

The ES Doctrinal Basis

Flinders ES upholds the fundamental truths of the Christian faith, including:

1. The divine inspiration, trustworthiness, and infallibility of Holy Scripture, as originally given, its entire sufficiency for our knowledge of God, and its supreme authority in all matters of faith and doctrine.
2. The sovereignty of God in creation, revelation, redemption and final judgment.
3. The unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in the Godhead.
4. The universal sinfulness and guilt of all people since the fall, rendering them subject to God's wrath and condemnation.
5. The conception of Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit and his birth of the virgin Mary.
6. The undeserved love of God which finds its ultimate expression in redemption from the guilt, penalty and power of sin through the sacrificial death (as our Representative and Substitute) of Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Son of God.
7. The bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and his ascension to the right hand of God the Father.
8. The justification of the sinner only by the grace of God through faith alone
9. The necessity of the work of the Holy Spirit to make the death of Christ effective in the individual sinner, granting him/her repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ.
10. The indwelling and work of the Holy Spirit in the believer
11. The one holy universal Church which is the body of Christ and to which all true believers belong
12. The expectation of the personal return of the Lord Jesus Christ

1. The Doctrine of Scripture

The divine inspiration, trustworthiness, and infallibility of Holy Scripture, as originally given, its entire sufficiency for our knowledge of God, and its supreme authority in all matters of faith and doctrine.

The Scriptures are comprised of humanly written documents in which God was actively involved in initiating the writing and moving the writers. This is not to be thought of simply as dictation. There was real human agency and decision in the forming of the documents of Scripture. But in all that human activity, God was at work shaping these writings so that they clearly and without fault represented His mind and will.

As human documents they are set in historical situations and reflect actual human thought and understanding of the world, and so have limitations in some directions. But they are infallible in communicating the truth of the way of salvation that God wants us to have and to know. To affirm the infallibility of Scripture is to affirm the trustworthiness of God in His speaking to us. (See 2Timothy 3:14-17)

The central theme and heart of the Scriptures is Jesus Christ, who is the Word made flesh (John 1:14) and the full and final communication of God to humanity that far exceeds previous modes of communication (See Hebrews 1:1-2). Jesus' coming in fulfilment of the Scriptures give us reason to look to them with confidence (2 Peter 1:16-21)

There does not need to be any other source of revelation to supplement or clarify what God has said about Himself already in the Bible. This does not exclude God from being able to make Himself known by other means (eg. through creation - Romans 1:20); however these other means will never be adequate for a person to truly know God, nor to come to a full understanding of the Gospel. This also means that whenever we read or hear the scriptures, we can be sure that God Himself is speaking - actually and livingly.

The phrase, 'as originally given,' recognises the primacy of the original documents of Scripture. It is unlikely that we have any original copy of any Biblical book or letter. The process of copying (by hand) runs the risk of error. Many documents underlie the Biblical text as we have it, and whilst there are small discrepancies between versions of a number of texts, there are remarkably few serious discrepancies.

As the Scriptures are the trustworthy, inspired gift of God in which we have clearly His Word, and with the example of Christ's use of the Scriptures as a clear model, they have authority for us in all matters of faith and conduct (what we believe about God and what that faith in God then requires we do.) No matter of faith or teaching of conduct is to be accepted that contradicts the Scriptures. Nothing is to be required of persons in faith or conduct that is not proven by Scripture. All matters of faith and conduct are to be tested by Scripture. We are not left to mere subjectivity in our lives, but are given an objective declaration of the mind and will of God. Subjectivity (discovering the truth from within yourself) ultimately leads to autonomy (having no external authority apart from yourself.)

2. The doctrine of God

The sovereignty of God in creation, revelation, redemption and final judgment.

A Sovereign is someone who has ultimate authority. There is no higher authority than God, who as creator and sustainer of all things has the right to determine the existence and destiny of every creature. Every creature owes him their ultimate allegiance, and has no right to question his will (Romans 9:19-29, 11:33-36). This means that God is the one who has and will determine how things are (creation), what we may know about Him (revelation), how he has and will act to deal

with the human problem of sin (redemption), and what the end goal of creation is (final judgement).

