
Article II. God

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

A. God the Father

God as Father reigns with providential care over His universe, His creatures, and the flow of the stream of human history according to the purposes of His grace. He is all powerful, all knowing, all loving, and all wise. God is Father in truth to those who become children of God through faith in Jesus Christ. He is fatherly in His attitude toward all men.

Genesis 1:1; 2:7; Exodus 3:14; 6:2-3; 15:11ff.; 20:1ff.; Leviticus 22:2; Deuteronomy 6:4; 32:6; 1 Chronicles 29:10; Psalm 19:1-3; Isaiah 43:3,15; 64:8; Jeremiah 10:10; 17:13; Matthew 6:9ff.; 7:11; 23:9; 28:19; Mark 1:9-11; John 4:24; 5:26; 14:6-13; 17:1-8; Acts 1:7; Romans 8:14-15; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Galatians 4:6; Ephesians 4:6; Colossians 1:15; 1 Timothy 1:17; Hebrews 11:6; 12:9; 1 Peter 1:17; 1 John 5:7.

(Sermon Title)

Acts 17:22-31

If you brought your Bible, turn to Acts 17:22-31. Stand in honor of God's word as I read Acts 17:22-31.

May God add His blessings to the reading of his word.

The task Paul faced as he stood before the Areopagus, I now face. The people of Athens gave Paul the opportunity to proclaim his God. Dr. Kinchen has given me the opportunity to preach about God and God the Father as understood by Southern Baptists. Paul's purpose was evangelistic because he sought to convert his audience to his way of thinking, he wanted them to turn from their worship of idols and non gods to the real God. Paul wanted the people of Athens to experience his God and worship the God he described.

As I look at you this morning, my purpose is not primarily evangelistic, because you know the God of whom I speak. You have experienced his invitation to salvation through his son, Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit has worked and is continuing to work in your life. You do not need to be convinced of your need for God.

So what is my purpose? My purpose is to help you think about God so you will be prepared to proclaim him to people.

I want you to do something for me. I want you trade places with the person who does not know God. Think about yourself as if you were one of those people Paul spoke to in Athens. From what Paul told us about those people, they were religious people: altars to all kinds of gods, even to an unknown god. They were concerned and committed to worship. From Paul's perspective, they just did not know the real God, the only God. Paul seized the opportunity to inform the people by appealing to their ignorance: their lack of knowledge, understanding. People do not want to be ignorant, we use the term in negative way to criticize someone for their lack of knowledge, but if people do not have information, and we do have information, it is our responsibility to share the information we have with them so as to remove their ignorance.

I have never watched a complete episode of Saturday Night Live. Are you familiar with the TV show? I may be indicating my age by referencing it. For most of my Saturday nights, I always had something better to do than watch SNL. I have seen a few segments, on a few rare Saturday nights when there was nothing else to do. One of those rare moments remains in my memory. The SNL staff did a parody of the Dow Chemical Company's ads on the major networks. The Dow ad went something like this: A company representative bragged on the value chemicals add to life: cleaning products for the home, medicines, plastics, etc. the slogan went: Chemicals: good for life. The SNL parody went something like this. The Dow representative sat across from the news anchor asserting the value of chemicals for life. The news anchor handed the representative a beaker with a clear liquid labeled H_2O and invited the representative to take a drink. He did. The anchor then handed him a beaker with a clear liquid labeled H_2SO_4 and asked him to take a drink. He did. Upon returning the beaker to the anchor the representative asked: what is H_2SO_4 ? The anchor replied: Sulfuric Acid. The representative grabbed his throat and fell over. The scene closed with the Anchor repeating the slogan: Chemicals: good for life.

Paul did not want the people of Athens to continue worshipping in ignorance so he decided to inform them about his God.

What would you say to a person who does not know God, about God or the real God. They may or may not be religious. There are many people today who are practical atheists, they live as if there is no God. By the way the scripture has a name for the

person who says there is no God: Fool. Pretend you are that person and let me have the opportunity to tell you about God. To make the task a little more difficult, pretend you are the person who says there is no God.

May I ask you a question? Do you consider yourself to be an honest person? Let's say you are an honest person and honestly speaking how much of the knowledge in the world would you say you possess? Let's be generous and say you possess 50% of all the knowledge there is. Would that be fair? Now, is it possible for God to exist in the 50% of knowledge you do not possess. In the area of knowledge outside your experience is it possible for God to exist? If you are honest, the only answer is yes. May I share with you my understanding God as I have discovered him in that 50% area of knowledge you have not yet experienced?

Hit the pause button in your mind. Now I am going to state the article about God from the Baptist Faith and Message: Let's resume:

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

Each of these statements about God are revealed in Scripture and affirmed in personal experience. Do not try to grasp all of this at once, let's take the information I have shared with you a little at a time.

