

Essential Doctrines of Hope Chapel

*Part of Hope Chapel's
Leadership Training Series*



The LORD said to his people: "You are standing at the crossroads.
So consider your path. Ask where the old, reliable paths are.
Ask where the path is that leads to blessing and follow it.
If you do, you will find rest for your souls." (Jer 6:16 ^{NET})

ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES OF HOPE CHAPEL

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1. Introduction

This course teaches the *essential* doctrines of the historic Christian faith, as taught at Hope Chapel. These include more than what we must believe in order to be saved, more than what we proclaim in evangelism, more than who Christ is and what he has done to save His people. These beliefs include the *core* teachings of the Christian Faith, but they also include what we call “matters of indifference” (*adiaphora*).

Many *essential* doctrines must be believed if we are to spend eternity in heaven rather than hell. They determine if God will justify us through faith in Christ alone, or if we are none of His (Mat 7.23; Rom 8.9). But they also distinguish Hope Chapel from other reformed churches, like Lutherans, and from other Christian churches, like Methodists and Assemblies of God.

For example, whether we believe that Scripture requires immersion or sprinkling for our baptism, is a matter of indifference regarding our salvation. Baptists (who immerse) and Presbyterians (who sprinkle) both embrace the reformed doctrines of salvation. Whether the elements of the Communion table are mere memorials, or are imbued with the very presence of Christ, is a matter of indifference when it comes to our salvation. But they are *essential* doctrines when it comes to what Hope Chapel teaches regarding the truth of God’s word, as we understand it. Leaders *must* teach and practice credo-baptism only.

Denominational churches typically use a major Confession of Faith, like the Westminster or Augsburg Confession. Or they may use a Catechism like the Heidelberg, to establish their doctrinal standards — their “orthodoxy.” They hold their teachers accountable to those standards, which include matters of indifference. However, if a teaching elder fails to abide by those standards, he may be subject to disciplinary action by the local church, or by the denomination. These churches take a firm stance on *all* the things contained in their Confession. This unites the churches of such denominations, and it distinguishes them from other churches outside the denomination. Even so, there are doctrines that reformed churches share across these denominational boundaries, identifying them as “reformed,” despite those minor differences.

Independent Churches —Independent reformed churches may likewise subscribe to an historic confession, like the London Baptist Confession of 1689. They may subscribe to creeds like the Apostles’ Creed, or Athanasian Creed. They may use historic catechisms, or quote the rulings of church councils, like Chalcedon (451), Orange (529), or the Canons of Dort (1618). Or, like Hope Chapel, they may write their own STATEMENT OF BELIEFS. It serves the same purpose, which is to define its orthodoxy. There’s an article in the Appendix titled *Confessing the Reformed Faith – Unity and Diversity*. You’ll also find an article on *The Need For Creeds And Confessions*. We provide two catechisms on our website for our congregation to use (Spurgeon’s and the Baptist Catechism of 1689). We *use* creeds, confessions, and catechisms. We are *not* opposed to them. Churches without doctrinal convictions say inane things like, “We have no creed but Christ.” That’s a shame.

Why, then, does Hope Chapel not subscribe to a major historical confession? That’s a good question. Those confessions were *denominational*, often *national* confessions. They had legal implications. The elders of the churches which subscribed to them, could be held accountable by law, to the contents of those confessions. They could be imprisoned, exiled, or executed for failing to abide by them. Some historical “baggage” attaches to

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them, which we wanted to avoid (we're *not* denominational). They include more restraints than we felt were necessary, e.g., who may "lawfully" administer the sacraments, or what view of eschatology is permissible. They make clear what Scripture has left unclear, for the sake of uniformity. Thus they *unnecessarily* bind the conscience in some matters of indifference. They *unnecessarily* restrict the right of private judgment about such things.

A local church establishing its own system of beliefs and church government, having only the authority of Scripture for its rule, is a form of CONGREGATIONALISM. The English *Act of Uniformity* of 1662, led to a Non-Conformist movement. They did not seek to reform the Church of England, and refused to conform to the Act of Uniformity. Instead, they sought to establish independent churches, to escape the binding of their conscience by an unbiblical rule of law. Many fled to New England in America, where they planted independent churches, and flourished. They were often baptist in their practice. That is our heritage at Hope Chapel. That's the "line of descent" from which we come. You will discover more about that in the section on *Ecclesiology*.

When we say that we're "independent," that's what we mean. We are not *autonomous* – we're not a rule unto ourselves. But we're not governed by or subject to outside authority. We'll examine the implications of that in that same chapter. We are subject to the authority of Scripture alone. We are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, to the glory of God alone, standing on Scripture... *alone*.

What doctrines, then, are essential to the reformed faith? What is taught by Hope Chapel? That is what this course lays out. We must believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, who atoned for our sins by substituting himself for us, taking our sins upon himself, and receiving the wrath of God in our place. Why? That we might receive His righteousness solely through placing our faith in Him alone for salvation. Only then may we be reconciled to God forever. *That* doctrine makes a difference; it has eternal consequences for us; it is an *essential* doctrine.

There are doctrines in Scripture which are clear, and some that are less clear. As we begin our study of essential doctrines, understand that our salvation depends on things that are clear in God's word, not on things which are unclear. What things, for example?

When Christ returns is unclear. That He *will* return is clear. And when He returns, he will judge the living and the dead (2Tim 4.2). The Christian life is preparation for His return. That's when He separates sheep from goats — his followers from his enemies (Mat 25.32). He'll cast into the lake of fire the devil and his angels, and all those who worship him, all those whose names are not found in the Book of Life (Rev 19.20; 20.15).

Whether the millennial reign is on earth or only in the heavenlies, whether it is currently active or yet to come – is unclear. What is clear, what matters, is that God's Kingdom *has* come. It has been among us since Christ's coming (Mat 12.28), and Jesus Christ is *now* the King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev 17.14; 19.16).

Likewise, there are doctrines that are *explicit* and foundational; others are *derived* from Scripture, and yet they are no less foundational to the Christian faith.

The TRINITY is foundational, even though the term is not found in the Bible. MIRACLES are foundational, as proof of Christ's authority. The VIRGIN BIRTH of Jesus is foundational — for *necessary* reasons, and not merely because one verse says so (Luk 1.34). JESUS' NATURE as truly God *and* truly Man, is foundational. SUBSTITUTIONARY ATONEMENT, or *forensic*

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justification (a surety's payment of another's debt), is foundational. His RESURRECTION is foundational, or else our faith is futile — for we would remain in our sins (1Cor 15.17).

Some of these doctrines are *distinctives* of the PROTESTANT Faith. They distinguish it from the beliefs of the Roman Catholic and Orthodox faiths. They may also distinguish the REFORMED Faith from other protestants, like Lutherans, and from cults like Mormons and JW's. "Repent and believe in the Gospel" is a call to saving faith in Christ (Mk 1.15). But what makes the Gospel *good news*, has been contested since the beginning.

What we include in this course are the DOCTRINAL STANDARDS of Hope Chapel of Colorado Springs — standards to which its teachers are held accountable. We teach some of these doctrines in our *Distinctives Course*; more are contained in our *Statement of Beliefs*. Nonetheless, what we present here is the historic Christian faith as we understand it, recovered by the reformers — so that by believing them, we may enjoy fellowship together with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ (1Joh 1.3).

The Primary Categories of Doctrine

When it comes to essential doctrines, there are a number of theological categories with fancy terms to describe them. But they all come down to these essentials:

- (1) BIBLE — the authority, content, meaning, and application of Scripture (*Bibliology*)
- (2) GOD — the nature, attributes, and will of God (*Theology*)
- (3) MAN — the spiritual condition of Man, and his relation to God (*Anthropology*)
- (4) CHRIST — the person, work, and rule of Jesus Christ (*Soteriology*)
- (5) POLITY — the purpose, organization, and oversight of the local church (*Ecclesiology*)

These are all briefly covered in our Distinctives Course, but we will address some deeper issues within each, that church leaders and teachers should know. Each one will begin with an excerpt on that category from our Statement of Beliefs. We will then explain why we believe each doctrine in that excerpt is correct according to Scripture and tradition. In the appendix is an annotated version of our Statement of Beliefs, with biblical citations for each statement we make. Take time to skim through that. We think you'll see that the authority of Scripture governs our doctrine, and our doctrine governs our practice.

This course isn't about methodologies — it's not about *how* to do anything. As we said, it's about the biblical doctrines that constitute what we believe (our *orthodoxy*), and those in turn govern what we practice (our *orthopraxis*).

- It's not about APOLOGETICS — how to defend those doctrines and practices.
- It's not about EVANGELISM — how to teach the gospel with the aim to persuade.
- It's not about HERMENEUTICS — how to study and properly interpret the Bible.
- It's not about HERESIES — how to spot and distinguish them from orthodoxy.
- It's not about GOVERNANCE — how we run Hope Chapel as an enterprise.

We have separate courses for each of those. This course overlaps them. But it is designed to provide the *foundation* for them, the truth of God about them, as revealed in His holy word. It's more than a doctrinal statement or a confession of beliefs. It's an explanation of *how* those beliefs are derived from Scripture, and *why* they matter — now and forever.

Our desire is to demonstrate that the historic faith must be grounded in the Word of God as its sole authority, lest it be a false religion, with a false gospel, and a misplaced faith.

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Here are the chapter headings in the London Baptist Confession of 1689. Checkmark (✓) the ones you find in Hope Chapel’s Statement of Beliefs (*a copy is in the Appendix*).

The Holy Scriptures	The Perseverance of the Saints
God and the Holy Trinity	The Assurance of Grace and Salvation
God’s Decree	The Law of God
Creation	The Gospel, and the Extent of its Grace
Divine Providence	Christian Liberty and Liberty of Conscience
The Fall of Man, Sin, and its Punishment	Religious Worship and the Sabbath Day
God’s Covenant	Lawful Oaths and Vows
Christ the Mediator	The Civil Magistrate
Free Will	Marriage
Effectual Calling	The Church
Justification	The Communion of Saints
Adoption	Baptism and the Lord’s Supper
Sanctification	Baptism
Saving Faith	The Lord’s Supper
Repentance Unto Life and Salvation	State of Man after Death, and the Resurrection
Good Works	The Last Judgment

To repeat, Hope Chapel’s “orthodoxy” is not fully contained in our Statement of Beliefs. We have other doctrinal statements included in the Appendix to our Distinctives Course. We felt that the topics they address, required more extensive treatment than a Statement of Beliefs or confession normally provides. *Here is a list:*

Affirmations of the Christian Life	Statement on Leadership – Plurality of Elders
Statement on Church Discipline	Statement on Women in Leadership
Statement on Confidentiality and Counsel	Statement on Women’s Role in the Church
Statement on Conflict, Disputes, & Lawsuits	Affirmations & Denials of Together for the Gospel
Statement on Marriage	Affirmations of the Danvers Statement
Statement on Divorce and Remarriage	Excusing the Neglect of the Tithe

A few, like the Danver’s Statement (opposing radical feminism) were written by others; we simply affirm them. But even these additional statements do not completely cover all the things that govern our understanding of the truth of Scripture as applied to a changing culture, and which govern our practices in individual circumstances.

Seeing this list, are there other topics you can now check off on the topical list above it, taken from the London Baptist Confession?

In our course, Studying the Bible, we include the *Chicago Statements* (Inerrancy of Scripture, Biblical Hermeneutics, and Biblical Application). They are useful supplements to our core orthodoxy. As new cultural movements and heresies arise, it is sometimes necessary to address them separately and extensively. With the social justice movement gaining momentum around the world (gender and identity politics), many evangelicals have subscribed to the *Statement on Social Justice and the Gospel*. So might we. Creeds and confessions expand in response to new heresies and errors, to refute them.

Now, there are some things we chose not to address in our Statement of Beliefs. We left them open for discussion. And so, they are *not* part of our orthodoxy. As explained earlier, our guiding principle is not to make clear what God has left unclear. What about schools of interpretation, such as covenant theology versus dispensationalism? At its core, *reformed* theology is *covenant* theology. Dispensationalism cannot be reconciled with

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covenant theology. Therefore, in our course on Cults & Sects, we chose to describe dispensationalism as a sect. It is outside the norm of covenant (reformed) theology, but it is not outside Christianity. That means we do not teach dispensationalism at our church, for the reasons laid out in that course; but neither do we break fellowship with dispensationalists.

This suggests that there are some things contained in the courses we teach, which also supplement our orthodoxy. They help to explain our reasoning for the doctrinal stances we take, or for our practices. Even so, Scripture alone is our final authority.

All of this is to say that there are some things we find it necessary to take a stand on; and there are other things that we prefer to leave open for now. Whatever we take a stand on, that doctrine (our teaching on it) becomes part of our orthodoxy. Consequently, our leaders are obliged to teach and uphold those things. Although it is disconcerting to hear, *orthodoxy is not fixed*. It changes over time in response to various heresies and errors that arise. That was described in our course on Church History, and explained in our course on Heresies & Errors.

Orthodoxy for a local church, as we said at the beginning, goes beyond the essentials of saving faith, and may include matters of indifference, such as the mode of baptism. While different churches may have different doctrines and practices concerning such things, it may be essential for a local church to take a stand, to ensure uniformity of teaching, and to establish doctrinal unity among the believers who attend there.

WARNING: There's an old adage that we can be so heavenly minded, that we're of no earthly good. That's debatable. But it is entirely possible to be so doctrinally correct, such a "purist," that we become unloving towards others. We never want to compromise the truth for fear of hurting someone's feelings; but we never want to be so oblivious to the feelings of others, that we drive them from the love of Christ.

Sound doctrine must lead to sound practice. And sound practice will always display the love of God. Displaying our knowledge of God's truth, without evidencing God's love, puffs us up; and it belies the Gospel message we proclaim. But love builds up (1Cor 8.1). So let your speech be seasoned (Col 4.6), and your heart be humble (Isa 57.5), to God's glory.

Questions.

1. What does "orthodoxy" mean? (the Greek means "*correct doctrine*"):

2. Why does orthodoxy matter?

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3. What difference would it make if Hope Chapel subscribed to a confession, instead of having its own Statement of Beliefs? (*Who would interpret it? Why was it written?*)

4. Might that be a good thing? Why?

2. Bibliology – Bible

STATEMENT OF BELIEFS

Inerrancy of Scripture – We accept the Bible as the recorded Word of God. It is without error in its original autographs and consists of 39 books in the Old Testament and 27 books in the New Testament. The Bible is the record of God’s revelation of Himself in human history. Its unique truth leads us to an understanding that salvation comes by grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone, to the glory of God alone. The Scriptures are fully and verbally inspired by God as the prophets were moved by His Spirit. It is living and powerful, discerning the thoughts and intents of the heart. ^{Heb 4.12}

Scriptural Interpretation – Each book of the Bible is to be interpreted according to its grammatical context and historical purpose as believers are illumined by the Spirit of God. The Lord speaks through the Bible in living power. All believers are exhorted to diligently study the Scriptures and apply them to the conduct of their lives. The Scriptures are the authoritative and governing rule of all Christian life, practice, and doctrine. They are completely sufficient, neither to be added to nor taken away from. Being sufficient, the canon of Scripture is self-contained; it is therefore closed. Every man-made creed, confession, or theology must be tested against the full counsel of God’s Word to ensure they conform to it. It is the final arbiter of truth.

The Canon and Authority of Scripture.

The “canon” refers to the books of the Bible that are considered “genuine and inspired.” Who determined that there are 39 books in the Old Testament, and 27 in the New? Why are some books considered *inspired*, while others are only *historical*? How do we know that what we have in our hands, is accurate and reliable? The short answer is that the canon of Scripture was established in part by Eusebius of Caesarea, in his *Ecclesiastical History* (325 A.D.); and later set by the Protestant Confessions, particularly the [Second Helvetic Confession](#) (1566), and the [Westminster Confession](#) (1643-1647).

While the *reliability* of Scripture is important for apologetics – that is, whether the text is historically accurate – it’s irrelevant if the text itself is not the Word of God. Affirming that God is the Author of His Word, and that what we have is reliable, sufficient, and complete, are the aims of Bibliology.

BIBLIOLOGY involves defining the canon of Scripture, studying its content, and accurately determining its truth and principles. It includes methods of interpretation (which we call *hermeneutics*), the study of original languages, the organization and coherence of its content, and the historical context. Those things are explained at length in our course, *Studying the Bible*. Here’s an excerpt concerning the canon:

The criteria used to establish which books would be used to instruct the church were really very much the same as those used during the Reformation:

- 1) *Self-authentication*: They are unique on their face, having a profound effect on the people who read them. Justin Martyr, Tatian, Theophilus, Hilary, Victorinus, and Augustine are some of those early Christians who were drawn by hearing or reading God’s Word itself.
- 2) *Early use in worship*: The Books or letters were used in worship in Apostolic Times. Paul told the churches to use his letters to instruct (Col 4.16). Justin Martyr described early church services and how they made use of Apostolic writings.
- 3) *Apostolic Ties*: The fundamental test of authenticity was a text’s connection with an Apostle. Was the text written by an Apostle or by someone with very close ties to an Apostle? Early

2. Bibliology

worshippers recognized that the Apostles had a unique relationship with the Lord. Clement of Rome wrote, “Christ is from God and the Apostles from Christ... The Church is built on them as a foundation” (1 Clement 42).¹

The Bible is the Special Revelation of God

What do we mean by revelation? That is, how does God reveal Himself to us?

¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. ¹⁹ For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰ For his *invisible* attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. (Rom 1.18-20 ^{ESV})

So, how do we know there’s a God? _____

That’s called *General Revelation*. But how do we know what He’s like, *specifically*? Is He personal, loving, gracious, and merciful? Or is He an impersonal force, unreachable, and indifferent to our human condition? How do we know anything about Jesus Christ, the means of salvation, or eternal life? If God doesn’t reveal these things to us *Himself*, there’s nothing in nature that will reveal them to us. What we need is “*special revelation*.” And that comes from God, by His Spirit, through His prophets.

Everything we need to know about God that is *not* revealed in nature, and whatever we need to know about Jesus Christ and God’s Plan of Salvation, is found in the Bible. The Bible is the *revealed* Word of God. It is God’s word about Man, not Man’s word about God. Therefore, God is its author, not the men who recorded it.

for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke *as they were* moved by the Holy Spirit. (2Pe 1.21 ^{NKJ})

So, there’s an important relation between the *Word* of God, and the *Spirit* of God. Jesus’ words are spirit and they are life (Joh 6.63). Not everyone who reads the bible, believes it, and comes to saving faith. How, then, does the Bible “come alive” for us, by the *Spirit*?

The Effectiveness of God’s Word

If God doesn’t reveal himself to us, we can’t know him. God reveals himself *generally* to everyone, through his creation (Rom 1.20). But he reveals himself *specifically* (regarding gospel salvation) to his chosen people, and to no others. We are his precious possession, his portion. This is a *reformed* view of Scripture. There’s a difference between this view, and a competing view that is widespread in the church — *Arminianism*. We’ll explore that difference shortly. First we need to see what the Bible says about its author, and how we are able to comprehend what He has revealed to us.

God revealed himself in the OT to the prophets who recorded his words (2Pet. 1.20-21). God revealed himself in the NT through Jesus Christ, whose words were recorded by the apostles. Today, God’s revelation comes to us through the Bible, but the Bible itself is not the revelation. It is only the *content* of the revelation. Now that’s a little confusing, so let’s expand on that.

¹ Shelley, Bruce *Church History in Plain Language* (Word, Inc., Waco, 1982), p. 77.

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The text of the Bible will not reveal God apart from the illumination of his Spirit (1Cor. 2.10-11). Non-believers who read the Bible do not come into his presence there. They are not *persuaded* by it. They consider it interesting historical or mythological literature. They may even consider it wisdom literature, an interesting view of morality and self-sacrifice. But they do not encounter the living God in its pages. They do not believe it to be *true* even if they believe it to be accurately recorded; and many do not even believe that.

Now, there are two competing views in the church as to the effectiveness of God's word. Some say that God's word is sufficient of itself to alter the hearts of men, to reveal God, and to bring anyone to Christ who hears it and wants to come. God's word itself removes their blinders, and opens their ears to see the truth and hear the call of God (or else they say that Christ's sacrifice on the cross enabled all men to see and hear it). After all, they say, God's word is a living and active thing. I suppose this view is saying that the Spirit acts through God's word, while the reformed view would say that God's word acts through his Spirit. The following two verses tell us that the word of God is powerful indeed:

Jer 23.29 "Is not My word like a fire?" says the LORD, "And like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?"

Heb 4.12 For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

God's word is a hammer, and it's piercing. But the reformed view is that God's Spirit must first "quicken" or enliven a person, before he is capable of being hit by the hammer, or pierced by the sword. To put it another way, apart from the preparatory actions of the Holy Spirit, acting directly on us, God's word falls on deaf ears; its truth cannot be seen or understood.

If God's words were effective on their own, then when Christ spoke them directly, *everyone* who heard him would believe him; *everyone* he touched would be healed; *everyone* would recognize him as the Son of the living God, just as Peter did. But Jesus said that the only way Peter could know who he was, is that God *revealed* it to him. He was "blessed" by God (Matt. 16.16). It is clear that not everyone is blessed, nor was everyone healed by Jesus, especially in his hometown. And not everyone accepted him as the Christ. Why? Because there are apparently two types of people in the world. Those who belong to Christ, and those who don't.

The Pharisees demanded of Jesus, "Tell us plainly if you are the Christ" and Jesus responded, "I did tell you... but you didn't believe me. And you didn't believe me because you are not my sheep... My sheep hear my voice." Jn. 10.24-27 They could not hear his words, and so they were not changed by them. They were not Spirit-enabled to receive them. God did not reveal himself to them. They remained blind, deaf, and hardened without God's Spirit first enabling them to see, hear, and receive. Or to use another metaphor from Scripture, the good seed of God's word fell on unprepared soil.

How then do we discern spiritual things?

The ARMINIAN view is that everyone is pre-enabled by God to hear His word. They call it prevenient or enabling grace. Therefore, reading or hearing God's word will draw people to God in such a way that they may freely accept or reject Christ. And because everyone is

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able, what distinguishes those who accept the truth of God's word, and those who don't, is the persuasive argument of the evangelist, not the convicting work of the Spirit. That puts undue pressure on evangelists. Effective conversion is their hands. Because salvation is in the hands of the evangelist to persuade the unbeliever, and in the hands of the unbeliever to be persuaded, salvation may be rejected, even after conversion. We believe this is a distorted and unsound view of free will, and of God's sovereignty.