God is never surprised by what happens, as he knows the end from the beginning (Isaiah 46:8-10), and works out all things together for his purposes (Hebrews 6:17) and for the good of His people (Romans 8:28). This means that while we may initially resist the idea of God's absolute sovereignty, because it seems to override human free will, knowing the sovereignty of God gives us great security, because we can trust God to run the Universe well; and because it means that no threat will ever be big enough to stop or undo His good purpose for us.



3. The doctrine of the Trinity

The unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in the Godhead.

This doctrine involves a term not found in the Scriptures. This has scandalised some people over the years. Given the first fundamental truth that AFES upholds (concerning the Scriptures and their supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct) should it scandalise us? The doctrine is firmly grounded in Scripture and is a summation of the teaching of Scripture concerning the person and nature of God. It is a teaching “forced” on us by the affirmation of Scripture concerning Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, and their relationship with God the Father. (eg. The Spirit of God/the Lord in OT and NT is not identical with God/the Lord; The teaching about Jesus Christ indicates that he had existence prior to time, and is more than human.)

The Trinity cannot and should not be arrived at philosophically but biblically. It should not be approached as a mathematical conundrum. Attempts to talk about the Trinity by analogy or illustration run grave risks - such analogies only illustrate the idea of three-ness. (Inevitably all the illustrations lead us into one of the Trinitarian heresies of the first three centuries.) A little thought will show us that what has eternal and divine dimensions can scarcely be shown by temporal and created elements.

God is love – not just loving in the actions of history, but personally and eternally love Himself, prior to any creation. Love makes no sense in isolation. The heart of the idea of the Trinity is relational. The Trinity is a unity of persons in relationship, and the relationships are essential to their persons. It is impossible to speak of Father and Son in isolation from each other. The relationship of the Father and the Son are not known by human analogy (see Matt. 11:27) but can only be known by revelation. The Holy Spirit is the one who brings this revelation home to us – the Spirit of the Father (Matt. 10:20) and the Spirit of the Son (Gal. 4:6.)

The doctrine of the Trinity trains us to listen carefully to the Scriptures and to hear precisely Who is said to be doing what in the actions of God in creation, redemption and final sanctification. So the Father and the Son and the Spirit have differing roles in the action of God. (eg. it is God the Father who loved the world so much that He gave His Son.) We are also called by this doctrine to make sure that we do not isolate out any of the persons of the Godhead from any of the actions of God in creation, redemption and final sanctification. (eg. Jesus' death on the cross was not “on his own” but accomplished “by the eternal Spirit” (Heb. 9:14) – the Spirit who was poured on him by the Father.)



4. The doctrine of human sinfulness

The universal sinfulness and guilt of humanity since the fall, rendering men and women subject to God's wrath and condemnation.

Human sinfulness has its starting point at a definite point in history (Genesis 3:1ff) – called by theologians “the Fall.” Sinfulness is not part of our created state: men and women were created

good, and in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-28, 31) – ie. to share in his holiness, goodness, truth, righteousness and love. The awfulness of our sinfulness and guilt is measured by the greatness of the glory of God for which we are made. Sinfulness is non-discriminatory: men and women share in this terrible inheritance, just as they share in the created glory of God together.

The disobedience of the first couple has rendered the whole human family sinful and guilty (Romans 5:12-21, Psalm 14:2-3, Romans 3:9-18, 23.) Our sinfulness is not defined by sinful deeds, but rather our sinful deeds flow from our sinfulness. Every person is in this situation from conception onwards (Psalm 51:5.) There is a solidarity in the human race; so, what is born of flesh is flesh – we inherit or share in the situation of our parents; we cannot simply escape it by some generational evolution or improvement. Sinfulness is not a compartment of our existence, but spreads through all we do and say, so that even our “goodness” is sinful - it is possible for God to hate our offerings, our prayers and our worship (eg. Isaiah 1:11-17.)