1. When Paul spoke to the people of Athens, he said The God, implying only one, not one of many, is the Lord of Heaven and Earth:

2. God can be understood in terms of who he is and what he does:

he is: intelligent, spiritual, personal, holy, all powerful, all knowing, infinite. Before we go any further, we have to admit a problem: we are finite, God is infinite, we are limited, God is not; God is God, we are not.

What does God do? According to Paul again: he creates, rules, redeems, judges, gives life, loves, reveals himself

3. God desires a response from man: repentance, love, obedience, worship, reverence because of God's self disclosure

The general description about God is mind boggling, so let's focus on one aspect of God: how he reveals himself as Father:

God as Father reigns with providential care over His universe, His creatures, and the flow of the stream of human history according to the purposes of His grace. He is all powerful, all knowing, all loving, and all wise. God is Father in truth to those who become children of God through faith in Jesus Christ. He is fatherly in His attitude toward all men.

The concept of God as Father is troubling to some because they have not had a good experience with their earthly father. God is not like the father who said to his little girl, standing on the front porch, "jump, honey, Daddy will catch you." Then as the little girl jumped, the dad stepped aside, letting her fall to the ground. He then said to her: "that will teach you not to trust anybody."

The picture of God as father should bring to mind only the best of thoughts, the ideal father who never does anything to hurt his children, who always helps them and wants only the best for them. Father is a positive expression used by God to help us understand who he is and what he does.

The Latin language can help us understand the concept of God as father because there are two words in Latin often translated to same way: father, but the words have significantly different meanings and usages:

The first word is genitor: used of father in the sense of the conception of a child, to beget; the word did not imply any responsibility for the child after conception.

I hesitate to tell share this experience in my life, but I think you will get the point of what a genitor is. I was visiting my paternal grandparents, my grandfather was sitting in his cowhide covered slat back chair, I was sitting in the porch swing. He looked over at me and said these words: "Boy, if it wasn't for me you wouldn't be here." He spoke only as my genitor. He did not have or exercise any responsibility for rearing me. Understand I am named after my grandfather, I do not think he had any self-esteem issues, or maybe he did.

God is father in the sense that he is responsible for giving life, look again at what Paul said in verses 25-26: he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. 26 From one man he made every nation of men that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live.

The second Latin word to help us understand God as father is the word: Pater: father in the sense of sustainer, provider, teacher, equipper, a father is one responsible for the growth and development of his offspring. A more intimate relationship between father and child is implied in the word Pater, in the same way as the Aramaic word for father used by Jesus: *Abba*

A specific relationship with God as father comes to people through faith in Jesus Christ. The image used in the Bible is the image of adoption whereby people become the children of God

As Paul said in Romans 8:15-16 but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." 16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.

By implication, if we are God's children, then he is our father.

I asked you to take on the role of a person who did not know anything about God or who did not know the true God. Now you may resume your identity as a child of God. I want you to look at the book of Acts 17:34. Luke recorded the outcome of Paul's proclamation of God at the Areopagus.

Acts 17:34 A few men became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.

Some scholars define Paul's preaching at Athens as a failure. I do not. I see a note of encouragement in Luke's assessment of Paul's sermon before the Areopagus. Some believed. Every time God is proclaimed: some believe. People today want to know there is one and only one living, true God, we have the message, let's proclaim it!

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B. God the Son

Christ is the eternal Son of God. In His incarnation as Jesus Christ He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. Jesus perfectly revealed and did the will of God, taking upon Himself human nature with its demands and necessities and identifying Himself completely with mankind yet without sin. He honored the divine law by His personal obedience, and in His substitutionary death on the cross He made provision for the redemption of men from sin. He was raised from the dead with a glorified body and appeared to His disciples as the person who was with them before His crucifixion. He ascended into heaven and is now exalted at the right hand of God where He is the One Mediator, fully God, fully man, in whose Person is effected the reconciliation between God and man. He will return in power and glory to judge the world and to consummate His redemptive mission. He now dwells in all believers as the living and ever present Lord.

Genesis 18:1ff.; Psalms 2:7ff.; 110:1ff.; Isaiah 7:14; 53; Matthew 1:18-23; 3:17; 8:29; 11:27; 14:33; 16:16,27; 17:5; 27; 28:1-6,19; Mark 1:1; 3:11; Luke 1:35; 4:41; 22:70; 24:46; John 1:1-18,29; 10:30,38; 11:25-27; 12:44-50; 14:7-11; 16:15-16,28; 17:1-5, 21-22; 20:1-20,28; Acts 1:9; 2:22-24; 7:55-56; 9:4-5,20; Romans 1:3-4; 3:23-26; 5:6-21; 8:1-3,34; 10:4; 1 Corinthians 1:30; 2:2; 8:6; 15:1-8,24-28; 2 Corinthians 5:19-21; 8:9; Galatians 4:4-5; Ephesians 1:20; 3:11; 4:7-10; Philippians 2:5-11; Colossians 1:13-22; 2:9; 1 Thessalonians 4:14-18; 1 Timothy 2:5-6; 3:16; Titus 2:13-14; Hebrews 1:1-3; 4:14-15; 7:14-28; 9:12-15,24-28; 12:2; 13:8; 1 Peter 2:21-25; 3:22; 1 John 1:7-9; 3:2; 4:14-15; 5:9; 2 John 7-9; Revelation 1:13-16; 5:9-14; 12:10-11; 13:8; 19:16.

(Sermon Title)

Philippians 2:5-11

Dr. Logan Carson serves as professor of theology at Southeastern Seminary. He is a blind African-American that has overcome rejection in his life due to various "isms." He overcame "blindism," a prejudice of the abilities by blind individuals. He described his experience growing up at the North Carolina School for the Blind. The Blind school separated students into two camps, camp 1 for blind white students and camp 2 for blind African-American students as if the color of skin mattered to a blind student. He overcame prejudice of blindism, racism, ageism, and theological conservatism. He expressed his life story by means of a poem, "Rejected."

Rejected was I by my father,
Received I have been by the Lord.

Rejected was I by my mother,
Received by his precious, sweet Word.

Rejected by world and by family,
Received by the Lord Jesus Christ,
Rejected was I by my hometown,
Received by my Lord's sacrifice.

Rejected because of my blindness,
Received by the Spirit of God;
Rejected by some in high places,
Received by faith I have trod;
Rejected by misunderstanding;
Received by my Father above:
Rejected by those who would hate me,
Received by His strong, matchless love.

I have no great hate nor resentment,
No bitterness bothers my soul,
For since I was but a teenager,
The Lord Christ has taken control.
I may not be loved by a woman;
Perhaps never gain a sweet wife,
But all is quite well with my spirit;

Received by the Lord of my life.

His Presence is vital and stirring.

His guidance is mine everyday.

Rejection can never destroy me:

For Christ is my light all the way.

Some day, very soon, He will call me

To live on His bright, blissful shore,

Received into great habitations

To suffer rejection no more.¹

Dr. Kinchen graciously asked me what topic I wanted to address from the Baptist Faith and Message. I responded, "Dr. Kinchen, I want to preach on Jesus." This morning I want to preach on Logan Carson's Lord; I want to preach on my Lord.

Philippians 2:5-11

"Let Christ Jesus be your example as to what your attitude should be. For he, who had always been God by nature, did not cling to his prerogatives as God's equal, but stripped himself of all privileges by consenting to be a slave by nature and being born as mortal man. And, having become man, he humbled himself by living a life of utter obedience, even to the extent of dying, *and the death he died was the death of a common criminal*. That is why God has not lifted him so high, and has given him the name beyond all names, so that at the name of Jesus "every knee shall bow," whether in Heaven or earth or under the earth. And that is why, in the end, "every tongue shall confess" that Jesus Christ is the Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

- *The New Testament in Modern English*, translated by J. B. Phillips
Paul wrote this letter from a Roman prison. He never regarded himself as a prisoner of Rome. He referred to himself as a "prisoner of Jesus." During his imprisonment, his focus was upon Jesus not himself. As Paul experienced life in a

Roman prison, his thoughts, as gleaned from common emphases in his prison letters, focused on the themes of prayer and the person of Jesus.

Paul's focus on Jesus relates to life. Doctrine always relates to life. The church at Philippi encountered two problems. The first problem was one of rivalry between believers – dissension in the church. Paul addressed this issue by admonishing the Philippian believers, "Do not look after your own selfish interests, but humbly look to the needs of others. Here is what Jesus did. He emptied Himself of the prerogatives and positions." The second problem faced by the Philippian church was the rumblings of persecution. The Roman Emperor Nero claimed to be Lord. With that background, Paul reminded them, "There is only one Lord, the Lord Jesus Christ"

The Baptist Faith and Message article on God the Son follows closely the outline of Jesus' life detailed in Philippians 2.

First, the Baptist Faith and Message affirms the Pre-existence of Jesus (Phil. 2:6). "Christ is the eternal Son of God." He possessed the nature or form (morphe) of God. Form or morphe affirms that He possessed all the essential attributes or qualities of Godness. Jesus lacked nothing in terms of what it means to be God. Christ has always been. He always will be. He was not a man adopted by God because of His righteousness. He was not as some say in modern theology a "God-intoxicated" man. He is very God of very God.

