

Doctrinal Statement of Michael DeAngelis

*Submitted to clarify doctrinal positions in
consideration of the calling to Elder Pastor*

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October 22, 2008

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Preamble

My personal doctrinal statement is a product of the continual work of the Lord in my life from childhood through the challenges of the teenage years into adulthood. My relationship with the Lord can be traced to the instruction and guidance of parents and grandparents who loved the Lord and served Him and as such they raised me in the faith, in the Church.

In spite of this upbringing, it was my personal encounter with the Gospel and the inner working of the Holy Spirit that brought me to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ and reconciled me to God. At the age of seven, during a Church school class on Sunday morning, I was quickened by the Spirit (John 6:63; Rom 8:11), and saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone (Eph 2:8). Like Saul who was blind (Acts 9:17-19), the scales of sin fell from my eyes, and I saw for the first time the true glory of God and His love for me through Christ Jesus. I could not resist the drawing of the Spirit; with the gift of faith granted, I repented of my sin, left my nets (the concerns of the flesh), and followed Him. I distinctly remember the moment when those words of the Gospel that I had heard so often took on a new meaning and became so profound.

As I have grown in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ, I have had to wrestle with many issues of life as well as challenges to my faith and belief system. Growing up in a charismatic denomination posed theological problems for me as I delved more deeply into what scripture teaches regarding salvation, gifts and evangelism. The challenges of my journey shaped my theological position into one that is firmly reformed and Baptist.

Our Heavenly Father has called me into service as a shepherd of Austin Square Baptist Church. This doctrinal statement encapsulates what I believe regarding the essentials of the Christian faith.

The Doctrine of the Bible (Bibliology)

Some have said of the Bible that it contains the words of truth of God. However, scripture is clear that the Bible is the actual oracles and utterances of God conveyed to men through the work of the Spirit of God (Holy Spirit). The Spirit searches and knows the depths of the Father and hence communicates that through the Word (1 Cor 2:10-12). The Bible is the prophetic word that conveys the will of God not that of men (2 Peter 1:19-21). As the actual words of God, the Bible is inerrant as God himself is perfect and the ultimate authority on all law, truth and reality. The scriptures are inerrant in their original utterances and through the Spirit man has translated the Word for our edification. The Bible is holy as God is holy and as Holy Spirit inspired, it is profitable for teaching, reproof, correction and training in righteousness (2 Tim 3:16). The reading and teaching of the Word is a means of grace that can draw a person to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ as the Word takes root in the hearts of man (Mat 13:1-23). The Word is called a lamp and a light that guides and directs how we live and travel through this life (Psalm 119:105). The Word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword, living and active, cutting to the marrow and exposing the heart of man (Heb 4:12). It is the source of defense of the faith and a guide for how we are to conduct worship, govern the church and administer ordinances. It is the authoritative and final word on questions of the faith. I believe that the canon of scripture is

comprised of 66 books (39 Old Testament; 27 New Testament) and I do not count the Apocrypha among canonical text.

The Doctrine of God

God the Father is the first person of the trinity and exists as an infinite being with no beginning and no end. In short, He is eternal (Psalm 90:2). The concept of a triune God is one of the great mysteries of the Almighty. God exists as three distinct persons equal in glory, power and might—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—with distinctive roles. Scripture reaffirms this throughout and although the human mind has difficulty conceiving of this it is a fundamental truth of God (Gen 1:26; Joh 1:1; 12:26; 15:26; 16:13-15; Mat 28:19). His vastness cannot be fully comprehended by the human mind since the mind is finite and God is infinite. To be clear, although God exists in three distinct persons, there is one and only one God and all things exist from and for Him (1 Cor 8:4-6). He is holy (Rev 6:10) and good (Psalm 34:8) being infallible, immutable and incorruptible as well as all powerful (omnipotent), all knowing (omniscient) and all present (omnipresent). The Apostle John writes extensively about the love of God as it is expressed through His plan for the salvation of man through Jesus Christ. John writes that God is love (1 John 4:8) and anyone who does not know love does not know God. It is His very nature. In this love, He is gracious and merciful to us; giving us what we don't deserve and holding back the wrath that we do deserve. Yet, this love is always balanced with His holiness, justice and His total aversion toward evil and sin. As such, God cannot tolerate sin and being true to His nature, He will punish those who deny Him and His Son. From Him the plans for creation, man, and restoration to relationship with God through Christ were initiated. There is nothing beyond His control or command. There is nothing outside of His foreknowledge and ordained plan including our salvation (Acts 2:23). Satan himself is limited in what he can accomplish by the Almighty (Job 1:12) since Satan is a created and finite being whereas God is, was and ever will be infinite. God sits enthroned in Heaven with His Son at His right hand, awaiting the final consummation, of which only He knows the day and time.