Sinfulness and guilt are matters that have to do with our relationship with God. We don't actually sin against another person, only God – although we sin “before” another and so cause them great harm and do terrible abuse to them (Psalm 51:4, Luke 15:18.) The sinfulness of these actions is about what they mean for our relationship to God in His holiness, goodness, truth, righteousness and love. Guilt is not primarily about a subjective experience of regret in us, but about the Father's objective verdict concerning us. It is possible to be guilty and not feel guilty about it. Sinfulness and guilt cannot then be dealt with simply by rectifying the human messes to which our sins lead.

This universal sinfulness and guilt means that the whole human race stands under God's wrath and condemnation (Psalm 7:11-13, Romans 1:18-32, Ephesians 2:1-3, Colossians 1:21.) God is angry with the sinner every day and His wrath is being revealed from heaven against all the ungodliness and wickedness of human beings who suppress the truth of who He is by their wicked acts. This wrath is expressed in His giving over people to their sins. This wrath has its final expression in the final judgment of hell into which all who refuse faith in Christ will be taken.

Since Christ has dealt with sin in his dying under sin's penalty on the cross (Romans 8:3-4), those who believe in Christ have the guilt and shame, the penalty, and the power of sin broken for them, but the presence of sin remains with us until the resurrection from the dead. That day will be the final liberation we long for from all that is evil and sinful (Romans 7:21-25, Galatians 5:16-18, Romans 8:22-25.)



5. The doctrine of Christ's divine and human natures

The conception of Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit and his birth by the Virgin Mary.

Jesus' conception was “by the Holy Spirit.” This means that his conception was not by the usual sexual union of his father and mother (Matthew 1:18), but by the direct and miraculous work of God (Luke 1:35.) Mary did not have a perpetual virginity (as some elements of the Roman Catholic church teach), but remained a virgin only until after the birth of Jesus and her marriage to Joseph (Matthew 1:25) and we have recorded in the gospels the fact of Jesus' brothers (Luke 8:19-21, Acts 1:14.)

Jesus was the *incarnation* ('enfleshment') of the eternal Son of God. In Jesus Christ, all the fullness of God dwelt bodily (Colossians 1:19.) He is the Word who was from the beginning with God, and was God Himself, who has become flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:1-2, 14.) By the power of the Holy Spirit, the fullness of God entered into human existence – we should never cease to be gob-smacked by the fact of the incarnation!

His birth was by a human mother. His unique conception does not undermine the reality of his true humanity. Jesus' unique origin does not exclude him from participation in true human existence – even our first father and mother had unusual, God-initiated origins! What the manner of his conception does mean is that he is not a participator in the situation of bondage to sin that all human beings have shared in since the fall of our first parents. He comes in real human flesh,

but only in the likeness of *sinful* human flesh. It is at the cross, as a sinless one that he stands in our place, fully bearing our sin in his body as a substitute. If he were as fully involved in sin as we are, then he could not be in any way an offering for our sins. See Hebrews 2:14, 4:15, Philippians 2:7, Romans 8:3

This unique conception is essential to the grace of the salvation that has come in Christ. Being conceived by the Holy Spirit, Jesus is one who comes from God and does not arise “naturally” from among human beings. He was sent. He comes because God the Father intervenes to rescue us from sin, death and the devil. Our salvation is by the Father, and not by any human initiative, working or effort.

Jesus Christ’s humanity was not disposable – he remains incarnate for eternity – and his divinity was never lost. Enfleshed deity walked human streets and “glorified dust sits at the right hand of God.” In Jesus Christ, humanity is promised and secured for an entrance into the life of the Godhead in eternity in a fully human way – we will become partakers in the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4.) No eye had seen or ear heard or mind conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him!

6. The doctrine of Christ’s saving work

The undeserved love of God which finds its ultimate expression in redemption from the guilt, penalty and power of sin through the sacrificial death (as our Representative and Substitute) of Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Son of God.

Note how this doctrine is built on the previous statement concerning Jesus Christ being the incarnation of God’s eternal Son. Incarnation and redemption form a “seamless robe” (also with resurrection) and cannot be played off against each other.

