

STATEMENT OF FAITH

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PREFACE

The church is “the pillar and support of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15). It is to the church that the Lord has entrusted the good deposit of faith. We are to tenaciously “guard the good deposit” (1 Timothy 6:20; 2 Timothy 1:14) and to “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3).

God’s truth has always been questioned, attacked, and perverted. The Bible warns that such deception will continue, and history has demonstrated the accuracy of these warnings. It is no wonder, then, that in our day, truth is rare while error is rampant. In offering this Statement of Faith, we are not offering anything new or profound. We are, in fact, standing on the shoulders of many men – dead and alive – who have handed down this time-honored truth known as “the faith” (cf. 2 Timothy 2:2). We offer this Statement of Faith with the prayer that it might help each church member sharpen their understanding of the faith resulting in a cherishing of the treasure and a guarding of the good deposit.

*See to it that no one takes you captive
by philosophy and empty deceit,
according to human tradition,
according to the elemental spirits of the world,
and not according to Christ.*

Colossians 2:8

It shall be the understanding that this Statement of Faith is the guide to all the teaching and preaching ministries of Gospel Fellowship of Sussex. As a member, one must firmly hold to the doctrines as spelled out in the Confession of Faith and willingly submit to the teaching that is consistent with this Statement of Faith. Upon entering the membership of this church, one understands that he/she will be taught in accordance with the truths as spelled out in this document.

It shall be the understanding of Gospel Fellowship of Sussex that this Statement of Faith shall be the fence that guards the good deposit of the faith. Therefore, this Statement shall be the governing document for all content taught in this church. Upon accepting a teaching role of any kind, one willingly submits to teach in accordance with this Statement of Faith.

ARTICLE 1.

THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

THE CANON OF SCRIPTURE

By Scripture, we mean the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament and the twenty-seven books of the New Testament, excluding the Apocryphal writings, which are not divinely inspired. While the Apocryphal writings may be of some interest, they have no more authority over us than any other human writing. The Canon of Scripture is now complete and therefore no new claims of canonical revelation will be accepted.¹

INSPIRATION

The Bible has both human and divine authorship. Though written over many centuries by men of differing perspectives, experiences, styles, temperaments, and languages, it is entirely free of contradictions. This unity is explained by the fact that the Holy Spirit of God is the true author of Holy Scripture. He inspired, or more precisely breathed out his message. He moved men to write what they wrote, incorporating their human personalities and literary styles into the text.²

INERRANCY AND AUTHORITY

Scripture is the Word of God. Scripture alone* is the final authority in matters of doctrine and practice. The Bible is the only inspired, infallible, and inerrant writing that exists. By infallible, we mean that the Bible is incapable of error. By inerrant, we mean that the words themselves are without error. The Bible is without error even when it touches on subjects of history and science. It provides the absolute answers for all men, concerning how we are to be saved, what we are to believe, and how we are to live in order to please our Creator.³

This Statement of Faith does not exhaust the extent of our beliefs. The Bible itself, as the inspired and infallible Word of God that speaks with final authority concerning truth, morality, and the proper conduct of mankind, is the sole and final source of all that we believe. For purposes of this church's faith, doctrine, practice, policy, and discipline, our Council of Elders is GFS' final interpretive authority on the Bible's meaning and application.

THE CLARITY OF SCRIPTURE

While all Scripture does not contain the same degree of clarity either by design or due to our limited understanding, we affirm that the Bible is sufficiently clear in revealing what one needs to know in order to come to a saving faith in Jesus Christ.⁴

THE AUTOGRAPHS

All that has been said about the divine nature of the Bible applies strictly speaking to the original writings (the Autographs) and not to the translations. We believe that for all practical purposes we have the actual Word of God. Those parts of the Bible that we are not absolutely certain about do not affect the essentials of the Christian faith.

ARTICLE 2

GENERAL REVELATION

General or Natural Revelation is the knowledge of God that can be gained through his creation and experienced in the

conscience of every man. This knowledge is limited and is not sufficient to bring someone to a saving faith. No one, as a result of Natural Revelation, will want to lovingly know the true God. The knowledge of God revealed in creation and placed upon the conscience of each man⁵ serves to make all of mankind without excuse before the judge of all heaven and earth.⁶

ARTICLE 3

GOD AND THE TRINITY

THE INCOMPREHENSIBILITY OF GOD

The God of Scripture, the only true God, is very different from man in his being. Man is like God, made in his image, in very limited ways. There is no way that man can fully grasp an infinite God with his limited capacity. There will always be incompleteness in our understanding of God. Some areas of incompleteness are the Incarnation, the Trinity, the relation between predestination and responsibility, and the concept of the eternity of God, that is, the truth that God has always existed.⁷

THE TRINITY

The Scriptures clearly teach that there is one God who is an infinite being and who exists in three persons: The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Each person is wholly God, equal in power and glory, and possesses precisely the same attributes and perfection. Though undivided in nature and being, they each have different roles, eternally functioning with perfect harmony.⁸

THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

God is a spirit who is infinite in being and perfection. He is unchangeable. He is eternal, without beginning or end. He fully exists everywhere, yet he is separate from his creation. He knows all things because he decrees all things. He is all-powerful, absolutely holy, and most wise. He is self-sufficient and is in no way dependent on his creation. He is a God of love, who is compassionate and forgiving. Yet, he is also the judge who executes perfect judgment on all mankind according to his holiness revealed in his law. God can do anything that is consistent with his nature and his eternal purpose. He cannot deny himself, nor can he lie.⁹