The Doctrine of God's Decrees

The will of God can be described as existing in two forms: decretive and preceptive. The preceptive will of God are those precepts, statutes and commands that God has graciously revealed to us through His Word. This is the will that we are responsible to know and to obey. This would include our call to repent of our sins and be baptized (Acts 2:38). It would include the call to put on Christ (Rom 13:14) and the full armor of God (Eph 6:13-20) to live according to the Spirit and not the flesh (Rom 8:13). The decretive will of God are those secret decrees that God has made that are hidden from our eyes and understanding and as such we are called to yield to their unfolding and trust the grace and mercy of our God. His decrees have established from the very beginning His intent for creating man (Gen 1:1); His foreknowledge of Adam's free choice to sin and hence mankind's bondage to sin; man's need of the Savior; the course of human history; the life, suffering, death, resurrection and victory of His Son Jesus Christ and the precise choice of His people before the foundations of the world were laid; and the final consummation at the end of the age (Rom 8: 30; Rom 9:11-18; Eph 1:3-6, 11; Rev 17:8). Only God knows how the events of our lives have been ordered from the very beginning of time

(Psalm 37:23; 148:5-6). His secret will also includes those who have been set aside and designated for condemnation that the will of God would unfold and all glory would be heaped upon Him (Jude 4). All of this transpires for His glory and for His pleasure and enjoyment of relationship with His creation (Rev 4:11). Having confidence in the secret decrees of the Almighty engenders contentment, peace, trust and reliance on Him.

Doctrine of Man

In the beginning, man was created by God and in His image. In this original state, man was without sin (Gen 2:16, 17) and as such was not bound and limited by sin. Adam, the first of mankind, had an unblemished relationship with God and was granted dominion over the earth to subdue and rule the earth. Woman, named Eve, was given to Adam, created from bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh, as a helpmate (Gen 1:28; 2:23). Through temptation of Satan in the form of a serpent, Adam and Eve disobeyed God by eating of the forbidden fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil and hence sin entered the world (Gen 3). At this point, mankind lost a free will since it was now bound by sin. As a result of this fall, sin is a part of us all and we are all defiled from conception (Rom 3; Psalm 51:5); we are all dead in our sin that has been passed down from Adam (Rom 5:12-19; 21). In this sin nature, we are inclined to do evil (Col 13:21); it is most comfortable and easy for us to choose evil although through the merciful hand of God we are not utterly evil. This inborn sin nature puts us at enmity with God and therefore unless we have a means of being justified and declared righteous in God's eyes, we cannot have an eternal relationship with Him. This is where the gifts of salvation through Jesus Christ, the Son, allow us to be in relationship with God. Although this sin nature remains even after conversion, it is mortified by the working of the Holy Spirit, by the grace of God (Rom 7:18-25; Eccles 7:20).