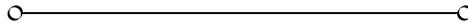
Without the incarnation Jesus cannot truly be our representative and substitute. What Jesus did in his sacrificial death was in total solidarity with the human race (Hebrews 2:17.) He stood with us and for us where we could not stand and still live – before the holiness of God. But we are not saved simply by the fact of his incarnation – identification with a situation is not the same as saving a person from it. The incarnation was with a view to his sacrificial death. Each of the gospels trace the steady and certain movement of Jesus to Jerusalem for his necessary death (Mark 8:31, 9:31, 10:32-34.)

Redemption refers to the transaction that takes place to buy a slave back from another owner. Here it speaks of being bought back to belong to God from being slaves to sin, death and Satan. Satan keeps humanity in slavery through the fear of death (Hebrews 2:15.) Death has power through sin and condemnation (1Corinthians 15:56, Romans 6:23) – we fear death because of the judgment that follows (Heb. 9:27.) For Satan and death to lose their dread grip on humanity, the issue of sin and judgment must be settled finally and forever. Our consciences will never be at peace truly until we are sure about this matter. Assurance of salvation is settled by the apprehension of the truth of atonement.)

The slavery of sin is in its guilt, penalty and power. The guilt of sin is its wrongness before the holiness of God. There are no small sins – each is as large as the truth of God that it opposes. The guilt of sin is not primarily our “guilt feelings” (although that is linked) but the objective reality that God Himself opposes what we do. The penalty of sin is God’s righteous pronouncement against it – death and eternal judgment. The power of sin comes through guilt and judgment, and works so that we can no longer simply decide to have nothing to do with it, but rather will follow it and even seek it out (Romans 6:16-23.)

On the cross Jesus died a sacrificial death. This primarily means he bore the penalty and judgment that is due to us (Romans 3:25, 1 John 4:10, John 1:29.) He did this as he fully represented us, bearing our sins in his body. (1Peter 2:24, 2 Corinthians 5:21.) When Christ was

crucified, the world (personally) was crucified with him (John 12:32, Galatians 2:20.) In his body he also bore the judgment of God on our sins (Isaiah 53:4-6.) All those who have faith in Jesus Christ – that is, who trust in him as their sin-bearer and sacrifice – receive the wonderful fruit of his suffering and death, the redemption that is in him.



7. The doctrine of Christ's bodily resurrection

The bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and his ascension to the right hand of God the Father.

His resurrection from the dead on the third day was a constant part of the proclamation of Jesus as he prepared the disciples for the coming events of the cross (eg. Matthew 16:21, 17:9, 17:23, 20:19 etc.) Despite this recurrent teaching, the disciples were surprised when it actually happened.

The initial encounter with the resurrection were of the empty grave and with angelic messengers about the resurrection (Matthew 28:1-7, Mark 16:1-8, Luke 24:1-12, John 20:1-9.) This underlines the fact of the bodily resurrection. Later, Jesus walked with the disciples and broke and ate bread (Luke 24:36-43), and he had a body which could be handled (John 20:24-28.) The actuality of his bodily resurrection is stressed. This body was now transformed – seen in its able to appear in locked rooms (John 20:19.) It is a spiritual body - meaning that it is filled, empowered and led by the Holy Spirit (1Corinthians 15:42-44.)

The physical nature of the resurrection stresses the actuality of the event. We are not speaking of the idea or myth of resurrection nor of “the circle of life,” but of the actual raising – in real history – of a real flesh-and-bones man. We see by its physicality that the resurrection is a human event, not something belonging to the divinity of Jesus. He acts in the resurrection for all those who have bodies – men and women throughout history.

The resurrection is a Trinitarian act – primarily he was raised by the Father (Acts 2:24, 3:15, 4:10, 5:30, Romans 4:24), but also we read that he lay down his life and took it up again (John 10:17-18), and he was raised by the Spirit of holiness (Romans 1:4.) Each member of the Trinity was involved in the whole action of salvation in the incarnation, ministry, cross, resurrection and ascension – it is this that makes the salvation a reconciling action.