ARTICLE 4

GOD'S DECREE

ETERNAL DECREE

God never has been, nor ever will be taken by surprise. Of his own free will, without obligation to any, in infinite wisdom and goodness, he has decreed, or determined, before the foundation of the world, everything that has already happened as well as everything that will come to pass.¹⁰

FOREKNOWLEDGE

God does know everything that is going to happen because he has determined everything that is going to happen. With regard to salvation, foreknowledge means that God entered into a saving relationship with some. God has not determined the future by seeing what man will do and then decreeing it to come to pass.¹¹

MAN IS RESPONSIBLE

Since God, in his being, is not like man, he is able to determine everything that will happen without forcing man, against his will, to carry out his decrees. Yet, God can never be blamed for the evil that is committed by man. Man is always blamed for his own evil that he commits.¹²

REDEMPTION

God, in his grace, has decreed that a fixed number of men and angels will inherit eternal life. The rest he has determined to leave in their sin to suffer their just condemnation, thereby revealing his perfect justice.¹³

CALLING HIS ELECT

God has, before the world began, predestined to eternal life all those who would believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. He chose them freely, according to the secret counsel of his own pleasure, to be in Christ and to share in his eternal glory. He did not choose them because he saw that they would believe, since saving faith is a gift of God. Neither did he choose them because he saw any goodness in them, because all men come into the world as God-haters and are incapable of performing any good work. The elect do not live perfect lives after their conversion, but they will struggle to obey their Lord and will give evidence of a changed life.¹⁴

MEANS

Just as God has predestined the salvation of the elect, He has also determined the means of their salvation. They are redeemed from their fallen state in Adam through the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ on the cross. They are called to Christ, in due time, by the Holy Spirit through the hearing or reading of the gospel. They are justified, adopted into God's family, and are guaranteed sanctification. They are also kept by his power throughout their lives by a God-given faith. God has also decreed their glorification, which is the guarantee that they will be with him forever in a perfect state.¹⁵

ARTICLE 5

CREATION

THE CREATION OF ALL THINGS

In the beginning it pleased God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, from nothing, to speak into existence the universe and everything in it, whether visible or invisible. God created the angels, assigning their various ranks and functions. There was nothing before him, and without him nothing came into existence. God created the universe and everything in it in six days. On the sixth day, after he had made man, God viewed everything that he had made and said that it was very good.¹⁶

THE UNIQUENESS OF MAN

After God had made all other creatures, he created man, male and female, with reasoning and immortal souls. Man was created in the image of God, a rational and moral being. Man was assigned to populate and have dominion over the earth.¹⁷

MAN WAS CREATED GOOD

Adam and Eve were created innocent and inclined to do good. They were not outwardly forced to obey God, but they obeyed willingly. God provided for their every need and pleasure. They were given only one restriction: they were not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.¹⁸

MAN AND THE SANCTITY OF HUMAN LIFE

We believe that all human life is sacred and created by God in His image. Human life is of inestimable worth in all its dimensions, including pre-born babies, the aged, the physically or mentally challenged, and every other stage or condition from conception through death. We are therefore called to defend, protect, and value all human life.¹⁹

MAN AND MARRIAGE, GENDER, AND SEXUALITY

We believe that God wonderfully and immutably creates each person as male or female. These two distinct, complementary genders together reflect the image and nature of God.²⁰ Rejection of one's biological sex is a rejection of the image of God within that person.

We believe that the term "marriage" has only one meaning: the uniting of one man and one woman in a single, exclusive union, as delineated in Scripture. We believe that God intends sexual intimacy to occur only between a man and a woman who are married to each other. We believe that God has commanded that no intimate sexual activity be engaged in outside of a marriage between a man and a woman.²¹

We believe that any form of sexual immorality (including adultery, fornication, homosexual behavior, bisexual conduct, bestiality, incest, and use of pornography) is sinful and offensive to God.²²

We believe that in order to preserve the function and integrity of Gospel Fellowship of Sussex as the local Body of Christ, and to provide a biblical role model to the church members and the community, it is imperative that all persons employed by GFS in any capacity, or who serve as volunteers, agree to and abide by this Statement on Marriage, Gender, and Sexuality.²³

We believe that God offers redemption and restoration to all who confess and forsake their sin, seeking His mercy and forgiveness through Jesus Christ.²⁴

We believe that every person must be afforded compassion, love, kindness, respect, and dignity.²⁵ Hateful and harassing behavior or attitudes directed toward any individual are to be repudiated and are not in accord with Scripture nor the doctrines of Gospel Fellowship of Sussex.

ARTICLE 6

GOD'S PROVIDENCE

MEANING OF PROVIDENCE

God, who makes every creature for his own good pleasure, did not merely decree what should be, and then retire to heaven to watch what inevitably must come to pass in his universe. Rather, in his infinite wisdom and power, he controls all second causes (cause and effect events), upholding and governing all creatures and circumstances, making all things work together for the accomplishing of his own eternal plan. This invisible governing hand of God is called his providence.²⁶

SECOND CAUSES

God's eternal decree, unchangeably decided before the world began, is the first cause of everything that happens in the

universe. Nothing is left to chance, nor happens apart from his providence. His wise providence is brought about by the use of second causes (cause and effect events). The answer to the question, "What caused you to become a believer?" is two-fold. The first cause is God's sovereign choice. The second cause is whatever he used in your experience to bring you to himself.²⁷

MIRACLES

A miracle is an event where God uses extraordinary means to cause something to happen. Examples of miracles are the virgin birth and the long day of Joshua.²⁸

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

God's providence is all-inclusive. His invisible hand is behind the rebellion of Satan, the temptation in the Garden of Eden, the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, and all other evil acts. He determined before the creation of the world to use everything, even the acts of evil men, in his eternal plan. The wicked are fully responsible for what they do. God cannot be blamed.²⁹

