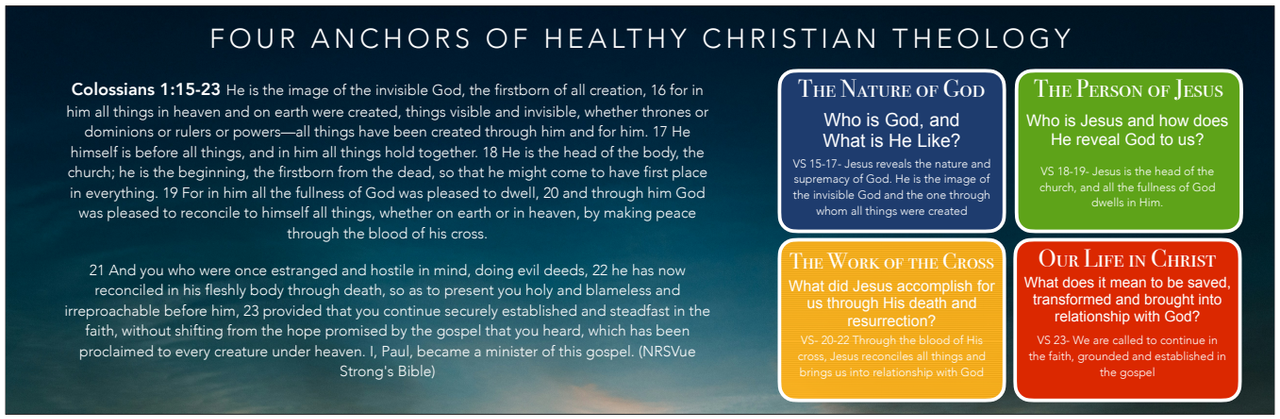


In essentials, unity
In non-essentials, liberty
In all things, charity.- Meldenius

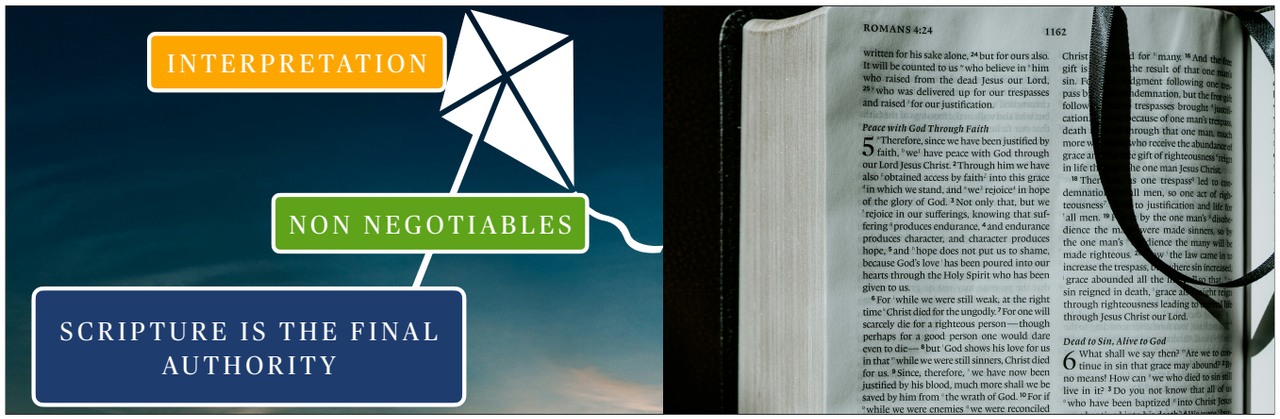
Ephesians 4:1-6
1 I, therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace: 4 there is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.



Colossians 1:15-23 15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, 16 for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. 17 He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. 19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20 and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.
21 And you who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, 22 he has now reconciled in his fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him, 23 provided that you continue securely established and steadfast in the faith, without shifting from the hope promised by the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven. I, Paul, became a minister of this gospel. (NRSVue Strong's Bible)

1. **The Nature of God-** Who is God and what is he like? Verses 15-57- Jesus reveals the nature and supremacy of God. He is the image of the invisible God and the one through whom all things were created.
2. **The person of Jesus-** Who is Jesus, and how does he reveal God to us?- Verses 18-19- Jesus is the head of the church, and all the fulness of God dwells in Him.
3. **The Work of the Cross-** What did Jesus accomplish for us through His death and resurrection? - Verses 20-22- Through the blood of His cross, Jesus reconciles all things and brings us into relationship with God.
4. **Our life in Christ-** What does it mean to be saved, transformed and brought into relationship with God? - Verse 23- We are called to continue in the faith, grounded and established in the Gospel.