The significance of his resurrection is that Christ was publicly vindicated by the Father. All he'd done in his death on the cross was shown to be effective. He is shown to be the one who now rules all things with the Father. (Romans 1:4, Acts 2:22-36.) He is raised into cosmic lordship far above every other claim to authority (Philippians 2:9-11.) As risen Lord he commissions us to be heralds in the world of his universal lordship (Matthew 28:16-20) Without the resurrection of Christ, our sins would not be dealt with, faith be vain, death still reign, and Christian living be a pathetic joke (1Corinthians 15:17-19.)

Jesus was raised as a firstfruits of the resurrection to come (1Corinthians 15:20.) We will be made alive in Christ and we have by faith a share in resurrection power even now (Romans 6:1-4.) He is the hope of our future inheritance of the kingdom, and the strength of our living in the kingdom now (Romans 6:5-10.) The resurrection of Jesus is the basis of our saying no to sin in this world and living obedient and holy lives now (Romans 6:11-14.) The “bodiliness” of the resurrection means that this power of Christ flows into every part of our existence and not simply “spiritual” aspects. His power enables us to offer up the parts of our body to God for righteousness (Romans 6:13.)



8. The doctrine of Justification

The justification of the sinner only by the grace of God through faith alone

The doctrine of justification is built entirely on the objectivity of what God the Father has done in Jesus Christ's incarnation, atoning death and resurrection. Without that, there is no possibility of a new start for humanity.

Justification is the action of God, in which he declares a person to be 'righteous' - or in a right standing before Him. He does this as the righteous judge of the whole earth (Genesis 18:25), who is qualified to make an assessment of every human being against the standard of his Law. Justification may be on the basis of a person having no record of sin, or of their sin being fully punished so that justice is satisfied.

Jesus alone is the one person who qualifies as one who has perfectly kept the Law, by loving God with all his heart, soul and strength, and by loving his neighbours (us) as himself (see Matthew 22:37-39), and so he was 'justified' -or vindicated - by God the Father by giving Him the Holy Spirit (1 Timothy 3:16, John 1:32-34), and raising him from the dead (Acts 2:25-36)

Because, as we have seen above, every human being falls short of this standard, and does not have in themselves any righteousness or ability to gain merit with God, the only way a person can be justified is through the work of Jesus on their behalf; hence, it is a pure gift of God - grace - not something that can earned. We are justified because Jesus bore our sin and unrighteousness at the cross (1 Peter 2:24), and because the Father credits all of Jesus' righteousness to us, such that we stand before the Father on the basis of Jesus' righteousness, not our own (2 Corinthians 5:21, Philippians 3:9). If we were required to contribute even the tiniest bit to our justification, it would not be by grace.

Justification is received by faith - meaning that the way in which this justification become a reality in a person's life is through trusting the person of Jesus and what he has done. Faith does not originate in us. It is not the strength of our ability to believe that makes justification effective; rather, it is the reliability of God's work of justification, made known to us clearly in the Gospel, that turns our hearts towards him so that we abandon all self sufficiency and depend on him alone to save us.

This means that a person who is justified by God through Jesus will know they are justified (even as they continue to grow in their understanding of what that means). Faith is a conscious and willing trust in Jesus Christ, and it comes through a hearing and comprehending of the Gospel message. In this sense, and outwards expression of faith in Jesus is always a necessary evidence that we have been justified by God's grace (see Romans 10:9, 1 Corinthians 12:3)



9. The doctrine of conversion

The necessity of the work of the Holy Spirit to make the death of Christ effective in the individual sinner, granting him or her repentance towards God, and faith in Jesus Christ.

Christ dealt with the whole world and with all peoples. There is no type of person untouched by the work of Christ. (See John 12:32, Romans 5:12-21, 3:21-26, 2 Corinthians 5:14-20, 1 Timothy 2:5-6, 4:10.)

The achievement of Christ's work for us is personalised by the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Without the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing this home to us, we remain outside the blessing and benefit

of the work of Christ. The way that this is personalised is that the Holy Spirit grants to us – that is, He works in us – repentance towards God and faith in Jesus Christ. Repentance is the acknowledgement of the truth of God and His Gospel and the turning away from all our own attempts to justify ourselves. Faith is trust in Jesus Christ as the one who is the entire basis of our relationship with God. Neither of these is possible without the ministry of the Holy Spirit in us (1 Corinthians 12:3, Acts 5:31, 11:15-18, 2 Timothy 2:25.) Repentance and faith are the gift of God to us, not our work that we present to God.

The Holy Spirit works this repentance and faith in us through the preaching of the Gospel. As God's word concerning Jesus Christ is proclaimed, the Holy Spirit works via that word in the human heart, bringing all of God's "new creative" power to bear. There is parallel here with the work of the Spirit at creation – it was as God spoke that the Spirit was at work in shaping and effecting the world.

The proclaiming of the Gospel and the winning of men and women to faith in Christ needs the work of the Holy Spirit. No matter how clear the presentation, no matter how winning the style of the preacher, no matter how desperate the need of the hearer, without the Holy Spirit's ministry there is no saving action done. For this reason we need to acknowledge our dependence on, and deep desire for, the work of the Spirit in our sharing of the gospel with our friends and families by giving ourselves to prayer (Romans 10:1, 2 Corinthians 1:11, Ephesians 6:19-20, Philippians 1:19, Colossians 4:2-4.) We need to be in prayer too for those whom God has called especially to be proclaimers of His Gospel in the world. As we pray we must know that we are praying for that which the Father, Son and Spirit desire even more than we do, that sinners not die, but rather that they turn and be saved.



10. The doctrine of the Holy Spirit

The indwelling and work of the Holy Spirit in the believer.

The Holy Spirit is the one who brings us to faith and repentance by opening us to the truth of Jesus Christ as the word of God is spoken. Having begun by the Spirit, the Christian now goes on living by the Spirit of God (Galatians 3:3.) We do not progress from the Spirit's work in us to our own, independent work. Another way of saying this is that we never move away from the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Christian sanctification is not "our part of the contract" but is also the gift of God through the Holy Spirit to us.

It is clear that the Holy Spirit indwells both individual believers and the body of Christ as a whole. John 14:17 - "The Spirit of truth... lives with you and will be in you." 1 Corinthians 6:19 - "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God." By the Holy Spirit's indwelling, we are also indwelt by Christ Himself and also by the Father (John 14:20, 23). When God indwells us we are secured in the love of God for us.

Jesus taught that when he gave the gift of the Holy Spirit, He would teach us (John 14:26) and guide us into all truth (John 16:13.) The Holy Spirit does not "speak on his own", and so his teaching is not additional to the full revelation that has come in Christ (Hebrews 1:1-3), but rather will be the opening up to us of all the truth that is in Jesus. (See 1 Corinthians 2:12ff.)

The Holy Spirit works to sustain us in the gospel, and in its freedom, and to mature us in the new life to which Christ has brought us. The Holy Spirit gives us love and hope (Romans 5:1-5, 15:13), along with faith – and so the things that remain (1 Corinthians 13:13) are begun in us now by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit fills us with joy (1 Thessalonians 1:6, Galatians 5:22, Romans 14:1, 15:13)! The Holy Spirit is the guarantee of our future inheritance (Ephesians 1:13-14.) As we suffer in this age, the Holy Spirit focuses us on Christ and teaches us to pray (Romans 8:22ff.) Through the Spirit we know that we have access to the Father, and so he leads us in prayer (Ephesians 2:18, 6:18) The Holy Spirit sets our minds now on the will of God (Romans 8:ff) and so leads us in sanctification; as temples of the Spirit we seek to honour God by holiness of life (2 Corinthians

7:1, Ephesians 4:30, 5:18.)



11. The doctrine of the Church

The one holy universal Church which is the body of Christ and to which all true believers belong

‘Church’ describes the gathering together of every person who has been redeemed and justified by Jesus Christ, adopted by the Father to be members of His family, and set apart and sanctified by the Holy Spirit to be part of God’s mission for and to the world. The church is properly expressed whenever believers in Jesus come together; it is a corporate expression of the work that God is doing to save people. Whether we like it or not, every Christian is a member of the church, and is called to express this by loving one another as Christ has loved them (See John 15:12-17, 1 Peter 1:22, 1 John 3:23, 4:11). In this expression of loving community we bear witness to the world of the reality and power of God’s love; and it also marks us out as distinctive (John 13:34-35). Therefore, we should never think of ourselves as solitary or individual Christians, as we need one another if we are to grow and mature in faith (Acts 2:46, Hebrews Hebrews 10:24-25).

