted, but [making a big issue of it after you have been officially notified to stop being so adamant about an alternative position might jeopardize your credentials.](#)

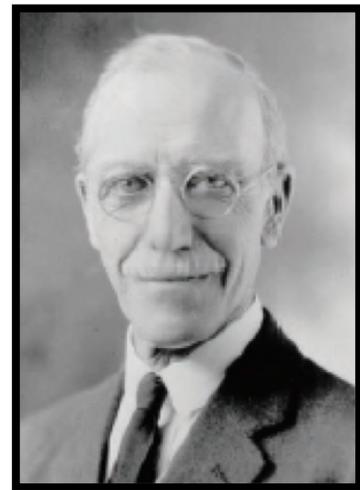
***NOTE: The extent to which this might be a problem varies greatly from one AG district to another.***

One of our founding fathers believed things about eschatology that were not officially approved by the AG, but *they chose unity of purpose as being more important than unity of doctrine!* This founding father was D. W. Kerr who actually wrote most of the original AGSFTs, including the points on eschatology. This has been documented most recently in an article by President Gordon Anderson and Professor Glen Menzies of North Central University of the Assemblies of God.

**"D. W. Kerr and Eschatological Diversity in the Assemblies of God,"** Dr. Glen Menzies and President Gordon Anderson, NCU of the AG, *Paraclete*, Winter, 1993.

Daniel Warren Kerr was one of the most influential founding fathers in the Assemblies of God. "The statement of Faith approved at the 1916 Council was largely the work of D. W. Kerr,"<sup>1</sup> yet he held a most unusual view of the Rapture and Tribulation, one which even in his own day was eccentric and which has never become popular. Moreover, since he believed in two raptures and that at least part of the Church will go through the Tribulation, it appears that according to the Assemblies of God Bylaws he held to what is now a disapproved doctrine.

Surprising? Not really, when one understands how and why the Assemblies of God was formed and the way the founders viewed the role of doctrine in relation to the mission of the church. In a nutshell they believed that unity of purpose is more important than unity of doctrine, and that the Movement would be well served by allowing latitude in some doctrinal issues, as long as those issues did not become divisive.



It is important to know and believe the right things, but you must also be able to discern between what's cardinal (creedal) vs what's confessional (specific to one group).

Through the years, the AGSFTs have been modified at various points.

The Statement of Fundamental Truths is not inspired, nor is it beyond change.

This course is entitled "Introduction to Theology: A Pentecostal Perspective", but it is not precisely an introduction to theology.

*It is more accurately described as the theology of the Assemblies of God Statement of Fundamental Truths.*

The Fundamental Truths have been changed over the years and no one should believe them to be inspired. Nor should you believe them to be sufficient for responding to all theological situations you will encounter in life and ministry. This course is basically designed to help you better understand our State of Fundamental Truths.

Sadly, there is no real requirement that our ministers take a true Intro to Theo course, or courses in Systematic or Biblical Theology, or courses in any other kind of theology, or that they have any sound understanding of theology. **This has caused a lot of problems for our Fellowship.**

Because of the poor education of our ministers and people in Bible and theology, the Assemblies of God and the Pentecostal / charismatic movement have been particularly vulnerable to false doctrines, false practices, bad preaching and teaching, fads of doctrine and fads of practice, etc.

The following is an extremely brief definition of the two major overarching ways of doing theology ...

## **SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY and BIBLICAL THEOLOGY**

**The two major overarching ways of doing theology are Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology.**

Systematic theology and biblical theology are interdependent. They depend upon one another for their development and clarity of expression and understanding.

Systematic theology examines and explains biblical doctrines / themes topically drawing from all parts of Scripture.

Biblical theology traces and explains biblical doctrines / themes chronologically as they develop through the whole Bible from beginning to end.

There are other ways of examining Scripture and doing or organizing theology as well: Old Testament (OT) theology, New Testament (NT) theology, Reformed theology, Wesleyan theology, Pentecostal theology, Catholic theology (theologies actually), Orthodox Church (OC) theology, etc., etc. Each of these and numerous other categories would provide more than enough material for a full semester of accredited graduate level study. To fully explore any single category would take a full time effort of years.

**I. SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY** as the name implies takes the whole of Scripture and organizes biblical teaching into several major categories (and various minor categories). This approach tries to “systematize” what Scripture says on each category or major topic, explain each category, and relate all of the categories to each other. *Systematic theology seeks to approach an accurate final statement of what Scripture teaches on each particular area of doctrine.* Systematic theology will still operate within the interpretive and theological system within which it originates. The “final statements” of a Reformed systematic theologian will end up being Reformed, and those of a Wesleyan systematic theologian will end up being Arminian / Wesleyan. Excellent insights will be provided by both. A brief description of the major categories follows.

**A. Theology** (proper) - the study of the person, triune nature, attributes, knowability, and work of God (theos is Greek for God).

**B. Christology** - the study of the person, nature, attributes, life, and redemptive work of Jesus Christ.

**C. Pneumatology** - the study of the person, nature, attributes, and ministry of the Holy Spirit (pneuma is Greek for spirit; hagios is Greek for holy).

**D. Bibliology** - the study of the origin, development, transmission, characteristics, canon, and inspiration of the Bible (biblios is Greek for book).

E. **Anthropology** - the study of the origin, essential nature, maleness-and-femaleness, purpose, and fall of humankind (Anthropos is Greek for man and can be used generically for mankind / humankind).

F. **Hamartiology** - the study of the origin, nature, effects, power, result, and solution of sin (hamartia is Greek for sin).

G. **Soteriology** - the study of the need, origin, purpose, plan, means, order, process, and result of salvation (soteria is Greek for salvation).

H. **Ecclesiology** - the study of the origin, nature, purpose, marks, government, ministry, worship, and destiny of the church (ecclesia is Greek for congregation or assembly).

I. **Angelology** (and Demonology) - the study of the origin, nature, purpose, fall, work, and destiny of angels (angelos is Greek for messenger (angel)).

J. **Eschatology** - the study of the nature, purpose, signs, approach, consummation, eternal destiny, and end of all things, personal, communal, and cosmic (eschaton is Greek for end or goal).

Systematic theology studies each of these categories and their sub-categories in depth, and correlates each category to the other categories appropriately, according to the scriptures.

II. **BIBLICAL THEOLOGY** seeks to discover the beginnings and trace the development of the major redemptive themes of Scripture from Genesis through Revelation, correlating these themes with each other through the various eras of redemptive history, to their fulfillment in Jesus Christ. *Biblical theology seeks to follow the redemptive historical movement of God's mission, tracing these themes to their fulfillment in the New Testament and the final future of which the NT speaks. Following the process of God's progressive revelation, the biblical theologian explains the process by which God's revelation unfolds and how it is all connected. Biblical theology enables the legitimate use of the OT as understood through the NT for the purpose of Christian preaching and teaching and illuminates the NT as the fulfillment of the OT.*

Biblical theologians try to discover and trace motifs that run through the primary storyline or metanarrative of Scripture as a clear evidence of the importance of that theme in understanding the character and mission of God, and as clear evidence of the inspired unity of the Bible.

There are numerous such unifying themes that can be traced through the metanarrative (primary storyline or overarching story) of Scripture. *Each one of these motifs reveals something about the character of God, the nature of his dealings with humanity, and his redemptive mission and ultimate goal.* Different biblical theologians select different themes to delineate, consider, and explore. *Biblical theologies almost always begin in Genesis and move all the way through Scripture to the end of Revelation.* Some of the more common themes are listed in a summarized fashion below. There are many others.

A. **The Covenants of God** - identifies and follows the successive covenants that God made with humanity from creation to Christ, how God revealed his character and mission through each of these covenants (Creation, Noah, Abraham, Moses / Israel, David, Jesus, the Church, ...)

**B. The Commands of God** - identifies and follows the successive commands that God gave from creation all the way through the NT, how God revealed his character, his mission, our human need through each set of commands.

**C. Promise-Fulfillment** - identifies the covenantal / prophetic promises of God and their (sometimes gradual) fulfillment, primarily related to deliverance, redemption, and restoration. This is traced into and through Christ, the church, and the New Heavens and New Earth.

**D. The Garden-Temple** - traces the motifs of garden, paradise, God's Glory and Presence, communion with God, Creation-New Creation, and related concepts from Genesis, through Tabernacle-Temple, The Land (Canaan-Israel), the Church (Pentecost forward), to the New Heavens and New Earth.