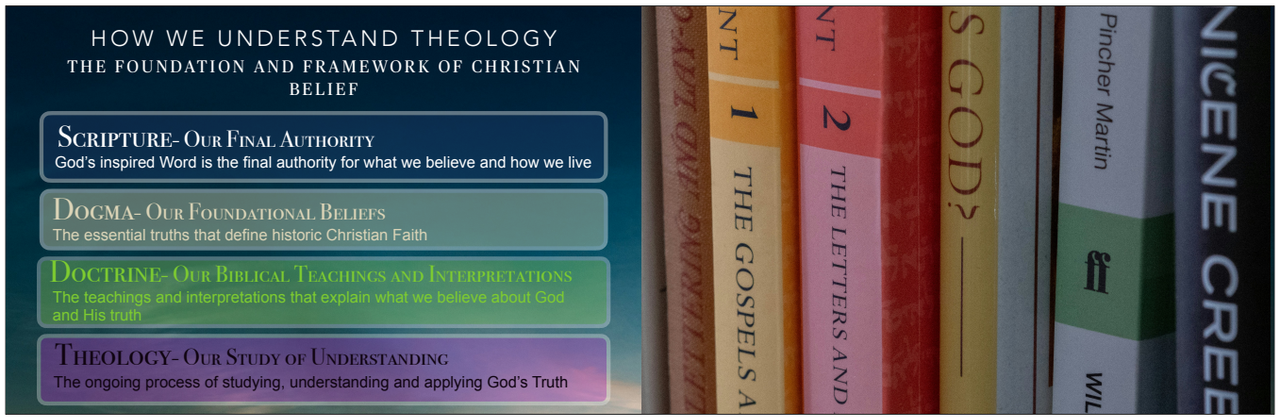
These are broad strokes, but the basic anchors of healthy belief: who God is, who Jesus is, what Jesus did and how we are called to live.



Our first faith statement is that Scripture is the final authority with regard to our faith

It is appropriate to interpret Scripture, and those interpretations are where we get different doctrines and denominations. But those interpretations or theorizing, much like a kite, need to be tethered to the final authority; they must have a string, or a structure of non-negotiable beliefs about God, that guard the interpretations of Scripture so we don't interpret ourselves out of truth

The non-negotiables are what we will call Dogma- Providing a lens by which we interpret scripture, keeping our interpretations accountable
So what is that, and how do we come to it?



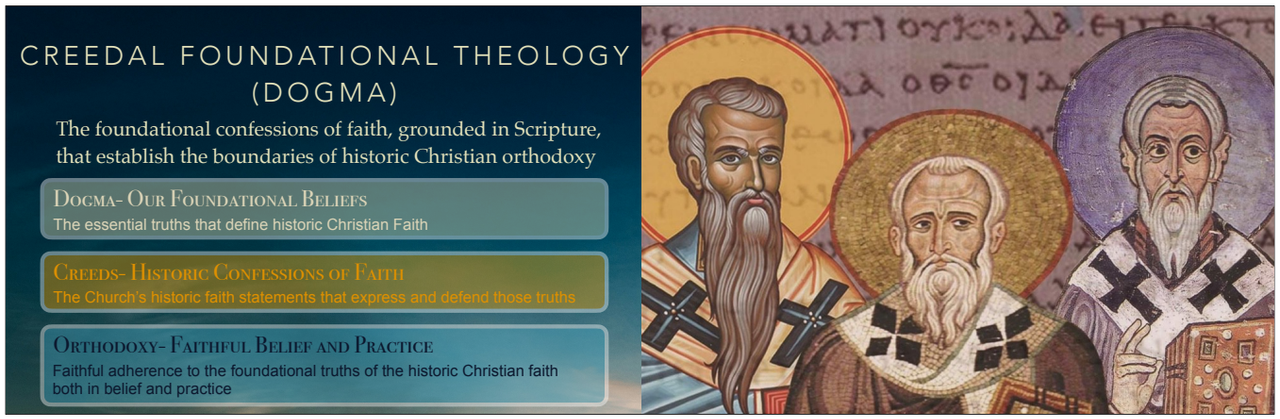
How We Understand Theology
The Foundation and Framework of Christian Belief

Scripture- Our Final Authority- God's inspired word is the final authority for what we believe and how we live
- So we are clear: Scripture remains the final authority; the challenge is how Scripture is interpreted. To simply say, "the Bible says," still requires a lens to protect from an interpretation quoting Scripture but changing its truth.