The REFORMED view is that God's Spirit must first act on you to regenerate you – to enable you to understand and accept God's word, and thereby see the kingdom of God (Joh 3.3). That is, He enables you to understand the things of God; and then you *will* freely come to Christ. When you do, you receive the Spirit of God (Act 2.38; Act 19.2; Gal 3.2, 14). The Spirit not only acts *on* you, but *in* you. You may then walk by the Spirit, not by the flesh (Rom 8.4). He is your Helper, who teaches you all the things of Christ (Joh 14.26). In the reformed view, you were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, not at your conversion (Eph. 1.4). You were given to Christ by the Father. No one can take you out of His hand, nor out of the Father's hand (Jn. 10.28-29). The Spirit is the deposit *guaranteeing* your inheritance (Eph.1.14; 2Cor. 1.22; 5.5). You are *secure* in Christ.

This truth, this revelation of God, is where your comfort and assurance come from in this life. God loves you specifically, personally, and particularly. He *called* you particularly. You are his, and have always been one of his elect. Once you were apart from Christ; once you were a child of wrath (Eph 2.3). But being united to Christ by faith (Rom 6.5), and being baptized into his Body by the Spirit at your conversion (1Cor 12.13), you will *always* be his. Praise God for that!

Are there rules of interpretation to employ as we read? Yes. But they come down to this: determine what the original writer intended to be heard by his original audience, in the context of his day. These things are determined in large part by the language he used – his vocabulary, grammar, type of language (poetic, historical narrative, figurative), etc. Once we rightly know what he intended to convey to his original audience, we can apply the same principles to ourselves today. God was not writing directly to us; nonetheless, He had us in mind. He wants us to understand His will, His love, and His truth, so that we may have fellowship with Him, together, through Jesus Christ.

That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship *is* with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. (1Joh 1.3 ^{NKJ})

Questions.

1. What is the difference between *general* and *special* revelation?

2. Why is Scripture necessarily inerrant?

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3. What's the difference between the inerrancy, inaccuracy, and reliability of the Bible?

4. What difference does it make, how we interpret the Bible? (*e.g.*, asking ourselves, Who was it written to? Why was it written? What was the historical context? What did the original language mean? What did it mean to its first audience?)

5. What is *regeneration*, and why is it necessary?

6. If the Bible itself cannot convict anyone of its truth, and the Holy Spirit enables us to understand and believe it, then what role do we play when we evangelize or preach?

2. Bibliology

3. Theology – God

The nature, attributes, and will of God as a Trinity

STATEMENT OF BELIEFS

The Trinity – God is One. He is infinite, eternal, almighty, and perfect in holiness, truth, and love. There are three persons in the one substance of the Godhead: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. These persons are distinct with regard to one another, and yet they are co-existent, co-equal, and co-eternal. Each is truly God. There is One God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is the foundation of Christian faith and life. To deny the Trinity is to deny the central truth of the Christian faith.

- **God The Father** – God is the Creator of heaven and earth.^{Gen 1.1} By His word and for His glory, He freely and supernaturally created the world out of nothing. Through His Word He daily sustains all creation. He rules over it all, being sufficient in and of Himself. He is the Only God. Besides Him, there is no other. His plans and purposes cannot be thwarted. He fulfills every promise, and He works all things together for good to those who love Him.^{Rom 8.28} In His unfathomable grace, He sent His only Son Jesus Christ as an atoning sacrifice ^{1Joh 4.10} to redeem mankind from the penalty of sin, which is death. He made man for fellowship with Himself– even so, being all-sufficient in Himself, God needs nothing outside Himself. He has made all of creation for the praise of His own glory.
- **Jesus Christ** – Jesus Christ is the only begotten Son of God. He is the eternal Word made flesh that He might reveal God to men, and that God might provide for man’s salvation. Jesus Christ was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He is perfect in nature, teaching and obedience. He is fully God and fully man. He was with God in the beginning and He is God. Through Him all things came into being and were created. He was before all things and in Him all things hold together by the word of His power. He is the exact representation of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation. In Him all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in bodily form. He is the only Savior for the sins of the world, having atoned for them by His blood and having died a substitutionary death on the cross. By dying in our place, He revealed God’s divine love and upheld God’s divine justice. He permanently removed our guilt and completely reconciled us to God. Having redeemed us from sin, He bodily rose from the grave on the third day following His crucifixion. He was victorious over death and the powers of darkness. For a period of forty days, He appeared to over five hundred disciples, performing many convincing proofs of His resurrection. He ascended into heaven where He now sits at God’s right hand to intercede for His people and to rule as Lord over all. He is the Head of His Body, the Church. As such, He is to be worshipped, adored, loved, served, and obeyed by all believers. At the Last Day, every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord.
- **The Holy Spirit** – The Holy Spirit is the Lord and Giver of life. He convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. Through the proclamation of the gospel, He summons men to repent of their sins and to confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The same Spirit brings about the new birth, regeneration, by which a person is given the faith to receive God’s gracious gift of salvation through Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit unites believers to Jesus Christ by faith. He indwells them to bring about their sanctification according to God’s will and His purposes. The Holy Spirit glorifies the Son who in turn glorifies the Father. The Holy Spirit leads the Church into a right understanding and application of the truth of God’s Word. He is to be respected, honored, and worshipped as God Himself – the Third Person of the Trinity.

Christianity is *monotheistic*. There is only one God. And yet Scripture makes it clear that God is triune. There is a Godhead comprised of three distinct persons in the One God.

3. Theology – God

And each person of the Godhead is fully and truly God, without conflict, confusion, or mixture. Any doctrines concerning God must therefore address these three persons distinctly. God lives in us, Father, Son, *and* Spirit (1Joh 4.12; Gal 2.20, 2Tim 1.14).

We pray to the Father, through the Son, by the Holy Spirit. We make our requests known to the Father, through the Son, by the Holy Spirit. What we ask of the Father, He will hear through the Son – to whom we are united by faith – and answer by His Spirit, according to His will. Accordingly, we have three groups of doctrines within Theology:

- *Pateriology* – The nature, person, and work of the Father
- *Christology* - The nature, person, and work of Jesus Christ
- *Pneumatology* - The nature, person, and work of the Holy Spirit

Because God is a unity in three persons, the attributes of the Father are the attributes of the Son and the Spirit. These include His glory, goodness, infiniteness, sovereignty, omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, justice, beauty, majesty, love, grace, mercy, faithfulness, holiness, immutability, transcendence, and immanence. However, these are variously expressed in the three persons.

When God or Yahweh is used in the Bible, the Father (first person) is almost always intended. When “Lord” is used for God (not indicating Yahweh), it refers either to the Father or the Son (first or second person). When “Angel of the Lord” is used, we take it as referring to the pre-incarnate Christ, the second person of the Godhead. When the Spirit is referred to as our Advocate, Helper, or Counselor, it is the third person of the Godhead.

The Son was sent by the Father (Joh 3.16). The Spirit proceeds from the Father and was sent by the Father and the Son (Joh 14.26; 15.26). That does not mean the Son is in any way inferior to the Father in His godhood, nor is the Spirit in any way less than God the Father or God the Son. There is *order* in the Godhead, but not *rank*, for there is but one God; and there is no other (Deu 4.35, 39; Joh 10.30; 14.9; 17.21).

And thus the son submits to the Father; and the son is distinct from the Father (Joh 4.34; 5.19, 36; 10.25; 20.17). The son became flesh, and so he remains eternally: truly God and truly man (Joh 1.14; Act 1.9-11; Eph 4.10; Col 2.9; 1Joh 5.20), ever living so as to intercede for us as the Christ (Heb 7.25). *This is profound, and utterly mysterious.* We know it is true, and yet we cannot fully comprehend or explain it. But it is not to be treated lightly, or ignored, just because it is beyond our capacity to understand (Isa 55.8-9). This is why we approach the throne boldly (Heb .16), and yet with fear and trembling (2Cor 7.15). For He is God, and we are but dust (Psa 103.13-14).

How then is the Spirit distinct from the Father and the Son? Every sin and blasphemy against the son may be forgiven, but not blasphemy against the Spirit (Mat 12.31). We may be ignorant of who Jesus is, as God incarnate and the Christ, until it is revealed to us by God (Mat 16.16-17). But there is no excuse for failing to fear and honor the Spirit of God, who *is* God (Rom 1.20). He was sent by God to the people of God, to act in them with power (Act 1.8), and to convict the world of sin (Joh 16.8), to justify and sanctify the saints (1Cor 6.11) and to sanctify their work (Rom 15.16). This is *His* work; yet He does the work of the Father and the Son, bringing into reality the will of the Father, through the work of the Son, for He knows the mind of God (Rom 8.27). And this Spirit of God, is the Spirit of Christ, who indwells and informs His people (Rom 8.9-11; Gal 2.20; 1Pet 1.11).

3. Theology – God

OK, that's the interwoven nature of the Godhead; and those are the distinctive threads of the Godhead. The will of God, and the sovereignty of God, and the love of God, are found in the First Person of the Godhead, God the Father; but these are expressed through the Son and by the Spirit, as an indivisible unity.

*There is one body and one **Spirit**, just as you were called in 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 you all. (Eph 4.4-6 ^{NKJ})*

Profound. Mysterious. Incomprehensible.

That's why the Son came into the world, taking on the form of a man: it was to make the ineffable God, both visible and approachable to the people of God. So now we'll focus on the nature, person, and work of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

We've established that he is fully God, and fully man. If he were not God, he couldn't in any sense reveal God to us, so that we might know Him (Mat 11.27). If he didn't have the mind of God, he couldn't explain the word of God to us. "You've heard it said, but I say..." If he didn't exercise the power of God, he wouldn't have been able to heal the lame, deaf, and blind, or to raise Lazarus from the dead. His miracles marked him as the Son of God, sent to us by God (Joh 10.25, 38). If he didn't have the authority of God, he couldn't forgive our sins, reconcile us to God, or raise us up on the last day (Mat 9.6; Eph 2.16; Joh 6.39; Mat 28.18). He came that we would have life, and have it abundantly (Joh 10.10).

In His person, he is the very image of the invisible God, and the firstborn over all creation (Col 1.15). He is, at the same time, a man like us, who was tempted in every way as we are tempted (Heb 4.15). He was poor and dependent, with no place to lay his head (Mat 8.20). He came to his own people, and they rejected him (Joh 1.11). He was beaten, mocked, and crucified for claiming to be the Son of God (Joh 19.7). And yet he was not a victim but a victor. He conquered sin and death, by being the atoning sacrifice for sin – so its penalty would not fall on those who place their faith in him as their Savior. That was His work, assigned to Him by the Father, and accepted by Him out of love for the Father and for us.

Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. (Joh 15.13) By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. (1Jo 3.16) In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins. (1Jo 4.10)

We'll explore this further in the section on Soteriology – the doctrine of salvation through faith in the atoning sacrifice of Christ. For now, we're done with Theology, the doctrine of God as Trinity.

Our courses on Church History, and Heresies and Errors, present more information about the development of the doctrine of the Trinity, and about the dual nature of Christ. You should know that Christ does not have *two* natures, but *one* nature, which is at once both divine and human. As with the Godhead, both are inherent in Christ, without confusion or mixture.

3. Theology – God

Questions.

1. Do you need to be able to explain the Trinity when you evangelize? Why?
2. Does a non-believer have to understand the Trinity in order to be saved? Why?
3. Why is it essential that Jesus Christ be the Son of God, and not just a man?
4. What does it mean that Jesus' sacrifice and his life were "substitutionary"? (forensic)
5. Why does it matter that Mary was a virgin? (*re Joseph: Mat 1.12 cf. Jer 22.28-30*)
6. What is the work of *Jesus*?
7. How is *your* work any different? (Joh 14.12; 20.21)

4. Anthropology – Man

The origin, nature, and condition of man

STATEMENT OF BELIEFS

Man's Condition – God made mankind both male and female in His own image, as the crown of His creation, that man might have fellowship with Him. Tempted by Satan in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve rebelled against God and sinned by eating of the forbidden fruit. Through Adam's Fall, death entered into the world, separating mankind from God and making us all objects of His wrath. Despite being a responsible creature, Adam and all His offspring are inwardly depraved, unable to do what is right and pleasing in God's sight. Apart from a special work of God's grace, men are utterly incapable in themselves of being saved from His wrath or of returning to His favor and fellowship. This depravity in mankind is radical and pervasive. It extends to man's mind, will, and affections. Unregenerate man lives in bondage to sin. He is at war with God; he is hostile and hateful toward God. Fallen, sinful people, whatever their character or moral successes, remain lost and without hope in the world apart from the salvation which is to be found in Christ alone.

These doctrines concern man's great and inescapable need for Christ. The primary issue contested among evangelical Christians is whether man is totally depraved and without the ability or will to save himself from sin, death, and hell. Or is he only partly incapacitated, and thus mankind is universally capable of responding to the Gospel? If Christ died for all mankind (*universalism*), but redemption depends on our *choice*, then Christ saved no one. He only obtained the *possibility* of salvation. He made us salvable, but did not finally and effectively save anyone. This is the difference between Calvinism and Wesleyan Arminianism. It must be clearly understood if we are to avoid confusion in teaching the truth of God to His people — as He enables us to understand it.

This is the great and never-ending debate about free will and the sovereignty of God. It boils down to a self-contradictory question, "How sovereign is God?" God is altogether sovereign, or He isn't sovereign at all.

This is like asking, "How sovereign is Satan?" If there are things that Satan can do apart from God, then God (some say) has relinquished part of His domain to Satan. God governs the light, and Satan governs the darkness. This is *dualism*, where Satan is an "equal" but opposite god. It's the theology of many world religions, but it is *not* biblical Christianity.

God is absolutely sovereign over *all* things. And that includes our salvation. Salvation is not in *our* hands, but *His* hands.

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: ¹³ who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, *nor of the will of man, but of God.* (Joh 1.12-13 ^{NKJ})

"You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you. (Joh 15.16 ^{NKJ})

And you **He made alive**, who were dead in trespasses and sins (Eph 2.1 ^{NKJ})

That all seems perfectly clear and unambiguous. But we like democracy, and having a vote or a say in things which affect us, like salvation. So we cling to the idea that our free will is able to restrict God's sovereignty. We think that He must first have our approval, before we will permit Him to approve of us as His children. How *arrogant* that sounds! And yet

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some seventy percent of evangelicals have adopted this Arminian interpretation of what our conversion requires. Let's examine that description given in the previous verse from Paul's letter to the Ephesians:

And you **He made alive** — you who were dead in trespasses and sins, ² in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, ³ among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and **were by nature children of wrath**, just as the others.

⁴ But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in trespasses, **made us alive together with Christ** (by grace you have been saved), ⁶ and raised *us* up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, ⁷ that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in *His* kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, ⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast. ¹⁰ For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. (Eph 2.1-10 ^{NKJ})

Yes, once we were children of wrath, **by nature**. We were in bondage to sin, and servants of Satan, who is the prince of this world (Joh 12.31, 14.30). But Christ set the captives free (Isa 61.1; Luk 4.18), and called us to a new nature – to put off that old man, and put on the new man, created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness (Eph 4.24). For we're under a new and *better* covenant in Christ's blood (Luk 22.20; Heb 8.6).

If we have the choice, then we made *ourselves* into that new creature (2Cor 5.17). We were not dead in sin, but somehow alive enough to choose, without corrupted faculties and an innate desire to satisfy our flesh, rather than satisfy God. At some point along the way, we somehow changed our nature, changed our stripes, and became new creatures with the ability to please God through faith in Christ, without being drawn to Him by the Spirit.

John Wesley recognized this weakness in his Arminian theology. And so he claimed that God *did* enable us, and the Spirit *does* woo us to Christ – but ultimately, we can choose to accept or reject. So, all those given into the hands of Christ for redemption on the cross, may not all be saved, by their own choice. And Christ is powerless to save them against their will. This is ludicrous. It denies the sovereignty of God, and the authority of Christ.

Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: “Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, ² “as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. (Joh 17.1-2 ^{NKJ})

“This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day.” (Joh 6.39 ^{NKJ})

That is a claim that Jesus had no right, power, or authority to make, if indeed *we* are in control of our salvation. To repeat, we are either entirely capable of coming to Christ, or else we are completely unable to come to him. What is our condition without God's grace?

“**All** that the Father gives Me **will** come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.” (Joh 6.37 ^{NKJ}) “**No one** can come to Me **unless** the Father who sent Me draws him; and I **will** raise him up at the last day.” (Joh 6.44 ^{NKJ})

That seems clear and unambiguous. Why then do so many deny it?

4. Anthropology – Man

Linked to this issue of the incapacity of man, is the doctrine of the elect. If indeed it is true, as the verses above indicate, that God chooses us according to His will, and not ours, then he has **elect**ed us. He has **chosen** us.² And that choice was not made by first seeing what choice *we* would make, and then making it His own. That would deny His sovereign will in the matter. It would grant us limited sovereignty – *autonomy* from the will of God. God’s will would be subservient to our will. That denies both His will and his absolute sovereignty in the matter of our salvation. It puts us on a par with God, which is the very sin that Adam committed in the Garden: wanting to be like God, knowing good from evil.

One more time. What does the Scripture say? We’ll close with this:

Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, ⁴ just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, ⁵ having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, ⁶ to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved.

(Eph 1.3-6 NKJ)

That’s the doctrine of ELECTION, and of ADOPTION.³ It is entirely of God, and not of us. Once we’ve been freed of the blindness, deafness, and bondage of sin through regeneration by the Spirit, we come most freely to Christ. We’re adopted as sons of God, *by God*, “and if children, then heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ” (Rom 8.7). But we all *do* come. This is the will of the Father (Joh 6.39 *above*). And the fact that we all *do* come, leads to the next doctrine, which involves the extent of the atonement.

Questions.

1. What does it mean to be “reasonable” (reasoning) and yet “depraved”?

2. Sin separates us from God, and makes us objects of His wrath. So what?

² God has loved His people with an everlasting love (Jer 31.3); and yet God hates some (Mal 1.2-3; Rom 9.13). It is thus reasonable to conclude that the elect are chosen out of God’s love for them, and not for anything inherent in them.

³ **Rom 8:23** “And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we *wait eagerly for adoption as sons*: the redemption of our bodies.” — Justification precedes and conveys our right to adoption. We then have the right to become children of God (Joh 1.12), and the right to an inheritance in Christ, which is kept for us “incorruptible and undefiled” (1Pet 1.4). We now possess the title, but we eagerly await its fulfillment. Thus the sons of God groan for their inheritance in Christ (Rom. 8:17; Gal. 4:7). Only then will they be completely righteous in both body and soul, like pre-fall Adam; restored to full communion in the true paradise.

4. Anthropology – Man

3. Is it possible to be in bondage to sin, and yet not sin? Why? How would you know?

4. What does it mean to be “at war with God”? (Jas 4.4)

5. If at times unbelievers can be moral, and believers can be immoral, why are unbelievers without hope in the world (Eph 2.12), while believers can have hope? (Rom 15.4)

6. Does bondage to sin, or a sin nature, make it impossible to please God? (Heb 11.6)

7. Why must God save unbelievers by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone?

5. Soteriology – Christ’s Sacrifice

The doctrine of salvation.

STATEMENT OF BELIEFS

The Gospel – Jesus Christ is Himself the gospel, the Good News. This good news is revealed in His birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension. Christ’s crucifixion is the *heart* of the gospel. His resurrection is the *power* of the gospel. And His *ascension* is the glory of the gospel. Christ’s death is substitutionary. He died in our place. His death was a propitiatory sacrifice to God for our sins, satisfying the demands of God’s holy justice and appeasing His holy wrath on our behalf. It was a demonstration of God’s love that, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. The benefits of this gracious act that saves us from eternal damnation are freely given to those who repent, to those who place their faith in Christ’s atoning work alone and not in their own works. Jesus Christ is the only mediator, or intercessor, between God and man. There is no other name by which men must be saved. At the heart of all sound doctrine is Jesus’ identity as God in the flesh, and Jesus’ cross as the point at which our salvation was fully accomplished. All our gospel worship, praise, obedience, love, and service therefore proceed from and look to the cross.

Redemption comes through the blood of Jesus Christ, which atones for our sin, satisfies God’s justice, and frees us from death and hell under God’s wrath. Thus, salvation is about the scope and effects of the cross (*i.e.*, of Christ’s sacrifice) on the elect of God.

The doctrine of ELECTION in the previous section dealt with how we obtain salvation, or who causes our salvation. In this section, the concern is the extent of the atonement, the scope of it. Who receives the effects or benefits of the cross? For whom did Christ die?

Before we answer that, we need to understand the doctrine of *substitutionary atonement*, or *forensic justification*. It’s where one person takes the place of another person, and pays the cost of their debt or crime. “While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” He died *in our place*. He received the penalty that we should have paid, which released us from it.

Therefore, if Christ died for all, then all are saved. Why? Because the debt of their sin is cleared, and no penalty remains to condemn them. They are redeemed and freed. There is now no condemnation for them (Rom 8.1), for they are all in Christ Jesus, united to Him under the covenant of grace. There is no need to appropriate or receive that gift through faith, because its effect is universal. It applies to all alike. Hell is empty. Jesus, we must conclude, misled us by saying that we should fear the one who has power to throw our soul into hell (Luk 12.5); it was an empty threat.

Wesleyan Arminians therefore make faith the *condition* of salvation. It is not receiving a gift, but obtaining a reward. It is *our* act, and not an act of God. That is contrary to what we discovered in the previous section, from the text of Scripture. It may be logical, even reasonable, but it is not biblical.

Was Christ’s sacrifice sufficient to atone for all the sins of all mankind for all time? Yes. It was an infinite sacrifice by an infinite being. That’s not the issue. The issue is whom did Christ die for? For the whole world, or only for the elect? This restricted application of the benefits of his sacrifice, is called limited, definite, or particular atonement. He did not die for the whole world indiscriminately; rather he died for his friends; he died for his sheep; he died for those given to him before time, by the Father, for redemption on the cross.

5. Soteriology – Christ

God's gracious salvation of his people, through faith in Jesus Christ whom He sent, brings God glory. If salvation is dependent on us, and not entirely dependent on God, it robs God of the glory He is due. Hence Eph 2.8-9, "For by grace you've been saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God — not of works, so that none may boast." If faith is the condition and not the instrument of salvation, then it is a work. We may boast of being smart enough to choose Christ, because everyone had that same choice available to them. But what of infants and children? What of the elderly and others who may be infirm in their minds – who cannot make an informed "decision for Christ"? Are they all *lost* because of their infirmity? Are they all *saved* (excused) because of their infirmity?

How can election and adoption be squared with conditional salvation, where we choose God rather than being chosen by God? It is inconsistent with God's sovereignty. We make God dependent on us to save us, as we saw earlier.

What is Saving Faith?

STATEMENT OF BELIEFS

Our Saving Response to the Gospel – God's grace through Christ's Atonement is the only cause of man's salvation. From before the foundation of the world, our salvation has been rooted in the free and unconditional election of God which was decreed by God for God's own pleasure and glory. Every elect man and woman is a free agent, imbued by the Holy Spirit with the requisite faith to trust in Christ alone for his or her salvation. Saving faith requires that we genuinely repent of our sins and by God's grace embrace Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. This gospel of grace is to be sincerely preached to all men in all nations. The evidence of biblical repentance is a changed life. Saving faith in Christ requires good works as the necessary evidence of that saving faith. And yet neither repentance nor good works can save us; they cannot earn or repay what has been done by Christ alone. Salvation is the free gift of God in Christ. Nonetheless, a believer must be willing to deny himself, pick up his cross, and follow Christ, or else he cannot become His disciple.

Salvation Inherited through the Gospel – Salvation is the free gift of God provided by grace alone, received through faith alone, because of Christ alone, for the glory of God alone. Anyone turning from sin and trusting in Christ and His substitutionary death receives the gift of eternal life. He is declared righteous by God because of Christ. The righteousness of Christ is imputed to Him. He is fully justified and fully accepted by God. He has been reconciled to God. God is His Father and the believer is adopted as His child. The debt of his sin is forgiven. And because he has been made a new creature through regeneration, he is liberated from the law of sin and death. He has been transferred into the kingdom of the Son, to live in freedom according to God's Spirit. He has become an heir to the kingdom of God and a co-heir with Christ.

Between these two things – the Law, and the Gospel of Grace – there is much confusion. As we've seen, works play no part in our justification before God. He declares us righteous through faith alone in Christ alone. We're not justified by works alone, or by faith plus works; or by faith plus church membership – we're justified by faith *alone*. And there is a single object of faith, the one we place our faith and trust in. And that is Jesus Christ. We trust in what *he* has done, and not in what *we* have done.

In that sense, justification is a freebie. It cost us nothing. But *faith* will cost us everything. And so we are warned to count the cost of following Christ (Luk 14.28). "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me." (Luk 9.23) We were liberated from the law of sin and death, that we might willingly come under the law of love. We no longer live, but Christ lives in us (Gal 2.20). We are no longer darkness,

5. Soteriology – Christ

but now we are light. So we walk in the light, as children of light (Eph 5.8). As we do, the blood of Christ cleanses us from all sin (1Joh 1.7).

That means we have turned from darkness and sin, and the sinful habits of the flesh, and turned towards the light of Christ, living accordingly. That's true repentance, imperfect in this life, but sincerely sought after by every true follower of Christ. You may rightly ask, "Isn't that still works, or good deeds? How is it grace alone? How are we freed of the law?" And the answer is that we are *not* freed of the law. We are freed of the *penalty* of the law.

We uphold the law (Rom 3.31). We don't uphold the ceremonial, dietary, or civil laws of Israel, because we're not under the law (Rom 6.14). Rather, we uphold the Law of Love, which fulfills all those laws (Rom 13.10). We are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love our neighbor as ourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on those two commandments (Mat 22.40; Luk 10.27).

The moral law of God reflects the attributes and character of God. It remains in place. The Ten Commandments are as valid today, as they were when God first gave them to Moses. The Sabbath predates the Mosaic Code. It was established when God rested from His own labors in creation (Gen 2.3). He blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, ostensibly to Adam. There was no need to do that for Himself. And He made it an everlasting sign with His people (Exo 31.13). Christ told us that he did not come to do away with the Law, but to fulfill it (Mat 5.17-19). The fact that he fulfilled it, doesn't mean we may ignore it. We're *free* to obey it – without threat, fear, or guilt. It was given to us for our good.

How Then Shall We live?

STATEMENT OF BELIEFS

Sanctification – The Holy Spirit is actively guiding and producing our sanctification. He empowers us to produce His fruit as we are transformed by the renewing of our minds through God's Word. Over time we are being transformed into the image of Christ. By God's grace, the power of sin has been destroyed, even though its presence remains in our flesh; but we can now say no to the flesh and yes to the Spirit. As we are led by the Spirit, we grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, freely keeping His commandments. We endeavor to live in such a way that people may see our good works and glorify our Father who is in heaven. All believers are exhorted to persevere in the faith, knowing they will give an account to God for every thought, word, and deed. To aid them in their walk of faith, believers ought to practice spiritual disciplines, especially Bible-study, prayer, worship and confession. Nevertheless, the believer's ultimate confidence to persevere is based on God's promise to preserve His people until the end. To this end, the Holy Spirit has been given to them as a pledge, guaranteeing what is to come, and empowering believers for Christian witness and service.

The Work of the Spirit – All genuine believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit at conversion. Yet the New Testament indicates that there is also an ongoing, empowering work of the Spirit subsequent to conversion. Being indwelt by the Spirit as a pledge of salvation, and being filled with the Spirit for works prepared in advance for us to do, are theologically distinct experiences. The Holy Spirit continually and repeatedly fills each believer with power for Christian life and witness as necessary. He imparts His supernatural gifts to individual believers for the common good, and to edify the Body of Christ for various works of ministry in the world. Gifts of the Holy Spirit are vital for the mission of the church, and they are meant to be earnestly desired and practiced.

5. Soteriology – Christ

Sanctification is the progressive putting away of sinful desires and conduct. We're sanctified by God's grace, just as we were justified by God's grace. But our justification was entirely of God; our sanctification is a cooperative process. It is Spirit enabled, but it is an act of will on our part. We choose to be "washed" by the Spirit. Paul puts it succinctly:

"For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live." (Rom 8.13 ^{NKJ})

There are many verses that exhort us to be obedient. All of them refer to our sanctification; none of them refer to our justification. We were completely sanctified at our conversion, by the blood of Christ. There is no stain remaining to keep us from God. Christ washed us from our sins (Rev 1.5). And yet we wash our robes and make them white in the blood of the Lamb (Rev 7.14). What we are inside because of Christ, and what we appear to be in the sight of men, must coincide. It is the exercise of our faith in Christ, demonstrating it to ourselves and to the world. That's how we grow; that's how we mature in our faith. We need to get past the milk of salvation (the basic truths of salvation), and begin to feed on solid food, which is the meat of obedience (Heb 5.12; 1Cor 3.1-3).

We need to stop gratifying the flesh, and learn to be led by the Spirit (Gal 5.16-18). That's when we're no longer under the law, because we no longer need it to tutor us in right living (Gal 3.24). We understand what it means to be justified by faith. "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." (Gal 5.25)

Those references to the Spirit make it clear that He equips and gifts us for the common good (1Cor 12.7), and enables us to exercise the gifts with power – so that we do the work of Christ effectively and fruitfully. All of us must do our part, so that the body grows in love (Eph 4.16). He teaches us the things of Christ, so we're purposeful in what we do.

"Blessed *are* those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching. Assuredly, I say to you that he will gird himself and have them sit down *to eat*, and will come and serve them. (Luk 12.37 ^{NKJ})

"Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season?" (Mat 24.45 ^{NKJ})

That should give you a good idea of how to respond to the Gospel with faithful living, in cooperation with the Spirit whom we received at our conversion (1Cor 2.12).

Questions.

1. Does our *faith* in Christ cause us to be saved? How, or Why? (Eph 2.8-9)

2. Why is Christ's resurrection **necessary**? (Joh 11.25; Act 24.15; 1Cor 15.15-19)

5. Soteriology – Christ

3. How does *justification* relate to *redemption* and *reconciliation*?

4. Why must we be justified by faith ***alone***? (Rom 4.4)

5. When was Jesus Christ himself justified? Why does it matter? (1Cor 15.17)

6. If Christ died for all mankind alike, what are the implications for the Gospel?

7. How does repentance differ from remorse?

8. Why must saving faith evidence itself by repentance and *good works*?

9. Why is sanctification a ***necessary*** response to the Gospel?

10. Where does your assurance of salvation come from? Or, what is its basis?

5. Soteriology – Christ

6. Ecclesiology – The Church – Part 1

STATEMENT OF BELIEFS

The Church – By His Word and Spirit, God has created, preserves, and guides the Church. The Church is a gathering or assembly of the elect of all ages and all nations. Sinful men have been called out of the whole human race for redemption and sanctification in the fellowship of Christ's Body. The Church is not a religious institution, organization, or denomination. Rather, the universal Church is comprised of all those who have personally appropriated the gospel and who have become genuine followers of Jesus Christ. The Church exists to worship and glorify God. It also exists to serve Him by faithfully doing His will on earth as it is done in heaven. Believers commit themselves to God and to one another to preach the gospel and to plant churches throughout the world as a testimony to the love and grace of God. The Great Commission entrusted to the Church is to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey all that Christ has commanded. New believers are to be added to a local church. There they devote themselves to the teaching of God's word, to the fellowship of the Body, to breaking bread together, and to prayer.

Giftedness for Service – All believers are to be a vital part of a local church. It is in the context of the local church that God's people receive pastoral care and leadership. They are given the opportunity to employ their God-given gifts in His service, both with regard to one another and with regard to the world. They are called to live out the New Covenant in Christ's blood as the people of God, demonstrating the reality of the kingdom in the world. To that end, Christ has gifted the church with apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers to equip the saints for works of ministry, so that the Church will mature and grow. Women play a vital role in the life of the church; but in keeping with God's design, they are not permitted "to teach or to have authority over a man" (1Tim. 2.12). Leadership in the church is therefore male.

Sacraments – The Scripture provides for two sacraments or ordinances: baptism and communion. Sacraments are physical signs and seals of a spiritual reality. Water baptism is an outward sign of an inward change. As such, it is only intended for the person who has by faith received the saving benefits of Christ's atoning work, and has become His disciple. Therefore, in obedience to Christ's command and as a public testimony to God, the Church, and the world, a believer is immersed in water in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Water baptism visually represents a person's union with Christ, signifying his own death and resurrection. His former way of life is symbolically put to death as he is immersed in the water, and his resurrection to newness of life is vividly depicted as he is raised up out of the water. The Lord's Supper is likewise to be observed only by those who have become genuine followers of Christ. This ordinance symbolizes the breaking of Christ's body and the shedding of His blood on our behalf. It is to be observed repeatedly throughout the Christian life in remembrance of the atoning benefits of Christ's death. We partake of the Lord's Supper with faith and an attitude of self-examination as a congregation, so that the whole body is joined together in the communion of the saints. As we take of the elements together, we remember and proclaim the death of Christ on our behalf, and we receive real spiritual nourishment for our souls. By participating, we signify the unity of Christ's Body whose life flows from His blood, and is healed by His stripes.

In the last section, we saw how we have all been gifted by the Spirit for the common good. In this section, we'll see how the leaders of a church are gifted by God; and they in turn are given by God to the Church to equip the saints. We're about to see what it takes to govern a church, and how necessary it is that God builds the church, or else we'll labor in vain (Psa 127.1). Our course, *Introduction to Biblical Leadership*, covers this in greater detail, as it applies to Hope Chapel in particular.

6. Ecclesiology – The Church – Part 1

Our Statement of Beliefs has three parts dealing with the Church and its responsibilities: (1) The role or purpose of the Church; (2) How the Church is governed; and (3) How the Sacraments are administered. These are largely self-explanatory, but we'll make a few observations regarding each, comparing the biblical view to some of the changes and trends we've seen develop over the last half century. For a more comprehensive view of the development of the Church, our course on the *History of the Church* might be helpful.

(1) The Role of the Church.

The Bible variously describes the church as the household of God, the gathering of the saints, the body of Christ, and the kingdom of God on earth. It is the New Jerusalem descended in part and imperfectly, until Christ returns to perfect it. It serves as a refuge, a school, a haven, and a hospice. It is organized and orderly, but it is not primarily an organization. It is God's ordained means of making disciples of Jesus Christ. It is the visible expression of Christ on earth. It is a sanctifying agent in an age of corruption, and a bastion of biblical truth in a culture that rejects it. It is the place where Christ is taught among those who are called of God (Eph 4.20). It is where the truth of God is guarded and proclaimed, and where the Gospel of Grace is celebrated, and God is worshipped by His people, together. And it is the place where a believer's faith may be tested, exercised, and practiced with fellow believers, before engaging the culture and the enemy at the very gates of hell (Mat 16.18).

Christ's work is the work of the Church — of the saints collectively — acting in concert with one another, in the name of Christ, to fulfill the Great Commission. It is *this* work:

“The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to *the* poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to *the* captives And recovery of sight to *the* blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed; ¹⁹ To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD.” (Luk 4.18-19 ^{NKJ})

It is Spirit-driven, Spirit-enabled, and Spirit-empowered. Acting in Christ's name, means acting in love, grace, and mercy — toward one another, and toward our enemies. We are called to stand firm against the tides of change and persecution. The Bible is clear that we are more than conquerors through Christ who loved us (Rom 8.37); if only we are faithful.

(2) How the Church is Governed.

The primary truth about the governance of the Church is that Christ was given to the Church to be its head (Eph 1.22).

And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, ¹³ till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; ¹⁴ that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, ¹⁵ but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head — Christ — ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

(Eph 4.11-16 ^{NKJ})

That's it in a nutshell. There are two offices mentioned in Scripture (Phi 1.1; Tit 1.5). The one office is known as elder, pastor, shepherd, or bishop. These words describe their

6. Ecclesiology – The Church – Part 1

varying roles as mature believers, those who care for the flock, and who “rule” or oversee the church as an organization, directing its activities (1Tim 5.17). The qualifications of the individuals are outlined in 1Tim 3.1-11, and Tit 1.6-9.

There is a second office, known as “deacon,” It is optional and subordinate to the office of elder. These men oversee the physical needs of other believers in the church, relieving the elders to pray and minister the word. The duties and qualifications of a deacon are described in Acts 6.1-6, and in 1Tim 3.12-13. See our course on Biblical Leadership.

At Hope Chapel we’re led by elders, and we’re supported by deacons. Together they comprise the core of our leadership team. They work collaboratively to identify and meet the needs of our church body, and to fulfill their duties to God. There are two governing principles that we find in Scripture, to limit the practices of the church, and to limit the authority of our church leaders.

The first is the REGULATIVE PRINCIPLE. It says, in brief, if a practice isn’t found in Scripture, it shouldn’t be done. When taken to the extreme, as with the Amish, anything not mentioned in Scripture, like belts and automobiles, shouldn’t be used. When taken to the other extreme, anything that is not expressly forbidden, is permissible. We embrace a *reasonable* Regulative Principle. Our worship is governed by Scripture, but the elements or means of worship are adapted to changing technologies. Projectors, sound boards, speakers, mics, musical instruments, and other means, we believe are *neutral* with regard to what is or is not permissible. They are neither mentioned nor forbidden, but neither are they at odds with the principles of worship that we find in Scripture.

And that brings up the *second principle*, which is that the elders hold “the KEYS TO THE KINGDOM” (Mat 16.19) They’re charged with preserving and proclaiming the one true Gospel, as contained in the Word of God and taught to them (Gal 1.6-8; 1Th 4.1; 2Th 3.6). That means they are authorized to establish the *orthodoxy* and *orthopraxis* (the doctrines and practices) of their church, and to administer church discipline accordingly. Discipline is prescribed in Matthew 18. Elders do not possess unbounded authority. They administer discipline meekly, aiming to restore fellowship, not to punish offenders (Mat 20.25-28; Gal 6.1). Elders and deacons are subject to church discipline, like everyone else. The requirement of two witnesses against an elder (1Tim 5.19), is true of *all* disciplinary actions (Mat 18.16). See our Statement on Church Discipline for more information.

(3) How the Sacraments are Administered.

Traditionally, we say that a true church is marked by three things: the right proclamation of the Gospel, the right application of church discipline, and the right administration of the sacraments. These are taken from Acts 2.42, ““And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.” Three main things are mentioned: continuing steadfastly in sound doctrine handed down by the apostles, fellowship in which unity and communion are evident in contrast to discipline, and the regular administration of the sacraments (which is “breaking bread” in the Lord’s Supper). All these are to be covered in prayer.

Berkhof writes, “The sacraments should never be divorced from the Word, for they have no content of their own, but derive their content from the Word of God; they are in fact,

6. Ecclesiology – The Church – Part 1

a visible preaching of the Word.”⁴ The sacraments were established by Christ and the Bible describes how they are to be dispensed. The sacraments are seals of the Covenant of Grace and intended only for partakers of the Covenant of Grace. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* states, “Sacraments are holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace, immediately instituted by God, to represent Christ, and his benefits; and to confirm our interest in him: as also, to put a visible difference between those who belong to the church, and the rest of the world; and to solemnly engage them to the service of God in Christ, according to his Word” (Rom 4.11; Gen 17.7, 10, 11; Mat 28.19; 1Cor 11.23; Rom 6.3-4; Col 2.12; 1Cor 10.16; 11.25-26; Gal 3.27; Exo 12.48; Gen 34.14; 1Cor 10.21; Rom 6.3-4; Gal 3.27; 1Pet 3.21; 1Cor 5.7-8; 10.16).⁵ The Spirit baptizes us into the Body of Christ (1Cor 12.13).

As for properly dispensing them, à Brakel (1635-1711) writes, “One church uses them either as a symbol of unity [*Lutheran*] or as a mere external commemoration of the suffering of Christ [*Zwinglian*], while another church [*Roman Catholic*] assumes the external signs to be Christ Himself, attributing Christ’s efficacy to them, thereby negating the nature of the sacraments.”⁶ The sacraments must be correctly administered for them to be a *means of grace*. That’s why they must never be divorced from the Word of God and must be dispensed accordingly (Mat 28.19; Mar 16.16; Act 2.38-42; 1Cor 11.23-30).

We favor the Calvinist understanding, as expressed in the *Consensus Tigurinus*. Basically, it is not a mere memorial; but neither do the elements (juice and bread) convey anything in themselves. They are ordinary and remain ordinary. But our faith, directed to Christ, sees in them the body of Christ sacrificed for us, atoning for our sin once for all. They also represent Christ’s fulfillment of the law on our behalf. The sacrament is a sign – and yet it conveys grace, through faith in Christ’s finished work. That’s what it signifies. However, to do that, *the Spirit must attend the sacrament*. That’s why it is more than a memorial in our mind.

explains this in detail. It is in the Appendix, with additional information about our practice of Baptism and Communion.

Questions.

1. Why does the Church exist? What is its purpose?

2. What do believers do in the Church? Or, why have they been gifted by God?

⁴ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: 1988) 577-78.

⁵ *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter 27:1, Of the Sacraments.

⁶ Wilhelmus à Brakel, *The Christian’s Reasonable Service*, Vol. 2 (Carlisle, Soli Deo Gloria: 1993) p. 36.

6. Ecclesiology – The Church – Part 1

3. What do elders and deacons do? What are they responsible for?

4. Why do the sacraments matter? What is their purpose?

5. Why does it matter who participates in the sacraments or who conducts them?

6. Ecclesiology – The Church – Part 1

7. Ecclesiology – The Church – Part 2.

Why is Hope Chapel an Independent Church?

How does that work if there's an internal dispute?

We'll take this in three parts: (1) the biblical basis, (2) the historical basis, and (3) practical solutions for unresolvable disputes.

1. The Biblical basis for independent local churches

In the Bible, there's no indication that the local churches had an over-arching hierarchy among the churches, with someone at the top, outside that local church, directing what they should or should not do. Instead, there is every indication that they operated independently. "Appoint elders in every town" (Tit 1.5-11, etc.). So the gospel was proclaimed by an evangelist; a group of believers was gathered together and instructed in the faith; some among them who met the qualifications were appointed to lead it; and then the evangelist moved on.

Later on, the evangelist (church planter) would return or correspond to see how they were progressing, to ensure unity in body and doctrine among the churches. But it was not to "rule" those churches. Hence the direction concerning local elders, "Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine." (1Ti 5.17) Paul has given direction, instruction, but not a command. He is coming alongside them to offer counsel – often repeating the basics of the faith as a reminder of what they were taught at the beginning.

He writes the churches in Galatia, "O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified?" (Gal 3.1) He didn't manage or rule over them, but let the Word of God rule them, through men in those local churches, who were called by God to follow Christ faithfully.

Sometimes Gospel correction was advised to the leaders. For example, when Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he never "ordered" anything. Instead he counseled the local elders and left it up to them whether to follow his counsel. His introduction in 1Corinthians 1 is instructive, especially verse 12,

"Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ." Is Christ divided?"

How did Paul approach them? As their head? Far from it. Here's how he described his encounter with this church. It shows nothing of "lordship" over them, but of one humble follower of Christ cautioning other followers, using the truth of God as his only authority. THAT is what must rule them, not men:

"Brethren, when I came to you, I did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God." (1Co 2.1-5)

7. Ecclesiology – The Church – Part 2

In his letter to the Corinthians, chapter 16, Paul took up a collection from the various local churches, to aid the church at Jerusalem which was under severe persecution and suffering greatly – they needed help. He did not *command* them to aid that church. But he did *DIRECT* them how it could be done effectively, since he was *ORGANIZING* it, and wanted it to be orderly and successful. He coordinated the raising of the funds – just one aspect of what they did as local churches – to facilitate raising support; nothing more. He simply let the local churches know the need, how and when he would gather the funds, etc. and then left it up to them, to their local elders and congregations, whether to meet the needs of the church at Jerusalem, and how much to give. Yes, he cajoled a bit, by letting them know how generous other churches had been. That was “leading” by persuasion and not by coercion or command. And he was able to persuade them, because of his own reputation among them, not because of his position over them. It came by example, and by relationship:

Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come. And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem.

If it seems advisable that I should go also, they will accompany me. I will visit you after passing through Macedonia, for I intend to pass through Macedonia, and perhaps I will stay with you or even spend the winter, so that you may help me on my journey, wherever I go. For I do not want to see you now just in passing. I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits. But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries. (1Co 16.1-9)

2. The historical basis for independent churches

Churches were originally independent churches, as the biblical text suggests. But early on, because of challenges to doctrine and practice, the elders of the churches thought it best to appoint a bishop over all the churches of a city. This was to unite them in the truth, rather than to organize them in administration.

Nonetheless, once Constantine called the council to Nicea to settle matters in dispute, there came not only subscription to the creedal truths of such councils, but administrative oversight of the churches. They were no longer independent. Even on the eve of the Reformation, the trend was merely to move away from centralized leadership at Rome, and to substitute centralized leadership within each nation. It was the substitution of a king for the pope, neither of which is provided for in Scripture. Although individual groups rose up, like the Waldenses, these weren't really independent *churches*, so much as independent *movements*.

In Switzerland, 1523, Zwingli declared that 600 Christians who had gathered at the First Zurich Disputation, were a legitimate church council. The Catholic authorities were aghast that Zwingli believed this gathering of ordinary Christians, under the authority of the Bible alone, was equal to an official church council led by the Pope, Cardinals, and Bishops. It was an early example of the powerful allure of congregationalism.

In 1559, The Act of Uniformity was instituted by Elizabeth I of England. She attempted to unite Roman Catholics and Protestants under a single Book of Common Prayer. Those who dissented from the watered-down doctrine and practices, were called dissenters.

7. Ecclesiology – The Church – Part 2

They were also known as PURITANS, for demanding pure doctrine and practice according to Scripture, rather than submit to a political compromise. In 1662, Parliament passed a new *Act of Uniformity*, designed to suppress the Puritans and other dissenters (e.g., Presbyterians, Congregationalists, other Calvinist sects, plus Baptists and Methodists).

The RC's had rewritten the Book of Common Prayer to favor Catholic beliefs and practices. Anyone who refused to sign it would be removed from the pulpit – barred from preaching, teaching, or even speaking about alternative views. In 1662, two thousand Puritan preachers were removed from their positions when they refused to sign. It became known as the GREAT EJECTION.

Puritans wanted to reform the Church of England, but instead were barred from it. They were called *nonconformists*, for failing to conform to the revised Book of Common Prayer. But there were others who did *not* want to reform the Church of England. They wanted autonomous churches, under their own pastors, apart from the national church, so that they could practice their faith according to the dictates of their conscience. They were known as *separatists* or independents. Robert Browne formed the first Separatist church at Norfolk, England, in 1581.

In the main, Separatists proposed a CONGREGATIONAL OR INDEPENDENT form of church polity. Each congregational church was founded on a formal covenant, elected its own officers, and restricted membership to “visible saints.” In the 1640s, the minority wing of the Puritan party in England maintained congregationalism against the majority in the Westminster Assembly and the Parliament. As churches in New England were founded on these separatist principles, they established the norm for the independent churches we see today.

Hope Chapel was originally a Foursquare church; its polity was not congregational. One might think the fear was that a pastor would labor to found a church, only to have the congregation vote him out, and take “his church” from him. Of course it's not his church, but congregationalism can indeed lead to a usurping of authority.

2Tim 4:3-4, “For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.”

If the sheep choose their shepherds, and students their teachers, where is the safeguard for sound doctrine? Who will judge the elders' character under 1Tim 3 and Titus 1? How will they not be the most popular, rather than the most qualified? Even in Acts 6, where the people are told to *pick* deacons, the elders appointed them “after testing” (1Tim 3.10). “*God Himself* gave some to be ... pastors and teachers,” Eph 4.11. And in response, some “aspire to be an elder” (1Tim 3.1), and are *gifted by God* for it (1Cor 12.28).

So there is no founding “covenant” for Hope Chapel, no voting rights or other aspects of congregationalism, that might reflect the historical character of New England churches. Its Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws define the church's polity. Elders and deacons are recommended by the Board, and approved or disapproved by the congregation prior to installation, but they are not nominated or elected *per se*. Finances and budgets are not approved by the congregation, even though the financial status of the church is regularly reported, and financial records are available for review. Neither is the Board elected by

the congregation. Thus, the administration of Hope Chapel is internally independent of the congregation, as well as externally independent of other churches.

3. The practical necessities when there are internal disputes

In independent churches, a challenge arises if there is a split between the congregation and the leadership, or if there is a dispute among the leaders, or a disciplinary action is initiated by one elder against one of or more of the other elders. Who will mediate between them? It would have to be someone outside the local congregation, but it's an independent church. How does that work?

What is needed is a small group of elders from another like-minded church or churches, who have no stake in the outcome, and will play no favorites in the dispute. Reformed churches, historically and typically, are not independent. Finding outsiders who are “like-minded” – who don't have an inherent bias against independent churches – is not an easy task. Independent churches may be perceived by other church leaders as renegades, who deserve whatever grief they are experiencing. Their common ground of reformed doctrine must therefore *not* involve church polity.

The search for like-minded outsiders must begin early, be continued regularly, and the relationships must be maintained personally, by all the elders. Ideally, they are searching for these outside elders *as a group*, so that no one elder is better known or favored than any other. And yet, each elder must be sufficiently known by those outsiders, so as to facilitate a cordial and realistic mediation if needed.

To that end, time and funds must be set aside to build ongoing relationships with pastors outside the local congregation. Whether this is done by luncheons, informal discussions, information sharing, or other activities, mutual trust must be gained by them.

Church Membership

What follows is excerpted from our Distinctives Course. Many people have a problem when it comes to church membership. Instead of seeing it as a wonderful undeserved privilege, they view it as a hindrance at best, and at worst, a man-made tradition. ⁷

There are at least four reasons that we consider membership in a local church to be a vital aspect of a believer's life.

1. Membership is essential in order to facilitate and organize true community. The Church is a living organism with an internal organization. Many teachers often emphasize one aspect over another as if these two aspects are in opposition. In other words, they will consider the church *only* an organism or *only* an organization. As in most cases, the truth is not either/or but both/and. The church truly is a living organism, made up of living saints. However, the Bible commands that this living organism be organized and structured. Hence the commands in the Bible concerning Elders, Deacons, Pastor-teachers, Administrators, etc. This organization of the church's people is completely for the sake of promoting the life of the church. In other words, the organization is for the sake of promoting the life of the organism.

⁷ From Richard J. Vincent's Article, "Is Church Membership Essential?" at www.theocentric.com , 11/27/1997.

7. Ecclesiology – The Church – Part 2

The church is in need of life-sustaining and life-promoting organization. Her well-being depends upon it. As Stanley Grenz writes,

“To be effective in carrying out its purposes, every human community must organize itself. Community organization includes practices of commitment which integrate new members into the body and provide opportunities for members to reaffirm their loyalty to the corporate vision. Organization includes likewise the development of structures within the community. Ultimately, the goal of such structures is to facilitate community life.”

2. Scripture commands a Christian to be committed to a local church. “And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near” (Hebrews 10.24-25). You might be tempted to say, “Hold on, that doesn’t say I’ve got to attend church weekly and be a member.” You’re right! It says much more than that! The command goes much deeper than just attending services regularly. We are to give careful consideration and forethought to how we will stimulate others to love and good deeds when we meet with our brothers and sisters in Christ in order that we might encourage them in their faith.

Scripture knows of no lone-ranger Christians. All of the Epistles are written to churches or to pastors of churches. In Revelation, Christ speaks directly to His churches--not just to individuals. Christ loves His church! If we are to be Christlike, we should too!

Do you want to be in God’s will? Then be active in a local church. Certain things in Scripture are clear. When we refuse to obey God in even the most fundamental of areas, we shouldn’t expect Him to bless us or guide our way in other less-clear areas. C. H. Spurgeon writes concerning those who would refuse to obey God’s command: “I know there are some who say, ‘Well, I have given myself to the Lord, but I do not intend to give myself to any church.’ Now, why not? ‘Because I can be a Christian without it.’ Are you quite clear about that? You can be as good a Christian by disobedience to your Lord’s commands as by being obedient?”

Jay Adams is even more bold: “People who are not members of a church should be treated like unbelievers, because they are treating themselves as unbelievers.” Adams is not referring to someone seeking membership and yet carefully exercises discernment before finally making a commitment. He is referring to those who don’t care to have any part in God’s beloved church.

3. Christians are obligated to submit to and obey the leaders of a local church. The leaders of this church have decided that church membership makes it easier to shepherd the flock.

Please note the commands to believers in the following verses.

“But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another” (1 The 5.12-13).

“Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you” (Heb 13.17).

7. Ecclesiology – The Church – Part 2

God's people are to appreciate, esteem highly, obey, and submit to their leaders. They are to seek to make leadership's oversight a joy--easier for them to accomplish. Church membership makes it easier to shepherd the flock.

It does this in a number of ways. Membership clarifies the difference between believers and unbelievers. It helps leaders to know who should be treated as believers and who as unbelievers. It helps leaders to know whether they should seek to encourage a person as a believer or seek to evangelize a person as an unbeliever. Granted, church membership will never tell us who is and is not a true Christian. However, it will help give the leadership guidance in how to approach and help those in their sphere of influence and those under their charge.

There are also privileges attached to membership that are not given to all. Many service opportunities in the church are not offered to non-members. We believe that one should express their commitment to this local church before they are granted the privilege and opportunity to regularly serve this local body. Mack writes,

“Leadership, teaching, evangelism, handling of funds, music, ushering, and even such seemingly mundane tasks as nursery care and grounds keeping should be performed by those who love Christ and are committed to the church. That is because the members of the body are gifted by the Spirit for the purpose of accomplishing the work of the ministry (1Cor. 12; Eph. 4.11-16) ... those who are members have the freedom to obey God in any way He calls them to serve.”

Finally, divine accountability from others by means of church discipline is not possible with non-members. It is impossible to discipline a non-member--you can't threaten excommunication to one who is not a member. Church discipline is only possible among members.

4. Church membership makes public a private decision. In publicly expressing our commitment to the mission and members of this church, we are letting others know where our loyalty and allegiance lies. Others can know that we are concerned for their welfare and that we are committed to the common good of the body and the common task Christ has commissioned.

“Eric Lane... likens Christians who refuse church membership to a man and woman who merely declare themselves married and move in together without ever submitting to a legal marriage ceremony: “They have only thought of themselves and not of the society of which they are a part. Marriage is a public affair, because, however private a matter individuals may think it to be, other members of the community have a right to know who belongs to whom and who is whose wife or husband. A society in which everyone behaved as this couple would be sheer chaos. Moreover, their selfishness in fact rebounds on their own head, because, by refusing registration, they preclude themselves from certain benefits the state grants to married folk.”

7. Ecclesiology – The Church – Part 2

Questions.

1. Scripture indicates that the elders of the church at Jerusalem served as an authoritative council for other churches. James served as its spokesman (Act 21.15ff). What benefits are described in that passage?

2. Why did the early churches band together in each city, with a bishop to rule over them? What are some benefits, and what might be some drawbacks? Did it prevent error?

3. Church councils have been used since the beginning to establish orthodoxy, and to refute errors in both doctrine and practice. How can abuse of their power be prevented? Take into account what happened to the Puritans.

4. If a church is not an autocracy, and not a democracy, then what's the alternative? In 1646, Thomas Hooker proposed a "consociation" of churches, as an advisory council. It was temporary, *ad hoc*, and without ruling authority over participating churches. Is that viable? How would it work? Who would participate?

5. Why does membership matter to the leadership? *Consider care and discipline.*

7. Ecclesiology – The Church – Part 2

6. Why should membership matter to those who attend and serve the church?

8. Eschatology – Christ’s Return

STATEMENT OF BELIEFS

The Last Day – We patiently await the visible, personal, and glorious return of Jesus Christ, the resurrection of the dead, the translation of those remaining alive in Christ, the Judgment of both the just and the unjust, and the fulfillment of Christ’s kingdom in the new heavens and the new earth. On that day, Satan with his fallen angels, and all those who are outside Christ, will be finally separated from the benevolent presence of God and endure eternal punishment. But the righteous who will receive glorious bodies, shall live and reign with Him forever. The Marriage Feast will celebrate the wedding of Christ to His Bride the Church, which will be presented to Him without spot or blemish. In this way, the Church will be in God’s presence forever, serving Him and giving Him endless praise and glory. The whole earth will proclaim the glory of God who makes all things new.

You’ll notice there’s no mention of millennialism, whether pre-, post-, or amillennialism. We chose to stick to what Scripture has made clear, and to avoid conjecture about what is less clear. The millennium is obviously less clear, or there wouldn’t be so many schools of thought about how we arrive at the Last Day, and what happens then.

Our eschatology is pretty simple. “Christ is coming again: get ready.”

That’s not meant to be funny or cute. All of history pointed to the coming of Christ. And since his advent, all of history points to his return. Salvation or Redemption is about the Judgment. There is a single day appointed at which all mankind must stand before God to give an account of the life they led. The coming of Christ was to make atonement for our sin, and to fulfill the law on our behalf, so that we might stand on the Day of Judgment and not be consumed by the wrath of God. Everything necessary for our salvation was done by Christ. *It is finished* (Joh 19.30) Nothing remains to be done by us, other than to faithfully make obedient disciples of all the nations (Mat 28.19-20), and to live a life worthy of the calling to which we’ve been called (Eph 4.1).

To believe that anything else remains to be done, whether by us or by the Church, seems to die that Christ finished his work of salvation. It seems to deny that Satan was defeated on the cross, and knows his time is short (Rev 12.12). The Lion of Judah has prevailed, and overcome the world on our behalf (Rev 5.5; Joh 16.33).

What follows Judgment Day, for us, is life eternal in the presence of God. We’re preparing for that day, today, for we will eternally worship God in heaven. A New Jerusalem shall descend upon a new earth (Rev 21.2); new heavens will appear (Isa 65.17). There won’t be any need for the sun to light the kingdom, for Christ will be our light, and the glory of God will illumine it (Rev 21.23). The tabernacle of God will be with men forever (Rev 21.3).

What exactly will that be like? *We don’t know*. It’s a surprise, a mystery, an inheritance kept in heaven for us, undefiled and unfading, until that day (1Pet 1.4).

May that be sufficient hope for our souls, and sufficient incentive for our days on earth.

Christ is coming again: get ready.

Eschatology – Christ’s Return

Questions.

1. Why should we (*do we*) look for and hope in the return of Christ? What happens then?
1The 4.13-18; 1The 5.4-6; Mat 16.27; 24.44; 25.31-46; 1Cor 4.5; 15.52-54; Joh 14.2-3; 1Joh 3.3;
2Pet 3.10; 2Tim 4.8; 2The 1.7; Gal 5.5; Dan 2.44-45; 7.18;

Appendix

Statement of Beliefs – Annotated

Inerrancy of Scripture – We accept the Bible as the recorded Word of God. It is without error in its original autographs and consists of 39 books in the Old Testament and 27 books in the New Testament.⁸ The Bible is the record of God’s revelation of Himself in human history.⁹ Its unique truth leads us to an understanding that salvation comes by grace alone, through faith alone,¹⁰ in Jesus Christ alone,¹¹ to the glory of God alone. The Scriptures are fully and verbally inspired by God as the prophets were moved by His Spirit.¹² It is living and powerful, discerning the thoughts and intents of the heart. ^{Heb 4.12}

Scriptural Interpretation – Each book of the Bible is to be interpreted according to its grammatical context and historical purpose as believers are illumined by the Spirit of God.¹³ The

⁸ **Luk 16:29** Abraham says to him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. ³¹ And he said to him, If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, they will not be persuaded even though one rose from the dead. **Eph 2:20** And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone. **Rev 22:18** For I testify to every man who hears the words of the prophecy of this book; If any man adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book: ¹⁹ And if any man takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book. **2Ti 3:16** All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. **Luk 24:27** And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded to them from all the scriptures the things concerning himself. ⁴⁴ And he said to them, These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you: that all things must be fulfilled that were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. **Rom 3:2** Much in every way: chiefly, because the oracles of God were committed to them. **2Pet 1:21** For the prophecy did not come in olden times by the will of man: but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. [The “canon” of Scripture was established in part by Eusebius in his Ecclesiastical History (325 A.D.), but fixed by the Protestant Confessions, particularly the [Second Helvetic Confession](#) (1566), and [Westminster Confession](#) (1643-1647).]

⁹ **Pro 22:19** That your trust may be in the Lord, I have made known to you this day, even to you. ²⁰ Have I not written to you excellent things in counsels and knowledge, ²¹ That I might make you know the certainty of the words of truth; that you might answer the words of truth to those who send for you? **Luk 1:3** It also seemed good to me, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you, most excellent Theophilus, in order ⁴ that you might know the certainty of those things, in which you have been instructed. **Rom 15:4** For whatever things were written before this time were written for our learning, so that through patience and the comfort of the scriptures we might have hope. **Mat 4:4** But he answered and said, It is written, Man will not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. ⁷ Jesus said to him, It is written again, You will not tempt the Lord your God. ¹⁰ Then Jesus says to him, Get away, Satan: for it is written, You will worship the Lord your God, and you will serve only him. **Isa 8:19** And when they will say to you, Seek those who have familiar spirits, and wizards who peep and mutter: should not a people seek their God, rather than the living seek the dead? ²⁰ To the law and to the testimony: if they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.

¹⁰ **Eph 2:4** But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, ⁵ Even when we were dead in sins, has quickened us together with Christ, (by grace you are saved). ⁸ For by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: ⁹ Not of works, lest any man should boast. **Rom 9:11** For the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calls.

¹¹ **Joh 1:12** But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to those who believe on his name. **Act 4:12** Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. **Act 16:31** And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, and your house. **Gal 2:20** I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. **Act 15:11** But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we will be saved, even as they.

¹² **Heb 1:1** God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets.

¹³ **Joh 6:45** It is written in the prophets, And they will all be taught of God. Every man therefore that has heard, and has learned from the Father, comes to me. **1Cor 2:9** But as it is written, Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for those who love him. ¹⁰ But God has revealed them to us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. ¹¹ For what does man know of the things of a man, except by the spirit of man that is in him? Even so no man knows the things of God, except the Spirit of God.

Hope Chapel – Statement of Beliefs - Annotated

Lord speaks through the Bible in living power.¹⁴ All believers are exhorted to diligently study the Scriptures¹⁵ and apply them to the conduct of their lives.¹⁶ The Scriptures are the authoritative and governing rule of all Christian life, practice, and doctrine.¹⁷ They are completely sufficient,¹⁸ neither to be added to nor taken away from.¹⁹ Being sufficient, the canon of Scripture is self-contained; it is therefore closed.²⁰ Every man-made creed, confession, or theology must be tested against the full counsel of God's Word to ensure they conform to it.²¹ It is the final arbiter of truth.²²

¹² Now we have not received the spirit of the world, but the spirit who is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us by God.

¹⁴ **Exo 34:27** Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write these words, for according to the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel." **Deu 17:18** "Also it shall be, when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself a copy of this law in a book, from *the one* before the priests, the Levites. **Jer 10:1** Hear the word which the LORD speaks to you, O house of Israel. **Jer 30:2** "Thus speaks the LORD God of Israel, saying: 'Write in a book for yourself all the words that I have spoken to you.

¹⁵ **Jos 1:8** "This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. **2Tim 2:15** Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

¹⁶ **Hos 14:9** Who is wise? Let him understand these things. *Who is prudent? Let him know them. For the ways of the LORD are right; The righteous walk in them, But transgressors stumble in them.* **Eph 2:10** For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

¹⁷ **2Pet 1:19** We also have a more sure word of prophecy; to which you would do well to take heed, like a light that shines in a dark place until the day dawns, and the day star arises in your hearts. ²¹ For the prophecy did not come in olden times by the will of man: but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. **2Ti 3:16** All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. **1Joh 5:9** If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God that he has testified of his Son. **1Th 2:13** For this cause we also thank God without ceasing, because, when you received the word of God that you heard from us, you did not receive it as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectually works in you who believe.

¹⁸ **1Cor 1:21** For because, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God by wisdom, it pleased God to save those who believe by the foolishness of preaching. **1Cor 2:13** What we also speak, not in the words that man's wisdom teaches, but what the Holy Spirit teaches; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. ¹⁴ But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness to him: nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

¹⁹ **2Tim 3:15** And that from your childhood you have known the holy scriptures, which are able to make you wise to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, instruction in righteousness: ¹⁷ That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly equipped for all good works. **Gal 1:8** But though we, or an angel from heaven, preaches any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. ⁹ As we said before, so I now say again, if any man preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed. **2Th 2:2** That you are not soon shaken in mind, nor troubled, whether by spirit, word, or letter as if from us, because the day of Christ is at hand.

²⁰ **Rev 22:18** For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; ¹⁹ And if any man takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.

²¹ **Eph 2:20** And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone. **Act 17:11** These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. **1Cor 2:5** That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. **2Cor 1:24** Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for by faith you stand.

²² **Isa 8:20** To the law and to the testimony: if they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them. **Act 15:15** And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written. **Joh 5:39, 46** Search the scriptures; for in them you think you have eternal life: and they are what testify of me. ⁴⁶ For had you believed Moses, you would have believed me: for he wrote of me.

The Trinity – God is One.²³ He is infinite, eternal, almighty, and perfect in holiness, truth, and love. There are three persons in the one substance of the Godhead: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. These persons are distinct with regard to one another, and yet they are co-existent, co-equal, and co-eternal.²⁴ Each is truly God.²⁵ There is One God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is the foundation of Christian faith and life. To deny the Trinity is to deny the central truth of the Christian faith.²⁶

- **God The Father** – God is the Creator of heaven and earth.^{Gen 1.1} By His word and for His glory, He freely and supernaturally created the world out of nothing.²⁷ Through His Word He daily sustains all creation.²⁸ He rules over it all, being sufficient in and of Himself. He is the Only God. Besides Him, there is no other.²⁹ His plans and purposes cannot be

²³ **Deu 6:4** Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord. **1Cor 8:4, 6** Therefore, concerning the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one. ⁶ But to us there is but one God the Father, of whom all things are, and we are in him; and there is one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom all things are, and we are by him.

²⁴ Benjamin Warfield writes, “The term “Trinity” is not a Biblical term, and we are not using Biblical language when we define what is expressed by it as the doctrine that there is one only and true God, but in the unity of the Godhead there are three coeternal and coequal Persons, the same in substance but distinct in subsistence. A doctrine so defined can be spoken of as a Biblical doctrine only on the principle that the sense of Scripture is Scripture. And the definition of a Biblical doctrine in such un-Biblical language can be justified only on the principle that it is better to preserve the truth of Scripture than the words of Scripture.” — “Under the leadership of Athanasius, this doctrine was proclaimed as the faith of the church at the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D., and by his strenuous labors and those of “the three great Cappadocians,” the two Gregories and Basil, it gradually won its way to the actual acceptance of the entire church. It was at the hands of Augustine, however, a century later, that the doctrine thus became the church doctrine in fact as well as in theory, received its most complete elaboration and most carefully grounded statement. In the form which he gave it, and which is embodied in that “battle-hymn of the early church,” the so-called [Athanasian Creed](#), it has retained its place as the fit expression of the faith of the church as to the nature of its God until today.” [Biblical Doctrine of the Trinity](#).

²⁵ **Joh 1:1** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. ⁴ In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. **Rom 8:9** But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. **1Joh 5:7** For there are three who bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit: and these three are one. **Mat 3:16** And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: ¹⁷ And behold a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; **Mat 28.19** Go therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **2Co 13:14** The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

²⁶ [If Jesus is not the infinite and eternal Lord of Creation — if He is not God — then His sacrifice was not infinite and eternal to atone for all our sins; neither is He our Mediator to intercede with the Father eternally on our behalf; and neither is life found in him, to give to whom he pleases. But Scripture is clear]: **Joh 5:26-29** “For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, ²⁷ and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man. ²⁸ Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice ²⁹ and come forth-- those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.” **Eze 37:13** “Then you shall know that I *am* the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up from your graves.

²⁷ **Gen 1:2-3** The earth was without form, and void; and darkness *was* on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. ³ Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light.

²⁸ **Heb 1:3** Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

²⁹ **Deu 4:39** “Therefore know this day, and consider *it* in your heart, that the LORD Himself *is* God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; *there is no other*. **Isa 45:5** *I am* the LORD, and *there is no other*; *There is no God besides Me*. **Isa 45:21** Who has declared this from ancient time? *Who* has told it from that time? *Have not I, the LORD?* And *there is no other God besides Me*, A just God and a Savior; *There is none besides Me*. **1Cor 8:4** we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that *there is no other God but one*.

Hope Chapel – Statement of Beliefs - Annotated

thwarted.³⁰ He fulfills every promise, and He works all things together for good to those who love Him.^{Rom 8.28} In His unfathomable grace, He sent His only Son Jesus Christ as an atoning sacrifice ^{1Joh 4.10} to redeem mankind from the penalty of sin, which is death.³¹ He made man for fellowship with Himself ³²— even so, being all-sufficient in Himself, God needs nothing outside Himself.³³ He has made all of creation for the praise of His own glory.³⁴

- **Jesus Christ** – Jesus Christ is the only begotten Son of God. He is the eternal Word made flesh³⁵ that He might reveal God to men,³⁶ and that God might provide for man's salvation.³⁷ Jesus Christ was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.³⁸ He is perfect in nature, teaching and obedience.³⁹ He is fully God and fully man. He was with God in the beginning and He is God.⁴⁰ Through Him all things came into being and were created.⁴¹ He was before all things and in Him all things hold together by the word of

³⁰ **Isa 14:27** For the LORD of hosts has purposed, And who will annul *it*? His hand *is* stretched out, And who will turn it back?"

³¹ **Hos 13:14** "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death.

³² **Joh 17:3** "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. **1Joh 1:3** that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship *is* with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

³³ **Act 17:24** "God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. ²⁵ "Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. **Job 22.2** "Can a man be profitable to God, Though he who is wise may be profitable to himself? ³ *Is it* pleasure to the Almighty that you are righteous? Or *is it* gain *to Him* that you make your ways blameless?"

³⁴ **Psa 96:11-13** Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; Let the sea roar, and all its fullness; ¹² Let the field be joyful, and all that *is* in it. Then all the trees of the woods will rejoice ¹³ before the LORD. For He is coming, for He is coming to judge the earth. He shall judge the world with righteousness, And the peoples with His truth. **Psa 148:1** Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD from the heavens; Praise Him in the heights! ² Praise Him, all His angels; Praise Him, all His hosts! ³ Praise Him, sun and moon; Praise Him, all you stars of light! ⁴ Praise Him, you heavens of heavens, And you waters above the heavens! ⁵ Let them praise the name of the LORD, For He commanded and they were created. **Isa 43:7** Everyone who is called by My name, Whom I have created for My glory; I have formed him, yes, I have made him." **Rom 11:36** For of Him and through Him and to Him *are* all things, to whom *be* glory forever.

³⁵ **Joh 1:14** And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

³⁶ **Mat 11:27** "All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and *the one* to whom the Son wills to reveal *Him*.

³⁷ **1Tim 1:15** This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.

³⁸ **Mat 1:18** Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. **Mat 1:20** But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.

³⁹ **Joh 13:13** "You call me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. **Heb 5:9** And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him; **Heb 7:28** For the law appoints as high priests men who have weakness, but the word of the oath, which came after the law, *appoints* the Son who has been perfected forever. **2Pet 1:1** Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ:

⁴⁰ **Joh 1:1** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **Joh 10:28** "And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. ²⁹ "My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of My Father's hand. ³⁰ "I and *My* Father are one." **Col 2:9** For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; **Heb 2:17** Therefore, in all things He had to be made like *His* brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things *pertaining* to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

⁴¹ **Joh 1:3** All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.

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His power. He is the exact representation of the invisible God,⁴² the first-born of all creation.⁴³ In Him all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in bodily form.⁴⁴ He is the only Savior for the sins of the world,⁴⁵ having atoned for them by His blood and having died a substitutionary death on the cross. By dying in our place, He revealed God's divine love and upheld God's divine justice.⁴⁶ He permanently removed our guilt and completely reconciled us to God.⁴⁷ Having redeemed us from sin,⁴⁸ He bodily rose from the grave on the third day following His crucifixion.⁴⁹ He was victorious over death and the powers of darkness. For a period of forty days, He appeared to over five hundred disciples, performing many convincing proofs of His resurrection.⁵⁰ He ascended into heaven⁵¹ where He now sits at God's right hand⁵² to intercede for His people⁵³ and to rule as Lord over all. He is the Head of His Body, the Church.⁵⁴ As such, He is to be worshipped, adored, loved, served, and obeyed by all believers.⁵⁵ At the Last Day, every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord.⁵⁶

⁴² **Col 1:17** And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. **Heb 1:3** who being the brightness of *His* glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

⁴³ **Col 1:15** He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

⁴⁴ **Col 2:9** For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily;

⁴⁵ **Act 4:12** "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

⁴⁶ **Rom 5:8** But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

⁴⁷ **Col 1:21** And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled ²² in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight; **1Pet 2:24** who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness - by whose stripes you were healed. **1Pet 3:18** For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit;

⁴⁸ **Gal 3:13** Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us...

⁴⁹ **Rom 14:9** For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living. **1Cor 15:3-4** For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.

⁵⁰ **Act 1:3** to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. **1Cor 15:6** After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep.

⁵¹ **Act 1:9** Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.

⁵² **Eph 1:20** which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated *Him* at His right hand in the heavenly *places*; **Col 3:1** If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. **Heb 10:12** But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God; **1Pet 3:22** who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.

⁵³ **Rom 8:34** Who *is* he who condemns? *It is* Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.

⁵⁴ **Eph 1:22** And He put all *things* under His feet, and gave Him *to be* head over all *things* to the church, **Col 1:18** And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.

⁵⁵ **Heb 5:9** And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him; **Joh 15:10** "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.

⁵⁶ **Phi 2:9-11** Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, ¹¹ and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Hope Chapel – Statement of Beliefs - Annotated

- **The Holy Spirit** – The Holy Spirit is the Lord and Giver of life.⁵⁷ He convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment.⁵⁸ Through the proclamation of the gospel, He summons men to repent of their sins and to confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.⁵⁹ The same Spirit brings about the new birth, regeneration, by which a person is given the faith to receive God’s gracious gift of salvation through Jesus Christ.⁶⁰ The Holy Spirit unites believers to Jesus Christ by faith. He indwells them to bring about their sanctification according to God’s will and His purposes.⁶¹ The Holy Spirit glorifies the Son who in turn glorifies the Father.⁶² The Holy Spirit leads the Church into a right understanding and application of the truth of God’s Word.⁶³ He is to be respected, honored, and worshipped as God Himself – the Third Person of the Trinity.⁶⁴

Man’s Condition – God made mankind both male and female in His own image,⁶⁵ as the crown of His creation, that man might have fellowship with Him.⁶⁶ Tempted by Satan in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve rebelled against God and sinned by eating of the forbidden fruit.⁶⁷ Through

⁵⁷ **2Cor 3:6** who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

⁵⁸ **Joh 16:8** “And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment:

⁵⁹ **Act 2:38** Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. **1Cor 6:11** And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. **Eph 3:5** which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: **2The 2:13** But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth;

⁶⁰ **Joh 3:5-7** Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶ “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ “Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ **Joh 6:63** “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and *they* are life. **Gal 4:6** And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, “Abba, Father!” **1Pet 1:22** Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, ²³ having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever;

⁶¹ **Joh 14:17** “the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. **1Cor 6:11** And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. **2The 2:13** But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth; **1Pet 1:2** elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ:

⁶² **Joh 13:31** So, when he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man is glorified, and God is glorified in Him. ³² “If God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and glorify Him immediately. **Joh 17:4-5** “I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. ⁵ And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was. **2Cor 3:18** But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

⁶³ **Joh 14:26** “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.

⁶⁴ **Mat 12:31** “Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy *against* the Spirit will not be forgiven men.

⁶⁵ **Gen 1:27** So God created man in His *own* image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

⁶⁶ **1Joh 1:3** that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship *is* with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

⁶⁷ **Gen 3:1** Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, “Has God indeed said, ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?’” **Gen 3:11** And He said, “Who told you that you *were* naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?”

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Adam's Fall, death entered into the world,⁶⁸ separating mankind from God and making us all objects of His wrath.⁶⁹ Despite being a responsible creature, Adam and all His offspring are inwardly depraved,⁷⁰ unable to do what is right and pleasing in God's sight. Apart from a special work of God's grace, men are utterly incapable in themselves of being saved from His wrath or of returning to His favor and fellowship.⁷¹ This depravity in mankind is radical and pervasive. It extends to man's mind, will, and affections. Unregenerate man lives in bondage to sin.⁷² He is at war with God; he is hostile and hateful toward God.⁷³ Fallen, sinful people, whatever their character or moral successes, remain lost and without hope in the world apart from the salvation which is to be found in Christ alone.

The Gospel – Jesus Christ is Himself the gospel, the Good News. This good news is revealed in His birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension. Christ's crucifixion is the *heart* of the gospel. His resurrection is the *power* of the gospel.⁷⁴ And His *ascension* is the glory of the gospel. Christ's death is substitutionary. He died in our place. His death was a propitiatory sacrifice to God for our sins,⁷⁵ satisfying the demands of God's holy justice and appeasing His holy wrath on our behalf. It was a demonstration of God's love that, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.⁷⁶ The benefits of this gracious act that saves us from eternal damnation are freely given to those who repent, to those who place their faith in Christ's atoning work alone and not in their own works.⁷⁷ Jesus Christ is the only mediator, or intercessor, between God and man.⁷⁸ There is no other name by which men must be saved.⁷⁹ At the heart of all sound doctrine is Jesus' identity as

⁶⁸ **Rom 5:12** Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned--

⁶⁹ **Eph 2:3** among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

⁷⁰ **Rom 1:28** Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved [i.e., *debased*] mind, to do what ought not to be done. **Rom 3:12** They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one." ¹³ "Their throat is an open tomb; With their tongues they have practiced deceit"; "The poison of asps is under their lips"; ¹⁴ "Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness."

⁷¹ **Rom 8:7** Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. ⁸ So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. **1Cor 2:14** But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned. **Joh 8:43** ^{NIV} Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. **Joh 6:44** "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him;

⁷² **Rom 7:14** ^{NAU} For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. **Gal 4:22-24** For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. ²³ But he *who was* of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, ²⁴ which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar;

⁷³ **Rom 8:7** Because the carnal mind is enmity against God (i.e., hostile to God); for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. **Jas 4:4** Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

⁷⁴ **1Cor 6:14** And God both raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by His power. **Phi 3:10** that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death;

⁷⁵ **1Joh 2:2** And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; **1Joh 4:10** In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins.

⁷⁶ **Rom 5:8** But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

⁷⁷ **Rom 11:6** And if by grace, then *it is* no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if *it is* of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work. **Eph 2:8** For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, ⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast.

⁷⁸ **1Tim 2:5** For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.

⁷⁹ **Act 4.12.**

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God in the flesh,⁸⁰ and Jesus' cross as the point at which our salvation was fully accomplished.⁸¹ All our gospel worship, praise, obedience, love, and service therefore proceed from and look to the cross.⁸²

Our Saving Response to the Gospel – God's grace through Christ's Atonement is the only cause of man's salvation.⁸³ From before the foundation of the world, our salvation has been rooted in the free and unconditional election of God which was decreed by God for God's own pleasure and glory.⁸⁴ Every elect man and woman is a free agent, imbued by the Holy Spirit with the requisite faith to trust in Christ alone for his or her salvation.⁸⁵ Saving faith requires that we genuinely repent of our sins and by God's grace embrace Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.⁸⁶ This gospel of grace is to be sincerely preached to all men in all nations.⁸⁷ The evidence of biblical repentance is a changed life. Saving faith in Christ requires good works as the necessary evidence of that saving faith.⁸⁸ And yet neither repentance nor good works can save us;⁸⁹ they cannot earn or repay what has been done by Christ alone. Salvation is the free gift of God in Christ.⁹⁰

⁸⁰ **Col 2:9** For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily;

⁸¹ **Joh 19:30** So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.

⁸² **Heb 12:2** looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

⁸³ **Rom 3:24** being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; **Rom 4:16** Therefore *it is* of faith that *it might be* according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed; **Rom 5:1** Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. **Rom 11:6** And if by grace, then *it is* no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if *it is* of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work. **Tit 3:7** that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

⁸⁴ **Eph 1:4** just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love; **Rom 9:10** And not only *this*, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, *even* by our father Isaac ¹¹ (for *the children* not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls); **Rom 11:7** What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded.

⁸⁵ **Tit 3:5** not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit;

⁸⁶ **Act 2:38** Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. **Mar 1:15** and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel." **1Joh 3:23** And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment.

⁸⁷ **Mat 28:19** "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; **Luk 24:47** "and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. **Act 17:30** "Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent; **Rom 16:26** but now made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith;

⁸⁸ **Mat 5:16** "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. **Joh 13:35** "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." **Eph 2:10** For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. **Heb 10:24** And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works; **Jas 2:15** If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what *does it* profit? **Jas 2:20** But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? **1Joh 3:17** But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?

⁸⁹ **2Tim 1:9** who has saved us and called *us* with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began;

⁹⁰ **Rom 6:23** For the wages of sin *is* death, but the gift of God *is* eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

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Nonetheless, a believer must be willing to deny himself, pick up his cross, and follow Christ, or else he cannot become His disciple.⁹¹

Salvation Inherited through the Gospel – Salvation is the free gift of God provided by grace alone,⁹² received through faith alone,⁹³ because of Christ alone,⁹⁴ for the glory of God alone.⁹⁵ Anyone turning from sin and trusting in Christ and His substitutionary death receives the gift of eternal life.⁹⁶ He is declared righteous by God because of Christ. The righteousness of Christ is imputed to Him.⁹⁷ He is fully justified and fully accepted by God.⁹⁸ He has been reconciled to God.⁹⁹ God is His Father¹⁰⁰ and the believer is adopted as His child.¹⁰¹ The debt of his sin is forgiven.¹⁰² And because he has been made a new creature through regeneration,¹⁰³ he is liberated

⁹¹ **Luk 9:23** Then He said to *them* all, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. **Luk 14:27** “And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.

⁹² **Rom 4:16** Therefore *it is* of faith that *it might be* according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all. **Rom 5:15** But the free gift is not like the offense. For if by the one man’s offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many. **Rom 11:6** And if by grace, then *it is* no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. **Eph 1:7** In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace; **Eph 2:8** For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God;

⁹³ **Gal 3:6** just as Abraham “believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.”⁷ Therefore know that *only* those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. ⁸ And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, *saying*, “In you all the nations shall be blessed.”⁹ So then those who *are* of faith are blessed with believing Abraham. ¹⁰ For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.”¹¹ But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for “the just shall live by faith.”

⁹⁴ **1Tim 2:5** For *there is* one God and one Mediator between God and men, *the* Man Christ Jesus,⁶ who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time, **Act 4:12** “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

⁹⁵ **1Cor 10:31** Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. **1Pet 4:11** If anyone speaks, *let him speak* as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, *let him do it* as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. **Rev 1:6** and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him *be* glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. **Eph 3:21** to Him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. **Rom 11:36** For of Him and through Him and to Him *are* all things, to whom *be* glory forever. Amen.

⁹⁶ **Rom 6:23** For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

⁹⁷ **Rom 4:22** And therefore “it was accounted to him for righteousness.”²³ Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him,²⁴ but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead,²⁵ who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.

⁹⁸ **Rom 3:24** being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, **Tit 3:7** that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

⁹⁹ **Rom 5:10** For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. **2Cor 5:18** Now all things *are* of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, **Col 1:21** And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled²² in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight--

¹⁰⁰ **Mat 16:17** Jesus answered and said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven. **Joh 20:17** Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, ‘I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and *to* My God and your God.’” **Rev 1:6** and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him *be* glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

¹⁰¹ **Gal 4:4** But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. **Eph 1:5** having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will,

¹⁰² **Eph 4:32** And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.

¹⁰³ **2Cor 5:17** Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. **Tit 3:5** not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us,

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from the law of sin and death.¹⁰⁴ He has been transferred into the kingdom of the Son,¹⁰⁵ to live in freedom according to God's Spirit.¹⁰⁶ He has become an heir to the kingdom of God and a co-heir with Christ.¹⁰⁷

Sanctification – The Holy Spirit is actively guiding and producing our sanctification.¹⁰⁸ He empowers us to produce His fruit¹⁰⁹ as we are transformed by the renewing of our minds through God's Word.¹¹⁰ Over time we are being transformed into the image of Christ.¹¹¹ By God's grace, the power of sin has been destroyed,¹¹² even though its presence remains in our flesh;¹¹³ but we can now say no to the flesh and yes to the Spirit.¹¹⁴ As we are led by the Spirit, we grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ,¹¹⁵ freely keeping His commandments.¹¹⁶ We endeavor to

through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, **Rom 6:4** Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

¹⁰⁴ **Rom 8:2** For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.

¹⁰⁵ **Col 1:13** He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love,

¹⁰⁶ ^{ESV} **1Pet 2:16** Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. **2Cor 3:17** Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

¹⁰⁷ **Rom 8:17** and if children, then heirs – heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ...

¹⁰⁸ **1Cor 6:11** And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. **2Th 2:13** But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, **1Pet 1:2** elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ:

¹⁰⁹ ^{ESV} **1Cor 12:11** All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills. **Eph 5:9** (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth),

¹¹⁰ **Rom 12:2** And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. **Eph 4:22** that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, ²³ and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, **2Tim 3:16** All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

¹¹¹ **Rom 8:29** For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. **Phi 1:6** being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ; ^{ESV} **2Cor 3:18** And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

¹¹² **Rom 6:6** knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. **Rom 6:9** knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. ¹⁰ For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. ¹¹ Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

¹¹³ **Rom 7:18-25** For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. ¹⁹ For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. ²⁰ Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. ²¹ I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. ²² For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. ²³ But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. ²⁴ O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? ²⁵ I thank God-- through Jesus Christ our Lord!

¹¹⁴ **Rom 8:13** For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴ For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. **Gal 5:16** I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.

¹¹⁵ **2Pet 3:18** but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. **Gal 5:18** But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

¹¹⁶ **Joh 15:10** "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. **1Joh 2:3** Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. **1Joh 3:24** Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him.

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live in such a way that people may see our good works and glorify our Father who is in heaven.¹¹⁷ All believers are exhorted to persevere in the faith,¹¹⁸ knowing they will give an account to God for every thought, word, and deed.¹¹⁹ To aid them in their walk of faith, believers ought to practice spiritual disciplines, especially Bible-study, prayer, worship and confession.¹²⁰ Nevertheless, the believer's ultimate confidence to persevere is based on God's promise to preserve His people until the end.¹²¹ To this end, the Holy Spirit has been given to them as a pledge, guaranteeing what is to come,¹²² and empowering believers for Christian witness and service.¹²³

The Work of the Spirit – All genuine believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit at conversion.¹²⁴ Yet the New Testament indicates that there is also an ongoing, empowering work of the Spirit subsequent to conversion.¹²⁵ Being indwelt by the Spirit as a pledge of salvation, and being filled with the Spirit¹²⁶ for works prepared in advance for us to do,¹²⁷ are theologically distinct experiences. The Holy Spirit continually and repeatedly fills each believer with power for Christian life and witness as necessary.¹²⁸ He imparts His supernatural gifts to individual believers for the common good,¹²⁹ and to edify the Body of Christ for various works of ministry in the

¹¹⁷ **Mat 5:16.**

¹¹⁸ CSB **Rev 14:12** This demands the perseverance of the saints, who keep God's commands and their faith in Jesus."

¹¹⁹ **Mat 12:36** "But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. **Rom 14:12** So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.

¹²⁰ **Heb 4:12** For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. **1Th 2:13** For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe. **Act 6:4** "but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word." **1Th 5:17** pray without ceasing, **Phi 3:3** For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh, **Rev 5:13** And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: "Blessing and honor and glory and power *Be* to Him who sits on the throne, And to the Lamb, forever and ever!" ¹⁴ Then the four living creatures said, "Amen!" And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped Him who lives forever and ever. **1Joh 1:9** If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

¹²¹ **1Th 5:23** Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. **Jude 1:1** Jude, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, To those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ:

¹²² **2Cor 1:21** Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, ²² who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee. ^{NAU} **2Cor 5:5** Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge.

¹²³ **Act 1:8** "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." **Eph 3:16** that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, **2Tim 1:7** For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind. **2Th 1:11** Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of *this* calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of *His* goodness and the work of faith with power, **Col 1:29** To this *end* I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.

¹²⁴ **Act 2:38** Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

¹²⁵ **Phi 2:13** for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure.

¹²⁶ **Eph 5:18** And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord,

¹²⁷ **Eph 2:10** For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

¹²⁸ **Mat 10:19** "But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; **Rev 1:10** I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet;

¹²⁹ ^{ESV} **1Cor 12:7** To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

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world.¹³⁰ Gifts of the Holy Spirit are vital for the mission of the church, and they are meant to be earnestly desired and practiced.¹³¹

The Church – By His Word and Spirit, God has created,¹³² preserves,¹³³ and guides¹³⁴ the Church. The Church is a gathering or assembly¹³⁵ of the elect of all ages and all nations.¹³⁶ Sinful men have been called out of the whole human race for redemption and sanctification in the fellowship of Christ's Body.¹³⁷ The Church is not a religious institution, organization, or denomination. Rather, the universal Church is comprised of all those who have personally appropriated the gospel and who have become genuine followers of Jesus Christ.¹³⁸ The Church exists to worship and glorify God.¹³⁹ It also exists to serve Him by faithfully doing His will on earth as it is done in heaven.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁰ **Eph 4:11** And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, **Eph 4:16** from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

¹³¹ **1Cor 12:31** But earnestly desire the best gifts. **Rom 12:6** Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, *let us use them*: if prophecy, *let us prophesy* in proportion to our faith;

¹³² **Act 2:2-4** And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³ Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and *one* sat upon each of them. ⁴ And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. **1Cor 12:13** For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body-- whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free-- and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. **Psa 127:1** Unless the LORD builds the house, They labor in vain who build it; Unless the LORD guards the city, The watchman stays awake in vain.

¹³³ **Eph 5:26** that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, ²⁷ that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

¹³⁴ **Joh 16:13** “However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own *authority*, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.

¹³⁵ The Greek word for “church” is *ecclesia*, meaning those who are called out or summoned. The Hebrew word *qahal* means, “congregation, assembly,” and likewise refers to those who are called out or summoned (a convocation).

¹³⁶ **Eph 1:10** That in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him. ²² And has put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, ²³ Which is his body, the fullness of him that fills all in all. **Eph 5:23** For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the savior of the body. ²⁷ That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. ³² This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. **Col 1:18** And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.

¹³⁷ **1Tim 1:15** This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. **Heb 9:15** And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. **Luk 24:47** “and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. **Rev 7:9** After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands,

¹³⁸ **Act 2:47** praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved. **Act 20:28** “Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

¹³⁹ **ESV Rom 12:1** I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. **Phi 3:3** For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh,

¹⁴⁰ **Mat 6:10** Your kingdom come. Your will be done On earth as *it is* in heaven. **Mat 28:18** “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ “teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you;

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Believers commit themselves to God and to one another to preach the gospel¹⁴¹ and to plant churches throughout the world as a testimony to the love and grace of God.¹⁴² The Great Commission entrusted to the Church is to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey all that Christ has commanded.¹⁴³ New believers are to be added to a local church.¹⁴⁴ There they devote themselves to the teaching of God’s word, to the fellowship of the Body, to breaking bread together, and to prayer.¹⁴⁵

Giftedness for Service – All believers are to be a vital part of a local church.¹⁴⁶ It is in the context of the local church that God’s people receive pastoral care and leadership. They are given the opportunity to employ their God-given gifts in His service,¹⁴⁷ both with regard to one another and with regard to the world.¹⁴⁸ They are called to live out the New Covenant in Christ’s blood as the people of God, demonstrating the reality of the kingdom in the world.¹⁴⁹ To that end, Christ has gifted the church with apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers to equip the saints for works of ministry, so that the Church will mature and grow.¹⁵⁰ Women play a vital role in the life of the church; but in keeping with God’s design, they are not permitted “to teach or to have authority over a man” (1Tim. 2.12). Leadership in the church is therefore male.¹⁵¹

¹⁴¹ **Mark 16:15** “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. **Luk 4:18** “The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to *the* poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to *the* captives And recovery of sight to *the* blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed;

¹⁴² **Act 9:31** Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.

¹⁴³ **Mat 28:19** “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ “teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age.” Amen.

¹⁴⁴ **Act 5:14** And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women,

¹⁴⁵ **Act 2:42** And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

¹⁴⁶ **Heb 10:24** And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, ²⁵ not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as *is* the manner of some, but exhorting *one another*, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

¹⁴⁷ **1Co 12:4-7** There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. ⁵ There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. ⁶ And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. ⁷ But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit *of all*: **Eph 4:16** from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

¹⁴⁸ **Rom 12:4-8** For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, ⁵ so we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. ⁶ Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, *let us use them*: if prophecy, *let us prophesy* in proportion to our faith; ⁷ or ministry, *let us use it* in *our* ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; ⁸ he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. **Mat 5:16** “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. **1Pet 2:12** having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by *your* good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.

¹⁴⁹ **2Cor 3:6** who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

¹⁵⁰ **Eph 4:11** And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, **Heb 13:17** Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.

¹⁵¹ For further clarification, please see our Statement on Women in Leadership, in this Appendix.

Sacraments – The Scripture provides for two sacraments¹⁵² or ordinances: baptism and communion.¹⁵³ Sacraments are physical signs and seals of a spiritual reality.¹⁵⁴ Water baptism is an outward sign of an inward change.¹⁵⁵ As such, it is only intended for the person who has by faith received the saving benefits of Christ’s atoning work, and has become His disciple.¹⁵⁶ Therefore, in obedience to Christ’s command and as a public testimony to God, the Church, and the world, a believer is immersed in water in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Water baptism visually represents a person’s union with Christ, signifying his own death and resurrection.¹⁵⁷ His former way of life is symbolically put to death as he is immersed in the water, and his resurrection to newness of life is vividly depicted as he is raised up out of the water. The Lord’s Supper is likewise to be observed only by those who have become genuine followers of Christ.¹⁵⁸ This ordinance symbolizes the breaking of Christ’s body¹⁵⁹ and the shedding of His blood

¹⁵² Historically, the reformed churches have referred to communion and baptism as “sacraments” – a formal religious ceremony conferring a specific grace on those who receive it: through faith, by the Holy Spirit. And so communion in particular is regarded as a “means of grace.” But for many Baptists in the 17th century, the term “sacrament” was too close to Roman Catholic superstition, as if its elements had inherent power in them. Though Protestants uniformly deny that there is anything inherent in baptism that saves, or in communion that sanctifies, Baptists chose to call them ordinances (commands) instead of sacraments. They likewise rejected the Westminster Confession phrase “signs and seals” (ch. 27) and preferred to use only the term “signs.” They adopted the Zwinglian view of the communion as a memorial only, and baptism as an act of obedience. However, Calvin and the Zwinglians compromised on the nature of the communion in the [Consensus Tigurinus of 1549](#). Anabaptists did not agree with it.

¹⁵³ **Mat 28:19** “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **1Cor 11:24-25** and when He had given thanks, He broke *it* and said, “Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” In the same manner *He* also *took* the cup after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink *it*, in remembrance of Me.”

¹⁵⁴ **2Cor 1:22** who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee. **Eph 1:13** In Him you also *trusted*, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, ¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.

¹⁵⁵ **Rom 2:28-29** For he is not a Jew who is *one* outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; ²⁹ but *he* is a Jew who is *one* inwardly; and circumcision is *that* of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God. **Rom 6:4** Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

¹⁵⁶ **1Pet 3:21** There is also an antitype which now saves us-- baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

¹⁵⁷ **Rom 6:4** Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. ⁵ For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be *in the likeness* of His resurrection,

¹⁵⁸ **1Cor 11:29** “For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body.” **1Cor 2:14** “For the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”

¹⁵⁹ **1Cor 11:23-24**: For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the *same* night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke *it* and said, “Take, eat; this is My body which is **broken** for you; do this in **remembrance** of Me.” [*However, Christ’s bones were not broken on the cross, though his body was cruelly pierced.*] **Joh 19:33** But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. ³⁴ But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out. ³⁵ And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe. ³⁶ For these things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled, “Not *one* of His bones shall be broken.” [*The term “broken for you” in 1Cor 11.24, was said about the bread, not the wine. And Jesus said of himself,*] **Joh 6:48-51** “I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹ “Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. ⁵⁰ “This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. ⁵¹ “I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.” [*And so the communion was perhaps to remind them of breaking the loaves of bread to feed the 5000 and 4000 – a reminder of his sufficiency and their utter dependency*]: **Mark 8:18**: “Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear? And do you not **remember**?” ¹⁹ “When I **broke** the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments did you take up?” They said to Him, “Twelve.” ²⁰ “Also, when I broke the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets full of fragments did you take up?” And they said, “Seven.” ²¹ So He said to them, “How *is it* you do not understand?” [*We need to understand and be constantly reminded*

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on our behalf.¹⁶⁰ It is to be observed repeatedly throughout the Christian life in remembrance of the atoning benefits of Christ's death. We partake of the Lord's Supper with faith and an attitude of self-examination as a congregation,¹⁶¹ so that the whole body is joined together in the communion of the saints.¹⁶² As we take of the elements together, we remember and proclaim the death of Christ on our behalf,¹⁶³ and we receive real spiritual nourishment for our souls.¹⁶⁴ By participating, we signify the unity of Christ's Body whose life flows from His blood,¹⁶⁵ and is healed by His stripes.¹⁶⁶

The Last Day – We patiently await the visible, personal, and glorious return of Jesus Christ,¹⁶⁷ the resurrection of the dead,¹⁶⁸ the translation of those remaining alive in Christ,¹⁶⁹ the Judgment

that Christ is our life and our sustenance.] **Joh 6:35** And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.

¹⁶⁰ **Heb 9:22** And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission. **2Cor 5:21** For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

¹⁶¹ **1Cor 11:28** But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

¹⁶² **1Cor 12:12-13** For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. ¹³ For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body-- whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free-- and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. **Eph 4:4-6** *There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in 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 you all.*

¹⁶³ **1Cor 11:26** For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.

¹⁶⁴ **Joh 6:54** "Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. ⁵⁵ "For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. ⁵⁶ "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. ⁵⁷ "As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. ⁵⁸ "This is the bread which came down from heaven-- not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever."

¹⁶⁵ **Joh 6:53** Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. **Eph 1:22** And He put all *things* under His feet, and gave Him *to be* head over all *things* to the church, ²³ which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. **Eph 5:30** For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones.

¹⁶⁶ **1Pet 2:24** who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness-- by whose stripes you were healed.

¹⁶⁷ **1Th 2:19** For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? *Is it* not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? **1Joh 2:28** And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming. **Mat 24:26-27** "Therefore if they say to you, 'Look, He is in the desert!' do not go out; or 'Look, He is in the inner rooms!' do not believe it. ²⁷ "For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. **Mat 24:30-31** "Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. ³¹ "And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

¹⁶⁸ **1Co 15:12-20** Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³ But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. ¹⁴ And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. ¹⁵ Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up-- if in fact the dead do not rise. ¹⁶ For if *the* dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. ¹⁷ And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! ¹⁸ Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. ¹⁹ If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. ²⁰ But now Christ is risen from the dead, *and* has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. **1Cor 15:41-44** *There is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differs from another star in glory. ⁴² So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. ⁴³ It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. ⁴⁴ It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.*

¹⁶⁹ **1Co 15:51-52** Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed -- ⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. **1Th 4:17** Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

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of both the just and the unjust,¹⁷⁰ and the fulfillment of Christ's kingdom in the new heavens and the new earth.¹⁷¹ On that day, Satan with his fallen angels,¹⁷² and all those who are outside Christ,¹⁷³ will be finally separated from the benevolent presence of God and endure eternal punishment.¹⁷⁴ But the righteous who will receive glorious bodies,¹⁷⁵ shall live and reign with Him forever.¹⁷⁶ The Marriage Feast will celebrate the wedding of Christ to His Bride the Church,¹⁷⁷ which will be presented to Him without spot or blemish.¹⁷⁸ In this way, the Church will be in God's presence forever,¹⁷⁹ serving Him and giving Him endless praise and glory.¹⁸⁰ The whole earth will proclaim the glory of God¹⁸¹ who makes all things new.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁰ **Act 24:15** I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of *the* dead, both of *the* just and *the* unjust. **Dan 12:2** And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, Some to everlasting life, Some to shame *and* everlasting contempt. **Joh 5:28** "Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice²⁹ "and come forth-- those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.

¹⁷¹ **2Pet 3:13** Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. **Rev 21:1** Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. ² Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

¹⁷² **Rev 12:9** So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. **Rev 20:10** The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet *are*. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

¹⁷³ **Rev 20:15** And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.

¹⁷⁴ **Mat 25:32** "All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides *his* sheep from the goats. ³³ "And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. ³⁴ "Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world... ⁴¹ "Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

¹⁷⁵ **Phi 3:20-21** For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

¹⁷⁶ **Rev 22:5** There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever.

¹⁷⁷ **Rev 19:7** "Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready."

¹⁷⁸ **Eph 5:25** Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, ²⁶ that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, ²⁷ that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

¹⁷⁹ **1Th 4:17** Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

¹⁸⁰ **Rev 4:9** Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, ¹⁰ the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying: ¹¹ "You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, And by Your will they exist and were created."

¹⁸¹ **Isa 6:1** In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His *robe* filled the temple. ² Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. ³ And one cried to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy *is* the LORD of hosts; The whole earth *is* full of His glory!"

¹⁸² **Rev 21:5** Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new."

Statement on Women in Leadership

Since the 1970s there has been a notable shift in our society concerning the role of women. Some of those changes have brought welcome reform, especially in the area of the workplace. Where the church is concerned, we have been hard-pressed to hold onto the integrity of scripture, not modifying its intent just to conform to outside pressure. The subject of Biblical Leadership is vast and cannot be contained in such a concise statement as this.

We believe God has divinely instituted a chain of authority. Beginning with the Godhead, the Son and the Spirit are submitted to the Father.¹⁸³ Paul also teaches that the head of every man is Christ and the head of Christ is God.¹⁸⁴ If authority were based on equality, then Jesus could not be equal to the Father. We believe that authority is given for the express purpose of order. Authority defines how relationships will flow in order for certain purposes to be accomplished.

Authority does not define equality. According to Gal. 3.26-29, both male and female are one in Christ. We believe that men and women are equal in the sense that they bear God's image equally.¹⁸⁵ The Bible teaches that men and women exhibit distinct roles, yet the woman is submitted to the man for the sake of order. Paul emphatically states, "The man is the head of every woman." He draws this statement not from a cultural bias but from the very beginning of God's creation. He tells us that man did not originate from woman and woman was created for man's sake.¹⁸⁶

This brings us to God's very intent from the beginning, His original design. According to Genesis 2, Adam was created first and Eve soon followed, created to be his helpmate. The role of headship was given to the man at the outset of creation. The model of headship is our Lord, the Head of the church, who gave himself for us.

The antithesis to male headship is male domination. By male domination we mean the assertion of the man's will over the woman's will, ignoring her spiritual equality, rights, and value. True biblical submission is never to be confused with male domination. Paul makes it clear that women are every bit as important and not inferior to men. Yet God's will is that men are to be responsible for leadership in the home, and men are to be responsible for the public gathering and care of believers in the church.

¹⁸³ 1Cor. 15:24-28

¹⁸⁴ 1Cor. 11:3

¹⁸⁵ Gen. 1:27

¹⁸⁶ 1Cor. 11:8-9

Confessing the Reformed Faith

Our Identity in Unity and Diversity

By Richard A. Muller

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I have selected as my topic this evening, “Confessing the Reformed Faith: Our Identity in Unity and Diversity.” The central issue that I will address is the issue of Reformed identity – specifically as indicated by the body of confessional documents that both unites us in faith and distinguishes us into branches and denominations. I would also argue that retention and maintenance of the integrity and stability of the Reformed faith in its confessions is one of the two greatest issues confronting our churches today. The other, I would venture, is the parallel and profoundly related issue of the retention and maintenance of our tradition of liturgy and hymnody in which the doctrinal stance of the confessions is put, as it were, into action and application in the corporate life of believers. In fact, the two issues are inseparable. I propose to address these issues with a view to: (1) our confessional diversity; (2) the nature of our unity in diversity; (3) pressures on confessional integrity in our times; and (4) ways of reaffirming and strengthening confessional integrity today.

1. Confessional Diversity

Virtually all of us here, tonight, represent, in one way or another, a branch of the Reformed faith. More than that, we represent, for the most part, two major branches of the Reformed faith – one identified by its adherence to the Westminster Standards (the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Westminster Shorter Catechism, and the Westminster Larger Catechism), the other by its acceptance of the Three Forms of Unity of the Dutch Reformed churches (the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort). In both confessional families, the teaching of the confessions and catechisms has been echoed in forms of worship and in traditions of hymnody reaching back into the Reformation of the sixteenth century and reflecting the life of our churches throughout the intervening years.

When in recent years, however, I have visited churches, whether of the “Reformed” or of the “Presbyterian” confessional type, I have been struck by the increasing variety of forms of worship, by the loss of traditional hymnody, and by the decreasing interest on the part of these churches in their confessional traditions. In the context of this erosion of identity, some way of refocusing our church life in the light of our confessional heritage appears to be in order.

When I was considerably younger and, more importantly, a bit less wise (some would say less cynical) about the problems of church life, administration, and direction, I was very enthusiastic about the movement from mono-confessional to multi-confessional standards in what we were accustomed to calling the “Northern” and “Southern” Presbyterian churches. It seemed to me at the time that the augmentation of the Westminster Standards with such revered confessional writings as the Second Helvetic Confession, the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Scots Confession, and the Geneva Catechism could only enrich our churchly perceptions and lead to confessional renewal – that this was a primary way of refocusing our attention on the confessions.

I well remember a wise, elderly deacon of the country church that I served saying to me, “Rick, we’ve got enough trouble just learnin’ the Westminster Standards.” At the time, I argued the case of multi-confessional enrichment to him – today, I would stand in agreement with his worry. The adoption of multi-confessional standards has done little to enrich the life of Presbyterians in the

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United States. In fact, it has done little other than contribute to the dilution of Reformed confessionalism, whether through the adoption of a looser form of subscription, on the ground of diversity among the confessions now present in the *Book of Confessions*, or, as my deacon feared, through an increased ignorance about all of the confessions. A greater number of unread, unused, undeclared confessions solves no problems.

To make the point succinctly, adopting one another's confessions, with the result that each Reformed group professes its faith through the use of more confessions, neither brings about a renewal of interest in the confessions nor a richer or fuller sense of the meaning of the confessions – at least not necessarily. Nor does it bring about a genuine unity in the faith: churches that hold to the same confessions do not necessarily hold them in the same way or with the same level of interest and commitment.

In addition, from the very beginnings of our history, the Reformed faith has been expressed in and through the diversity of regional and national confessions – the Tetrapolitan Confession, the Gallican Confession, the Belgic Confession, the First Confession of Basel, the First Helvetic Confession, the Second Helvetic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Scots Confession, the Thirty-nine Articles, and others. All of these confessions were understood in their time as Reformed. The various confessing groups recognized each other as belonging to the same family of faith, without feeling the need to subscribe to each other's confessions or to prove at length that the teaching of any one confession was identical with that of all the others. And, more often than not, these distinct confessions were accompanied by, and reflected in, distinctive regional and national orders of worship.

The closest that the Reformed churches have ever come to a single book of confessions, shared by all was in 1580, when the Genevan theologians produced the Harmony of the Reformed Confessions, a document based on the Second Helvetic Confession and including quotations from all of the major Reformed confessions of the age. The document was admired and praised, but never acknowledged as the normative confession of any of the branches of the Reformed church. Similarly, the Canons of Dort were pressed for a time as a standard beyond the Netherlands, and they did gain some authority during the seventeenth century in Switzerland, but they have never become a universal standard. The regional and national confessions together with their distinct orders of worship have, in fact, prevailed down to the present day.

2. Unity in Diversity

Granting this diversity, we might well ask what unites us. From the perspective of orthodox, confessional Lutheranism, any claim we might make to a unity of the faith is immediately called into question by the diversity of our confessional standards. Lutheran confessional theologians have pointed to the diversity of our confessions and spoken of the internal contradictions of Calvinism in contrast to the theological harmony of Lutheranism, indeed, the unity of churchly confession, as expressed in the Book of Concord. And a contemporary historian of the sixteenth century has argued, on the basis of differing emphases in the doctrine of the covenant of grace in Calvin and Bullinger, that there are in fact two rather divergent Reformed traditions.¹

The Lutheran criticism can, of course, be relatively easily countered. Reformed theologians of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were able to note that the Lutherans' mono-confessional standard, the Book of Concord, was not really as indicative of a unified confession as it claimed to be. It not only had arisen out of terrible controversy, and attempted (with relative success, we might add) to find a middle course between doctrinal extremes, but also was not entirely unified in its own documents.

Thus, after the Lutheran concord, several great questions remained unanswered for Lutherans and, indeed, remain unanswered to this day: Is a "true Lutheranism," distinct from the presumed problems caused for Lutheranism by the teaching of Philip Melancthon, an attainable doctrinal

position? Or does the role of Melancthon in producing the confessional standards (he was the author of the Augsburg Confession and the Apology of the Augsburg Confession) cause a rift within the confessional documents themselves, given Luther's authorship of the Larger and Smaller Catechisms? Does the late sixteenth-century scholastic style of the Formula of Concord preclude a genuine unity between it and the earlier documents in the Book of Concord? Then again, there are those many Lutheran confessions of the sixteenth century that were not included in the Book of Concord and which also point toward a diversity in Lutheranism. It is also the case that even after the signing of the Formula of Concord, differences in the understanding of grace and election continued to trouble Lutheranism.

The claim of a mono-confessional unity in Lutheranism, over against the Reformed diversity, is not quite accurate. On the Reformed side, moreover, we are certainly able to recognize a common ground and fundamental agreement in doctrine arising from the general acceptance or several major Reformed symbols. A mono-confessional standard does not in itself guarantee unity—and, even so, a multi-confessional family does not in itself indicate disunity.

But what of the claim that there are two Reformed traditions? It is certainly true that Calvin's covenantal teaching tends to emphasize the sovereign activity of God in establishing the covenant of grace and that Bullinger's covenantal teaching tends to emphasize human responsibility in covenant. Nonetheless, it is also surely the case that Calvin never sought to remove human responsibility before God, and that Bullinger never claimed that genuine response to the covenant could occur apart from God's grace. Both Calvin and Bullinger stressed the necessity and priority of grace in the work of salvation—and both recognized the difficulty of maintaining that fine balance, typical of Reformed theology, between an emphasis on divine sovereignty and an insistence on human responsibility before God. The difference in stress between the teachings of these two pillars of the Reformed tradition does not indicate two divergent ways of being Reformed, but rather a certain breadth of doctrinal statement and emphasis in the Reformed tradition itself.

Reformed unity, then, is neither the unity of a single confession nor even the unity of a book of confessions, such as Lutheranism boasts. Nor is it a unity of utter agreement between its various confessional documents. Rather, Reformed unity is a unity of faith represented as a spectrum of opinion – a unity within boundaries. By way of example, in the fundamentally infra-lapsarian pattern of the Reformed confessional doctrine of election, we nonetheless can move from the infra-lapsarian and *single* predestinarianism of the Second Helvetic Confession, to the infra-lapsarian but *double* predestinarianism of the Canons of Dort, to the mingling of infra- with supra-lapsarian (with, I think, an infra-lapsarian conclusion) in the Westminster Confession, without feeling the need to argue either that one or another of these confessions falls outside of the bounds of the Reformed faith or that the high supra-lapsarian position, which is definitively found in none of the documents, violates our confessional teaching.

Even so, there are only two Reformed confessional documents that teach the two-covenant schema of a covenant of works and a covenant of grace—the Irish Articles and the Westminster Confession—and the schema is, admittedly, a minor theme in the Irish Articles. Nonetheless, the two-covenant schema is a significant, even central, doctrinal motif in much Dutch Reformed theology, where it has never been a confessional theme. In the English Reformed tradition, the schema became a matter of confessional teaching—in the Dutch Reformed tradition, it did not. We might even hazard the guess that the difference is rooted purely in the historical development of Reformed theology and in the fact that the Dutch Reformed confessional development came to a close at the Synod of Dort, before the great flowering of Reformed covenant theology, while the Puritan Revolution brought about a confessional situation in England after that flowering had taken place. In any case, this confessional diversity does not mark a point of dissent in doctrine between branches of the Reformed faith. Terminology and interpretation of the prelapsarian

covenant varies in the orthodox Reformed systems sometimes the concept is absent, sometimes it is present as a “covenant of nature,” and other times as a “covenant of works.” More importantly, the outworkings of the doctrine of the covenant of grace are clearly present in the baptismal teaching and practice of all the Reformed churches.

In the midst of our confessional diversity, there is a genuine unity. It is not a unity framed by confessional doctrines that are absolutely uniform, throughout the Reformed churches. We not only can experience differences in emphasis among our churches, we also ought to be able to recognize that the unity of all the Reformed churches functions very much like the confessional unity of believers under any one of the documents. In other words, once a churchly confession is accepted as a doctrinal norm, it provides boundaries for theological and religious expression, but it also offers considerable latitude for the development of varied theological and religious expression within those boundaries.

Thus, two fully orthodox but nevertheless different systems of theology, like Herman Hoeksema’s *Reformed Dogmatics* and Louis Berkhof’s *Systematic Theology*, both stand within the confessional boundaries identified by the Three Forms of Unity. Similarly, given the breadth of Reformed teaching on the doctrine of predestination—from the Second Helvetic Confession to the Westminster Confession—we can acknowledge such diverse statements of the doctrine as those of Berkhof, Hoeksema, Hodge, or, among the older dogmaticians, Ames, Perkins, and Turretin, as all expressing Reformed teaching. Nonetheless, we raise an eyebrow (or perhaps two) at the hypothetical universalism of Moises Amyraut, and we feel quite justified in the sentiment that Arminianism is excluded not only by the Canons of Dort, but also by a correct understanding of any and all of the confessions in the Reformed family.

Each confession singly permits a variety of teaching within its boundaries – typically a variety caused by theological explanations and elaborations that enter into greater detail than the confession. The family of confessions permits this kind of variety as well, but it also permits within the larger Reformed faith—a variety within the spectrum of belief caused by differences among the confessions themselves. Our unity, then, is a unity that exists along a spectrum of doctrinal statements and, at the same time, remains within the boundaries established in one way by our particular confessional standards and in yet another by the larger family of Reformed confessions. And it is a unity that has belonged to the Reformed churches from the very beginning of their history without either a mono-confessional or a multi-confessional standard held in common by all of the churches.

3. Pressures on Confessional Integrity in Our Times

Granting the confessional unity of the Reformed churches within the boundaries set by their several sets of confessional standards, the second issue to be addressed is that of confessional integrity within the diversity. The issue here is not simply one of allegiance to the doctrines contained in our confessional documents—the issue is also one of the fundamental acknowledgment of the importance of having and holding our confessions as such and, as a group or confessional family, recognizing the importance and the distinctiveness of our Reformed faith. Perhaps I should say from the outset of this part of my presentation that I am not about to offer a ready-made solution—what I want to do is to frame or, more precisely, to re-frame a particular problem and, by drawing attention to it from a slightly different vantage point, to encourage others to develop solutions with a particular view of the problem in mind.

It is all too easy to identify the loss of interest in, and the loss of desire to maintain, traditional points of doctrine, such as salvation by grace alone through faith as grounded in God’s election, or Christ’s purchase of salvation in an act that was both a substitution for us in the place of punishment and a satisfaction for us to the divine demand of payment for the offense of sin, or of the spiritual presence of Christ to believers in and through their faithful participation in the Lord’s

Supper, as the result of a national and international slide down the slippery slope into liberalism. After all, liberal Christianity typically inserts a positive view of human nature and its abilities into its doctrine of salvation and grace; it expresses difficulty with the seeming inhumanity and arbitrariness of divine decrees; it can scorn penal substitutionary atonement either as an unforgivable legalism or as a patriarchal teaching about an abusive father, and it finds little use for the mystery of the Lord's Supper and quite easily and comfortably reduces the Supper from the status of sacrament or means of grace to that of ordinance. There is, however, another source of confessional erosion that produces similar and, at times, identical results—and to which we are much more susceptible.

I am speaking here of the non-credal, non-confessional, and sometimes even anti-confessional and anti-traditional biblicism of conservative American religion. One recent evangelical systematic theology makes the point that confessional theology is a form of “indoctrination” that ought to be avoided – and, over the years, I have heard similar comments from students who were associated with the non-credal churches: *Confessions are unnecessary at best when one has the Bible. At worst, they prevent their adherents from encountering the meaning of Scripture.* I have usually asked such students whether they believe in the doctrine of the Trinity, specifically, the doctrine of one divine essence in three persons. When they nearly invariably respond positively, I point out to them that they are not really non-credal or non-confessional, but are in fact adherents to the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed from the Second Ecumenical Council (381).

I ask next whether, from their non-credal perspective, they view it as permissible to hold a doctrine of the Trinity according to which only the Father is truly God, and the Son, as “the firstborn of all creation” who himself confesses, “The Father is greater than I,” might be viewed as an exalted creature of God. Of course, they deny such a possibility – but they have very great difficulty arguing against it in brief, without recourse to the Nicene formula: Arianism, after all, did have its scriptural proof texts. The point is, then, quite simply made that we need creeds and confessions so that we, as individuals, can approach Scripture in the context of the community of belief. It is not that creeds and confessions stand above Scripture as norms. Not at all. They stand below, but also with Scripture as churchly statements concerning the meaning of Scripture. And therefore, they also stand above the potentially idiosyncratic individual and prevent him from becoming his own norm of doctrine even as they provide entry for him into a churchly perspective.

The non-credal, anti-confessional tendency thus understands the sola Scriptura of the Reformation in a manner that the Reformers themselves never did and surely would have repudiated. On this particular count, had they the opportunity, the Reformers would most probably associate much conservative American religion with the biblicism of Servetus and the Socinians or with various Anabaptist groups. Of course, someone will object, conservative American religion, much of which identifies itself as fundamentalist or evangelical, is not anti-trinitarian. That it true – but much of it is doctrinally dispensational, premillennial, anti-sacramental, opposed to the baptism of infants, anti- or non-covenantal, and stylistically anti-liturgical and revivalistic. It is distinctly non-Reformed – or, more broadly, not rooted in the Reformation – granting that our confessional Lutheran brethren are presently experiencing the same kind of erosion of confessional and liturgical sensibilities.

4. Reaffirming and Strengthening Confessional Integrity

As said previously, I have no specific solution to this problem of Reformed Christianity in America, but I do have a series of suggestions or, more precisely, a series of points to ponder at the pastoral, the educational (whether in the local church or in our seminaries), and the denominational levels. We must find ways to express our unity with one another as Reformed Christians – and this can clearly and constructively begin with a consistent reference to our confessional and liturgical heritage. Differences in confessional allegiance within the Reformed family ought not to be the basis for doubts concerning either our unity or our need for ongoing

dialogue and discourse with one another in a world that increasingly appears to doubt the significance of confessions and of liturgy.

We must be convinced enough of the continuing significance of our confessional heritage (including its relation to liturgy and hymnody) to resist the desire to create church growth by losing our identity. One of the most appalling “strategies” of contemporary evangelization is the assumption that we must find the least distinctive, least offensive, lowest common denominator in order to attract the most people. Christian symbols, distinctive services, traditional hymnody, and disturbing language about the human predicament can all be set aside in order to appear open – this in a religion where the authoritative canon of Scripture tells us that the cross, the central redemptive event in the plan of God, is a scandal and an offense! Our confessions and their active expression in worship present the fundamental teachings of our faith: the issue is not popularity but, one might say, “truth in advertising.”

We must, in addition, become more conscious of the crucial linkage between our confessional and our liturgical heritage. The forms of worship and the hymnody of the Reformed churches have consistently reflected and supported the teaching of our confessions – and, indeed, have historically been one of the primary avenues of instruction in our confessional teaching alongside of preaching and catechesis. Thus, the orders of baptism in the Reformed and Presbyterian churches echo the confessions in their own declarations that our children “belong, with us who believe, to the membership of the Church through the covenant made in Christ,”² or that “God graciously includes our children in his covenant, and all his promises are for them as well as us.... We are therefore always to teach our little ones that they have been set apart by baptism as God’s children.”³

Similarly, the words of virtually all Reformed services of the Lord’s Supper, “Lift up your hearts,” and the response, “We lift them up unto the Lord,” although one of the very ancient parts of the service, stand in a special relationship to the Reformed understanding of the Lord’s Supper. The spiritual uplifting of the heart in and through the words of the liturgy echo and instruct in the faith of the confessions, where we read that we truly partake of Christ’s body and blood “not by the mouth but by the Spirit, through faith” inasmuch as “Christ remains always seated at the right hand of God the Father in heaven.”⁴ The confessional and liturgical point, to paraphrase one of my favorite Protestant orthodox theologians, Amandus Polanus, is that we do not claim to drag the risen and glorious body of our Lord down to this wretched and miserable earth, but that, by the power of the Spirit, our hearts are joined to him in heavenly places. The connection between liturgy and confession is clear. Loss of the Reformed order of worship can lead directly to a loss of relevance of the confessions to the life of the believing community.

I would make a similar case for the confessional character of Reformed hymnody and the danger of its loss or replacement with popular hymns not rooted in the faith of the Reformation. Perhaps I have become a bit over-sensitive when I begin to cringe during a service of worship at the sound of the contemporary evangelical hymn, “Father, I Adore You,” sung to the neglect of such traditional Reformed hymns as “God of the Prophets,” “Now Thank We All Our God,” or “All People That on Earth Do Dwell.” And perhaps I am a bit too analytical when I examine “Father, I Adore You” and note that the only subject of its several clauses is the human “I”—all of the movement in the hymn begins in the human self, and all that we are directly taught by its words is something about ourselves. This identification of all religion as subjective experience is the point at which the conservative, evangelical community joins hands with Schleiermacher and tacitly confesses that he is the church father of the modern era. By way of contrast, our Reformed hymnody seldom loses itself in subjectivity. The human subject is assuredly present, not as a naked “I,” but as a member of the corporate community of faith: “Now thank *we all* our God, with heart and hands and voices.” But, then, immediately, the hymn speaks to us *objectively* of the

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providential and redemptive ground of our thanks: “who wondrous things has done, in whom his world rejoices.”

Yet another instance is what appears to me to be the incredible liturgical insensitivity of including “Let Us Break Bread Together on Our Knees” in our service of the Lord’s Supper, given that kneeling at the Supper was set aside by the Reformers at the very beginnings of our faith because of its association with the adoration of the host in the Roman Catholic Mass. At the very least, standing (or sitting) while singing about kneeling is incongruous—at most, it points to a variety of eucharistic piety that Calvin and his contemporaries took pains to avoid. Examples could easily be multiplied.

We must, I would suggest, be ready to test new orders of worship and new hymnody not only through popular practice but according to confessional standards. It is, I admit, a rather difficult task in some of our churches, where freedom in hymnody and order of worship has replaced the liturgical straitjacket that was the norm several decades ago. Like confessional diversity, liturgical diversity has been characteristic of the Reformed churches since the beginning and has never been a threat to our unity or to our integrity. There is no need to deny new orders of worship, or the adaptation of old orders to new circumstances, or the use of new hymns. But there is a need to test carefully the new orders and any new hymns before we admit them to our regular worship. The point here is much the same as the point I made concerning church growth: we are called upon by our confessions to maintain our identity for the sake of our Reformed understanding of the very nature and meaning of the gospel.

We must do all that we can to assure the contemporary use of our confessions and catechisms in the life of the church. They must not be relegated to the status of dead standards that are brought to bear *only* when problems arise and are then put back on a shelf in a closed book when the crisis has passed. It is well for us to remember that the confessions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were, first and foremost, declarations of faith. They were not (and, therefore, ought not to become) rules for belief imposed on the church from without: they are normative *declarations spoken from within* by the church itself, for the sake of pronouncing the church’s biblical faith. We do justice to their contents only when we declare them—only when we confess them—as the expression of our corporate faith and corporate identity. More confessions and varied patterns of subscription are not the solution to our problem. Only the regular use of our confessions as standards for the expression of biblical truth can render them effective and, indeed, contemporary in their significance. Only by declaring the confessions, by using them in the contexts of preaching, of teaching, and of corporate worship, can they fulfill their intended role as positive guides, arising out of the faith of the church in its meditation on Scripture, to the ongoing work of the Reformed churches.

In closing, I would simply commend to you our great heritage and commend to you as well the work of holding fast to what is most valuable in our tradition for the sake of our present and future work in the service of the gospel. Our unity will appear clearly in the declaration of our faith through our distinctive confessions and through the reflection of our confessional heritage in our forms of worship. Our Reformed *identity* depends on our willingness to declare our confessions and in so doing to confess the faith.

Endnotes

¹ J. Wayne Baker, *Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenant: The Other Reformed Tradition* (Athens, Ohio, 1980).

² *The Book of Common Worship* (Philadelphia, 1946, 121).

³ *Psalter Hymnal* (Grand Rapids, 1987), 961.

⁴ Belgic Confession, 35.

The Need for Creeds and Confessions

by Rev. Brian Garrard

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IT IS a constant lament that biblical standards are loosely kept or even forsaken by Christian believers. Such a situation is not unique to the present day. Over the centuries the battle for truth has been fought, and although there have been triumphs, defeats have also abounded. Reformed churches have historically resorted to the use of Creeds and Confessions in all their contendings for Gospel truth.

A DEFINITION

What are Creeds and Confessions? At their simplest, they are statements of the Bible's great doctrines and a list of its leading precepts. We can further add this: they are summaries and presentations of Gospel truth. Creeds and Confessions have been formulated throughout the life of the Church. See for example, "Jesus is Lord;" cf. Matthew 16.16 and 1 Corinthians 12.3. Later generations produced the Apostles' Creed, the Athanasian and Nicene Creeds, through to the great Reformation and Protestant Confessions. This leads to an all-important question:

WHY HAVE CREEDS AND CONFESSIONS?

1. They are the Means of Establishing Orthodoxy.

In other words, they are the means of testing a man's soundness in the faith. As hinted at above, history teaches us that tests of orthodoxy are a necessity. Heresies arose in Apostolic days. Great light and truth, attended by signs and wonders, had broken out, yet it was vital to "hold fast the form of sound words" (2 Timothy 1.13). If it mattered then, how much more today. The Reformation saw a pouring forth of Protestant Creeds and Confessions. Men clung to them, in some instances to the death. Such were needed, then, in better days. Do we not require them still in a time of terrible and unheard-of declension? How else are we to "try the spirits whether they are of God" (1 John 4.1)?

2. They are a Means of Safeguarding Truth.

As statements and summaries of the vital doctrines of the Bible, they take on the role of a guardian or protector. To explain, let us use the example of a farmer. He places cattle in a field and if he is experienced, he will know that the animals will always find a way of escaping, especially if they are sheep! This does not prevent him from placing a fence around the field in order to keep the wayward creatures in. Indeed, he makes the land as secure as possible. So too with Creeds and Confessions. Sinful nature is prone to wander, yet a Creed can be like a fence, helping to keep us in the 'field' of the Gospel.

3. They are a Means of Witnessing to the Truth.

The Apostle Paul describes the church as "the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Timothy 3.15). By this, we understand that God's Word has been entrusted to us. We are to guard it carefully and give a clear witness to all its precepts. In adopting a Creed, we formally and openly declare our belief in Scripture and a clear demarcation is drawn between the believing and the unbelieving.

4. They are a Means of Promoting Harmony and Peace.

The Scriptures command us to think, believe and speak the same things. See for example, 1Corinthians 1.10. How can this be achieved? Two cannot walk together unless they be agreed, and agreement cannot be obtained unless there is a common acceptance of a statement of holy Scripture. It is at this point that Creeds and Confessions are a great help.

5. They are a Means of Distinguishing between Christians.

This was especially true amongst the different Protestant denominations of past years and still ought to be the case. Creeds are an honest attempt to let others know what we believe. We say 'honest', because it is honourable to be open with each other, especially when a believer may consider joining with a company of God's people. Besides, they can be a help in allowing Christians from different denominations to understand and fellowship with one another, even if they do not always agree on every point.

6. They are also a Means of Study.

The reading of Creeds, Confessions and Catechisms has done much good down the centuries. Modern believers who neglect them, do so to their own detriment. A regular perusal of a Creed's contents will stimulate study, inspire faith and keep the Reformed doctrines alive in believers' hearts.

7. They are a Means of Exhortation.

Following on closely from the above, Creeds can challenge, rebuke, instruct and draw us closer to the Lord. Left to ourselves, we can grow spiritually lax, but as the Apostle Peter tells us, we need stirring up by being reminded of biblical truth (2 Peter 1.13). To this end, we recommend the reading of the Westminster documents every year or two. In this way, they will remain fresh in our hearts and minds.

8. They are the Means of Last Resort.

In other words, in cases of serious discipline they can be employed as a standard by which to act and judge. By way of example, when a minister begins to teach heretical doctrines, Creeds and Confessions are there to hopefully recall him to better things. If this fails, then the same Creeds can be used to dismiss him from the sacred office. We are mindful that it depends upon the godliness of his fellow ministers and elders as to whether matters are administered correctly or not. All the same, the Creeds are essential to this whole process.

The present age is one of spiritual vagueness, subjectivity and the assumption of a form of godliness, "but denying the power thereof." Creeds and Confessions can be something of a help in delivering the Church from these evils. Yet Creeds have their detractors, even from within denominations which have historically required subscription to such documents. What are their objections? Let us consider some and endeavour to give answers to them:

OBJECTIONS TO CREEDS AND CONFESSIONS

1. Creeds are put in the place of the Bible.

Therefore, Scripture is all that we need. This objection proceeds from a mistaken assumption. No true believer has ever believed that his Creed is equal with, or even supersedes, Scripture. The compilers of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* could write concerning the books of the Bible: "All which are given by inspiration of God, to be the rule of faith and life" (Chapter 1: section ii). Section iv adds: "The authority of the holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, depends not upon the testimony of any man or church, but wholly upon God, (who is truth itself) the author thereof; and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God." Thus the supremacy and authority of holy Scripture over any other writings is asserted. Creeds then, are only human statements and summaries of faith. As such, they are not infallible, but standards which are subordinate to the Word of God.

This objection has another mistaken assumption. It argues that the Bible is all we need. To a great degree that is true, but in another sense it is not. God gave permanent gifts to his Church of pastors and teachers. If the Bible is all we need, why did God provide us with such standing ministries? Preaching is necessary, because the Holy Spirit uses this ordinance to grant understanding of the

Word to the Church. Rejection of Creeds must also mean a rejection of preaching, for both exist for the same end. Lovers of Creeds do not esteem the Bible less, but instead, love and honour it more. Centuries of Reformed history testify to this.

2. Creeds are not found in the Bible.

Evidences of creeds do exist in the New Testament. See: Mat 16.16; 1Cor 12.3; 1Tim 6.12-13; 2Tim 1.13; 3.14 and Mat 28.19-20. The origins of the Apostles' Creed may be open to conjecture. It is clear, however, that its roots were certainly 'Apostolic', for the churches of Tertullian's day (born c.150 A.D.) accepted this as being so.

3. Creeds make the Christian Faith complicated.

The Christian faith is simple, it is said, but Creeds fill it with complexities. To this we can answer that the basic precepts of the Gospel may be simple. 1Cor 15.3-4 lays the fundamentals before us: Christ died for our sins; was buried; and rose again the third day. If these were the whole contents of Christianity, then critics might have a significant point in their favour; but the opposite is the case. The Bible contains some things hard to understand (2Pet 3.16) and this has caused individuals and churches to founder spiritually and fall into terrible error and heresy. If anything, Creeds help to explain the Bible's teaching and keep us on an orthodox path. To have a humble spirit and to regard Creeds and Confessions as teaching documents is surely a significant mark of grace.

4. Creeds are a straitjacket.

They hinder the development of further truth and light, and confine freedom of thought. Such an objection depends upon the presuppositions of the critic. If he believes that God has NOT confined his Word to the books of the Old and New Testaments, then Creeds will be obnoxious to him. If, however, he accepts the Bible's view of itself that it is God's ONLY Word to man, then he will be glad of any statement and summary of belief that strengthens faith. The doctrines of the Bible are not changeable. They are derived from God's holy, inspired Scriptures of Truth and, as such, are his final, sufficient and unchangeable revelation to us. The problem is, man is forever changing, especially in matters of doctrine and spirituality. On the contrary, orthodox belief seeks to be settled and grounded in the Truth and will use Creeds to maintain this. Indeed, faithful ministers will strive not to preach anything original. Only those things found in the Bible and summarised in the Creeds will fill their pulpit utterances. When a man is about to enter the ministerial office, he ought to know what he believes before he commits himself. He is not setting out to some unknown destination and lost before he starts. Rather, he takes up God's chart and compass and leads his people in the right way. Creeds are an indispensable aid in accomplishing this.

5. Creeds are a cause of contention and disunity.

It is not to be denied that certain individuals can use good things to serve an evil cause, but that is not to make a good thing bad. Creeds by their nature cannot cause discord. If anything, they are the means of obtaining oneness and peace, for a company of God's people united upon these principles will experience great harmony. Even so, the opponents of Creeds may persist in their objection. What can we further answer? Should Creeds seem to be the unlikely cause of division, they are still not to be blamed. Christ made it clear that his coming would not bring harmony, but division. See Luke 12.49-53. The Gospel always brings about opposition and even violent persecution. Is it at fault? Of course not! When a believer contends for the truth, as instructed by Scripture, is he to be condemned? A thousand times NO! The fault lies with those who resist the truth and will have none of it. Creeds, then, are blameless. So also are those who defend their use. Although we are to live at peace with all men, this will not always be possible because of error and wickedness in their hearts.

6. Creeds affect the rights of private judgment and conscience.

They are dictatorial and have no right to tell us what to believe. This objection makes a wrong assumption. Creeds are NOT dictatorial. No one is compelled to accept them; therefore the conscience is not violated in any way, or the rights of private judgment curtailed. Whenever a group of believers choose to unite and walk together, they will sooner or later agree upon a basis for this union. Every church must have one, for it is impossible to function otherwise. Such an agreement and the acceptance of this basis is voluntary. We repeat: no one is forced to submit to it against his wishes. Therefore, this objection cannot stand.

7. Creeds are old-fashioned.

We understand more today, so they are not necessary. This objection reveals conceit and also ignorance of history. To think that we know it all is in fact to be blind to our true state. A survey of history will tell us that our forefathers knew significantly more of divine truth than we do today. Modern Christians should hang their heads in shame for even thinking up such an objection.

8. Creeds are no guarantee of continued orthodoxy.

To this we agree, but do we abandon all safeguards because of a past disappointing experience? A dog may escape from a garden, but it does not prevent us from constructing a secure fence around our property. This objection, however, is not wholly accurate. Creeds and Confessions have done much to maintain orthodoxy over hundreds of years. Who knows to what depths the churches could have sunk without them? It is significant, that since many believers have refused any or little subscription to Creeds, the Church and nation have gone into spiritual decline.

Are you ashamed of your Creed and Confession? In danger of letting it slip? Wanting a creedless (and spineless) Christianity?

Do not be ashamed! Thank God that they arose in his providence. Gladly affirm your belief in and acceptance of them. Let the world and fellow believers know what we believe. Above all, let them be some of those means whereby we rededicate ourselves to the Lord and his service.

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The Sacraments of the New Covenant

Baptism and Communion

What is a Sacrament?

A sacrament *conveys* God's grace; therefore it is a *means* of grace. By partaking in the sacrament, we receive a valuable benefit or a blessing from God. That is, something real and valuable is imparted to us through the sacrament *by faith and in accordance with the Word of God*. Without faith, a sacrament becomes a meaningless and ineffective ritual; that's because without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11.6). To be effective, sacraments must be rightly administered, meaning they must be administered *biblically*. Louis Berkhof says, "The sacraments should never be divorced from the Word, for they have no content of their own, but derive their content from the Word of God; they are in fact, a visible preaching of the Word."¹

We often refer to sacraments as *signs and seals*. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* states,

"Sacraments are holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace, immediately instituted by God, to represent Christ, and his benefits; and to confirm our interest in him: as also, to put a visible difference between those that belong to the church, and the rest of the world; and solemnly to engage them to the service of God in Christ, according to his Word" (Rom 4.11; Gen 17.7, 10, 11; Mat 28.19; 1Cor 11.23; Rom 6.3-4; Col 2.12; 1Cor 10.16; 11.25-26; Gal 3.27; Exo 12.48; Gen 34.14; 1Cor 10.21; Rom 6.3-4; Gal 3.27; 1Pet 3.21; 1Cor 5.7-8; 10.16).²

Therefore, these two sacraments not only obtain the benefits of the cross, but they confirm our interest in Christ – that is, they are a means to visibly evidence that we belong to him, and that we acknowledge Christ alone as our Lord and Savior. And so they identify those who belong to the Church, and are engaged in serving God by obedience to Christ, as commanded in the Bible. Thus sacraments may only be administered to true believers – those who have made a credible profession of faith in Jesus Christ. All others who participate in or partake of sacraments without saving faith, condemn themselves and abuse the purpose of the sacraments.

^{NLT} 1Cor 11.27-29 So anyone who eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord unworthily is guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. That is why you should examine yourself before eating the bread and drinking the cup. For if you eat the bread or drink the cup without honoring the body of Christ, you are eating and drinking God's judgment upon yourself.

Simon Magus, Scripture says, believed and was baptized; but his faith was obviously not placed in Christ – he made a false profession of faith at his baptism, hoping to gain by it. Peter told him that he was still in bondage to sin. Like Balaam, Simon sought to profit by this new religion. It used different "magic" than what he had mastered previously. He wanted the authority and the power to confer the Holy Spirit at his own command. Peter said to him, "You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God." (^{ESV} Act 8.21)

¹ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: 1988) 577-78.

² *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter 27:1, Of the Sacraments.

Signs and Seals of the Covenant

Nearly all the Reformed standards describe sacraments as signs and seals of the covenant. The notable exception is the London Baptist Confession, which uses “ordinance” rather than using “sacrament”, and it drops the reference to signs and seals. The Larger Westminster Catechism by contrast asks, “What is a sacrament?” It answers, “A sacrament is a holy ordinance instituted by Christ in his church, to signify, seal, and exhibit to those that are within the covenant of grace, the benefits of his mediation; to strengthen and increase their faith, and all other graces; to oblige them to obedience; to testify and cherish their love and communion one with another; and to distinguish them from those that are without.”

The catechism asserts that they are not only **signs** (visible attestations of God’s favor), but also **seals** (confirmations of God’s love, in which he gives assurance of what is symbolized by the sign). The catechism goes on to ask, “What are the parts of a sacrament?” Its answer: “There are two parts of a sacrament; the one is an outward and sensible [*or sensory*] sign; the other is an inward and spiritual grace that is signified by it.”

Thus, baptism is an outward **sign** of what has happened to us inwardly, which is the washing of the water of the Word; and this is applied to us by the Holy Spirit in regeneration. But it is also a **seal** of God’s promise to be our God, and to make us His. That is, a sacrament is not only a picture of God’s grace to us (*the sign*), but it is also a means of claiming the promise of salvation. The Holy Spirit has *sealed* us in Christ, and thus sealed the promise of salvation to us. The seal is the safeguard or legal promise of something; we are signed and sealed like a legal document. A sacrament, then, is the sign of what the Holy Spirit guarantees (2Cor 1.22).

More than that, a sacrament actually confers grace on God’s people. The grace promised is not only offered, but it is actually *exhibited* and *conferred* by the Holy Ghost. In other words, the Holy Spirit is Himself the seal of the covenant, and the conveyor of God’s grace to us. He is given to us as a pledge of what will surely come by God’s hand.³ The sacrament is the visible sign of that seal, and of the efficacious covenant that exists between God and His people through faith in Jesus Christ.

We believe two sacraments are ordained by Christ in the New Testament: *baptism* (Mat 28.19), and *communion*, which is also called the *Lord’s Supper* (Luk 22.19). What follows is our view of these sacraments, of what they represent, and who may participate in them. It is a flier that we at times include in our Sunday bulletin. It’s on the next page.

³ GAL 3:27 For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. TIT 3:5 Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit; EPH 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; ²⁶ That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word. ACT 2:38 Then Peter said to them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Eph 1:13-14 In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation – having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, ¹⁴ who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of *God’s own* possession, to the praise of His glory.

The Lord's Supper

If you are new with us today, we will be celebrating a sacrament we call, "The Lord's Supper" or Communion. You may be wondering, "What is this and can I participate?" We have provided this information to briefly answer those questions, and to help you better understand its significance.

The Lord's Supper is eating and drinking bread and juice in remembrance of Christ. He commanded us to do this at His last supper the night before He was crucified, **Mat 26.26-28**. The bread is symbolic of Christ's body crucified on the Cross for us. The juice is symbolic of His blood being shed for our sins (**Joh 6.51-63**).

As we participate in the Lord's Supper, we are reminded of three things:

1. **Christ Forgives Us.** "He took a cup of wine and gave thanks for it...for this is my blood, sealing the New Covenant. It is poured out to forgive the sins of the multitudes." **Mat 26.27-28** (LB)
2. **Christ Unifies Us.** "No matter how many of us there are, we all eat from the same loaf, showing that we are all part of one body of Christ." **1Cor 10.17** (LB)
3. **Christ Gives Life To Us.** "This is my body" **1Cor 11.24**, "I am the true bread from Heaven; and anyone who eats this bread shall live forever." **Joh 6.58** (LB)

Some Guidelines to Follow:

1. We encourage those who have made a clear confession of faith in Christ to take communion.⁴
2. A child may participate with a parent if the parent has faithfully instructed the child in the particulars of this sacrament, and the child has credibly expressed his or her own faith in Christ.
3. Trays of juice and bread will be made available during the worship time, and a time of prayer and reflection will be led. You may serve yourself, and if you would like, you may serve your spouse, or others who may need assistance.
4. Before you take communion, take time for personal reflection, focusing on the grace of the cross and thanking God for his unconditional love towards you.

*We believe this sacrament is a means of grace; through it the benefits of the cross are applied to believers by faith in Christ – not because of anything inherent in the bread and juice, but because they are signs and seals of what Christ has already done. We also believe the Lord's spiritual presence is among us at the communion. Therefore we encourage you to treat this moment with deep sincerity and reverence.*⁵

⁴ That is, you have publicly confessed you are a sinner in need of God's forgiveness; you have turned from your sins and have turned to God to be saved (Ac 2:37-38; 26:20; Lk 3:3; 9:26); you believe that you are eternally saved by God's grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone, and not because of anything you have done to merit God's favor, but only because of what Jesus Christ has done on your behalf (Eph 2:8,9; 2Co 5:21).

⁵ You should confess your sins and receive God's forgiveness by faith in the blood of Christ before partaking. If any believers have something against you, first be reconciled to them; then take communion (Mt 5:23-24). Why? Because anyone who eats the bread or drinks the cup in an unworthy manner heaps judgment on himself. (1Co 11:27-29)

Sacraments of the New Covenant

Baptism

We have a booklet that tells new believers about the importance, meaning, effect, and mode of baptism. It describes who should be baptized and why. Here is a synopsis:

Who should be baptized? Everyone who has placed his or her faith in Christ for salvation (Mar 8.38). Scripture also requires repentance – a God-given change in heart producing a desire and commitment to put away sin, with the help of the church body (Eph 4.22-24; Jas 5.20).

“And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Act 2:38)

“So then, those who had received his word were baptized...” (Acts 2:41)

“But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike.” (Acts 8:12)

Can children be baptized? at Hope Chapel we do not have an age restriction as to who can be baptized. Rather, we honor the parents by encouraging them to be involved in their child’s decision to be baptized. Because children develop differently, and by stages, their ability to understand and make decisions varies accordingly. So each child must be considered individually. The requirements for baptism are the same for a child as for an adult: *repent* and *believe*. If children are able to articulate *in their own words* that Jesus Christ died for their sins, and if they can recognize that without His death they would not be forgiven, then according to scripture, they should be baptized.

Why should we be baptized? (1) To follow Christ’s example (Mar 1.9); (2) Because Christ commanded it (Mat 28.19-20); (3) To demonstrate our obedience by publicly professing Christ as our Savior (1Joh 2.3; Mat 10.32).

What is the meaning of baptism? It illustrates our union with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection Rom 6.3-4; 1Cor 15.3-4; Col 2.12). It illustrates our new life as a believer (2Cor 5.17; Rom 6.4).

Baptism does not make you a believer – it’s a response to what you already believe.

Baptism does not save you - only your faith in Jesus Christ saves you.

Baptism is like a wedding ring - it’s an outward symbol of the commitment you made in your heart.

Salvation is found in Christ alone; baptism symbolizes His work done at the cross in our behalf (Eph 2.8-9).

How should we be baptized (mode)? In the New Testament, every baptism was done by immersion (e.g., Mar 1.5, 10; Act 8.38-39). Jesus was baptized that way (Mat 3.16). And because baptism signifies our union with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection, immersion more clearly represents that truth than sprinkling. Baptism is the outward sign of faith in Christ. As you learned earlier, only those who trust in Christ alone for their salvation should take communion (1Cor 11.26-29). And because baptism is the point at which we publicly profess our trust in Christ alone for salvation, baptism should *precede* taking communion. But communion is not withheld from any professed believer in Jesus Christ merely because the baptism hasn’t yet taken place (typically there is a delay between our profession and our baptism).

Consensus Tigurinus

The Consensus of Zurich — Calvin & Bullinger — 1549.
Notes and updated language by William Gross – Colorado Springs CO 2009

Mutual Consent in Regard to the Sacraments Between the Ministers of the Church of Zurich and John Calvin, Minister of the Church of Geneva. Now published by those who framed it. MDLIV (1554)

Article 1. The Whole Spiritual Government of the Church Leads us to Christ.

Because Christ is the end of the law, and the knowledge of him comprehends in itself the whole sum of the gospel, there is no doubt that the object of the whole spiritual government of the Church is to lead us to Christ -- because it is by him alone that we come to God, who is the final end of a happy life. Whoever deviates from this in the slightest degree, can never speak duly or appropriately of any ordinances of God.

Article 2. A True Knowledge of the Sacraments comes from the Knowledge of Christ.

Because the sacraments are appendages of the gospel, only the one who begins with Christ can aptly and usefully discuss their nature, virtue, office, and benefit; and that is not done by referring cursorily to the name of Christ, but by truly contending for the end for which Christ was given to us by the Father, and for the blessings he has conferred upon us.

Article 3. Nature of the Knowledge of Christ.

We must hold therefore that Christ, being the eternal Son of God, and of the same essence and glory with the Father, assumed our flesh to communicate to us by right of adoption what he possessed by nature: namely, to make us sons of God. This is done when engrafted by faith into the body of Christ, and that is by the agency of the Holy Spirit – we are first counted righteous by a free imputation of righteousness, and then we are regenerated to a new life;¹ thus, being formed again in the image of our heavenly Father, we renounce the old man.

Article 4. Christ a Priest and King.

Hence Christ, in his human nature, is to be considered our priest who expiated our sins by the one sacrifice of his death, put away all our transgressions by his obedience, provided a perfect righteousness for us, and now intercedes for us, so that we may have access to God. He is to be considered a repairer who, by the agency of his Spirit, reforms whatever is vicious in us so that we may cease to live to the world and the flesh, and so that God himself may live in us. He is to be considered a king who enriches us with all kinds of blessings, governs and defends us by his power, provides us with spiritual weapons, delivers us from all harm, and rules and guides us by the scepter of his mouth. And he is to be considered in this way, so that he may raise us to himself, the true God, and to the Father, until the fulfillment of what is finally to take place, which is that God will be all in all.

Article 5. How Christ Communicates Himself to Us.

Moreover, so that Christ may thus exhibit himself to us and produce these effects in us, he must be made one with us, and we must be engrafted into his body. He does not infuse his life into us unless he is our head, and from him the whole body, fitly joined together through every joint of supply, according to his working, causes the body to grow in the proportion of each member. ^{Eph 4:16}

Article 6. Spiritual Communion. Institution of the Sacraments.

The spiritual communion which we have with the Son of God takes place when he, dwelling in us by his Spirit, makes all who believe capable of all the blessings which reside in him. In order to attest this, the preaching of the gospel was appointed to us, and the use of the sacraments was committed to us, namely, the sacraments of holy Baptism and the holy Supper.

¹ This is not referring to the enabling or illumining of the Holy Spirit prior to faith; it refers to the birth of the new man which follows faith. That is, the translation of the Latin word for “new birth” is meant to be descriptive, not doctrinal.

Article 7. The Purposes of the Sacraments

The purposes of the sacraments are to be marks and badges of Christian profession and fellowship or fraternity; they are to incite us to gratitude and to exercises of faith and a godly life; in short, they are to be contracts binding us to this. But among other purposes, the principal one is that God, by means of them, may attest, represent, and seal his grace to us. For although they signify nothing other than what is announced to us by the Word itself, yet it is a great matter, first, that living images of a kind are submitted to our eye. This makes a deeper impression on the senses by bringing the object directly before them, in a way, while bringing the death of Christ and all his benefits to our remembrance; this is so that faith may be better exercised; and secondly, it is a great matter that what God has announced is confirmed and ratified by these seals.

Article 8. Gratitude.

Now, seeing that these things which the Lord has given as testimonies and seals of his grace are true, he undoubtedly truly performs inwardly by his Spirit what the sacraments represent to our eyes and other senses. In other words, we obtain possession of Christ as the fountain of all blessings, in order that we may be reconciled to God by means of his death, and be renewed by his Spirit to holiness of life – in short, we obtain righteousness and salvation – and also in order that we may give thanks for the blessings which were once exhibited on the cross, and which we receive daily by faith.

Article 9. The Signs and the Things Signified are Not Disjoined but Distinct.

Therefore, although we distinguish (as we should) between the signs and the things signified, yet we do not disjoin the reality from the signs; rather, we acknowledge that all who in faith embrace the promises offered in them, receive Christ spiritually, with his spiritual gifts, while those who had long been made partakers of Christ continue and renew that communion by them.

Article 10. The Promise which is Principally to be Looked to in the Sacraments.

It is not proper to look to the bare signs, but rather to the promise annexed to them. Therefore, to the extent that our faith in the promise offered there prevails, the virtue and efficacy of what we are speaking about will display itself. Thus the substance of water, bread, and wine by no means offers Christ to us, nor does it make us capable of his spiritual gifts. Rather, we look to the promise whose function is to lead us to Christ by the direct way of faith – faith which makes us partakers of Christ.

Article 11. We Are Not to Stand Gazing on the Elements.

This refutes the error of those who stand gazing on the elements, and who attach to them their confidence of salvation; the sacraments, separated from Christ, are only empty displays; a voice is distinctly heard throughout proclaiming that we must adhere to none but Christ alone, and seek the gift of salvation from none but him.

Article 12. The Sacraments Effect Nothing by Themselves.

Besides, if any good is conferred upon us by the sacraments, it is not owing to any proper virtue in them, even though you should include in this the promise from which they are distinguished. For it is God alone who acts by his Spirit. When he uses the instrumentality of the sacraments, he does not infuse his own virtue into them, nor does he take away in any respect from the effectual working of his Spirit. Rather, adapting to our weakness, he uses them as helps in such a way that the whole power of acting remains with him alone.

Article 13. God Uses the Instrument, but All the Virtue Is His.

This is why Paul reminds us that neither he that plants nor he that waters is anything; but it is God alone that gives the increase. So it is also to be said of the sacraments that they are nothing, because they will profit nothing unless God makes them effectual in all things. They are indeed instruments by which God acts efficaciously when he pleases, yet in such a way that the whole work of our salvation must be ascribed to him alone.

Article 14. The Whole is Accomplished by Christ.

We conclude then that it is Christ alone who in truth baptizes inwardly, who makes us partakers of himself in the Supper, who in short fulfils what the sacraments represent, and uses their aid in such a way that the whole effect resides in his Spirit.

Article 15. How the Sacraments Confirm.

For this reason, the sacraments are sometimes called seals and are said to nourish, confirm, and advance faith; and yet the Spirit alone is properly the seal, and also the beginner and finisher of faith. For all these attributes of the sacraments sink down to a lower place, so that not even the smallest portion of our salvation is transferred to creatures or elements.

Article 16. All Who Partake of the Sacraments Do Not Partake of the Reality.

Besides this, we carefully teach that God does not exert his power indiscriminately in all who receive the sacraments, but only in the elect. For just as he enlightens unto faith only those whom he foreordained to life, so by the secret agency of his Spirit he makes the elect receive what the sacraments offer.

Article 17. The Sacraments Do Not Confer Grace.

This doctrine overthrows the fiction of the sophists which teaches that the sacraments confer grace on all who are not guilty of mortal sin. Besides holding that nothing is received in the sacraments except by faith, we must also hold that the grace of God is by no means annexed to the sacraments in such a way that whoever receives the sign also gains possession of the thing signified. For the signs are administered to reprobate and elect alike, but the reality only reaches the elect.

Article 18. The Gifts Offered to All, but Received by Believers Only.

It is true indeed that Christ with his gifts is offered to all in common, and that if the unbelief of man does not overthrow the truth of God, the sacraments always retain their efficacy; but all are not capable of receiving Christ and his gifts. Therefore nothing is changed on the part of God, but in regard to man each receives according to the measure of his faith.

Article 19. Believers Before, and Without the Use of the Sacraments, Communicate with Christ.

Just as the use of the sacraments will confer nothing more on unbelievers than if they had abstained from it, or worse, is destructive to them if they partake, so without their use believers receive the reality which is represented there. Thus the sins of Paul were washed away by baptism, even though they had been previously washed away. So likewise baptism was the basin of regeneration to Cornelius, even though he had already received the Holy Spirit. In the same way, Christ communicates himself to us in the Supper, even though he had previously imparted himself and perpetually remains in us. Since each is enjoined to examine himself, it follows that faith is required of each before coming to the sacrament. Faith is not without Christ; but to the extent that faith is confirmed and increased by the sacraments, the gifts of God are confirmed in us, and thus Christ in a way grows in us, and we in him.

Article 20. The Benefit is Not Always Received in the Act of Communicating.

The advantage which we receive from the sacraments should by no means be restricted to the time at which they are administered to us, as if at the moment the visible sign is brought forward, it brings the grace of God along with it. For those who were baptized when mere infants, God regenerates them in childhood or adolescence, and occasionally even in old age. Thus the utility of baptism is open to the whole period of life, because the promise contained in it is perpetually in force. And it may sometimes happen that the use of the holy Supper will do little good at the time, because of thoughtlessness or slowness of heart, but afterward it bears its fruit.

Article 21. No Local Presence Must Be Imagined.

We must guard particularly against the idea of any local presence. For while the signs are present in this world, and are seen by the eyes and handled by the hands, Christ, regarded as man, must be sought nowhere else than in Heaven, and in no other way than with the mind and eye of faith. Therefore it is a perverse and impious superstition to enclose him under the elements of this world.

Article 22. Explanation of the Words "This Is My Body."

We repudiate as preposterous interpreters those who insist that the formal words of the Supper, "This is my body; this is my blood," are to be taken in what they call the precisely literal sense. For we hold it is beyond question that they are to be taken figuratively; the bread and wine receive only the name of what they signify. Nor should it be thought that it is a new or extraordinary thing to transfer the name of things figured by metonymy² to the sign; similar modes of expression occur throughout the Scriptures, and by saying so we assert nothing but what is found in the most ancient and most approved writers of the Church.

Article 23. Of the Eating of the Body.

When we say that, by our eating of his flesh and drinking of his blood, which are represented here, Christ feeds our souls through faith by the agency of the Holy Spirit, we do not mean that any mingling or transfusion of substance took place; we mean that we draw life from the flesh once offered in sacrifice, and the blood once shed in expiation.

Article 24. Transubstantiation and Other Follies.

In this way, we refute not only the fiction of the Papists concerning transubstantiation, but all the gross figments and futile quibbles which either take away from Christ's celestial glory or are in some degree repugnant to the reality of his human nature. For we deem it no less absurd to place Christ under the bread, or couple him with the bread, than to transubstantiate the bread into his body.

Article 25. The Body of Christ Locally in Heaven.

And so that no ambiguity may remain when we say that Christ is to be sought in Heaven, the expression implies and it is understood by us to intimate distance of place. For though, philosophically speaking, there is no place above the skies, yet just as the body of Christ bearing the nature and mode of a human body, is finite and is contained in Heaven as its place, it is necessarily as distant a place from us in point of space as Heaven is distant from Earth.

Article 26. Christ is Not to Be Adored in the Bread.

If it is not lawful to affix Christ to the bread and the wine in our imagination, it is much less lawful to worship him in the bread. For although the bread is held forth to us as a symbol and pledge of the communion which we have with Christ, yet as it is a sign and not the thing itself; and it does not have the thing signified either included in it or affixed to it. Those who turn their minds towards it with the view of worshipping Christ, make an idol of it.

² Substituting the name of an attribute or feature for the name of the thing itself (as in 'they counted heads')

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; [He descended into hell;]* the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic** Church, the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.

* The phrase, "He descended into hell," was not included in the *Marcelli Ancyрани* (a Greek version of the creed, A.D. 340), nor even in some of the Latin versions of the creed. It was not until later that this line and others appeared in this creed. (see *History of the Christian Church*, by Philip Schaff, Vol. 2, pp.535-536). Acts 2.31 uses the word "hades" (the resting place of the dead, or grave), not "gehenna" (the place of eternal torment, or hell).

** "catholic" here means universal; this is not a reference to the Roman Catholic Church.

Criticism: Phillip Schaff defined a creed as "a confession of faith for public use, or a form of words setting forth with authority certain articles of belief, which are regarded by the framers as **necessary for salvation**, or at least for the well-being of the Christian Church" (*Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 1. Ch. 1.1). The Apostles' Creed does not accurately or fully summarize the content of saving belief; it's also ambiguous rather than clear. Thus it cannot unify the hearts of God's people. Being an *ecumenical* creed, it allows many to profess to be Christians, who do not hold to the Gospel as revealed in God's holy word,. "Even the demons believe, and tremble." (Jas 2.19)

The Nicene Creed

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man, and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again with glory to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the Prophets. And I believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

The Nicene Creed was defined at the Councils of Nicaea (325 A.D.) and Constantinople (381 A.D.). It explains the Church's teachings about the Trinity, and affirms certain historical realities of Jesus' life. It was written to refute the heresies of Arianism. