

A Basic Christian Vocabulary (version 1.0)

A

Adiaphora. Matters of conduct which are neither sinful or righteous in themselves but which may become legitimate or illegitimate in the Christian life according to circumstances.

Adoption. The act of God's love where, on account of Christ, he takes saved sinners into his family and bestows all the rights of sonship upon them as children of God.

Age. The Bible divides history into two ages. "This age" is the era in which we presently live – it ends at Christ's return. "The age to come" begins at Christ's return.

Annihilationism. A false teaching that the unsaved wicked will not suffer eternal punishment in hell but will finally cease to be as if they had never lived.

Anti-Christ. One who is against Christ. Just before Christ returns there will arise one individual who will concentrate in his life all imaginable evil against Christ.

Apocrypha. Those religious books, mostly written in Greek, which were not included in the Holy Bible because they were not inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Apostasy. A falling away from the truth of God, as revealed in the Bible, in words and deeds by one person, a church, or a nation.

Arminianism. A system of doctrine which regards God's actions as somewhat limited by and dependent upon the free actions of human beings. The name is derived from a Dutch theologian named Jacob Arminius.

Assurance. The conviction that a person is presently saved by grace and will surely enter into heaven, which a believer may attain as he or she rightly uses the means of grace and knows the witness of the Holy Spirit in their heart.

Atonement. The satisfaction of God's justice made by Jesus Christ, which was necessary for the forgiveness of sinners.

C

Calvinism. A term usually associated with the doctrines of grace found in the Canons of Dort. Calvinists acknowledge the absolute sovereignty of God in salvation. The name is derived from the Genevan Reformer, John Calvin.

Canon of Scripture. The 66 books of the Bible which are recognized as inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Catholic Church. The church in its broadest sense, encompassing the people of God in all times, places, and cultures.

Conscience. The function of a human being which registers approval when a person's actions fit in with their standards of conduct and disapproval when those actions violate their standards of what is right and wrong.

W. Bredenhof

Conversion. The sinner's turning from sin to God, which is the effect of regeneration and which includes repentance and faith.

Covenant of Grace. That gracious relationship God has with believers and their children in which God promises eternal salvation in the way of repentance and faith.

Covenant of Works. That relationship God established with Adam, as the first human being, in which God promised full fellowship with him and his seed on the condition of perfect, personal obedience.

Creation. The act of God's will by which, at the beginning, he made all things good for the praise and glory of his Name.

D

Deity of Christ. The truth that Jesus of Nazareth was and is the only true God.

Depravity, Total/Pervasive. The truth that the unsaved sinner is corrupted by sin in every way and completely unable and unwilling to do any good which is pleasing to God.

Divine Decrees. God's eternal purpose in which he has foreordained whatever happens. All of God's decrees form the counsel of his will.

E

Election, Unconditional. God's unconditional and sovereign choice of certain people in Christ unto final salvation.

Eschatology. The Bible's teaching about the last things – the end of the age and beyond.

Eternity of God. That perfection of God by which he exists independent of all the limitations of time and succession of moments.

Exaltation of Christ. The life of Christ which he now lives as having been rewarded by God for his perfect work. It consists of his resurrection from the dead, his ascension into heaven, his sitting at the right hand of God (his session), and his return at the end of the age.

Excommunication. The final step in Christian discipline in which the unrepentant church member is solemnly excluded from the fellowship of the church until such a time as that member turns from their sin.

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F

Faith, True. A gift of the Holy Spirit which connects us to Christ in a saving way. True faith consists of: 1) Sure knowledge of the biblical message, 2) Assent – affirming that the Bible’s message is true, 3) Firm confidence – personally taking that message for yourself.

Fall of Man. The act which took place when Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. This act plunged humanity from the situation of perfection and joy into sin and misery.

Five Points of Calvinism. Also known as “the Doctrines of Grace.” Five interrelated biblical truths explained in the Canons of Dort, one of our Three Forms of Unity. In the order of the Canons, these truths are: 1) Unconditional election, 2) Limited or definite atonement, 3) Total or pervasive depravity, 4) Irresistible grace, 5) Perseverance of the saints. These five truths form an answer to five errors held by the Arminians.

Foreordination. God’s determination from all eternity of everything that takes place in time.

Forgiveness of sins. The act of God by which the sinner’s guilt is no longer charged to him and he is thus released from paying the penalty for sin. Sometimes also called “pardon.”

G

Glorification. The final stage of salvation of God’s elect at which time they are taken to heaven at the moment of death and later have body and soul reunited for an eternity in God’s presence in the new heavens and new earth.

Good Works. Those acts of people which proceed from a true faith, according to the law of God, and dedicated to God’s glory.

Gospel. The good news of salvation which God provides for sinners in the work of Jesus Christ.

Grace. The goodness and favour of God when he gives to sinners the opposite of what they deserve.

H

Heaven. This refers to: 1) The celestial world (Genesis 1:1), 2) That place where God’s presence and glory dwell most fully, 3) The future home of the saved (2 Cor. 5:1).

Hell. The place of eternal conscious punishment prepared particularly for Satan and his angels. It is also the place where all unsaved sinners will forever experience the wrath of God in body and soul. For believers, however, Christ took this hellish wrath for us on the cross – hence we confess that “he descended into hell.”

Heresy. An unbiblical doctrine which endangers the salvation of those who hold it. Heresy is the most serious form of error.

Heretic. A person who holds to or propagates a heresy.

Holiness of God. The attribute of God by which he maintains an absolute separation from all that is sinful.

Hope. The believer's confident and eager expectation of final glory and joy in a recreated universe which shall be given when Christ returns.

Humiliation of Christ. The position which Christ took under the law of God at the time of his conception. While in this position he experienced the wrath of God, the miseries of human life, and final banishment from this life in his death and burial. His humiliation ended when he rose from the dead.

I

Incarnation. The act of God the Son in taking to himself a true human nature, body and soul, to win salvation for sinners.

Independence of God. Also known as "aseity." That attribute of God by which God is perfectly sufficient unto himself and in no way needs or is dependent on anyone or anything.

Inerrancy of Scripture. That quality of the Bible by which God has given his Word without any errors.

Infallibility of Scripture. That quality of the Bible by which God's Word will never fail. It is trustworthy.

Infinity of God. That attribute of God by which he is completely boundless, without any limits as to space and time.

Immanence of God. That attribute of God by which he is everywhere present and always near. It is also called the omnipresence of God. (Note: "immanent" and "imminent" are two different words with separate meanings).

Imputation. The act of a judge by which something is charged to one's account. What is charged then forms the basis of the judge's declaration. Scripture speaks of three imputations: 1) Adam's sin to all humanity, 2) Of the Christian's sin to Jesus Christ, 3) Of Christ's righteousness to the Christian.

Iniquity. A word for sin which includes the idea of perverseness, the absence of justice and wickedness.

Inspiration of Scripture. The act of God the Holy Spirit by which he guided the human writers of the Bible to write the exact words which God intended them to write. Thus the Bible is the Word of God.

Intercession of Christ. The work of the exalted Saviour in heaven whereby he pleads the cause of each and every true child of God.

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J

Justification. The declaration of God that we are righteous solely on the basis of Christ's righteousness. Through Christ we have satisfaction for our sins and a perfect measure of obedience in God's sight. This blessing can only be received through true faith.

K

Keys of the Kingdom. The preaching of the gospel and church discipline. These have been given to the church to open and close access to the kingdom of God.

Kingdom of God. The reign of God. While he rules over the entire universe already now, only believers recognize his rule. In the age to come, his reign will be universally acknowledged.

L

Legalism. The wrong theory that one can become right with God by obeying the law of God. This error was clearly seen in the lives of the Pharisees who thought that their obedience was acceptable to God.

Liberty, Christian. The freedom of the saved sinner from the wrath of God, the guilt of sin, the curse of the law, and the power of sin.

Longsuffering of God. That attribute of God by which he patiently bears with the evil in spite of their long-continued disobedience.

Love of God. That attribute of God which moves him to give himself in fellowship to sinners in Jesus Christ.

M

Means of Grace. The preaching of the Word and the sacraments. These are the ordinary means which Christ uses to bring the blessings of salvation into the lives of sinners.

Mediator. One who stands between two parties who are at odds. Jesus Christ is the only Mediator between the offended holy God and the offending sinner.

Mercy of God. That attribute of God by which he acts to take pity on the miserable sinner and relieve his or her distress.