Dogma- Our Foundational Beliefs- The essential truths that define historic Christian faith
- These are the non-negotiables of what our faith consists of: who God is, the Trinity, Salvation, the incarnation, Jesus' death and resurrection. These are belief statements, not interpretive ones.

Doctrine- Our biblical teachings and interpretations- the teachings and interpretations that explain what we believe about God and His truth
- This can vary in interpretation but not depart from dogma, redefining the faith. Birth place of denominations and factions within the body of Christ
- In this we can disagree but remain united in dogma

Theology- Our study of understanding- the ongoing process of studying, understanding and applying God's truth
- Theology is a valid endeavor for growth and understanding, but should not be used as a means of division

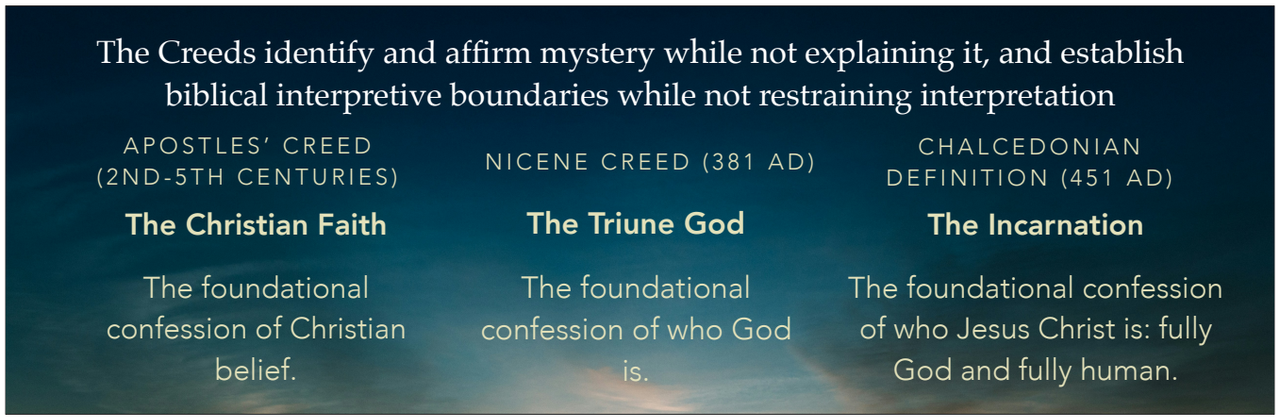


Dogma- Our foundational beliefs- the essential truths that define historic Christian faith

Creeds- Historic Confessions of Faith- The church's historical faith statements that express and defend those truths
- In a sense the creeds are the vehicle for dogma, our non-negotiables

Orthodoxy- Faithful belief and practice- Faithful adherence to the foundational truths of the historic Christian faith in both belief and practice
- Ultimately, historical Christian faith calls us to both faithful belief and faithful practice (James 2:17, Rom 12:1-2, Titus 2:1)