Philippians affirms that Jesus was equal with God. The Greek word translated "equal" is "isos" – the word from which we derive isosceles – a triangle with two equal sides. He was equal with the Father in every way. John expressed this truth beautifully

in the opening of his gospel. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). The phrase "in the beginning" recalls the opening of Genesis. Christ was equal with God the Father in time. Christ is co-eternal with God. He is co-equal in position. He was "with" God. The Greek preposition translated "with" is *pros*, a preposition that expresses the idea of "face-to-face" relationship. Christ possessed the position of being "face-to-face" equal with God. The eternal Son of God was God.

Christ expressed His Godness and the meaning of Godlikeness by giving of Himself. He did not regard His equality with God the Father as something to hold selfishly. He did not cling to His prerogatives, but He emptied Himself.

Second, the Baptist Faith and Message highlights the Humiliation of Christ. (Phil. 2:7-8). The New International Version states, "He made Himself nothing." The King James Version says, "He made Himself no reputation." The translation of J. B. Phillips states, "He stripped Himself of all prerogatives. He became incarnate. Not only is Christ the Pre-existent Son, He is the Incarnate Son. Incarnation means "in flesh."

In 2000, Southern Baptists became orthodox in their Christology, at least in their official doctrinal statement. The Baptist Faith and Message in 1963 stated that the Son "took upon Himself the demands and necessities of human nature." Understand that an individual temporarily can take upon himself the demands and necessities of a foster parent for three months without actually having the nature of a parent. The incarnation of Jesus involved more than taking upon Himself the demands of human nature. The

eternal Son of God “took upon Himself human nature” (BFM 2000). Praise the Lord; Southern Baptists now express Christology in an orthodox manner!

In the incarnation, the Son laid aside the praises, position, and prerogatives of heaven. The Son did not empty Himself of any divine attributes. Rather the Son added full humanity to His full deity. The Son united in one person full humanity and full deity. The union of the God-Man was a *voluntary* union. The Son willingly entered into our experience. Most people do not realize that the orthodox position historically has confessed that the union of the God-Man was a *permanent* union. The union of God and man was not an historic truth limited to the thirty plus years of the earthly life of Jesus Christ. The Son remains the God-Man. The Son forever will be the God-Man. The Baptist Faith and Message underscores this truth in the following statement, “He ascended into heaven and is now exalted at the right hand of God where He is the One Mediator, fully God, fully man....” Notice the BFM affirms that the ascended Lord in heaven is fully God and fully man. This precious truth is humbling, amazing, and praiseworthy. He permanently and everlastingly became the God-Man. This confessional statement accords with biblical teaching. Paul proclaimed, “For there is [present tense] one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5 NASB). Our mediator today is a man. To combat a denial of the humanity of Jesus, John wrote, “every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ *has come* in the flesh is from God” (1 John 4:3 NASB).ⁱⁱ

He entered our experience by being born. He is the Eternal son. He is the Incarnate son. He is the Born Son. If you believe in a creator who creates *ex nihilo*, then you have no problem with the doctrine of the virginal conception of Jesus. Luke

describes this miracle in terms of the Holy Spirit overshadowing Mary (Lk. 1:35). I confess that I do not understand the virginal conception, but I affirm that I believe in the virginal conception. The word “overshadowing” from Luke that occurs in the Greek Old Testament to describe the shekinah glory of God in the tabernacle and temple. The shekinah glory of God overshadowed Mary and impregnated Mary. The outcome of the Holy Spirit overshadowing Mary was the unique virginally conceived God-Man.

I am witnessing the rebirth of an ancient heresy called “Hofmannite Christology” or “celestial flesh Christology.”ⁱⁱⁱ This Christological teaching denies that Jesus received his human nature from Mary. Rather Hofmannite Christology claims that Jesus brought his human nature from heaven. Mary, in essence, provided only a surrogate womb through which Jesus passed. Hofmannite Christology, contradicts the Word of God. In Genesis 3:15, the *protoevangelium* or first gospel, prophesied that “out of the seed of woman” would come a man who would crush the head of the serpent. Paul affirmed that Jesus was a descendent of David according to the “seed” or the flesh” (Rom. 1:3). Galatians 4:4 claims that Jesus was born of woman. The Greek preposition (ek) translated “of” denotes source. Jesus Christ possessed the nature of full humanity; the source of that humanity was Mary.

In His humiliation, He took upon Himself the form of a servant. He was in the form (morphe) of God in His pre-existent state; He became the form (morphe) of a servant or a slave in his incarnation. The one who had all position, all power, all privilege entered into our experience as a servant – the one with no position, no power, or no privilege.