ARTICLE 7

THE FALL OF MAN

THE TEMPTATION

The Lord God, in the Garden of Eden, gave Adam and Eve the command not to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil or they would die. The woman was deceived by Satan and ate the fruit of the forbidden tree. She then gave some of the fruit to Adam and he willingly ate it. This first sin of Adam and Eve was part of God's wise plan.³⁰

THE CONSEQUENCES

As a result of eating the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve, our first parents, died spiritually and began to die physically. Adam was our representative. When he sinned we received the blame and incurred the guilt for his sin. As a result of Adam's sin all mankind is born spiritually dead. Spiritual death consists of two parts, guilt (a bad record), and corruption (a bad heart). All mankind inherits the guilt of Adam's sin. Therefore we all come into this world with a bad record. Even if it were possible to live a perfect life one would still have the guilt of Adam's sin on his record to condemn him. We also inherit a bad heart from Adam. We come into this world as God-haters. No one would ever naturally desire to know or please the true God. All of mankind would willingly choose eternal damnation rather than embrace the God of all creation. From the point of conception everyone stands under the wrath of God.³¹

ARTICLE 8

THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE ³²

TOTAL DEPRAVITY

Because of the Fall, man is unable of himself to believe the gospel. The sinner is dead, blind, and deaf to the things of God; his heart is deceitful and desperately corrupt. Neither is the will of the sinner free; it is in bondage to his evil nature. Therefore, he will not, indeed, he cannot, choose good over evil in the spiritual realm. Consequently, it takes much more than the Spirit's assistance to bring a sinner to Christ; it takes regeneration by which the Spirit makes the sinner alive and

gives him a new nature. Faith is not something man contributes to salvation but is itself a part of God's gift of salvation--it is God's gift to the sinner, not the sinner's gift to God.³³

UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION

God's choice of certain individuals for salvation before the foundation of the world rested solely in His own sovereign will. This is by grace alone.* His choice of particular sinners was not based on any foreseen response or obedience on their part, such as faith, repentance, etc. On the contrary, God gives faith and repentance to each individual whom He selected. These acts are the result, not the cause of God's choice. Election therefore was not determined by or conditioned upon any virtuous quality or act foreseen in man. Those whom God sovereignly elected He brings through the power of the Spirit to a willing acceptance of Christ. Thus God's choice of the sinner, not the sinner's choice of Christ, is the ultimate cause of salvation.³⁴

LIMITED ATONEMENT

Christ's redeeming work was intended to save the elect only and actually secured salvation for them. Christ's death was not intended to make all men savable, but to actually save those who were His chosen people. His death was a substitutionary endurance of the penalty of sin in the place of certain specified sinners. In addition to putting away the sins of His people, Christ's redemption secured everything necessary for their salvation, including faith, which united them to Him. The gift of faith is infallibly applied by the Spirit to all for whom Christ died, thereby guaranteeing their salvation.³⁵

IRRESISTIBLE GRACE

In addition to the outward general call to salvation, which is made to everyone who hears the gospel, the Holy Spirit extends to the elect a special inward call that inevitably brings them to salvation. The external call (which is made to all without distinction) can be, and often is, rejected; whereas the internal call (which is made only to the elect) cannot be rejected, it always results in conversion. By means of this special call the Spirit irresistibly draws sinners to Christ. He is not limited in His work of applying salvation by man's will, nor is He dependent upon man's cooperation for success. The Spirit graciously causes the elect sinner to cooperate, to believe, to repent, to come freely and willingly to Christ. God's grace, therefore, is invincible; it never fails to result in the salvation of those to whom it is extended.³⁶

PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS

All who were chosen by God, redeemed by Christ, and given faith by the Spirit are eternally saved. They are kept in faith by the power of Almighty God and thus persevere to the end.³⁷

ARTICLE 9

GOD'S COVENANTS

THE NOAHIC COVENANT

The Noahic Covenant is a covenant between God and all living creatures and it is a promise by God not to destroy the earth again by water. This is not a salvation covenant but rather a guarantee that the earth will continue until God's plan to save a people is accomplished.³⁸

THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

This is the agreement between God and Abraham and his descendants. It is a picture of God's plan of salvation that

was revealed through the physical descendants of Abraham. God promised to give Abraham many descendants, the land of Canaan, and to make him a blessing to others. Jesus Christ is the true seed of Abraham. All of those who were represented by Jesus Christ on the cross are the true children of Abraham. The fulfillment of the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant that were made to Abraham's physical descendants functioned as a picture of the true fulfillment that only true believers experience in Christ. The spiritual descendants of Abraham are all the elect in Christ. The land of promise is ultimately fulfilled in the new heaven and the new earth. The promise that Abraham would be a blessing to all the earth is fulfilled in the Great Commission when the gospel is taken to the entire world to bring in the elect from every tribe nation and tongue.³⁹

THE OLD COVENANT

The Old Covenant is also called the Mosaic Covenant or the First Covenant. This was a legal agreement between God and the nation of Israel that was given to Moses on Mount Sinai. This covenant is not to be considered as a "covenant of grace." Although the Lord had a gracious purpose in giving this covenant, the covenant itself was a legal covenant that demanded perfect obedience. The failure to obey would result in the curse of God. This covenant was used to prepare the way for the Messiah. Israel, as a whole, was not a believing people. The Old Covenant caused the Israelites to sin all the more. It was never the means of anyone's salvation.

The Old Covenant functions as a physical picture of many spiritual truths that can be used to teach believers today. The Ten Commandments are the essence of the Mosaic Law or Mosaic Covenant. The pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost brought to a close the Old Covenant era.⁴⁰

THE NEW COVENANT

This is a description of the saving work of Jesus Christ. He purchased a people who will all be God-knowers. Each of those who are a part of the New Covenant will necessarily experience a changed life. All true believers are part of the New Covenant no matter when they lived in that they received New Covenant promises. The New Covenant era as a unique historical period began with the pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost.⁴¹ This unique period in history is known as the "church."

ARTICLE 10.

CHRIST THE MEDIATOR

THE ETERNAL MEDIATOR

It pleased God, in his eternal purpose, to choose the Lord Jesus, his one and only Son, to be the mediator between God and man. He was to be the Prophet, Priest, and King, the head and Savior of his church, the heir of all things and judge of the world. To the Lord Jesus the Father gave, from all eternity, a people to redeem, call, justify, sanctify, and glorify.⁴²

FULLY GOD AND FULLY MAN

Jesus Christ, the Son of God and second person of the Trinity, is God. He is of the same essence as the Father and equal to him. At just the right time, according to the predestined plan of God, the eternal Son became a man. He was made like us in every way, except for his sinlessness. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary. This union of the divine and human made Jesus forever both God and man in one person. He is fully God and fully man. His divine and human natures are neither altered, blended, nor confused. Jesus Christ, the only mediator between God and man, was,

and is, fully God and fully man.⁴³ Jesus, as a man, never gave up any of his divine attributes; but willingly subjected them to the Father's will.

HIS HUMILIATION AND EXALTATION

The Lord Jesus willingly accepted his appointment as mediator and perfectly fulfilled that office. He endured the most severe tortures of soul and body, was crucified, buried, and remained under the power of death for three days, without seeing corruption. He rose from the dead on the third day. He ascended into heaven, where he sat down at the Father's right hand and intercedes for his people. From the Father's right hand he shall physically return at the end of the world to judge all men and angels.⁴⁴

HE PERFECTLY SATISFIED THE JUSTICE OF GOD

By his perfect obedience to God's Law, Jesus qualified as our substitute and perfect sacrifice. By his death on the cross he satisfied the justice of God and purchased for his people their complete salvation.⁴⁵

HE IS THE REDEEMER OF THOSE SAVED IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The price of redemption was not paid by Jesus Christ until after his coming in human flesh. But the benefits of his finished work were applied retroactively to God's elect living before the cross, as well as to those of us who have followed. By means of promises, types, sacrifices, and ceremonies, the Messiah is progressively revealed to be the woman's "offspring" who would crush the head of the serpent. He is "the lamb that was slain from the creation of the world." He is the Savior for all the elect.⁴⁶

JESUS CHRIST, AS OUR PROPHET, PRIEST, AND KING

The three offices of Jesus Christ, our Messiah, are necessary for us. Because of our ignorance we need him to be our Prophet. Because of our separation from God we need him to be our Priest so that we can be made to be acceptable to him. Because we have rebelled against him and have become God-haters there is absolutely no way for us to return to him, therefore we need him to be our King to convince, draw, deliver, and preserve us for his heavenly kingdom.⁴⁷

ARTICLE 11

THE WILL OF MAN

THE FREEDOM OF THE WILL

All men have been created with freedom of choice. They are free to do whatever they want to do. God never forces men to do anything against their will, yet he is in complete control of their will.⁴⁸

THE BONDAGE OF THE WILL

As a result of the Fall, man not only lost eternal life, but also his power to choose God or good. This is not to say that fallen man does not have the ability to choose; he does. What we are saying is that as a result of the Fall man is now a God-hater and is in bondage to his nature. He will on his own never choose to trust in Jesus Christ as his Savior and Lord. He will as an exercise of his freedom of choice freely choose eternal damnation rather than eternal life.⁴⁹

THE WILL OF THE BELIEVER IN THIS LIFE

When God saves us he causes us to want to repent of our sins and receive Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord. God makes us willing to choose that which pleases him, and gives us the power to do it. God works in such a way as to make us want what he wants without forcing us to do it. Nevertheless, in this life, the believer will never be able to live perfectly for his Lord.⁵⁰

THE WILL OF THE BELIEVER AFTER DEATH

It is not until the believer dies and enters into heaven that he will be made perfectly and unchangeably free to will only what is good. He will want to do good and good alone for all eternity.⁵¹

ARTICLE 12

GOD'S IRRESISTIBLE CALL

THE OUTWARD CALL

The outward or general call of God is the free offer of the gospel to all without exception. God desires all to come to faith in Jesus Christ, yet he has not provided atonement for the sins of all. This outward call can be, and is, resisted by the reprobate. The reprobates are the non-elect. They will never believe the gospel.⁵²

THE INWARD CALL

Only the elect receive the inward or specific call of God. At a time appointed by God, those whom he has predestined to eternal life are irresistibly drawn, by his Word and Spirit, out of the state of spiritual death which they are in by nature, to a saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Our God enables them to understand the things of God, convicts them of their sin and danger, moves them to genuine sorrow and repentance, changes their hearts, and makes them willing to believe and obey the gospel. In his irresistible call he does not force anyone to come against their will. They come because they want to come. They want to come because he has made them want to come.⁵³

GOD ALONE GETS THE CREDIT

The irresistible call of God is not based on anything man has done, is doing, or will do. For anyone to respond and embrace the free offer of the gospel he must first be empowered by the Spirit of God. This is the same power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead.⁵⁴

INFANTS AND MENTALLY DISABLED

Infants, pre-born or newly born, and the mentally disabled (as well as everyone else) are guilty of Adam's sin and deserve eternal damnation. If God so desired he could elect and save all of them in Jesus Christ. But, the Bible is silent concerning this matter. Though we don't know the fate of these individuals we can entrust them to our God who will do what is right. Our comfort comes not in knowing their fate but in entrusting them to a just God.⁵⁵

THOSE NOT CHOSEN

Those not chosen by our God, the non-elect, are called the reprobate. They will never effectively respond to the outward call of the gospel. Their end is eternal damnation. Everyone who goes to hell goes as a Godhater. They do not want to go to heaven.⁵⁶

ARTICLE 13

JUSTIFICATION

JUSTIFICATION THROUGH FAITH

God freely justifies (declares to be righteous) all those he irresistibly calls to himself. He does not justify anyone on the basis of their performance (infused righteousness) but by pardoning their sins and viewing them as perfectly forgiven and accepted by God. God imputes to the believer the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Because of his sacrificial death on the cross as the perfect payment for sin, righteousness is secured for all those who believe. Justification is by faith alone.* Justification is received by trusting in the work of Jesus Christ alone* to save us from our sins. This justifying faith is a gift of God and is not something that we are able to produce or attain on our own.⁵⁷

THE PAYMENT FOR JUSTIFICATION

Jesus Christ, through his obedient death on the cross, completely paid the debt for sin that was owed by those who were to believe and be justified. He fully satisfied all the claims which God's justice had upon them. The justification of the elect is a work of God's grace alone*, for no one deserves to be saved.⁵⁸

WHEN ARE THE ELECT JUSTIFIED?

From eternity past God decreed the justification of his elect. In the fullness of time Jesus Christ died for their sins and was resurrected for their justification. The elect are not personally justified until the Holy Spirit, at the appointed time, applies the saving work of Jesus Christ to them. Upon placing their personal faith in Christ, the believer is justified.⁵⁹

JUSTIFICATION IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Believers in the Old Testament were justified in the same way as believers in the New Testament though the content of their faith was different.⁶⁰

ARTICLE 14

ADOPTION

God adopts into his family all those he justifies. When they are adopted they become children of God and inherit rights and privileges, which include receiving the Holy Spirit, by whom they cry "Abba" or "Father," access in prayer to the throne of grace, and the Father's provision, protection, and loving concern. They also receive the discipline of the Father so that they will become more and more like him in holiness. Once someone has been adopted by the Father he will never be rejected or lost. As joint-heirs with Jesus Christ they inherit eternal life.⁶¹

ARTICLE 15

SANCTIFICATION

THE NEW HEART

Those who have received Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord have been regenerated and have received a new heart. This new heart consists of a new desire created by God the Holy Spirit to make the rule of God desirable.⁶² Before someone becomes a believer he is a God-hater. He is in bondage to his sin. This means that he is unable to do, and doesn't want to

do, anything that pleases the true God. As a result of conversion he now is a God-lover who desires to please the God of Scripture.⁶³

STRUGGLING WITH SIN

It is God's good pleasure that believers struggle with evil desires throughout their entire Christian life. Perfection will never be experienced by the believer in this life. There will never be a time this side of heaven when the child of God will be able to do anything that is perfectly good.⁶⁴

GROWTH IS GUARANTEED

Because of the death of Jesus Christ on the cross spiritual growth is guaranteed to the believer. Jesus purchased on the cross a transformed life for everyone who believes. Though the rate and amount of growth will be different for each believer, all Christians will experience a changed life and will bear the fruit of the Spirit. Believers may get caught in sin for a season, but they will eventually repent and be restored to fellowship with the Father.⁶⁵

ULTIMATE VICTORY IS GUARANTEED

It is promised to the believer that he will be preserved till the end. Jesus not only purchased a saving faith and a changed life for his people, he also purchased a guarantee that they will persevere in their faith and enter into heaven.⁶⁶

ARTICLE 16

SAVING FAITH

SAVING FAITH IS A GIFT

Saving faith is a gift of God given to his elect at the appointed time by the Holy Spirit. This gift causes the elect to believe the gospel and enter into the family of God. This faith does not originate with man, nor does it come from any other source; it is a gift of God.⁶⁷

THE EFFECTS OF SAVING FAITH

By this saving faith a Christian believes the Bible to be the authoritative Word of God. He is enabled to believe the Scriptures in all that they teach. The first and primary effect of saving faith is to cause one of the elect to receive Jesus Christ as his Savior and Lord, to rest upon him alone* for his salvation and to embrace him for all that Scripture says he is. Saving faith will result in a life characterized by good works.⁶⁸

ARTICLE 17

REPENTANCE

DEFINITION OF REPENTANCE

At the appointed time the Holy Spirit grants to each of the elect repentance that causes him to understand his rebellion against God and his guilt, which made the death of Jesus Christ necessary for his salvation. Repentance moves everyone who receives it to be genuinely sorry for having wronged his God and enables him to turn from his state of self-centeredness to a state of God-centeredness with Jesus Christ as his Lord.⁶⁹

THE NECESSITY OF REPENTANCE

The message of the Gospel is: “Turn from your sins (repent), trust in Jesus Christ alone* to save you from your sins by His death on the cross, and follow Him as your Lord.” Although repentance is not to be trusted as payment for sins, or as a means of earning pardon (pardon comes through embracing the cross-work of Jesus Christ alone*), there can be no real salvation without repentance.⁷⁰

CONTINUING REPENTANCE

Besides that initial act of repentance, without which no one can be saved, repentance is a lifelong concern for the believer. Since the believer continues to struggle with sin until he dies and enters into God’s presence, it is his responsibility to repent of all known sin. All true believers will exhibit a life marked by continual repentance.⁷¹

ARTICLE 18

GOOD WORKS

DEFINITION OF GOOD WORKS

Good works are only those works that are in agreement with the Word of God, motivated by a desire to please the God of Scripture, and empowered by His Spirit. Only believers are capable of doing good works.⁷²

GOOD WORKS ARE PROOF OF SAVING FAITH

Good works are the evidence of a true saving faith. Although you are not saved because of your works, no one will be saved without them. Good works are part of that salvation that Jesus purchased on the cross for the elect. You cannot receive one part of salvation, such as faith, without also receiving a changed life marked by good works.⁷³

THE SOURCE OF GOOD WORKS

The motivation and ability to do good works does not come from the believer, but from the work of the Holy Spirit who is working in him. All credit for good works must go to glorify God alone*.⁷⁴

SALVATION IS NOT EARNED

The believer’s good works cannot earn him eternal life. Everything the believer does is tainted with sin. The only reason the believer’s good works are accepted as good works is because he is unconditionally accepted by God because of the work of Jesus Christ on the cross.⁷⁵

THE WORKS OF THE UNSAVED

The only works that are acceptable to God and bring him pleasure are those works that come from a believer, done according to his Word, and done for the purpose of pleasing him. Religious or humanitarian works done by unbelievers may be called “good” in the eyes of the world, and helpful to themselves and others, yet they cannot please God.⁷⁶

ARTICLE 19

ASSURANCE OF SALVATION

DEFINITION OF ASSURANCE

Assurance is the conviction that the promises of the gospel apply to you. The Holy Spirit gives assurance to all believers at conversion. Therefore, all who have saving faith will also have assurance of salvation.⁷⁷

STRUGGLES WITH ASSURANCE

A true believer will never completely lose his assurance of salvation. He may struggle with his assurance for a period of time as he wrestles with his sin, but he will eventually regain his full assurance. The objective promises of the gospel and evidence of a changed life are used by the Holy Spirit to aid the believer in recovering his full assurance.⁷⁸

ARTICLE 20

THE LAW OF GOD

THE ESSENCE OF ALL LAW

The essence of all Law is summed up in these two commandments, "Jesus replied: Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."⁷⁹

THE FIRST LAW

God, the Creator and Lawgiver, gave Adam the commandment that he must not eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The penalty for disobedience to this commandment was death, while the promise for obedience was life. There is no record in Scripture of God making a Covenant of Works with Adam.⁸⁰

UNRECORDED LAW

These are the laws that were given to mankind prior to the Mosaic Law that are not specifically recorded in Scripture. One can only assume that these laws were passed down to each succeeding generation. This is sometimes referred to as "Oral Law".⁸¹

THE MORAL LAW

There is no Biblical justification for the use of the term "moral law." Any law God gives in any era is moral in that to transgress any commandment of God that applies to you is by definition "immoral." Thus, all God-given law is moral law.

THE LAW OF THE CONSCIENCE

This describes that sense of right and wrong that everyone experiences but no one is able to live up to. This law is the result of man being made in the image of God. Even with the sin of Adam and the resulting distortion of God's image in man there is still some part of that image remaining. This law is not exact and can be distorted. The law of the conscience condemns all men for no one is able to live up to its expectations.⁸²

THE MOSAIC LAW

This is the body of law that was given by the Lord to Moses on Mount Sinai for the nation of Israel. The Ten Commandments are the essence of the Mosaic Law. The Mosaic Law was binding on the Israelites during the period of time from the giving of the law at Mount Sinai to the ushering in of the New Covenant Era at Pentecost.⁸³

THE LAW OF CHRIST

This is the body of law that came through Jesus and the Apostles that is directly applicable to believers today.⁸⁴

ARTICLE 21

WORSHIP

THE OBJECT OF OUR WORSHIP

True worship is to be given to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and to Him alone*. Worship is not to be offered to angels, saints, Mary, the mother of Jesus, or any other creature. Since the Fall, worship cannot be offered to God without the mediation of Jesus Christ, our great High Priest. The mediation of the priests in the Old Testament era served only to foreshadow the true Redeemer, Jesus Christ, who is the only mediator between God and man.⁸⁵

THE PLACE OF WORSHIP

The "House of the Lord" is an Old Covenant concept that referred first to the Tabernacle, and then to the Temple. True worship, in the New Covenant era, is not confined to any particular location or building. Believers, both individually and corporately, are now the Temple of the Holy Spirit.⁸⁶

THE DAY OF WORSHIP

Although the Lord Jesus Christ rose from the dead on the first day of the week, believers are not commanded to meet together on this day. Sunday is not the Christian Sabbath. The Sabbath was a picture of our salvation and has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The commandment requiring the keeping of the Sabbath day came to an end at the close of the Old Covenant era. In the New Covenant era believers are commanded to gather together with the people of God, the church. Believers are free to gather together on any day of the week.⁸⁷

WORSHIP IN THE NEW COVENANT ERA

In the New Covenant era, all of life is worship and every day is holy for the believer.⁸⁸

ARTICLE 22

CIVIL GOVERNMENT

ORDAINED BY GOD

All governing authorities have been appointed by God. Therefore, to rebel against any of these authorities is to rebel against God.⁸⁹

GOVERNING AUTHORITIES HAVE LIMITED AUTHORITY

The believer is bound to obey the governing authorities as long as he is not required to do something that the Word of God prohibits, or is prohibited from doing something that the Word of God commands.⁹⁰

PARTICIPATION IN CIVIL GOVERNMENT

Since civil government is ordained by God, it is proper for the believer to participate in it in any capacity. In his participation he must not violate his conscience as it is held captive to the Word of God.⁹¹

GIVING CIVIL AUTHORITIES THEIR DUE

Believers are commanded in Scripture to pray for those in authority, to treat them with respect, to pay taxes, and to obey their commands. Whether or not those in authority are believers is irrelevant.⁹²

ARTICLE 23

MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

DEFINITION OF MARRIAGE

Marriage was established by God to join a man and a woman together for life. A believer is only allowed to marry another believer.⁹³

PURPOSE OF MARRIAGE

Marriage serves a variety of God-ordained purposes. Its primary purpose is to provide a picture of the relationship between Christ and the church. Marriage between a man and a woman is defined as a covenant of companionship. Secondary purposes include the provision of a legitimate outlet for sexuality and procreation.⁹⁴

THE LEGITIMACY OF SINGLENES

In the New Covenant era there is a legitimate gift of singleness as many men and women will forego the burdens of marriage and family as they feverishly seek the advancement of Christ's kingdom. Although most individuals will get married, there is a special enabling for some to be single. Singleness provides greater freedom for service to the Lord and is to be honored in the church.⁹⁵

FOUNDATIONS FOR DIVORCE

There are two legitimate grounds for divorce. The first reason is unrepentant adultery. A divorce may be biblically sanctioned after following the procedures of church discipline that aim at restoring the fallen. The second reason is when the unbelieving spouse chooses to leave.⁹⁶

FOUNDATIONS FOR REMARRIAGE

In the New Covenant era, remarriage is always allowed after a divorce, except for the professed believer who divorces someone for an unbiblical reason.⁹⁷

ARTICLE 24

THE CHURCH

THE PEOPLE OF GOD

All of God's elect who have ever lived, are now living, or ever will live, make up the one true people of God.⁹⁸

THE PEOPLE OF GOD IN THE NEW COVENANT ERA

While there has always been one redeemed people of God, the church and the New Covenant era have a unique historical beginning at Pentecost. The church is made up of both Jew and Gentiles and is not regulated by the Mosaic Law, but by the Law of Christ.⁹⁹

THE LOCAL CHURCH

The church in the New Covenant era is given visible expression in local churches. All professed believers are commanded to gather together in the local church to build up one another in the faith.¹⁰⁰

CHURCH LEADERSHIP

God has given two positions of leadership in the local church: elders and deacons. Elders are responsible to shepherd and teach the local church as spiritual stewards of God's house. They are to be qualified according to the qualifications of 1 Timothy chapter 3 and Titus chapter 1. They are never allowed to lord it over the people. A church without at least one elder is incomplete, though Scripture is clear that there are to be a plurality of elders. All elders have equal authority and are the pastors of the church. Women are not allowed to be elders.¹⁰¹

Deacons assist the elders as physical stewards of God's house freeing them to serve in the ministry of the Word and prayer. The deacons are called upon to serve the congregation at the decision of the elders and their duties are determined by the elders. Deacons are to meet the qualifications of 1 Timothy chapter three.¹⁰²

CHURCH DISCIPLINE

It is the responsibility of the local church to exercise church discipline. The method to be used is described in Matthew 18:15-17. The first step is to appeal to the offender alone. If there is no repentance, then you appeal to him with one or two others. Finally, if he remains unrepentant, then you bring him before the church and appeal to him one more time. If he does not repent he is put out of the church and is viewed as an unbeliever. Those in the church are responsible to call him to repentance. They are not allowed to have normal relations with him as long as he remains in an unrepentant condition. Any verifiable, unrepentant sin is grounds for church discipline. When someone is removed from the church, or excommunicated, he is denying that he wants Jesus Christ to be his Lord. Denial of the Lordship of Christ is a denial that one has saving faith. That is why all those who are put out of the church are viewed as unbelievers.¹⁰³

ARTICLE 25

THE ORDINANCES

The New Covenant people of God have been given two ceremonies to perform. They are baptism and the Lord's Supper. Both of these ordinances were instituted by Jesus Christ and are to be observed by the church until the Lord returns. The ordinances are outward pictures of spiritual truths. There is no saving power in the ordinances.¹⁰⁴

ARTICLE 26

BAPTISM

THE MEANING OF BAPTISM

The ordinance of baptism is the formal profession of faith for the believer. It is an outward sign of an inward reality. It is an appeal to God for a clear conscience.¹⁰⁵ When someone is baptized he is saying that he is now trusting in Jesus Christ alone* for his salvation, and desires Him to be the Lord of his life. Baptism is a necessary part of the Great Commission of Jesus Christ and is to be practiced by His church until the end of the world.¹⁰⁶

THE MODE OF BAPTISM

The key element in the ordinance of baptism is water. Baptism symbolizes the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Scripture clearly implies that the only acceptable mode for baptism is baptism by immersion.¹⁰⁷

Baptism is the only external means in scripture whereby the church can give affirmation to another's faith in Christ. Baptism, then, is the prerequisite for entrance into and enjoyment of the privileges of church membership.

ARTICLE 27

THE LORD'S SUPPER

INSTITUTION

The Lord's Supper was instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ on the night he was betrayed. This ordinance of the New Covenant age is to be observed in the church until the second coming of Jesus Christ.¹⁰⁸

THE MEANING OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

The elements, the bread and the fruit of the vine, are a reminder of the sacrifice on the cross of Jesus Christ for his people. The bread symbolizes his body, which was cursed on our behalf, and the wine symbolizes his blood which was poured out for the forgiveness of our sins and the purchase of our salvation. The elements of the Lord's Supper do not become the actual body and blood of the Lord (Transubstantiation). Jesus is not physically present even though the elements remain bread and wine (Consubstantiation or Real Presence). Jesus is not spiritually present in a way that he is not present at any other time. The Lord's Supper is a memorial. It is a time to remember the most important part of our faith, the death of Jesus Christ on the cross, as a payment for the sins of the elect.¹⁰⁹

THE WARNING

Any person professing faith in the Lord Jesus Christ who takes part in the Lord's Supper in an irreverent, self-centered manner, or is willfully hanging on to unrepentant sin, is eating and drinking judgment on himself. Our Lord promises to discipline all those who do not take to heart the seriousness of commemorating the death of Jesus Christ on the cross.¹¹⁰

ARTICLE 28

THE STATE OF MEN AFTER DEATH AND THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD

WHAT HAPPENS AT DEATH

When we die our bodies decompose and return to dust. Our souls or spirits (both terms refer to "the real you") live on forever. At death believers are received into heaven where they will be with the Lord and will await the full redemption of their bodies. Unbelievers are immediately thrown into hell, where they experience conscious torment while they await the great Day of Judgment. The Bible knows of no other place for souls at death.¹¹¹

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN CHRIST COMES

Believers who are alive at the second coming of Jesus Christ will not die, but they will be instantly changed into a resurrected state. At that time, the bodies of the believing dead will also be raised incorruptible with a resurrected body and all believers will be with the Lord Jesus Christ in the new heavens and the new earth.

The unbeliever will experience the full fury of God's wrath forever in the Lake of Fire.¹¹²

ARTICLE 29

THE LAST JUDGMENT

God has appointed a day when he will judge the world with perfect justice through Jesus Christ, to whom he has given all power and authority. On that day the fallen angels will be judged as well as everyone who has ever lived on the earth. All must appear before the judgment seat of Christ to give account for everything they have done (their thoughts, words, and actions) while they lived on the earth. The Lord Jesus will give his unchangeable verdict on that day, forever sealing the destinies of everyone. The wicked will be sent into the Lake of Fire to experience eternal torment, while the righteous, those whom Jesus purchased on the cross, will be rewarded and will enter into eternal life.¹¹³

ARTICLE 30

THE ROLE OF WOMEN

MEN AND WOMEN ARE EQUAL

Scripture clearly states that men and women are created in the image of God and therefore equal before the Lord. The priesthood of all believers, both men and women, clearly demonstrates this truth.¹¹⁴

MEN AND WOMAN HAVE DIFFERENT ROLES

In the beginning God created mankind male and female. He made Adam first, and then made Eve from Adam's rib. This order of creation subordinates wives to their husbands in marriage, and women to men in the church. As an act of submission to their Creator, women are commanded to submit to their husbands and to male leadership in the church. Women are not allowed to teach or have authority over men in any formal capacity in the church.¹¹⁵

ARTICLE 31

THE GLORY OF GOD

Christians must live for God's glory alone* through their awareness and enjoyment of His person, submission to His authority, and reliance upon his goodness. In truth, all things that have or will transpire, serve to glorify God as the highest purpose.¹¹⁶

THE FIVE SOLAS

** The use of the word alone throughout our statement indicates our affirmation of the five "solas" of the Protestant Reformation.*

1. SOLA SCRIPTURA (SCRIPTURE ALONE)

The Bible alone teaches all that is necessary for our salvation from sin and is the standard by which all Christian behavior must be measured.

2. SOLA GRATIA (BY GRACE ALONE)

In salvation we are rescued from God's wrath by His grace alone. God's unmerited favor is granted through the calling and regenerating work of the Holy Spirit who releases us from our willful bondage to sin and enables us to repent and believe in Christ.

3. SOLA FIDE (THROUGH FAITH ALONE)

Justification is by grace alone through faith alone. Justification can never be the reward of human works or merit, nor does it grow out of an infusion of Christ's righteousness.

4. SOLUS CHRISTUS (BECAUSE OF CHRIST ALONE)

Our salvation is accomplished by the mediatorial work of Jesus Christ alone. His sinless life and substitutionary death alone are sufficient for our justification and reconciliation to the Father.

5. SOLI DEO GLORIA (FOR THE GLORY OF GOD ALONE)

God glorifies Himself in all that he does. Therefore we should acknowledge His highest purpose and live for His glory alone.

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- 3 2 Timothy 3:16-17, John 10:34-35,
- 4 2 Timothy 3:16-17,

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- 5 Each time this document uses the term “man” it shall be in reference to the general word “mankind”.
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- 104 Matthew 28:18-20, Romans 6:1-4, 1 Peter 3:18-22, Luke 22:7-38, 1 Corinthians 11:17-34,

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- 105 1 Peter 3:21,
- 106 Romans 6:1-4, 1 Peter 3:18-22, Matthew 28:18-20, Acts 2:37-41,
- 107 1 Peter 3:18-22, Romans 6:1-4, Acts 8:36-40, "Immersian" is the meaning of the Greek word "baptizo".

ARTICLE 27

- 108 Matthew 26:17-30, 1 Corinthians 11:17-34,
- 109 Luke 22:7-23, 1 Corinthians 11:17-34,
- 110 1 Corinthians 11:27-32

ARTICLE 28

- 111 Genesis 3:19, Matthew 16:24-28, 1 Peter 3:18-22, Matthew 25:31-46, Romans 8:18-25, Philippians 1:21-26, Matthew 13:24-43,
- 112 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, Matthew 24, 1 Corinthians 15:12-58, Revelation 20-22

ARTICLE 29

- 113 John 5:16-30, Jude 5-7, 2 Corinthians 5:6-10, 1 Corinthians 4:1-5, Matthew 25:31-46, Revelation 20:11-15,

ARTICLE 30

- 114 Genesis 1:27, Galatians 3:26-29, 1 Peter 2:4-12
- 115 Genesis 2:4-25, 1 Timothy 2, Ephesians 5:22-33, 1 Corinthians 11:2-16,

ARTICLE 31

- 116 Romans 11:36,