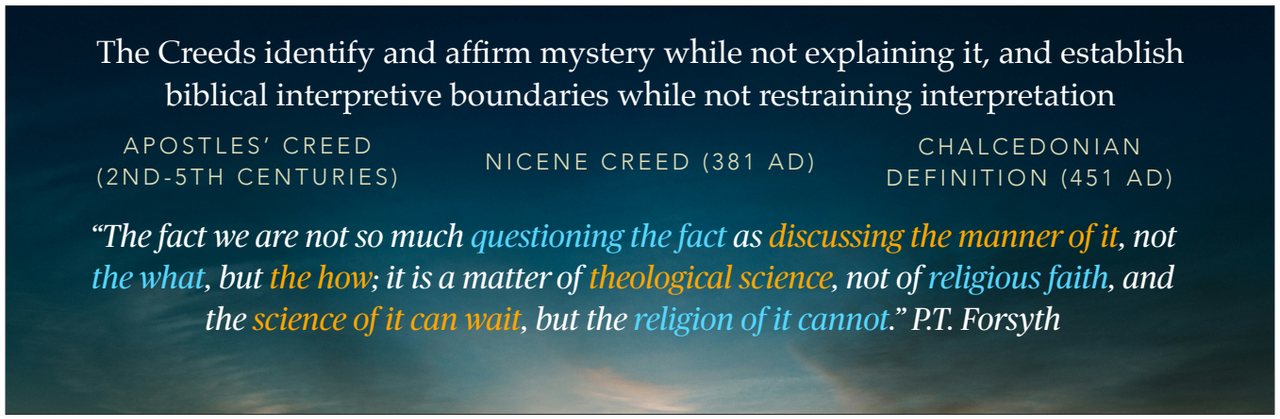
We don't just believe what is true but we live faithfully in accordance to what we believe.



The Creeds identify and affirm mystery while not explaining it, and establish biblical interpretive boundaries while not restraining interpretation

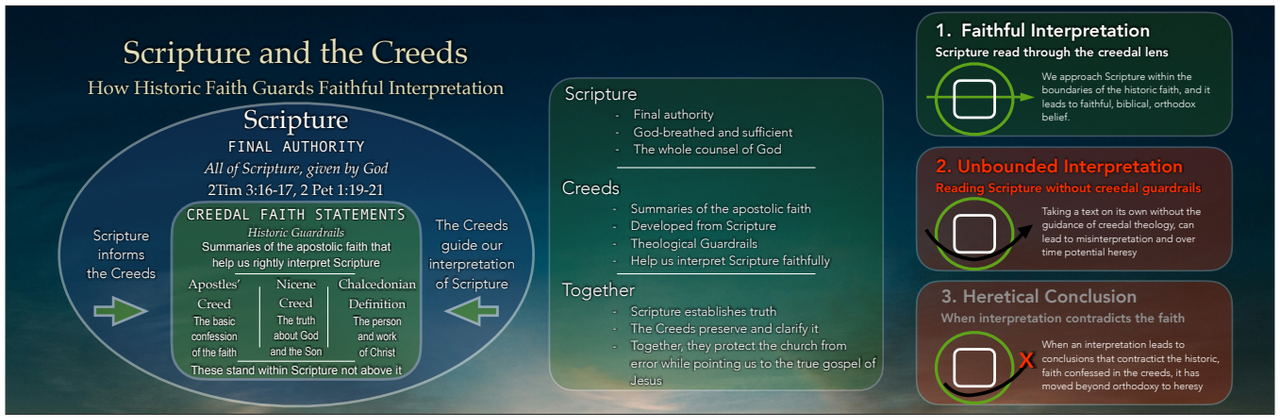
- Creedal theology identifies those mysteries deemed essential to the Christian faith and expressed through its foundational confessions, without attempteing to exhaustively define or explain every mystery of God
- The creeds establish the boundaries of historic Christian orthodoxy while allowing diverse scriptural interpretations within the great Christian traditions. They protect against interpretations that depart from the foundational confessions and the historic Christian consensus
- **The great traditions require us to receive certain foundational truths by faith, while allowing diversity in how we interpret and understand Scripture. However, our interpretations must never lead us outside the boundaries of the great confessions- the essential mysteries confessed by the historic Christian faith.**
- These are foundational statements of faith, not conclusions reached through human reason alone. They confess truths that reason may explore and illuminate, but cannot fully comprehend.
- **The creeds function like a fence around a playground: within the fence, there is freedom to explore, question, interpret, and develop a theological understanding and expression. The fence does not restrict exploration; it protects the space in which faithful exploration can take place.**

The Apostles Creed
The Christian Faith- The foundational confession of Christian belief.
The Nicene Creed
The Triune God- The foundational confession of who God is.
Chalcedonian Definition
The Incarnation- The foundational confession of who Jesus Christ is: fully God and fully human.



The Creeds identify and affirm mystery while not explaining it, and establish biblical interpretive boundaries while not restraining interpretation

P.T. Forsyth reminds us of the difference between "religious faith" and "theological science," that is, *"The fact we are not so much questioning the fact as discussing the manner of it, not the what, but the how; it is a matter of theological science, not of religious faith, and the science of it can wait, but the religion of it cannot." P.T. Forsyth.* Peter Taylor Forsyth, *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ: The Congregational Union Lecture for 1909* (Cincinnati, NY: Jennings & Graham; Eaton and Mains) n.d., 294.