Doctrine of Christ

Jesus is the second person of the trinity who in a perfect loving relationship with the Father works in concert with the Father to carry out His will, most notably as the willing sacrifice and the Lamb who takes away the sins of the world. Jesus and God are one and He has always existed with God the Father including when the earth was created (John 1:1). Jesus was born of a virgin, Mary, who conceived by the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit (Luke 2). In this way, Christ was born fully God and undefiled by the sin nature of mankind. Calvin describes the office and work of Christ in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* as prophet, priest and king. These three names describe how Christ, in His sinless and yet human form, both God and man at the same time, is able to reconcile men to God through His mediating work and how Christ reigns in victory and will return for His people. As prophet, Jesus declares the truth of God and the need for a savior to be reconciled to God (Acts 3:22-26). He also declares that He is the fulfillment of the prophecies of old (Luke 4:14-30). He declares His death and resurrection for the salvation of the world (Matt 17:22-23) and correlates the acts of the prophets to His death and resurrection (Luke 11:29). Jesus, as prophet, declared of Himself that He has come to seek and to save those who are lost (Luke 19:10). Most poignantly, Christ is our great High Priest who understands our struggles and temptations but through perfect obedience to God the Father, He never yielded to temptation, never sinned or fallen short of glory but willingly was made

lower than the angels for a time (Heb 2:9-18). He is the perfect fulfillment of the law and as such He is the perfect sacrifice to redeem and reconcile man back to God bridging the chasm between man and God created by sin. Unlike an earthly priest, Jesus was appointed to die once and for all; no more sacrifices are necessary (Heb 9:27-28). And now He is seated on the throne of heaven as the king, ruler and conqueror (Psalm 2). He is the King of kings and Lord of lords and He has overcome the world and the enemy (Rev 17:12-14) and will return for His people in all glory (1 Thess 4:16-17).

Doctrine of Salvation

Most modern evangelical Christians hold to the Arminian position regarding salvation which states that a person is enabled by grace to choose salvation but it is that personal choice that ultimately saves. In essence, grace is not enough and requires the work of man to make it effective. Furthermore, man can resist grace and thus resist the drawing of the Spirit. Also, the Arminian position flips election to be the result of faith rather than the precursor to faith. I do not believe that Scripture affirms the Arminian perspective on salvation. I believe that Scripture teaches salvation comes by grace alone, through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone (Eph 2:8). That faith, as a gift of God, is exercised but only after man is enabled by the regeneration of the Holy Spirit (Tit 3:4-7). Furthermore, there is nothing that man can do to earn salvation; we are justified by the work of Christ and the free gift of salvation (Rom 5:1). I believe the most concise approach to describing the salvation of man through Jesus Christ is to examine the Doctrines of Grace by using the TULIP acrostic, which has been devised to articulate the reformed theological position defended by Calvin and other reformers.

- Total Depravity- This is the doctrine that states that man is unable on his own accord to choose spiritual good because he is dead in his trespass and sin and is bound by sin so that he is unable to choose to be saved. This does not mean he doesn't do any good in his life; by the common goodness of God man is able to do good deeds but never anything that amounts to an act of salvation (Rom 3:10-18; 5:12-16).
- Unconditional Election- God has chosen a certain people from before the foundation of the earth was laid. He knew these people in love and chose them by His own will and not because of something that anyone has done or may do (Eph 1:3-6). He foreknew us, predestined us, chose us, justified us and then glorified us (Rom 8:29-32). This is all done by His sovereign choice. Just as He has chosen some (the elect) to be His, He also has appointed others to condemnation and destruction. The Scriptures tell us that Pharaoh was raised up as a vessel unto destruction and Esau was hated by God and predestined to destruction (Rom 9:13-24). Judas was raised up so that he might fulfill the betrayal of Christ leading to his utter demise as well (Acts 1:16). Some have called this double predestination, but I submit and believe that you cannot have a Sovereign God who predestines anyone to salvation unless you believe that this same God has predestined the rest to destruction.
- Limited Atonement- Those who Christ foreknew and predestined, He also called and justified (Rom 8:29-30). In this simplistic statement resides one of the most challenging truths of the Reformed tradition. When Jesus climbed upon the tree to suffer as an atoning sacrifice, He paid for sins. As Scripture shows us, His atonement means that those sins are forgiven and the price paid; the redemption is complete. Thus, Christ effectually died for the elect since the atonement paid the price for and covered their sins (John 10:14-15; Heb 9:14,15). If Christ died for all sins of all people, even the non-elect would have their sins