**E. The Atonement** - traces the motif of sacrificial atonement for sin from the Garden, throughout the OT, into and through Jesus, through the Church, into the resurrection, and the New Heavens and New Earth.

**F. The Day of The Lord** - traces the motif of the Day of the Lord as judgment and deliverance from the Garden, through the many "Days of the Lord" in Israel's history and those of her enemies, explicating the reasons for and nature of judgment and deliverance, into and through the crucifixion, and the ultimate Day of the Lord in the eschaton.

*(NOTE: Some biblical theologians seek to tie these (and other) prominent themes together into on grander meta-motif, such as in the recent work entitled "God's Glory in Salvation Through Judgment.")*

**G. Creation - New Creation** - traces the theme of creation / recreation, or creation / new creation, from Genesis through Noah and the flood, Israel in Egypt, Jesus' Incarnation and Resurrection, Israel and the Church, the New Heavens and New Earth.

**H. Exile and Exodus** - traces the theme of cyclical exile, repentance-crying out, deliverance, exodus, pilgrimage, and return-restoration from the Garden, Ur, Canaan, Egypt, Wilderness, Canaan-Israel, Babylon, Palestine, Jesus and the Church, Church Age, Second Coming, New Heavens and New Earth.

**I. The Glory of God** - traces the motif of God's Person-Nature / way-of-being / Life from creation, through the Garden, the Flood, Abraham, Israel, Tabernacle, Temple, the prophets, Jesus' Incarnation-Ministry-Passion-Resurrection-Ascension, Pentecost, the Church, the New Heavens and the New Earth.

Biblical theology will select one of these themes, or some closely related combination of these themes, or seek to create a defensible synthesis of these themes that are clearly present in Scripture, carefully trace them throughout the Bible, demonstrating the unity of God's Word and the character, mission, and ultimate goal of God in dealing with creation and humanity.

*Biblical theology illuminates the progress of redemptive history, the continuity of the OT and NT, and the framework within which individual passages, books, and events of the Bible are to be interpreted and understood.*

***Redemptive historical biblical theology is the overarching key to understanding all of the Bible.***

SO, now we will look at the theology associated with our AGSFTs. ...

**STATEMENT 1 – The Scriptures Inspired**

*The Scriptures, both the Old and New Testaments, are verbally inspired of God and are the revelation of God to man, the infallible, authoritative rule of faith and conduct (2 Timothy 3:15–17; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Peter 1:21)*

- The word **Scripture** means “holy writings”
- We use the word **inspiration** to describe the manner in which God gave His message to the original writers of Scripture through the Holy Spirit.

**By “Scriptures” we mean the holy writings of the Church.** They are holy because God gave them. At the time of Jesus the OT canon (accepted/official list) was established and by the end of the second century most churches agreed on most of the NT. But this will be discussed more below.

**By “inspiration” we mean the manner in which God gave his message to the original writers of Scripture.** We believe that all of Scripture—OT and NT—is divinely inspired. Some people say only part of Scripture is inspired because humans were involved, but the church has always held that all Scripture is fully inspired by God.

*The Christian doctrine of Inspiration is **not** dictation theory ... the Church has never believed that God “dictated” the words to the authors.*

*The vocabularies and styles of the authors, even the authors of the New Testament books, show great variety and difference from book to book.*

*The authors used words they knew based on their life experience and education. Some of the authors of the Bible are clearly far better writers than others. All are inspired.*

One belief about inspiration is that God dictated the exact words he wanted to the authors, and this is called “mechanical dictation.” Within this view God merely used the authors as tools to inscribe (write down) exactly what he wanted, like someone transcribing a speech or memo for their boss—the author has no say in what is said or how it is said.

*But dictation theory is **not** what Christians historically have believed and it is **not** what the AG believes.*

Even in an English translation you can see that there are widely different vocabularies and writing styles for the different authors.

We believe that the Holy Spirit guided the authors as they used their own literary skills and vocabularies to communicate what God had told them to say. And though the styles and quality of writing varies, we believe that all of them were inspired by the Spirit in the writing of these texts.

*The books of the Bible are all written in the various languages and cultural literary styles of the time and place where they were composed. This is very different from Genesis to Revelation.*

***Almost all books of the Bible show very careful thought and great artistry by the authors.***

*The Christian doctrine of Inspiration includes the Spirit’s guidance in the crafting of these books.*

The Bible was written over several hundred years by men from different countries, languages, cultural backgrounds, literary abilities, etc. And the Bible shows evidence of these things.

But each book is also written in a specific genre, and they show great artistry within that genre. And the Christian doctrine of inspiration includes the guiding of the Holy Spirit in the crafting of these books in their varied genres and cultural locations/settings.

*God gave a message to the authors, and then guided them in the choice of genre, literary techniques, structure of the book, words, and so forth as the **process** of writing was carried out over time.*

*The Christian doctrine of Inspiration holds that **the finished product of Scripture**, not the first draft nor the sentence as it was first written on the parchment, is our infallible guide to faith and practice.*

*Therefore, the Christian doctrine of inspiration also includes the Holy Spirit's guidance over those who compiled, ordered, and updated the original writings, such as when the oracles of the prophets were written down, or the language in the existing OT books was updated after the return from Babylonian exile.*

What we believe is that God gave a specific message to the authors then guided them towards the best genre, literary techniques, structure, and so forth, as the process of writing was carried out over time. Our doctrine holds that the finished product of Scripture is the infallible guide to faith and practice, not the first draft of each book.

**So, our doctrine of inspiration includes the Spirit's guidance over those who compiled, ordered, and updated the original writings, such as when the oracles of the prophets were written down, or the language of the existing OT books was updated after the return from Babylonian exile.**

**NOTE:** Not all prophecies were written down immediately after being given, so the Spirit guided the writers of the prophetic books as they selected which prophecies to include in order to communicate the message God wanted them to write.

The same is true of the teachings of Jesus – there may have been earlier documents on which his sayings and/or teachings were written, and the writers of the Gospels may have used those as they were writing the Gospels.

**Again, it's the final product, not the earlier editions, that we believe to be divinely inspired Scripture.**

*How is the Bible both infallible and inerrant? What does this mean for us?*

**infallible** - The word *infallible* means “incapable of error” - stresses the trustworthiness of Scripture

**inerrant** - *inerrant* means “without error.” - stresses the truthfulness of Scripture

One thing that is important to remember here is that we must read and interpret the Bible according to its genre and the historical and scientific understandings of the people during that time.

For instance, the Scriptures speak about the sun and stars rotating around the earth, but we know today that this is not scientifically accurate.

But God “accommodated” himself to the understanding of the people to whom he was speaking.

This is the critically important hermeneutical principle of Accommodation.

God had no interest in teaching ancient Hebrews or Greeks modern scientific concepts.

*God was only interested in teaching them about his holy and faithful character, and about the fallenness and sinfulness of man, and mankind's need for deliverance, forgiveness, and rescue by God.*

The best way to do that was to “accommodate” himself to their ways of understanding the world and communicate theological truths using cultural envelopes.

So, when we speak about the infallibility and inerrancy of Scripture, we must remember that the Bible is focused on theology and salvation, not modern history and science.

And, we must judge it by the common literary norms of the genres as they were practiced at that time. (FOR EXAMPLE, historians use different standards of accuracy and “objectivity” today than was the norm for ancient historians, *who wrote for a specific theological or national purpose rather than a purely objective, historical purpose*).

### SEVEN REASONS WE BELIEVE SCRIPTURE IS INSPIRED

1. OT authors claimed to be speaking for the Lord.
2. The OT authors claims of inspiration are proved by prophecies that were fulfilled
3. The writings of the OT and NT agree on every important area of belief, which is remarkable considering the number of authors, difference in time and location of the authors.
4. Jesus said the OT was Scripture.
5. The Apostles believed the OT was Scripture, and Peter said Paul’s writings were Scripture just like the OT (2 Peter 1:21).
6. History and Archaeology have shown the accuracy and trustworthiness of Scripture.
7. The changes in people’s lives is also believed to be a confirmation of Scripture’s inspiration.

### STATEMENT 2 - The One True God

*The one true God has revealed himself as the eternally self-existent “I am,” the Creator of heaven and earth and the Redeemer of mankind. He has further revealed himself as embodying the principles of relationship and association as Father, Son and Holy Ghost  
(Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah 43:10, 11; Matthew 28:19; Luke 3:22)*

It is vital to Christian doctrine that we believe in only one God, not three gods. Some false beliefs about God are pantheism, deism, and polytheism. Pantheism teaches that God is in every created thing (trees, flowers, animals, people). Deism teaches that there is a god who created, but since then is very distant from creation, leaving us to make it on our own. Some of the founding fathers of the US were deists rather than Christian.