Scripture and the Creeds- How Historic Faith Guards Faithful Interpretation
Scripture- FINAL AUTHORITY
All of Scripture, given by God, 2Tim 3:16-17, 2 Pet 1:19-21

CREEDAL FAITH STATEMENTS- Historic Guardrails-Summaries of the apostolic faith that help us rightly interpret Scripture
Apostles' Creed- The basic confession of the faith
Nicene Creed- The truth about God and the Son
Chalcedonian Definition- The person and work of Christ

Scripture informs the Creeds—The Creeds guide our interpretation of Scripture

Scripture - Final authority, God-breathed and sufficient, The whole counsel of God
Creeds- Summaries of the apostolic faith, Developed from Scripture, Theological Guardrails, Help us interpret Scripture faithfully
Together- Scripture establishes truth, The Creeds preserve and clarify it, Together, they protect the church from error while pointing us to the true gospel of Jesus

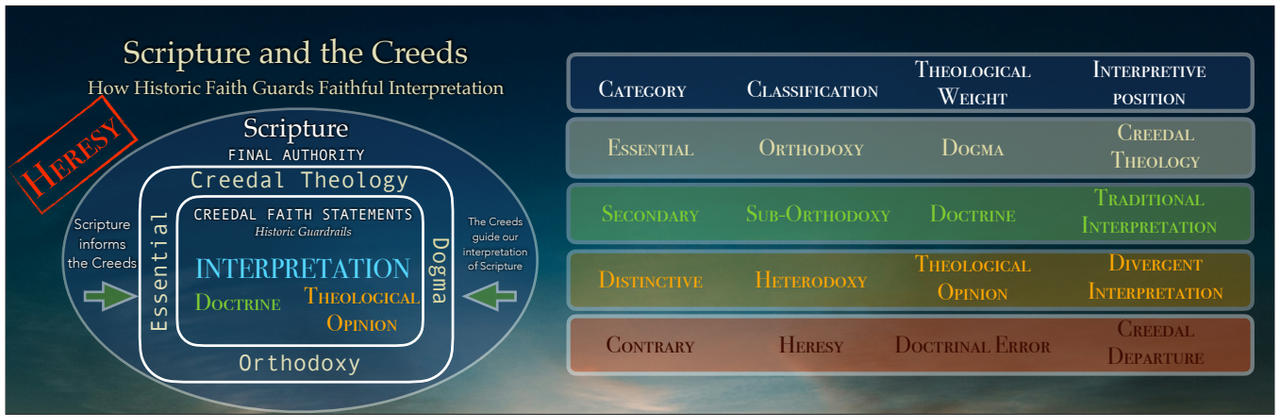
1. Faithful Interpretation
- Scripture read through the creedal lens
    - We approach Scripture within the boundaries of the historic faith, and it leads to faithful, biblical, orthodox belief.

2. Unbounded Interpretation
- Reading Scripture without creedal guardrails

- Taking a text on its own without the guidance of creedal theology can lead to misinterpretation and, over time, potential heresy

3. Heretical Conclusion

- When interpretation contradicts the faith
    - When an interpretation leads to conclusions that contradict the historic, faith confessed in the creeds, it has moved beyond orthodoxy to heresy



Scripture is the final authority, Scripture informs the creeds, Creeds guide our interpretation of Scripture

Creedal faith statements act like the fence around the playground

We are distinguishing between the significance of a theological belief, its relationship to orthodoxy, its theological authority, and its interpretive framework.

While Scripture remains the final authority for Christian belief and practice, the historic creeds provide a recognized framework for identifying the foundational boundaries of Christian confession. This allows room for theological diversity, interpretive differences, and denominational distinctives while preserving unity around the essential truths of the Christian faith. We can maintain conviction without demanding uniformity, and we can allow theological diversity without surrendering the boundaries of Christian faith.

1. **Category** – How significant or central the belief is to the Christian faith.
2. **Classification** – How the belief relates to historic Christian orthodoxy.
3. **Theological Weight** – The level of authority or significance assigned to the theological teaching and its degree and consistency of scriptural support.
4. **Interpretive Position** – How the interpretation relates to established creedal and theological understanding.