The Holy Spirit works in the church and in believers. He is the One who empowers the people of God for the ministry of proclaiming and witnessing to the gospel, given to them by Christ (Luke 24:49, John 20:21-22, Acts 1:8.) In this empowering, the Holy Spirit also acts as director and leader of the ministry, often in quite surprising ways (e.g. Acts 13:2-4, 9, 16:6-7, 20:23, 21:11.) All human planning must be subjected to the Spirit’s directing. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are all with a view to the church being strong and effective in our witness in the world (see Ephesians 4:7-16, Romans 12:1-8, 1 Corinthians 12-14, 1 Peter 4:10-11.)

The beauty of the church is that by being united to Christ, we are united in him to our sisters and brothers across the world, and across time. We are part of a family that transcends geography and history, because it is the family of the eternal Father! (Ephesians 3:14)



12. The doctrine of eschatology

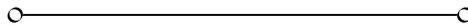
The expectation of the personal return of the Lord Jesus Christ

All that we believe as Christians has its setting in the plan of God which is centred in and worked out through His Son Jesus Christ. That plan has a great consummation, an endpoint, when all that God has been doing in history reaches its climax. That climax will be inaugurated by the personal return of Jesus Christ to the earth as its judge (Acts 10:42). The Holy Spirit works hope in believers so that we long for and wait for that appearing again of Jesus Christ eagerly (Philippians 3:20, Romans 8:23, Galatians 5:5, 2 Timothy 4:8.) This longing for Christ’s return is very much a litmus test of the reality of our faith in Christ.

Because the return of the Lord Jesus Christ is the point at which God’s plan is finalised and climaxed, we must see these things in deep connection with the whole of the rest of the outworking of His plan. (This may save us from some of the more bizarre misrepresentations of this doctrine that have sometimes intrigued believers.) There must be a consistency across our theology that is centred in Jesus Christ. The One who returns is He who was promised in the prophets, incarnate of the virgin Mary, suffered to deal with the sins of the world, who rose again and demonstrated the victory of God in him over all the powers and working of Satan and evil, and reigns in the earth while He pours out the Spirit on the church so that they may declare His lordship and call men and women to repentance and faith. History ends with the return of the man the Lord Jesus Christ to judge the living and the dead.

The return of Jesus Christ leads to the final judgment, the total liberating of God's people, the renewal of all things, and the start of the life of eternity. In the final judgment, men and women are judged primarily on their response to the action of God in Jesus Christ for the salvation of the world (Revelation 20:15) but also all that has been done against the truth of God is fully and finally measured (eg. Matthew 12:36, Hebrews 13:4, James 2:12-13, 5:9.) For the Christian this means that all that was not of God will be burned up – don't dread this, but long for it! (1 Corinthians 3:12-15) The liberation of God's people is the beginning of the renewal of the whole of creation - our destiny is not a spiritual place called heaven, but in a renewed, physical creation. (Romans 8:18-21.) In this liberation Satan, evil and sin, death and all their effects will be fully and finally removed and judged. And so life will flow freely!

The day of Christ's return is fixed in the plan of God (Acts 1:7, 17:31) and no human being knows this day, not even Jesus Christ himself (Matthew 24:36, Mark 13:32.) There is a sinful wilfulness and stubbornness in human beings who seek to find "hints" if not actual dates! Matthew 25 (and similar passages) spells out what must and will happen before the end, but it does not give us any basis for thinking that we can pinpoint its nearness. That return will be sudden and will be a shock to many. God calls Christians to live in constant expectancy of the nearness of the return of Christ, and to be ready at any moment for that return. On our lips and in our hearts is the longing cry, "Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus!" (Revelation 22:20).



(Originally written by Andrew Klynsmith in 2008, with some additions by James Krieg to reflect the 2014 update of the ES doctrinal basis)