Polytheism is the belief in many gods (of sun, moon, nations, etc.). The understanding of God as the only divine being developed over time during the OT era, in which they grew from believing Yahweh was a tribal god, to Yahweh as the greatest and most powerful God, to Yahweh as the only God. Most religions in the world are polytheistic, so Christians in these cultures must learn that our God is the only divine being, while all others are created beings (whether angelic or human).

*Most of the bigger controversies in church history have centered around whether the Son and Spirit were considered to be fully God, and how there could be three “persons” in one God without there being three gods. God as triune, or Trinity, is a complex topic, but here are some basics.*

1. Numerically, God is one. We believe there is only one divine being.
2. God is unique and radically different than anything he created.
3. God is collectively one. He is a unity of Father, Son, and Spirit.
4. God cannot be separated or divided into different parts.

Throughout the history of the church people have tried to explain God by using different analogies (lover, beloved, the love shared between them), but none of these is adequate to explain God as triune or Trinity. And while this is one of our most difficult doctrines to believe, it is also one of our most crucial, setting us apart from all other religions (including the other monotheistic religions).

While I encourage you to do further readings on our doctrine of God, I will caution *you that this is something you will have to take on faith because it is something that is impossible for us to understand* (just as it is impossible to understand how Jesus was God and human at the same time). The textbook and study guide discuss some of the attributes of God (holiness, omniscience, etc.), so be certain to read those in order to get a better understanding of how God is described in the Bible.

### **STATEMENT 3 - The Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ**

*The Lord Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God. The Scriptures declare:*

*His virgin birth (Matthew 1:23; Luke 1:31, 35)*

*His sinless life (Hebrews 7:26; 1 Peter 2:22)*

*His miracles (Acts 2:22; 10:38)*

*His substitutionary work on the cross (1 Corinthians 15:3; 2 Corinthians 5:21)*

*His bodily resurrection from the dead (Matthew 28:6; Luke 24:39; 1 Corinthians 15:4)*

*His exaltation to the right hand of God (Acts 1:9, 11; 2:33; Philippians 2:9–11; Hebrews 1:3)*

**Jesus as both God and man is one of the most important parts of Christian doctrine, because we believe it took God as man in order to grant us true salvation.**

*Many people in church history have questioned whether or not Jesus was both divine and human, and the church has responded each time by affirming our belief in his divinity and humanity.*

Jesus' divinity is seen by his virgin birth, sinless life, miracles, his work on the cross, his resurrection, and his ascension to God's right hand (the seat of highest honor). His humanity is seen in his human birth and development as a man and his bodily limitations (growing in knowledge, becoming weary, etc.).

But why is this so important? Because only God was powerful enough to save us, and it was right (appropriate) that man be involved in his own salvation. If Jesus wasn't divine, then he did not have the power to deliver humanity from our bondage to sin and death.

This is why we have always confirmed the full divinity of Jesus. But we have also believed that man needed to be involved in his own salvation because he is the one who sinned against God.

*For this reason Jesus became a man, so that he could fulfill our side—the human side—of the covenant with God.* His death served as a substitute for our sin, thus freeing us from slavery to sin and death.

**So, the church has always confessed Jesus as both fully God and fully human.** And though we cannot explain precisely how this can be (much like the Trinity), it is something we affirm because it is how Jesus is described in Scripture.

**Here are some misunderstood phrases about Jesus:**

1. Jesus is the Son of God – by this we mean he is the eternal Son of God. Scripture sometimes refers to angels and humans as sons of God, but the authors of Scripture and the early Christians always

understood that angels and humans are created beings who have been adopted into the Kingdom of God, whereas Jesus is the eternal Son of God.

2. Jesus is the only begotten – the Greek word here means “one of a kind” or “unique.” So a better interpretation would be Jesus is the “one and only” Son of God.
3. Jesus is the firstborn – this refers to Jesus as first in rank and the first to be resurrected into a glorified body.

#### **STATEMENT 4 - The Fall of Man**

*Man was created good and upright; for God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” However, man by voluntary transgression fell and thereby incurred not only physical death but also spiritual death, which is separation from God (Genesis 1:26, 27; 2:17; 3:6; Romans 5:12–19).*

Only humans were created in the image and likeness of God, and only Adam and Eve had the breath of God given to them at their creation. This shows that humanity is unique among all of God’s creation.

The terms translated “image” and “likeness” reveal that humans, in our inner lives, somehow reflect and resemble God. The terms in Hebrew carry a physical sense, so that our bodies are also somehow related to reflecting God’s image.

*And though we know that God is spirit and has no physical body (except the resurrection body of Jesus), something about our bodies is part of us bearing his image. This is a mystery of the faith.*

But our spiritual, moral, and intellectual capacities are also part of bearing God’s image, for only humans possess these. Only humans have the ability to choose between evil and good.

In the creation story, when God finished making humanity he said we were good and Adam and Eve enjoyed a special relationship with God in the garden he created for them.

Now, the Bible doesn’t reveal exactly when this happened or what Adam and Eve were like prior to sin.

The traditional view in most Protestant and Catholic churches is that they were perfect and had immortal life, but this is never explicitly taught in Scripture.

While the AG, and many other Christians, believe that God created humans in a unique event, believing in evolution is not necessarily sinful or heretical. *So long as people confess that God is the creator and that he orchestrated the specific creation or development of humanity, and that humans did not fully bear the image of God and become capable of sin until God breathed into them the “breath of life”,* they can still be within acceptable boundaries of Christian belief. And, the full spectrum of beliefs about creation (old earth, young earth, special creation, evolutionary creation, etc.) are all present and permitted in the AG.

*(NOTE: One’s belief in what the Scripture says about creation is based not on a belief or a denial of the Inspiration of Scripture, but on one’s hermeneutics regarding the genre of all the creation accounts, of the intent of the original authors, and on the impact of Accommodation on authors in both the OT and the NT. Christians who see in Genesis that God is giving the true theological story of creation rather than a chronological historical or scientific account are not denying that this is God’s word and are not denying Inspiration of Scripture. They believe God inspired Moses to write in the genre of Cosmogony using the perspectives of the Ancient Near East regarding the world and humanity.)*

In the story of creation, at some point Adam and Eve chose to disobey God. By this they, and all humans, became enslaved to sin and death, which included spiritual death (or separation from God). It is important to remember that for them, just as for us, sin involves a choice. No matter how someone understands the

genres of Scripture in which the Fall is described, it is a true theological explanation of humanity's very real rebellion against God. Humanity made a choice - many choices - to disobey God. And sin has consequences—spiritual death, physical decay and weakness, physical death, and ultimately, eternal separation from God.

### **STATEMENT 5 - *The Salvation of Man***

*Man's only hope of redemption is through the shed blood of Jesus Christ the Son of God.*

#### **Conditions to Salvation**

*Salvation is received through repentance toward God and faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ. By the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, being justified by grace through faith, man becomes an heir of God, according to the hope of eternal life (Luke 24:47; John 3:3; Romans 10:13–15; Ephesians 2:8; Titus 2:11; 3:5–7).*

Our only hope for salvation comes through Jesus – his incarnation, sinless life, and redemptive work on the cross. Jesus had to become human in order to save us and he had to die on the cross in order to pay the debt for our sins that we could not pay ourselves. Through his work:

1. Our sins are forgiven,
2. We are spiritually regenerated and once again experience spiritual life,
3. We have been reconciled with God and now have a restored relationship with him,
4. We have been redeemed from our bondage to sin and death, and
5. We have been justified – made free from the guilt of our sins.

Salvation comes by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

The doctrines of salvation are one sphere where we differ with many Baptists, Presbyterians, and others within the “Reformed” traditions.