Essential- A foundational belief necessary to the Christian faith and central to the historic confession of the Church.
Orthodoxy- The historic, widely received confession of Christian faith, grounded in Scripture and articulated through the Church's foundational creeds.
Dogma- A foundational Christian truth regarded as essential to the faith and authoritatively confessed by the historic Church, particularly through its creeds. Complete Scriptural support- Entirely supported throughout Scripture.
Creedal Theology- The theological framework expressed through the historic Christian creeds, which identifies and preserves the foundational truths of Christian faith.

Secondary- An important theological belief that shapes Christian understanding and practice but is not essential to the definition of Christian faith. **Sub-orthodoxy-** A

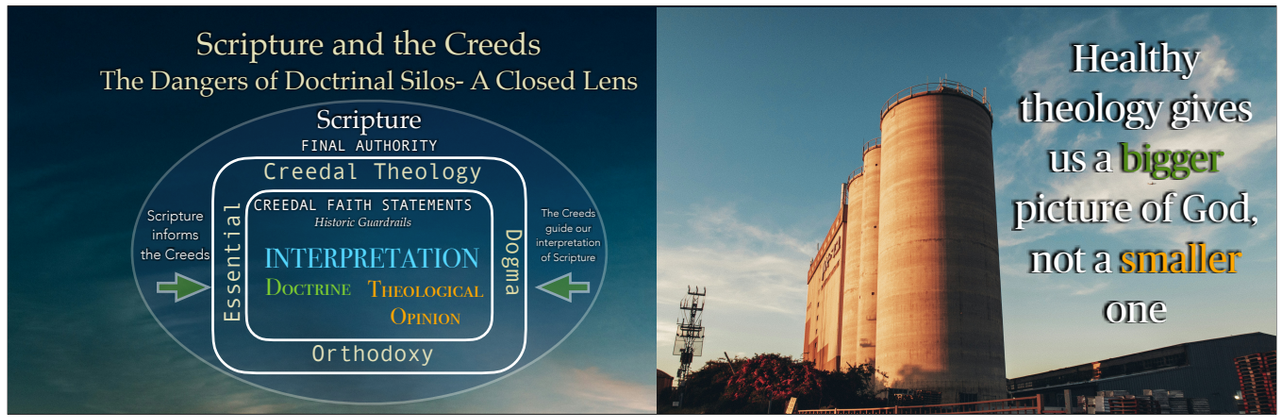
theological position that remains within the boundaries of Christian orthodoxy but differs from, or exists in tension with, established theological interpretations or traditions.
Doctrine- An established theological teaching derived from Scripture that provides a framework for understanding and practicing the Christian faith, where interpretation emphasis or theological conclusions may differ among faithful Christians.Profound Scriptural support- Significant biblical truths supported by Scripture.
Traditional Interpretation- An interpretation of Scripture that reflects the established theological understanding and teaching of a particular Christian tradition or broader historic consensus.

Distinctive- A theological belief or interpretation that distinguishes one Christian tradition, denomination, or theological community from another without necessarily undermining historic Christian orthodoxy.
Heterodoxy- A theological position that departs from established or widely accepted theological consensus, while potentially remaining within the broader boundaries of historic Christian confession.
Theological Opinion- A considered interpretation or theological conclusion that Scripture and reason may support but that is not universally established or binding on the wider Church. Departs from the prevailing historic theological consensus but potentially remains within creedal boundaries. Acceptable Scriptural support- Legitimate biblical basis or interpretive reason.
Divergent Interpretation- An interpretation of Scripture that differs from established or traditional theological understandings while potentially remaining within the boundaries of Christian orthodoxy.

- A belief can be distinctive to Pentecostal theology without being essential to Christian orthodoxy.
- A doctrine can be important to a denomination without being dogma for the universal Church.
- An interpretation can be divergent from traditional interpretation without necessarily being heretical.

Doctrine and theological opinion evolve, and opinions can sometimes align with, or even become, a traditional interpretation.