covered (paid for and pardoned) and as such there would be no direct effect of the atonement. This would make the atonement merely the availability of salvation sealed by the act of man at a future date. This is not what scripture teaches. When Jesus went to the cross, He had His sheep, the elect from the whole world, on His mind and He completed the payment once and for all for them. Thus, payment and righteousness is credited to us and hence we are justified. As His people, this should engender much comfort, confidence and joy.

- Irresistible Grace- When the Spirit of God apprehends a person's heart, that person is not able to resist the draw of the Father. The grace of God becomes irresistible and the result is a willingness to repent and pursue Christ. The regenerating work of the Spirit cannot be resisted. (John 6:37, 44; 2 Thess 2:13-14)
- Perseverance of the Saints- Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:35-39). The elect will endure to the end and be with the Father in a glorified state. Although a person may stray or "back slide" the elect will never be lost and cannot become unelect. The elect are sealed with the promise of the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13-14). This is an eternal assurance. In fact, someone who turns their back on Christ after knowing Him was never truly saved in the first place. God will preserve His people.

The appreciation of these doctrines should not impede our evangelism of the lost. The predestination and election of some is a secret decree of God that is obscured from man. Therefore, we are to put out the call for all to repent realizing that God will do the saving. And yet, there is personal responsibility on the part of mankind in that after the heart of man is quickened and regenerated by the Spirit the appropriate response and human responsibility is repentance. How God has orchestrated this is a wonderful mystery of His grace and mercy.

Doctrine of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity (Mat 28:19) and was present with God the Father and the Son in the beginning at creation (Gen 1:2; John 1:1). The Holy Spirit was always present and active in the world; the Old Testament is replete with references to the Spirit of God, which is synonymous to the Holy Spirit (2Sa 23:2). The Holy Spirit was present and active in the conception of Jesus (Luk 1:35) demonstrating that He is equally God. The Spirit seals us unto salvation and unites us to Christ at the time of our conversion. John the Baptist speaks of this sealing as the baptism of the Holy Spirit that Jesus would bring, a baptism that is greater than the baptism of repentance of John (Mar 1:8). The Spirit initiates salvation in that He regenerates and renews us (Tit 3:5), which then enables us to seek the Lord and repent. Without the initial regeneration and renewal of the Spirit, we are still bound to our sin and unable to repent (Rom 3). The holiness of the Spirit is affirmed by Jesus in that one who blasphemes the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven (Luk 12:10). The Spirit was poured out on the church after Christ ascended into heaven to the right hand of the Father (Joh 7:39) as a comforter (parakletos) or one who comes along side us to provide comfort and guidance. He is called the Spirit of Truth in that He will dwell in us and reveal and remind us of the teachings of Jesus; He bears witness of Christ and declares the truths of Christ, which are the truths of God the Father, to us. (Joh 14:17; Joh 14:26; Joh 15:26; Joh 16:13-15). At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out in a new and greater way to empower the church and to enable the apostles with authority and with boldness to declare the Messiah (Act 1:8; Act 4:8). This was a unique filling and indwelling of the Holy Spirit as believers would have the full impact of the Spirit living and dwelling within as

given by Christ. The Spirit endowed unique gifts upon the new believers as a means of validating the authenticity of the Apostles and to establish the church. Speaking in tongues, the most controversial of gifts today, was the act of speaking actual languages that provided for a wider sowing of the Word and a demonstration of the power endowed to the Apostles (Act 19:6; 1 Cor 12:7-11). As there are no longer any Apostles or need for the further revelation of truth, these gifts have ceased. Yet the Spirit does produce, in each of us, fruit of our changed nature that demonstrates our new life in Christ and that is a witness of the character of Christ. These fruit of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law (Gal 5:22-23). Finally, the Spirit will be present at the end of the age, fully participating in the final events and glorification of the saints (Rev 14:13; Rev 22:17).