### **The two broad theological branches of Protestant churches and theology are Arminianism and Calvinism (Reformed).**

**(NOTE: Martin Luther was the earliest “major” Reformer and was originally an Augustinian monk (an officially recognized and approved order within the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) like Franciscans, Dominicans, etc.). Saint Augustine (AD 354-430) originally formulated the doctrines later adopted by Calvin and the Reformers (5 point Calvinism). Nevertheless, although most Lutherans remain Augustinian, they differ from Calvinism on numerous other points of theology, they are not considered Calvinist, and are basically their own unique movement and theology. They are Protestants, they are Reformed in one sense, but they are not Calvinist. Basically, the RCC kept from splitting for 1,000 years (AD 500s - 1535) (except for the Great Schism with the East in 1054 from which came all of the Orthodox churches) by examining new theologies, ministry emphases, mission proposals, etc., that arose from monks/priests/bishops, and if they seemed valid and the petitioners agreed to key RCC dogmas, the RCC would create a new order (Augustinian/Franciscan/Benedictine/ and many others. Each order was carefully defined, given certain liberties and restrictions, and permitted to grow. This resulted in a wide variety of theological beliefs, ministry practices, structures, etc. among the orders in the RCC.)**

#### **Calvinism / Reformed Theology**

Calvinism is named after the French Swiss reformer, theologian, and pastor John Calvin.

This faith tradition believes in predestination or election, where God chose before time began those who will be saved and those who will not. Within this system of belief God makes the choice rather than humans. This means there is a **limited atonement**, where only those preselected by God will be saved.

**The acronym for the Five Points of Calvinism (the Reformed faith) is “TULIP.” This stands for ...**

**T - Total Depravity** ... the fallenness of humans is so complete that they will never decide to obey God.

**U - Unconditional Election** ... God arbitrarily chooses who will be saved regardless of their character.

**L - Limited Atonement** ... Christ’s death only atoned for those God predestined to be saved.

**I - Irresistible Grace** ... Those predestined for salvation cannot refuse God’s saving grace.

**P - Perseverance of the Saints** ... The genuinely saved will never be lost, will persevere and die saved.

This means that even if you sense conviction for your sins and God offers you the gift of saving faith YOU can NOT CHOOSE to receive that faith, believe on Christ, and be saved.

*God must FIRST sovereignly REGENERATE / SAVE you, and THEN you are able to believe the gospel.*

*In other words, your salvation occurs TOTALLY by GOD’S GRACE and power, and THEN you immediately - without noticing the timing - believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Most Baptists reject 4 points of Calvinism, but retain Perseverance of the Saints, which is framed somewhat differently by them and called Unconditional Eternal Security. Some Baptists are fully Reformed, believing all 5 points of Calvinism.

Reformed or Calvinist churches would include Presbyterians, Reformed Baptists, any church that holds to the Five Points of Calvinism, and any church with the word “Reformed” in its name.

### ***Arminianism / Arminian Theology***

The AG, as well as many other Protestants, Catholics, and Orthodox, believe that humans have free will and can choose whether or not to accept God’s offer of salvation.

*Among Protestants this theology is broadly called Arminianism, after a theologian named Jacob Arminius.*

We do not believe that humans can save themselves, nor do we believe that we can start the process of our salvation.

Rather, we believe that when the Spirit moves our hearts and minds, convicts us of sin, offers us the gift of saving faith, and gives us the opportunity to believe in Jesus as savior, we can choose whether to accept Jesus as Savior and Lord, or to reject him.

In both systems God is the initiator of salvation, but in Arminian beliefs humans are free to accept or reject God’s gift of salvation. Therefore, we do not believe in Irresistible Grace.

We define Total Depravity differently, believing that with the Spirit’s enabling power and provision of the gift of saving faith we are enabled to choose to say “yes” to and then be born again, or we retain the ability to say “no.”

We do not believe God predestines anyone to be saved or lost, but that “whosoever will may come and drink of the water of life freely.”

Therefore, we do believe in an unlimited atonement, because Christ died for all.

**Another difference is whether salvation can be lost.** Those who believe in election say it cannot because those elected for salvation cannot ultimately turn away from God.

The AG, and other Arminians, believe that salvation can be lost if the individual does not persevere in faith in Jesus and obedience to him. *We can do this only by the enabling grace of God, not our own works.*

While these are differences in doctrine, they are not something that we should make an issue when we speak with people who believe differently than us, for all of us want the Gospel to be preached so that people can be saved.

We Arminians believe all need to hear so that all can be saved, Reformed believers think the gospel should be shared because they don't know who the elect are, so all need to hear it so that the elect can hear when everyone else hears it.

Arminian churches would include most Baptists, Methodists, Wesleyans, Holiness groups like the Nazarenes, virtually all Pentecostals, and some others.

*(NOTE: **Anglicanism** came into being when Henry VIII of England broke from the RCC after the Pope would not annul Henry's marriage so that he could marry again and have a son for an heir. Anglicanism is a combination of the Great Tradition (RCC, Orthodox, Coptic, and other ancient churches) and various Protestant theologies. Some Anglicans are High Church (basically Catholic), some are Low Church Anglicans (basically evangelicals who retain Great Tradition beliefs on the Eucharist, bishops, etc.), some are Reformed, and some are Arminian. Anglicanism is a very pluralistic movement. The name comes from the name of one of the ancient ethnic groups in the British Isles, the Angles, from which we get the words Anglo-Saxon, Anglo, and England (Angle-land).)*

### **Salvation of Humankind (continued)**

#### **The Evidence of Salvation**

The **inward evidence** of salvation is the direct witness of the Spirit (Romans 8:16).

The **outward evidence** to all men is a life of righteousness and true holiness (Ephesians 4:24; Titus 2:12).

Salvation is a matter of faith, and obedience, **not of feeling**. It is important for people to understand this. There will be inner and outer evidences of salvation, as listed in this slide.

Some important points on what we believe:

1. Salvation is available for every person
2. Salvation is received and kept by faith
3. Continued sin will damage the believer's faith
4. A Christian can forfeit salvation by rejecting Christ

Salvation is a matter of faith, and obedience, not of feeling. It is important for people to understand this. There will be inner and outer evidences of salvation, as listed in this slide.

Some important points on what we believe:

1. Salvation is available for every person
2. Salvation is received and kept by faith
3. Continued sin will damage the believer's faith
4. A Christian can forfeit salvation by rejecting Christ

### **STATEMENT 6 - The Ordinances of the Church**

*(The "ordinances" have always been called sacraments by the overwhelming majority of the Christian church throughout history.)*

#### **Baptism in Water**

The ordinance of baptism by **immersion** is commanded by the Scriptures. All who **repent** and **believe** on Christ as Savior and Lord are to be baptized. Thus they declare to the world that they have **died with Christ** and that they also have been **raised with Him** to walk in newness of life (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:16; Acts 10:47-48; Romans 6:4).

All Christian theologies view water baptism in some form as the rite or sacrament of initiation into the Christian church. The New Testament has no examples of an unbaptized Christian. Scripture views conversion as not truly complete until the individual is baptized in water.

The AG says all believers should be baptized by immersion in water as a public declaration of their allegiance to Christ. The AG sees this as symbolic of dying and rising with Christ.

**Christians from other traditions have differing views on baptism.** Some believe that children of Christians should be baptized, others that only believers of a certain age. Some believe in sprinkling or pouring, others in immersion.

For many Protestants baptism is symbolic and does not really create any change in the believer, but some people believe differently.

Many other Protestants **do** believe that baptism - whether infant or believer and whether immersion, sprinkling, or pouring - is more than merely symbolic.

Many Protestants do believe, based on Scripture and the belief and practice of the ancient church, that the Holy Spirit does a supernatural work in the life of the baptized person. Even if the person is not regenerated by the Spirit (born again) in the waters of baptism, Christian baptism is still a supernatural encounter with God that marks the person in a spiritual way and identifies them as a believer in Jesus.

**Those in Catholic and Orthodox traditions** believe that baptism is the act that washes away the guilt of original sin, and that the believer cannot fully participate in the life of the church until he/she has been baptized. For these groups baptism is a requirement before one can participate in the Eucharist. Many Lutherans and Anglicans agree.

All Christian traditions believe that Christians should be baptized in water in order to participate in the Lord's Supper (Eucharist).

### ***Ordinances of the Church*** (continued)

#### **Holy Communion**

*The Lord's Supper, **consisting of** the elements—**bread** and the **fruit of the vine**—is the **symbol** expressing our **sharing the divine nature** of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:4), **a memorial of His suffering and death** (1 Corinthians 11:26), **and a prophecy of His second coming** (1 Corinthians 11:26), and is enjoined on all believers "until He comes!"*

The AG believes Jesus commanded us to remember his crucifixion by participating in the Eucharist, or the Lord's Supper, or Holy Communion. According to the AGSFTs, in Holy Communion we take bread and wine/juice as a symbol of our sharing his divine life, a memorial of his suffering and death, and a prophecy of his second coming. We are to continue doing this until he returns.

But, while Jesus commanded us to do this he did not state how often it should be done. Some churches do it every Sunday, others only a few times a year. Since Scripture isn't explicit on how often this should be done each church is allowed to establish their own schedule for how often to partake of the elements.

*(NOTE: The best understanding of Scripture indicates, and the practice of the earliest churches testify, that the Lord's Supper was celebrated weekly (sometimes in conjunction with a "love feast", the weekly fellowship meal of the local church after the Sunday morning service.)*

**The Roman Catholic Church (RCC)** and the **Orthodox Church (OC)** teach transubstantiation – the belief that once the priest prays the eucharistic prayer (prayer of consecration) over the bread and wine the

material part of the elements remain, but their spiritual aspect (their true substance) is replaced by the spiritual / true substance of the real body and blood of Jesus. The elements then contain the real presence of Jesus body and blood. The RCC and OC also teach that the priest is offering up Christ's body and blood as a propitiatory sacrifice for the sins of the living and the dead all over again.

**Lutheranism** teaches consubstantiation - that the material and spiritual aspects of the elements do not change but that the spiritual aspect or substance of the real body and blood of Jesus enter the elements and coexist with the physical elements. The elements then contain the real corporeal presence of Jesus body and blood alongside of the material elements. Believers are actually receiving the body and blood of Christ. Luther disagreed with transubstantiation and with the concept of the eucharistic as a re-offering of the sacrifice of Christ.

**Anglican theology** affirms the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Anglicans do not believe that Holy Communion is merely symbolic. Evangelical (low church) Anglicans believe that this real presence is a supernatural spiritual presence (you are actually receiving the real body and blood of Christ through the supernatural miraculous ministry of the Holy Spirit). This is very similar to the Calvinist view. High Church Anglicans believe this real presence is a corporeal presence, the substance of the body and blood of Jesus, like the RCC and OC.

**Calvinist theology** also affirms the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Calvinism does not believe that Holy Communion is merely symbolic. However, this real presence is not material or physical, and does not involve a change in the elements themselves or the entrance of the substance of true body and blood of Christ into the elements. The actual body of Jesus remains in heaven, but the Holy Spirit supernaturally lifts us to touch Christ where we do receive his body and blood and the grace and resurrection life they contain. To receive this grace and life we must come to the Lord's Table in faith believing.

It was the reformer **Ulrich Zwingli** who first invented the idea of Communion as merely symbolic, containing no real presence and no supernatural contact with Christ to receive grace and life. Luther, Calvin, and the great majority of the reformers rejected Zwingli's ideas.

**John Wesley** also affirmed the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. John and Charles Wesley, and all of those who followed them in the Wesleyan (Methodist) movement did not consider the Lord's Supper to be merely a symbolic memorial. The Wesleys believed that Christians who came by faith to the Lord's Table there through the power of the Holy Spirit encountered the risen Lord Jesus Christ. The Spirit enabled the believers to receive the true body and blood of Jesus with all of its gracious and sanctifying power. The elements of bread and wine, the ministry of the preacher / priest, all that happened in the Eucharist, were a "means of grace" that actually imparted the strengthening, sanctifying grace of God through the Holy Spirit's miraculous enablement.

**For all definitions of the real presence above**, this presence or "substance" is immaterial but is just as real as the material elements. It is simply of a different order of being, the spiritual or supernatural order. It is the New Creation, the risen body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by the Spirit's power conveys God's grace and the life of the age to come into the believer.

All of the above, from the earliest days of the Christian church, is why both baptism and the Lord's Supper are called "sacraments." A sacrament is a Christian act or enactment, an action of worship and faith, through which God's grace in some form is imparted to the participant. Sacraments are a "means of grace." [Christian theology teaches that God has ordained that these acts of worship, these actions,](#)

*actually be engaged by the believer in order to receive the fullness of grace that God has ordained be imparted through them.* In other words, the exercise of faith alone will not enable you to receive the fulness of this grace. The act alone (without faith) will not impart to you this grace.

Water baptism is the sacrament (ordinance) of **initiation** into the Christian church, the family of God. Holy Communion is the sacrament (ordinance) of **sanctification** and strengthening for the journey of following Jesus. Each is a means of grace, a sacrament.

***Ordinances of the Church*** (continued) ... TO SUMMARIZE ...

The “ordinances” of the Church have since the earliest days of the Church been viewed as including a genuine spiritual encounter with the grace and power of God. They have therefore been called “sacraments” by all branches of the Christian church, including Protestants and most evangelicals.

*Baptism and Holy Communion have only been considered merely symbolic in very recent times (since Zwingli in the 1500's) by a small minority within the Protestant evangelical tradition.*

Although most Protestants do not believe in baptismal regeneration or transubstantiation, **most do believe** that we encounter the Risen Christ in the power of the Spirit through the elements of water, wine, and bread, receiving grace and life.

Just as we might encounter the Lord’s grace and the Spirit’s power through an anointed cloth or the laying on of hands, even so we encounter God’s grace and the Spirit’s power in the same way through the consecrated water, wine, and bread. *This has been the belief of the Christian church from the most ancient days.*

The Baptist “symbolic only” belief was the context within which much of the Pentecostal movement emerged. That is why much of Pentecostalism, including most of the AG, adopted the “symbolic only” position.

*It seems clear in Scripture that God can and does make his supernatural presence or power to dwell in particular places, people, and material objects at times.*

*It also seems clear that he does make his grace and power to flow from those places, people, and material objects to touch humans at their point of need as he wills.*

*It seems very clear that the two places and material things through which God has ordained that his grace, his life, and his power abide and flow into humans who come by faith are the waters of baptism and the elements of communion.*

This is why most Protestants, most evangelicals, and many Pentecostals, though they do not believe in baptismal regeneration or transubstantiation, DO BELIEVE that in these sacraments (ordinances) we have a uniquely special encounter with the risen Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit through the elements of water, wine, and bread, receiving grace and life.

Here is an important distinction – they do not believe the water saves us or the communion elements become Christ’s body and blood, but that *in these events there is a special encounter with God.*

Pentecostals have always believed much the same about anointed clothes or the laying on of hands, or even going to the altar for prayer.

***A more sacramental view of water baptism and the Lord’s Supper that is closer to Wesley and Calvin would be much more in line with the Pentecostal spirituality and theology than is the AGSFTs current “baptistic” position of “symbolic only.”***

### **STATEMENT 7 - The Baptism in the Holy Spirit**

*“All believers are entitled to and should ardently expect and earnestly seek the promise of the Father, the baptism in the Holy Spirit and fire, according to the command of our Lord Jesus Christ. This was the normal experience of all in the early Christian church. With it comes the endowment of power for life and service, the bestowment of the gifts and their uses in the work of the ministry (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4, 8; 1 Corinthians 12:1–31). This experience is distinct from and subsequent to the experience of the new birth (Acts 8:12–17; 10:44–46; 11:14–16; 15:7–9). With the baptism in the Holy Spirit come such experiences as an overflowing fullness of the Spirit (John 7:37–39; Acts 4:8), a deepened reverence for God (Acts 2:43; Hebrews 12:28), an intensified consecration to God and dedication to His work (Acts 2:42), and a more active love for Christ, for His Word, and for the lost (Mark 16:20).”*

The AG believes that all believers are entitled to the Baptism in the Holy Spirit, and that we should all seek and expect it. The NT imagery and terminology means we will be immersed and filled to overflowing with the presence of the Spirit. We believe this gift empowers the believer for a life of holiness and service to the Kingdom of God.

The NT shows baptism in the Spirit as something subsequent to salvation, for those baptized had already been saved. All receive the Spirit at salvation, but not all are baptized by the Spirit and thus filled with his power. So, while all have the Spirit at salvation not all have been baptized in the Spirit.

Prior to Pentecostalism, and even in some literature today, the Holiness movement used the term Spirit Baptism to define a blessing from God that perfected sanctification. This is something different than what Pentecostals teach, and most of the time the term will be encountered and used in the Pentecostal way.

### **STATEMENT 8 - The Initial Physical Evidence of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit**

*The baptism of believers in the Holy Ghost is witnessed by the **initial physical sign of speaking with other tongues** as the Spirit of God gives them utterance (Acts 2:4).*

*The speaking in tongues in this instance is the same in essence as the gift of tongues, but is different in purpose and use (1 Corinthians 12:4–10, 28).*

The term “initial physical evidence” (IPE) refers to the first outward sign of Spirit baptism, and this is how believers knew who had received the baptism. The term “speaking in other tongues” refers to speaking in languages the believer has not learned.

#### **NOTE:**

- A.** The phrase “physical evidence” was not in the original title for Statement 8. For years the title of Statement 8 said that tongues were the “sign” of Spirit-baptism. “Sign” is a biblical word. “Physical evidence” is a modernist, forensic, or scientific phrase which does not occur in Scripture.
- B.** The testimony of some earlier leaders and people was that they had been baptized in the Spirit at some time before they later spoke in tongues (such as J.R. Flower, and Donald Gee).
- C.** There must be other evidence as well: The fruit of the Spirit in greater Christlikeness, greater love for God and others, deepening holiness of heart and life, desire to work and witness, etc.
- D.** Not everyone who “speaks in tongues” has been baptized in the Spirit.

The AG believes tongues is the IPE because Acts records several cases where tongues was associated with the baptism in the Spirit, and because at one of these the church leaders recognized tongues as the initial evidence.

This is one point where Pentecostals differ from Charismatics. While Charismatics believe in speaking in tongues and the other spiritual gifts, they do not believe that all should speak in tongues or that tongues is the IPE of baptism in the Spirit. Again, this is not something over which we should argue or cause strife, but should love and pray for them the way Jesus encouraged us to.

There are still some who believe the spiritual gifts ended with the last apostle and the conclusion of the writing of the NT. These people are called cessationists and their numbers are shrinking, even in schools where this was once the standard position.

### **STATEMENT 9 - Sanctification**

***Sanctification is an act of separation from that which is evil, and of dedication unto God (Romans 12:1–2; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; Hebrews 13:12).***

*The Scriptures teach a life of “holiness without which no man shall see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14 [KJV]).*

***By the power of the Holy Ghost we are able to obey the command: “Be ye holy, for I am holy” (1 Peter 1:15–16).***

***Sanctification is realized in the believer by recognizing his identification with Christ in His death and resurrection, and by the faith reckoning daily upon the fact of that union, and by offering every faculty continually to the dominion of the Holy Spirit (Romans 6:1–11, 13; 8:1–2, 13; Galatians 2:20; Philippians 2:12–13; 1 Peter 1:5).***

The key idea is sanctification is separation – both separation from and separation/devotion to. Both aspects must work together to make us holy and righteous before God.

The AG believes sanctification is a process, not a one time event of total sanctification. In one sense it occurs instantly, in that we are sanctified and devoted to God, but in another it is progressive in that we are progressively made more holy as we continue to follow Christ and live in the power of the Spirit. Sanctification carries both immediate and ongoing imagery in the NT, and it requires a cooperation of the Spirit’s power and our obedience and activity.

### **STATEMENT 10 - The Church and Its Mission**

***The Church is the Body of Christ, the habitation of God through the Spirit, with divine appointments for the fulfillment of her great commission. Each believer, born of the Spirit, is an integral part of the General Assembly and Church of the Firstborn, which are written in heaven (Ephesians 1:22–23; 2:22; Hebrews 12:23).***

*Since God’s purpose concerning man is to seek and to save that which is lost, to be worshipped by man, and to build a body of believers in the image of His Son, the priority reason for being of the Assemblies of God as part of the Church is:*

1. ***To be an agency of God for evangelizing the world* (Matthew 28:19–20; Mark 16:15–16; Acts 1:8).**
2. ***To be a corporate body in which man may worship God* (1 Corinthians 12:13).**
3. ***To be a channel of God’s purpose to build a body of saints being perfected in the image of His Son* (1 Corinthians 12:28; 14:12; Ephesians 4:11–16).**
4. ***To be a people who demonstrate God’s love and compassion for all the world* (Psalms 112:9; Galatians 2:10; 6:10; James 1:27).**

**The Assemblies of God exists expressly to give continuing emphasis to this reason for being in the New Testament apostolic pattern by teaching and encouraging believers to be baptized in the Holy Spirit. This experience:**

1. Enables them to evangelize in the power of the Spirit with accompanying supernatural signs (Mark 16:15–20; Acts 4:29–31; Hebrews 2:3–4).
2. Adds a necessary dimension to a worshipful relationship with God (1 Corinthians 2:10–16; 12–14).
3. Enables them to respond to the full working of the Holy Spirit in expression of fruit and gifts and ministries as in New Testament times for the edifying of the body of Christ and care for the poor and needy of the world (Galatians 5:22–26; Matthew 25:37–40; Galatians 6:10; 1 Corinthians 14:12; Ephesians 4:11, 12; 1 Corinthians 12:28; Colossians 1:29; Galatians 5:22–26).

Here are the reasons for the AG – to be a place where these 4 points are patterned through teaching and encouraging the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

The Church is the people of God, those called out of sin to assemble for a common spiritual purpose – worship of God. While “church” is used often to refer to the buildings where we meet to worship, in the Bible it is used to refer to the people. And there are two ways the word is used—Church with a big C, and church with a small c. The first is the church universal, made up of all Christians from around the world and from every denomination. This one is also sometimes used to refer to the saints in heaven combined with those on earth, so that all Christians past and present are included. The latter, with the small c, refers to local congregations.

The church’s primary mandate is to evangelize the world, making disciples of Jesus. But we are also called to be a place where people can worship God, be discipled and built up in their faith, and to be a people who demonstrate God’s love and compassion for the world.

**STATEMENT 11 - The Ministry**

*A divinely called and scripturally ordained ministry has been provided by our Lord for the **fourfold purpose** of leading the church in:*

1. **Evangelization** of the world (Mark 16:15–20)
2. **Worship of God** (John 4:23–24)
3. **Building a body of saints being perfected** in the image of His Son (Ephesians 4:11–16)
4. **Meeting human need with ministries of love and compassion** (Psalms 112:9; Galatians 2:10; 6:10; James 1:27).

All believers are called to serve the church and the world, but not all are called to leadership roles in the church. Those who are called and participate in this calling we call ministers. They are responsible for leading the church—teaching them how and modelling it for them—in evangelization, worship of God, building up the saints, and doing ministries of love and compassion.

While the call is given by God, it is important to receive recognition of this calling from the church and other ministers. Barnabas and Paul received this recognition before going out on their first missionary journey. The process you are going through now, seeking ministerial credentials (and hopefully ordination one day), is the AG recognizing that God has called you to ministry and that you are qualified to minister in the church (or whatever field you’re going into).

**As leaders in the church, who are responsible for the spiritual and theological well-being of your people, it is important that you pursue good training for yourselves.** Not all are able to go to college, and not all would do well there, but all ministers are called to have a good grasp of Scripture and theology in order that you can properly watch over your people like a good shepherd. This does not require reading Greek or quoting ancient theologians, but it does require discipline on your part to read good books and to engage in conversation with those who are better trained in Scripture and theology, so that you are continually growing yourself. If you have questions, call or email pastors you trust and/or professors at our colleges. This reading will include not only formal theology, but also current trends in society so that you know what is influencing your people.

The textbook covers other aspects of the ministry that it is important that you know.

### **STATEMENT 12 - Divine Healing**

*Divine healing is an integral part of the gospel. Deliverance from sickness is **provided for in the atonement**, and is the privilege of all believers (Isaiah 53:4–5; Matthew 8:16–17; James 5:14–16).*

The AG teaches that divine healing is available to believers, and that this was provided for in the atonement. We believe healing is part of the gospel for 4 reasons:

1. Jesus commanded healing when he commissioned his followers
2. Healing verifies that the gospel message is true
3. Salvation includes healing
4. Jesus and the apostles healed the sick, thus setting an example for us

*That healing is available to all does not mean that all will be healed.*

*Neither the Assemblies of God, nor any other Pentecostal denomination, has ever taught that it is always God's will to heal us immediately every time we are sick, or deliver us immediately from every trial or difficulty, or to give us abundant material prosperity.*

The Scriptures, the Ancient Church, no part of the Church in history has ever taught such things.

These particular doctrines are from the hyper-faith / health-and-wealth / positive confession movement. They originate in the metaphysical cults of New England that produced Christian Science and other mind-science heresies. These teachings began invading the P/c movement in the late 1940's and afterwards. God distributes all gifts, including healings / faith / workings of miracles **according to His sovereign will**. *That healing is available to all does not mean that all will be healed.*

Nowhere is Scripture does it say that all will be healed. In fact, God told Paul that he would not heal him. Jesus did not heal everyone he passed.

We believe that healing is available, *but not that God will heal every time we ask for it.*

*(NOTE: See Appendix 1 at the end of these notes for the great diversity in statements on eschatology among the AGSFTs of AG Fellowships around the world.)*

### **STATEMENT 13 - The Blessed Hope**

**The resurrection** of those who have fallen asleep in Christ and their translation together with those who are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord is the imminent and blessed hope of the church (Romans 8:23; 1 Corinthians 15:51–52; 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17; Titus 2:13).

**Words used:**

- a. “Parousia” - coming; the arrival of a dignitary such as a king, often to visit or claim a land;
  - b. “harpazo” - seize, take away; to snatch; always used as a verb, never a noun;
  - c. “apantesin” - meet; to go out and meet and immediately escort back into the city;
- “When a dignitary paid an official visit (*parousia*) to a city in Hellenistic times, the action of the leading citizens in going out to meet him and escort him back on the final stage of his journey was called the *apantesin*.” F. F. Bruce

**In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18** Paul is describing the coming (Parousia) of the Lord, at which time believers living and dead would be suddenly taken up to meet their coming Lord and immediately escort him into the city (the earth).

The NT speaks about believers being “caught up” (harpazoed, raptured; this is always a verb, never a noun, such as an event like “the seizing” or “the catching away”) to meet Jesus in the air when he returns to earth, and this is the blessed hope of the church. Some people will speak of a secret rapture of the church, but the passage in 1 Thessalonians indicates that this will be a loud and noticeable event, for Jesus will return with a loud command and the trumpet call of God. *Again, the imagery here is like an ancient king coming to visit a city, with trumpets and a loud voice proclaiming his arrival.*

The textbook still contains some elements of the dispensationalist system in which there is a secret rapture of the church followed by the 7 year tribulation, rebuilt Jewish temple, etc., and only after this the return of Jesus to the earth. *However, that scenario is difficult to find in Scripture passages, and that scenario and all of those detailed events are not stated in the AGSFTs themselves.*

*Regardless of which position you hold concerning eschatology, it is important to remember and to teach the imminence of Jesus’ return—that he could come back at any moment. On this point Scripture is very clear. And according to the explicit teaching of Jesus we cannot know if this event is near in time, far off in time, or when this will happen.*

#### **STATEMENT 14 - The Millennial Reign of Christ**

*The second coming of Christ includes the rapture of the saints, which is our blessed hope, followed by the visible return of Christ with His saints to reign on the earth for one thousand years (Zechariah 14:5; Matthew 24:27, 30; Revelation 1:7; 19:11–14; 20:1–6).*

*This millennial reign will bring the salvation of national Israel (Ezekiel 37:21–22; Zephaniah 3:19–20; Romans 11:26–27) and the establishment of universal peace (Psalm 72:3–8; Isaiah 11:6–9; Micah 4:3–4).*

The millennial reign is where you will encounter the terms premillennial, postmillennial, and amillennial.

**Classical Premillennialists** believe Christ’s Second Coming will be one unified event (rapture-and-immediate-coming-to-Earth), will be before (pre-) Christ establishes a long (millennial) reign with the saints upon the earth as it is, that will culminate in the final judgment, reward, and New-Heavens-and-New-Earth. Some do believe there will be some kind of end-time persecution, possibly a world-wide antichrist, before the Second Coming. Others believe Christ could return now, at any moment. *This view dates back to the earliest days of the church.*

**Amillennialists** believe that Christ’s millennial reign was inaugurated at his ascension and outpouring of the Spirit on the Church at Pentecost (A-millennial, meaning no earthly reign of Christ over an untransformed Earth at his Second Coming.). They see the “millennium” mentioned in Revelation as symbolic of the church age because of the genre of Revelation (apocalyptic - highly symbolic literature)

and the symbolic language used throughout the book. They believe Christ's Second Coming will be one unified event (rapture-and-immediate-coming-to-Earth), will immediately include the final judgment, reward, and New-Heavens-and-New-Earth. Some do believe there will be some kind of end-time persecution, possibly a world-wide antichrist, before the Second Coming. Others believe Christ could return now, at any moment. [\*This view dates back to the earliest days of the church.\*](#)

**Postmillennialists** do not believe in a physical 1000 year reign of Christ on earth, but that he will return when the whole world is largely Christian and the millennium has been enacted already established upon the Earth by the Holy Spirit through the Church (post-millennial; after the "millennium"). Only postmillennialism believes that almost all of humanity will be converted to Christ before Christ's return. They believe Christ's Second Coming will be one unified event (rapture-and-immediate-coming-to-Earth), will immediately include the final judgment, reward, and New-Heavens-and-New-Earth. [\*This view cannot be found in the ancient church.\*](#)

**Dispensationalism** was invented in the 1830's as a subcategory of premillennialism. Dispensationalists are premillennialists but have created a unique scenario including dividing the Second Coming into two events, the Rapture (coming in the air) and the Revelation (coming to the Earth) separated by 7 years (which contain a world-wide antichrist, peace, a rebuilt Jewish temple with animal sacrifices, then great persecution, then Christ's coming to the Earth. Christ then reigns for 1,000 years over an untransformed Earth, with the saints, over natural human survivors of the tribulation, followed by final judgment, reward, and New-Heavens-and-New-Earth. [\*This view cannot be found in the ancient church, or anywhere in church history, until the 1830's and afterward.\*](#)

Once again, there is room for disagreement on this subject. The official AG position is premillennial, but not officially fully dispensational. The official position is called "modified dispensational premillennial." This is still the majority position among most pastors and laity. However, the large majority of Pentecostal and AG scholars are now Classical Premillennial or Amillennial, as are our best educated ministers. [\*The primary concern of AG leadership regarding eschatology is that AG ministers and people never become lazy or carefree regarding the Second Coming of Christ ... it should always be viewed as potentially occurring at any moment in time.\*](#)

#### **STATEMENT 15 - *The Final Judgment***

***There will be a final judgment in which the wicked dead will be raised and judged according to their works. Whoever is not found written in the Book of Life, together with the devil and his angels, the beast and the false prophet, will be consigned to the everlasting punishment in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death*** (Matthew 25:46; Mark 9:43-48; Revelation 19:20; 20:11-15; 21:8).

All people will be resurrected for judgment, both the righteous and the wicked. The wicked will be consigned to Hell, the righteous to the new creation.

In the premillennial system the righteous were resurrected to reign with Christ during the millennial reign, and this is a judgement of the wicked. In the post- and amillennial systems everyone was resurrected at Christ's return for the purpose of final judgment and eternal reward or punishment.

However, there are different ways of defining the terms used for heaven, hell, eternal reward, and eternal punishment. This relates to what is called [\*Personal Eschatology - the personal final state of human beings.\*](#)

## Personal eschatology -

1. **The Intermediate State** - Some Christians believe that at physical death unbelievers go directly to hell and believers in Christ go directly to heaven. That is the position of the AG. Other Christians believe in “soul sleep” or the idea that there is no consciousness after death until the resurrection, at which we are sent to our eternal abode, either hell or heaven (new-heavens-new-earth).
2. **Eternal Punishment** -
  - a. The majority position of the church has always been that the eternal punishment of hell that the Bible speaks of means **Eternal Conscious Torment (ECT)**. That is the position of the AG.
  - b. There are some Christians who do not believe in ECT. They believe in ...
    - i. **Conditional Immortality** -
      1. The idea that humans are born with an immortal soul is a Greek philosophical idea, and is not actually taught in the OT or the NT. We bear the image of God in a unique way, but only God has unconditional immortal life.
      2. That humans only receive immortality - eternal life - when they believe upon Christ and are regenerated by the Holy Spirit. “He who has the Son has life, he who has not the Son has not life.”
    - ii. **Annihilation** ... Eternal Punishment but not Eternal Conscious Torment.
      1. That after a length and severity of punishment sufficient to their deeds in life (“Some will be beaten with few stripes, some with many” - Jesus) God will eventually annihilate the wicked.
      2. That all passages dealing with hell / ECT, when exegeted and interpreted carefully and properly, teach that the punishment for the wicked is eternal because it is “capital”: Eternal death. Their punishment lasts eternally because they are forever annihilated, never to dwell in God’s presence.
  - c. Therefore, this position is called “conditional immortality” or “annihilationism.”
  - d. The proponents of this position claim that it accords better with a close and careful reading of Scripture regarding both the eternal state of the unregenerate and with the character of God.

The traditional majority position of the Christian church remains the AG position.

The perspective of Conditional Immortality / Annihilationism is growing among evangelicals and Pentecostals.

### **STATEMENT 16 - *The New Heavens and the New Earth***

*“We, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness” (2 Peter 3:13 [KJV]; Revelation 21–22).*

While many people picture eternal life as spiritual existence or us in heaven with God, the Bible says that we will receive glorified bodies and that we will dwell with God in a new heaven and earth, where the two exist together. Right now we are unable to perceive the spiritual realm clearly, then there will be no barrier between the physical and spiritual.

1 Corinthians 15, John 5, and other passages teach us that at Christ’s coming our bodies will be transformed to be like Christ’s glorious body. When he was resurrected, the Spirit transformed Christ’s body from a normal (but sinless) physical body INTO a supra-physical body of glory.

Christ was raised as the beginning of the New Creation, material but glorified, physical but beyond physical as well. Christ's resurrection body is physical, but not simply a body energized by biological or chemical natural processes or subject to all natural law (gravity, the impermeability of solids by solids, etc.).

Christ could be seen, heard, and touched via normal human senses. He could eat, talk, walk, touch. But, he could enter-and-appear in a closed and locked room into which there was no physical access. Christ's body was now energized by glory, by the resurrection life of the age to come, by the Life-of-God.

This New Creation body of Jesus, this material body, was now perfected, able to dwell in two realms without a problem: The realm of the natural / material, and the realm of the supernatural and glory. **This is the only model we have for understanding what God will do our mortal bodies and to the material realm when Christ returns.**

**"This same Jesus will come again in the same way you have seen him go" the disciples were told by angels. Just as Jesus Christ ascended from the Mount of Olives into heaven - the world of glory - on Ascension Day, he will return in that same glorified resurrection body from the world of glory into this material realm.**

**Christ's New Creation body will be joined by our New Creation bodies in the transformed New Heavens and New Earth. The Holy City, New Jerusalem, shall descend, and the whole Earth shall be transformed, joined with heaven into the final New Creation, the glorified Earth. The nature of this eternal Garden City is described metaphorically in several places in Scripture. This is where God's children will spend eternity with him. Not some purely spiritual ethereal realm. Rather, this is the New-Heavens-and-New-Earth where God will rule and reign with his people forever.**

## APPENDIX 1

### Varieties of Wording in Assemblies of God Fellowships Confessional Statements in Other Nations Regarding Eschatology

**While the official position of the General Council of the Assemblies of God in the United States is a modified form of Dispensationalism**, the General Council bylaws has long recognized that there have always been scholars and ministers in the U.S. Fellowship who have held other eschatological perspectives, including the historic Christian perspectives of Classical Premillennialism, Amillennialism, and Postmillennialism.

This is permitted as long as such a person does NOT cause problems or divisions by emphasizing a perspective different from the traditional majority position found in the Statement of Fundamental Truths so strongly that it becomes “an issue,” AND then continues such behavior after being warned to desist.

The primary concern of the Assemblies of God in the United States regarding eschatology is that the “imminence” of Christ’s coming be affirmed, but even there another position such as “closure” may be held if it is NOT made an issue.

Below are a few examples of the confessional statements (Statements of Fundamental Truths) from Assemblies of God General Councils in other nations regarding eschatology. They reflect a variety of wording and significant liberty of belief in the Assemblies of God fellowships around the world.

**The World Assemblies of God Fellowship, made up of Assemblies of God General Councils around the world, describe their official eschatological position in their Fundamental Truths in a Classical Premillennial, non-dispensationalist manner:**

#### 11. THE END OF TIME

We believe in the premillennial, imminent, and personal return of our Lord Jesus Christ to gather His people unto Himself. Having this blessed hope and earnest expectation, we purify ourselves, even as He is pure, so that we may be ready to meet Him when He comes (John 14:1-3; Titus 2:13; 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17; 1 John 3:2-3; Revelation 20:1-6).

We believe in the bodily resurrection of all humanity, the everlasting conscious bliss of all who truly believe in our Lord Jesus Christ, and that everlasting conscious punishment is the portion of all whose names are not written in the Book of Life (John 5:28-29; 1 Corinthians 15:22-24; Revelation 20:10-15).

**Likewise, the Australian Assemblies of God describe their official eschatological position in their Fundamental Truths in a Classical Premillennial, non-dispensationalist manner:**

#### 4.16 THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST

We believe in the premillennial, imminent and personal return of our Lord Jesus Christ to gather his people to himself. Having this glorious hope and earnest expectation, we purify ourselves, even as he is pure, so that we may be ready to meet him when he comes. (John 14:1-3; 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17; 2 Thessalonians 2:1; Titus 2:13; James 5:7-8; 1 John 2:28; 3:2-3).

#### 4.17 THE MILLENNIUM

We believe in the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to set up his millennial reign on this earth (Psalm 11; 96:10-13; Daniel 7.22; Zechariah 14:5; Revelation 5:9-10; 20:1-10).

The **Pentecostal World Fellowship**, of which the **Assemblies of God General Councils** around the world are members, is made up of all major Pentecostal denominations worldwide. The PWF describes their official eschatological position in their Fundamental Truths without explicitly referencing the timing or specifics of the Second Coming or Millennium:

7. We believe in the resurrection of both the saved and the lost; they that are saved to eternal life and they that are lost unto the resurrection of damnation.

Similarly, the **Assemblies of God in Great Britain** describe their official eschatological position in their Fundamental Truths without explicitly referencing the timing or specifics of the Second Coming or Millennium:

#### RESURRECTION OF ALL WHO TRULY BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST

We believe in the bodily resurrection of all men, the everlasting conscious bliss of all who truly believe in our Lord Jesus Christ and the everlasting conscious punishment of all whose names are not written in the Book of Life.

Similarly, the **Austrian Assemblies of God** describe their official eschatological position in their Fundamental Truths without explicitly referencing the timing or specifics of the Second Coming or Millennium (thus permitting all orthodox perspectives):

#### 12. THE COMPLETION

- a) We believe that Jesus Christ, our Lord, will come again in power and glory - for those who believe in him for salvation, for the ungodly world for judgment (1 Thess 4: 13-18; 1 Cor 15: 50-55; 2 Thess 1,4-10).
- b) We expect the resurrection of all people - to eternal life in glory or to eternal judgment (Dan 12: 2; Jn 5:29; Acts 24:15).
- c) We expect a new creation of God for eternal life for his people after the passing of the present world (Isa 65:17; 2 Pet 3:13; Rev 21: 1-7).

The **Assemblies of God in Germany** allow all orthodox eschatological perspectives in their official Fundamental Truths without explicitly referencing the timing or specifics of the Second Coming or Millennium:

#### 3. Jesus Christ

We believe that Jesus our Lord will return in power and glory, the saved to eternal glory and the lost to eternal judgment. In him God invites all people as lost sinners to receive his salvation through repentance and faith.

The **Assemblies of God in The Netherlands** allow all orthodox eschatological perspectives in their official Fundamental Truths without explicitly referencing the timing or specifics of the Second Coming or Millennium:

#### Article 12 - Outlook For the Future

We believe in the return of Jesus to reign in glory as King. We expect a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness and peace will dwell. We believe in the bodily resurrection of the dead, of both the righteous and the unrighteous. We believe that as Judge, Jesus will render a righteous judgment on the living and the dead. That judgment

implies eternal life and glory for those who continued to expect Jesus as Savior and Lord for their salvation, and eternal loss for those who have not.

**The Assemblies of God of South Africa allow all orthodox eschatological perspectives in their official Fundamental Truths without explicitly referencing the timing or specifics of the Second Coming or Millennium:**

#### THE SECOND ADVENT OF CHRIST

We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ will manifest Himself in glory, majesty and power, and in physical Presence. This is the second coming of Christ and the blessed hope of the Church. (Matt.24:30; 2Thess.1:7-10; Lk.21:27; 1Cor.15:51-53; Rev.22:7; Rev.1:7; 1Thess.4:13-18)

**The Assemblies of God of All India specifies no particular eschatological perspectives in their official Fundamental Truths thus permitting all orthodox eschatological perspectives:**

The glorious return of our Lord Jesus Christ for His Church is coming soon. He will judge and reward, the living and the dead and will establish His kingdom forever. Until Jesus comes again the Church is called to be in the world, yet not of the world; submit to all authority that God has placed; be prayerful and watchful and be the salt and light to the world.

Many more examples of Assemblies of God and Pentecostal statements of faith from around the world could be cited demonstrating that belief in Classical Premillennialism, Amillennialism, and Postmillennialism is permitted by most of those Fellowships.

**(IT IS ALSO OF NOTE that there is usually no mention at all of the modern nation-state of Israel in the Statement of Fundamental Truths for Assemblies of God General Councils around the world.)**