Contrary- A belief or teaching that contradicts foundational Christian convictions and departs from the historic faith confessed by the Church.
Heresy- A theological teaching that contradicts or rejects foundational Christian truths and represents a departure from the essential confession of the Christian faith.
Doctrinal Error- A theological teaching that misinterprets, misrepresents, or contradicts biblical teaching, potentially ranging in seriousness from correctable misunderstanding to fundamental departure from Christian confession. Unattached Scriptural use- The use or interpretation of Scripture disconnected from the established theological boundaries of historic Christian orthodoxy.
Creedal Departure- An interpretation or theological position that contradicts or rejects the foundational affirmations expressed in the historic Christian creeds.



The Danger of Doctrinal Silos

A Theological Silo is taking one part of a biblical truth and allowing it to shape how we understand everything else.

The first danger of a closed lens

-If we look at atonement (What Jesus did through his death and resurrection to bring us back into a right relationship with God) through Western eyes, it is described as Jesus paying our penalty: the wages of sin is death; something had to die for God's righteousness and holiness to be satisfied, so Jesus died in our place to take the wrath of God upon himself to protect us from that wrath. It is called Penal Substitution.

The second danger is now also interpreting contrary scriptures through a closed lens to protect the doctrine.

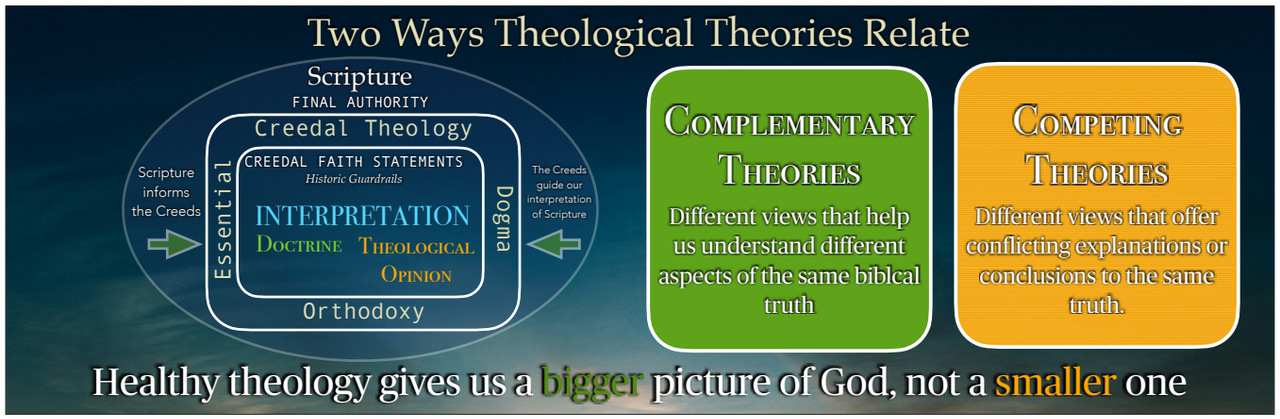
1 John 4:9-19 God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. 10 In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

- The closed lens sees Jesus sent because the Father needed someone to pay the penalty for our sin before he could forgive us, neglecting to see Jesus sent as an expression of the Father's love.

The Third Danger- Superiority, Judgment, and Division

-In our modern world, it is expressed through social media bombardment…which is devastating, but earlier it gave "Followers of Jesus" permission to subjugate and murder other "followers of Jesus."

Healthy Theology Gives us a bigger picture of God, not a smaller one.



Two Ways Theological Theories Relate

Not every theological difference should be handled in the same way. But if we understand the difference between doctrinal differences, we can grow in our understanding of God

Disagreement doesn’t allow one to act outside of love.

1. **Complementary Theories-** Different views that help us understand different aspects of the same biblical truth
    1. Provide potential for a multifaceted view of a subject, i.e., Atonement- we know Jesus died for us, but what did he do?
        1. Requires careful consideration to ensure a perspective doesn’t redefine the truth revealed through orthodoxy.
2. **Competing Theories-** Different views that offer conflicting explanations or conclusions to the same truth
    1. Provide different potential outcomes of a subject, i.e., End Time theology- we know Jesus is coming back; in what timeline?

Not every theological difference is a disagreement. Sometimes we look at different aspects of the same truth, and sometimes we look at genuinely competing interpretations. Learning to recognize the difference helps us know when to embrace different perspectives and when we need to carefully evaluate what is being taught. The goal isn't to make every theological view fit together. The goal is to recognize when different views enrich our understanding of Scripture and when they require us to discern what is true.