He humbled Himself to the point of death. The Baptist Faith and Message 2000 affirms the substitutionary nature of the death of Jesus. He died as our substitute; He died in our place. As Isaiah prophesied 750 years before his conception, the Servant took upon Himself our iniquities (Isa. 53:6). Jesus explained the significance of His death, "I have come to give my life as a ransom for (in the place of) many (Mark 10:45). The New Testament contains many pictures of the death of Christ. All the New Testament analogies of the cross, however, find their meaning in the doctrine of the substitutionary nature of the death of Christ. What does it mean to say that He is our example, but to say that He gave His life for us? What does it mean to say that He is one who incites love within us except to say that He loved us enough to die in our place?

Third, the Baptist Faith and Message celebrates the Exaltation of Jesus. Paul began in eternity past. He, then, discussed the historic manifestation of God the Son in Jesus Christ. He continued to eternity future in his affirmation of the exaltation of the Son. God will exalt the Son to the highest of the highest of the highest place. The term is a superlative in Greek. Not that He will be exalted to a position higher than the position He enjoyed during His preexistence. Rather Paul contrasted His future exaltation with the humiliation of a servant.

The exaltation involved the literal, physical *resurrection* of Jesus. I have completed doctoral seminars and apologetic classes on the resurrection. I am amazed at the number of Christians that have problems with the physical resurrection of Jesus. Some Christians claim the resurrection of Christ was a spiritual resurrection. Does that make sense to you? Am I foolish? I believe in a literal, physical resurrection of Jesus.

Christ's resurrection indicated that the end times have arrived. We do not await the last day. People have lived in the last days since the day of resurrection. Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost, "What does this [the resurrection] mean? This means that Jesus is Lord." The resurrection means our justification. In Romans 4:25, Paul taught, "He was delivered over to death for our offenses; He was raised for our justification." He is the Risen One. What does the resurrection mean for my daily living/ The resurrection provides power for ministry and power for living. We do not have to live in our own strength. We can live in resurrection power. "How tremendous is this power available to us who believe in God. "That power is the same divine energy which was demonstrated in Christ when he raised him from the dead and gave him the place of supreme honor in Heaven "(Eph. 1:19-20 Philippians). Resurrection power is available to us. John Wesley said, "It is as great a miracle for God to raise depraved sinners from the sepulcher of sin as it is to raise His son from the sepulcher ." I am a miracle because I have resurrected life.

The exaltation of Jesus included His *ascension*. Jesus appeared for forty days to His disciples. On the Mount of Olives, they saw Him rise (ascend) into the heavens. They observed a visible, physical sign. If Jesus had ascended to heaven spiritually, then they would wonder if Jesus would appear again. Maybe they would reason, "He skipped appearing this week. Maybe He will come next week." The ascension marked the end of His appearances. They learned a vital lesson. Whether Jesus Christ is physically here or not, He is still here.

The exaltation included the *seating* of Jesus at the right hand of God. He sat in a position as king, a royal imagery. He sat in a position of honor as high priest. Hebrews

affirms that the priests stood daily offering sacrifices (Heb. 10:11). The priest did not sit; their work was continual. In contrast, our high priest Jesus sat down because He completed His high priestly service on our behalf. the seating of Jesus has practical implications for our life. Hebrews says that we have such a sympathetic high priest seated; therefore, we have boldness to enter to the throne of grace (Heb. 14-16). Boldness (*parrhessia*), refers to an intimacy of relationship where you can say anything that is on your heart. Do you realize that because He is our seated high priest, we can approach the throne? Do you have a burden? Approach the throne. Do you have a concern? Approach the throne. Do you not understand? Approach the throne.

The exaltation of Jesus involves His *return*. The Baptist Faith and Message states, "He will return in power and glory." He will return personally. He will return visibly. He will return gloriously. I do not know when He is returning. I am ready today. I am ready if does not happen during my lifetime and I experience death, burial and resurrection at His coming. Some folks, I think, will be mad at Jesus when He returns. He will mess up their charts of the end-times. He is sovereign in the matter of His return. The emphasis in the New Testament is not upon *when* He is coming again. The emphasis is upon He is the fact that He is coming again; therefore, this is *how* you should live. The teaching of His return functions as a call to holiness.

My Jesus! My Jesus is the Eternal Son, the Incarnate Son, the Sacrificed Son, the Reigning son, and the Returning Son. Even so, Come Lord Jesus.

Dr. Mark Rathel

¹R. Logan Carson, *With Gladness and Singleness of Heart: My Life with My Lord* (Philadelphia, PN: Xlibris Corporation, 2006), 17-18.

¹The Greek verb in 1 John 4:3 is a perfect tense verb. The perfect tense indicates the continuance of completed action. Hence, John states that Jesus has become flesh (completed action) and the action of incarnation continues to the time at which John wrote.