Doctrine of Future Things

The first fundamental aspect of future things is the understanding of that which man should and should not know. Many Christians today engage in trying to predict when Jesus will return. To be clear, we do not now the hour or the time when the Lord will return and take His people home. In fact, only the Father knows when this will all unfold (Mat 24:36; Act 1:7). What we do know is what is revealed to us from the Scripture. First, the Kingdom is already at hand and is victorious through the work of Jesus Christ (1 Cor 5:25). Satan is already defeated as the atonement has sealed his fate. Jesus, however, does give his disciples signs that the end of the age is at hand. Wars, rumors of wars, nations rising against nations, lawless and myriad other pangs of birth will be present before the return of the Lord (Mat 24:6-14). We are, however, prone to thinking that it must be imminent as we view the current events of the day. It is futile and could be frustrating to continue to speculate and try to align every event with the specifics that Jesus Himself outlined. However, this does not negate the need for Christians to live expectantly, awaiting the rolling back of the clouds as a scroll and the trumpet sound as Christ returns. Christ will return in bodily form (Acts 1:11) with a trumpet blast and much pomp. He will gather up those who are alive and in Christ and then the dead in Christ will be raised as well to dwell with Him (1 Th 4:16-18). Of these things we can be sure, that Satan is already defeated, the Kingdom is here and the Lord will return to victoriously gather His people home to His bosom. There are several schools of thought regarding the millennium (1,000 year reign of Christ) and end times. I hold to an amillennial view of eschatology in that I believe the book of Revelation is a picture in various perspectives of the church age leading to the final consummation. I also believe that the numbers in Revelation are symbolic especially given the type of writing that is employed and the fact that numbers are used elsewhere for symbolism. For example, the 1,000-year millennial reign means the full church age as it is made up of multiples of 10, a number that means fullness. (2 Pet 3:8; Rev 20:4). Likewise, I do not believe that 144,000 of the elect is a literal number but it represents all of God's people. The concept that these are distinct and/or sequential events is not a position to which I hold as I firmly believe that the Kingdom of our Lord is presently advancing at an unprecedented pace (Mat 24:14) and yet the persecution and challenges to the church are also simultaneously advancing. As such, I believe we in this age are the ones coming out of the great tribulation with robes washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb (Rev 7:14) and we are the ones reigning with the Lord even today.

Justification and Sanctification

Justification is one of those big words in Christian theology: big in letter and big in meaning. Justification is the state of being declared righteous as if a judge has passed down a ruling. It is God who declares us righteous and hence justifies us, finds us not guilty, through the work that Jesus Christ accomplished through his substitutionary atonement (dying for us in our place as the sacrifice to satisfy the penalty for our sins) and spares us from the wrath of God (Rom 5:9). We are not justified by anything that we do; it is a gift of grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (Rom 3:20, 24). Christ's righteousness is imputed to us or counted as our own and in that we are "legally" declared in the court of the Almighty as not guilty. And so we are not justified by works but through Christ by God the Father's sovereign plan and gracious election (Rom 3:28; Rom 8:30). Furthermore, we do not become righteous but rather are counted as righteous.

Sanctification is used in three ways in the Faith. First, it means that at the time of our conversion by the Spirit, we are set apart for the Lord (positional sanctification). This is a setting apart from impurity and lawlessness that we knew and embraced as unbelievers (Rom 6:19; Rom 6:22). God chose us, called us and in doing so He sanctified us (2 Th 2:13). Second, sanctification is also a process that we experience throughout our lives in which we are refined and grow closer to the Lord (progressive sanctification). It is this sanctification that enables us to mature in Christ, call us daily to abstain from immorality, and causes us to be transformed by the renewing of our minds (1 Th 4:3; Gal 5:18-21; Rom 12:1-2). Finally, some day when we are in glory we will be complete (perfected sanctification).

The Ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper

I believe in the baptism of believers through immersion. I believe that this is the most accurate adherence to what is commanded and modeled in scripture. Although related in some ways to John's baptism, it is distinctive and progressive to the baptism of repentance that John advanced as believers' baptism (Christian baptism) is an outward sign of the inward conversion through the regeneration of the Spirit; it is a confession through deed of the change Christ has wrought in an individual and so follows repentance (Acts 2:38; 8:38; 16:30-33). Immersion perfectly portrays the dying to sin as one is submerged and the new life, new creation in Christ Jesus as one emerges. The standard of immersion is gleaned from the Greek word used for baptism (*baptizo*) which means "to make whelmed; that is to make fully wet." The use of this word does not communicate sprinkling or dipping but a full immersion. I believe a person can be baptized at any age provided they are able to articulate an understanding of their faith and what Christ has done for them through His sacrifice. Water baptism unites the believer to the church of Christ and follows after the baptism of the Spirit, which unites them to Christ at their conversion. I believe that participation in the Lord's Supper would rightly follow baptism as it is the communion of the saints together and with the Lord as an act of remembrance of His suffering, death and victory over sin and Satan (1 Cor 11:24-25). I believe the wafer (or bread) and the grape juice (or wine) are symbolic of the body and blood of Christ and do not actually transform into His body and blood (1 Cor 11:24-26). However, this is a solemn ceremony, which should be entered into with all appropriate gravity and reverence. A person should examine himself to ensure that there is no lingering egregious sin or disharmony with a brother before partaking.

Sharing in the Lord's Supper without proper preparation and introspection can have grave consequences (1 Cor 11:27-30). Finally, one need not be a member of Austin Square Baptist Church to participate in the Lord's Supper; one must believe (and repent) and be baptized.

The Doctrine of the Church

Leadership

The Bible teaches that there are two offices in the church: elders and deacons. Both offices require men of integrity, honesty, trustworthiness and sobriety (both literally and figuratively) (1 Tim 3:1-13). The distinctive difference is that elders must be apt to teach (1 Tim 3:2) while deacons are not required to have this ability. Elders were established in the first century churches to be shepherds (pastors) of the flock of God's people. Scripture affirms a plurality of elders who are dedicated to the teaching, care and spiritual well-being of the flock (Acts 14:23, 15:4; 1 Peter 5:1-5). Paul exhorts Timothy to uphold the faith and as such elders are called to defend the faith (1 Tim 1:3, 18). In this role, they bear the responsibility for ensuring that all of the affairs of the church honor God, advance the faith and protect the faith from false doctrines. Deacons were established to tend to the mundane affairs of the church to ensure equitable care and treatment of the congregation and to look after secular affairs so that the elders can focus on the study and teaching of the word (Acts 6:1-7). The Bible specifies that such leadership is male and requires proper examination of the man who feels called to this role (1 Tim 3:10).

Membership

Membership in the church is a key to the unity and commitment to serving one another and encouraging one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. Some have argued that membership is a modern invention akin to running a corporation. However, the concept of uniting the body of believers together in bonds of peace to bear one another in love is Biblical (Eph 4:1-6; 1 Pet 3:8). Similarly, the many gifts of the church such as the pastors and teachers are intended to equip the saints for the building up of the body of Christ, the church, and to inspire working together as the body to advance the kingdom (Eph 4:11-14; 1 Th 5:11-14). As a member one covenants with the other members to encourage one another and to work together for the glory of God. This covenant is binding and is an assurance (Gal 3:15). The whole church, all members, work with the leaders to tend to the needs of the ministries and one another (Acts 15:22). Church membership is a covenantal uniting with the community of believers for the kingdom work that must be done and for the mutual edification of one another.

Conclusion

In sum, I agree with and hold to the Baptist Confession of 1689 (2nd London), as revised and amended by Austin Square Baptist Church.