Merit. That which is earned. Merit is contrasted with grace which cannot be earned by human effort. Christ merited salvation and graciously gives salvation to whom he will.

Messiah. A Hebrew word meaning "anointed by Yahweh." An anointed person was set apart to perform a certain work. "Christ" is the Greek term meaning the same thing. Jesus Christ was anointed to be the perfect prophet, priest, and king.

Millennium. The thousand year period described in Rev. 20:1-10. During this period Christ reigns and Satan is kept in check. We believe this thousand year period refers to the time between Christ's ascension into heaven and his final return at the end of the age.

W. Breidenhof

Miracle. A special event in the physical world caused by the direct activity of God which points beyond itself to the saving work of God in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.

N

Natures of Christ. Refers to the mystery of Jesus' person – he is both truly human and truly God.

O

Obedience of Christ. Christ perfectly obeyed God's commandments. His having done that in his life on earth in our place is called his *active obedience*. His having done that in his suffering in our place and bearing the penalty for our sin is called his *passive (or: suffering) obedience*. This two-fold obedience makes up the righteousness of Christ credited to us for our justification.

Original Guilt. The liability of punishment which was Adam's because of his first sin and which is reckoned or imputed by God to all members of the human race.

Original Sin. The first sin of Adam which became the root out of which all the sin and misery of the world has come.

P

Perfectionism. The false teaching that it is possible for a Christian, in this life, to reach a position where they no longer sin at all.

Perseverance of the Saints. The biblical teaching that the elect regenerated sinner can neither totally nor finally fall away from salvation, but shall be preserved by the abiding grace of God.

Predestination. God's eternal determination of the final end of every individual.

Propitiation. The turning away of God's wrath and the return of his favour. Jesus Christ is the propitiation for our sins.

Providence. The everywhere-present activity of God whereby he preserves the whole order of creation and governs all things and events unto their appointed end.

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R

Reconciliation. Bringing two parties together into fellowship. Through the work of Christ, we are reconciled to God. Formerly at war, we are now in fellowship with him.

Redemption. God's work of meeting all the requirements for the salvation of sinners by which God freed the elect sinner from the bondage of sin.

Regeneration. The act of God the Holy Spirit by which he makes the spiritually dead sinner alive. It is also called the new birth or being born again.

Reprobation. God's sovereign act of passing by certain sinners not chosen to salvation and his righteous condemnation of such sinners to endure the just punishment for their sins.

Revelation. God's activity by which he makes truth known to people.

Revelation, General. God's action of communicating a limited knowledge of himself to people through the created world of nature, the history of humanity, and the human conscience.

Revelation, Special. God's action of communicating a more comprehensive knowledge of himself and his plan for salvation in and through the Scriptures.

Righteousness of God. That attribute of God by which he, as the Holy One, acts in perfect harmony with his law. It is also called the "justice of God" by which he rewards good and punishes evil.

S

Sacrament. A sign and seal of the covenant of grace instituted by Christ. These are given for the strengthening of our faith. The New Testament church maintains the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Sanctification. The process by which a believer grows in holiness and Christ-likeness.

Satisfaction of Christ. Christ's act of sacrificing himself in order to meet the demand of God's justice in the place of each one of the elect. It is also called "vicarious atonement" or "substitutionary atonement."

Sovereignty of God. That attribute of God's absolute authority over his created universe by which he does everything for his own glory according to the counsel of his will.

T

Temptation. The enticement of a person by Satan, the sinful world, or one's own sinful nature to commit sin by offering some seeming advantage to the person being tempted.

Transgression. Another word for "sin." It emphasizes the act as a stepping over the line laid down by God's law.

Trinity. The biblical teaching that one God exists in three separate persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, who are the same in substance and equal in glory.

W. Bredenhof

Truth. That which is in harmony with God's nature and revelation.

V

Vow. A solemn promise made to God. Sometimes called an "oath" which is a religious activity in which the person swearing solemnly calls God to witness what is being promised or asserted.

W

Wrath of God. God's perfectly righteous anger at sin and his act of inflicting deserved punishment upon guilty sinners. It is an expression of his righteousness/justice.

Z

Zeal. Passion on steroids! Also: a passionate enthusiasm or fervent desire to maintain a person or cause.