¹Hofmannite Christology is named for Anabaptist leader Melchoir Hoffman (1496-1544). This type of Christology shares ideas about the virginal conception similar to valentines Gnosticism. Melchoir Hofmann influenced Menno Simmons, the most influenced Anabaptist leader. Menno Simmons wrote, "For Christ Jesus, as to his origin, is no earthly man, that is, a fruit of the flesh and blood of Adam. He is a heavenly fruit or man. For his beginning or origin is of the Father, like unto the first Adam, sin excepted." The quote is found in Timothy George, *The Theology of the Reformers* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1988), 282. Early Baptists made great efforts to distinguish themselves from Anabaptists and Hofmannite Christology in particular. The 1611 English Declaration at Amterdam, authored by General Baptist leader Thomas Helwys, stated, "That Jesus Christ, the Son of God the second Person, or subsistance in the Trinity, in the Fullness of time was manifested in the Flesh, being the seed of David, and of the Israelites, according to the Flesh (Rom. 1:3; 8:5), the Son of Marie the Virgin, *made of her substance* (Gal. 4:4). Notice the emphasis in the confession that Jesus partook of the same nature(or substance) as Mary. Baptists regularly made similar statements in older confessions.

C. God the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God, fully divine. He inspired holy men of old to write the Scriptures. Through illumination He enables men to understand truth. He exalts Christ. He convicts men of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. He calls men to the Saviour, and effects regeneration. At the moment of regeneration He baptizes every believer into the Body of Christ. He cultivates Christian character, comforts believers, and bestows the spiritual gifts by which they serve God through His church. He seals the believer unto the day of final redemption. His presence in the Christian is the guarantee that God will bring the believer into the fullness of the stature of Christ. He enlightens and empowers the believer and the church in worship, evangelism, and service.

Genesis 1:2; Judges 14:6; Job 26:13; Psalms 51:11; 139:7ff.; Isaiah 61:1-3; Joel 2:28-32; Matthew 1:18; 3:16; 4:1; 12:28-32; 28:19; Mark 1:10,12; Luke 1:35; 4:1,18-19; 11:13; 12:12; 24:49; John 4:24; 14:16-17,26; 15:26; 16:7-14; Acts 1:8; 2:1-4,38; 4:31; 5:3; 6:3; 7:55; 8:17,39; 10:44; 13:2; 15:28; 16:6; 19:1-6; Romans 8:9-11,14-16,26-27; 1 Corinthians 2:10-14; 3:16; 12:3-11,13; Galatians 4:6; Ephesians 1:13-14; 4:30; 5:18; 1 Thessalonians 5:19; 1 Timothy 3:16; 4:1; 2 Timothy 1:14; 3:16; Hebrews 9:8,14; 2 Peter 1:21; 1 John 4:13; 5:6-7; Revelation 1:10; 22:17.

(Sermon Title)

John 14:16, 26; John 15:26; 16:14, John 16:8-11; Eph. 1:13-14; 1Cor. 12:11

I struggled to find one passage of Scripture that would unfold the manifold truths of the Spirit of God in an expository fashion. I read to you this morning John 3:8 about the mystery of the Holy Spirit.

“The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”

Mystery is one of the primary attributes of the Spirit. There is a mystery about the Holy Spirit for three reasons. First, humans lack an analogy for understanding “Spirit.” Out of my life and experience, I can understand something of father. I can understand something of son. I confess that I have no analogy in my life experience to understand

spirit. Second, the Bible attributes the adjective *holy* to the Spirit – the Holy Spirit. The Father is Holy. The Son is Holy. Why does the Bible emphasize the Spirit as Holy? The unique ministry of the Spirit in your life and my life is the promotion of holiness. That is why the Spirit remains a mystery to me. After thirty-four years of following Jesus Christ, I still know little about holiness. Third, believers lack comfortableness with “Spirit,” or Holy Ghost in the King James Version. The concept of “Spirit” conveys to us the image of that which is immaterial or invisible. The emphasize of the Word of God in reference to the title “Spirit” is not upon invisibility; the emphasis inherent in the descriptive noun “spirit” is upon power. The Spirit of God remains a mystery to me because I am still learning about the power of the Spirit. I have a second doctorate. I do not list this degree on my resume or vita, but I have a doctorate in human weakness. I am still learning ...

The Spirit is a mystery often times treated as a magical force. At times, we play games, judgmental games. “Spirit, Spirit who has the Spirit?” is the name of a game Christians play in interdenominational games of competition and in intramural personal relationships. The Spirit remains a mystery because we want to use the Spirit. We attempt to manipulate the Spirit of God. We cry out for the filling of the Spirit that others will recognize our name. We desire empowerment that “our” ministry may expand. When I was a student at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, Dr. Landrum Leavell served as president. He spoke words of rebuke to all of us who attempt to manipulate the mystery of the Spirit of God.

The sovereign wind of the Spirit with just one tiny puff can blow all man-made dividers and partitions. We cannot contain him; we cannot restrain him; we

cannot tame him. He will not be housebroken; he will not be taught to heel, and he will not jump through any denominational hoops.^{iv}

The Bible affirms the mystery of the Holy, Powerful Spirit. The Spirit is like the wind; He blows where He wills. Blow Spirit blow! Blow spirit blow is my cry!

The Baptist Faith and Message expresses the person and work of the Holy Spirit.

First, the Baptist Faith and Message proclaims the Person of the Holy Spirit (John 14:16, 26). Because of the emphasis on the term “Spirit,” many have conceived of the Spirit as in impersonal force. One young boy prayed “to God, Son, and Other One.” The Word of God says the Spirit is a Person who has the task of promoting holiness in our lives and empowering us for service. John 14:16: “I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever ... (NASB).” Jesus claimed to be the Helper, the Paraclete called along beside the believer. Jesus promised to send another Helper equal to Himself for the purpose that He will be with you forever.”” I am the Paraclete temporarily, He will be the Paraclete forever,” Jesus said. Jesus promised to send a “He” not an “It.” In Greek, a pronoun agrees with the noun it modifies in gender. Spirit, pneuma, is a neuter noun. We would expect, therefore, a neuter pronoun. Yet, the antecedent for the demonstrative pronoun ekeinos is the neuter noun “pneuma.” That is bad grammar, but it is great theology.^v

The Spirit is Person. If the Spirit is power or force, then the question becomes “how can I get more of it?” Perhaps, like Simon in Acts 8, we could purchase “It.” We could become dispensers of “It.” The Spirit, however, is not an “It”; the Spirit is a “He.” Now, the question becomes “how can the Holy Spirit get more of me?” How can He control me that I may live my life under Him?

Second, the Baptist Faith and Message describes some aspects of the Purpose of the Holy Spirit (John 15:26; 16:14).

The purpose of the Spirit is the exaltation of Christ in the life of a believer. The Baptist Faith and Message states, "He exalts Christ." The Spirit's ministry in your life is the exaltation of Christ. How do we know when we have had an experience of the Spirit? Neither a spirit-dance nor a special language characterizes a genuine work of the Spirit of God. When the Spirit does a genuine work in a believer's life, Jesus exhibits His prominence in that believer's life. The Spirit of God will lead a believer to Christlikeness. The Spirit exalts Christ in us.

The Spirit exalts Christ in the church. The Spirit exalts Christ in the Fellowship of the church. The Fellowship (koinonia) of the church is that we share all things in common because of Jesus. All believers share in the common life brought into existence by the death and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus is Lord of the church! Jesus is the Head of the church! The Spirit exalts Christ in the Mission of the church. As the Spirit compelled Jesus into the wilderness (Mk. 1: 12), the Spirit of God inevitably will drive us into the mission field. Repeatedly, Acts described the Spirit compelling believers into the mission. The purpose of the Spirit of God is to exalt Him in the fellowship and mission of the church.

Third, the Baptist Faith and Message outlines the Plan of the Holy Spirit. How does the Spirit carry out His purpose? The Spirit's plan *illuminates* the Christ, the theme of Scripture. I praise God I can analyze and study the Word of God through lexical studies, syntactical relationships, insights derived from background, culture, history, and

geography. I can analyze the literary genre. I can practice good hermeneutics. Yet, beyond and above our linguistic and hermeneutical practice, the Spirit of God enables our minds to discern spiritually the truth of God. The Spirit opens our hearts and enables us to understand the Word in the words of Scripture.

The Spirit's plan in exalting Christ includes the role of *drawing* people to Christ. The Spirit convicts of sin, righteousness, and judgment in relation to Christ (John 16:8-11). The Spirit of God convicted me of my sin. God began to work in my life when I was fourteen years old. I had a friend that dies of a motorcycle accident associated with drug use. While I never used drugs, God began to convict me of my lifestyle and my friends. Yet, I did not have anyone to tell me about Jesus. The heavy hand of the Spirit of God was upon me for two years with an absence of joy, peace, and purpose. Then, finally, someone told me about Jesus. I felt that same Spirit that had given me that sense of heaviness drawing me unto that one who was the Answer. He brought me unto the Savior Jesus. The Spirit calls us unto Christ. The plan of the Spirit convicts of sin, illuminates the Christ of Scripture, and draws people unto the Savior.

The Spirit's plan involves His *birthing* us into new life in Christ. When I was a senior in high school, the Spirit of God that moved upon creation moved upon me and created new life in me. I experienced a birth from above, a spiritual birth. I experienced new life from Christ.

The Spirit's plan *p/aces* us into the Body of Christ. God does not leave us as orphans without a family. The Spirit unites our lives with the church, the people of God. The Baptist Faith and Message 2000 made an important addition because of the

confusion people experience about the biblical language of the “baptism of the Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:13). Southern Baptists expressed clearly what the bible affirms by “baptism of the Spirit.” “At the moment of regeneration he baptizes every believer into the Body of Christ.” I experienced an immersion into life in the Spirit, life in the Body of Christ, at my new birth.

The Spirit’s plan *cultivates* Christ’s Character within us. The Spirit works in our life to grow, to nourish, to feed, and to reproduce the very character of Christ. The Bible most clearly describes character of Christ as the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). At times, the cultivating ministry of the Spirit entails weeding out that which is not conducive to Christ.

Fourth, the Baptist Faith and Message celebrates the *Pledge* of the Spirit (Eph. 1:13-14). The Baptist Faith and Message states, “He seals the believer unto the day of final redemption. His presence in the Christian is the guarantee that God will bring the believer into the fullness of the stature of Christ.” The presence of the Spirit in our life is our guarantee. Paul proclaimed in Ephesians 1:13-14, “you were sealed in Him, the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance.” The Spirit of God seals every believer. In the first century world, the seal denoted several truths. The seal *authenticated*. The Spirit of God certifies and authenticates us as children of God. We use seals today. A notary places a seal of a document signifying (authenticating, certifying) that the signature belongs to us. The first century seal indicated *ownership*. When the Romans sealed the tomb of Jesus, they communicated that the contents of that tomb belonged to Rome (Matt.27:66). The Spirit of God residing in our life

communicates that we belong to Him as the holy temple. The seal denoted protection. The Holy Spirit protects us. Satan may touch us, but Satan cannot grasp us.

The Holy Spirit is God's pledge (Eph. 1:13-14). Commercial transactions provide the background for this term. The Holy Spirit functions as the earnest of our inheritance. We continue to use the concept today in real estate. To purchase a home, you must put up earnest money. The earnest money serves as your pledge that you will complete the deal. If you back out of the deal, you lose your earnest money – that which you have put down as a guarantee. We can have no greater assurance or guarantee of our salvation than the indwelling Spirit. The Holy Spirit Himself is the pledge that “the one who began a good work in us will bring it to completion (Phil. 1:6). The Baptist Faith and Message 2000, therefore, changed the wording from “assurance” of salvation to “guarantee” of our salvation.

Fifth, the Baptist Faith and Message highlights the Prerogative of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:11). The Baptist Faith and Message states the Spirit “bestows the spiritual gifts by which they [believers] serve God through His church.” The apostle Paul wrote, “the Spirit distributes the gifts to each one as He wills (1 Cor. 12:11).” The Spirit wills what spiritual gifts you have to serve the Body of Christ. A believer, then, cannot covet another believer's gift. The Spirit sovereignly chooses what spiritual gift you receive based on what He wants to reveal to the Body about Christ through you.

“Charisma” or “charismaton” serves as the transliteration of the term for “spiritual gift” in the Greek New Testament. “Charisma is a compound word. The root “charis” means grace. A spiritual gift is a grace in our life. We do not deserve the gifts. We are

saved by grace, live by grace, and serve by grace. The suffix “ma” indicates results. A spiritual gift, then, is a grace of God in your life that produces results for His glory, not your glory. The Spirit does not give a spiritual gift to you as an individual; the Spirit gives a grace gift through you to the Body of Christ. You cannot hold onto your gift selfishly. You need to share the grace gift in the context of the Body of Christ

Finally, the Baptist Faith and Message accentuates the Power of the Spirit (Act 1:8). The Spirit of God, according to the Baptist Faith and Message, “empowers the believer and the church in worship, evangelism, and service.” Blow, Spirit, Blow!

Dr. Mark Rathel

¹Landrum Leavell, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*. (Nashville, TN: Convention Press, 1983), 24.

¹ Walter Bauer supports the syntactical understanding that *pneuma* is the antecedent of the demonstrative masculine pronoun *ekeinos*. Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2d ed. translated and augmented by F. W. Gingrich and F. W. Danker from Walter Bauer's 5th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), 239. In contrast, Daniel Wallace affirms that the masculine *paracletos* as the antecedent of the masculine pronoun *ekeinos*. Well, at least Wallace lists John 15:26 under the category of debatable examples. Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 331-32. In case of a tie between scholars, I follow the scholar that supports my sermonic rhetoric!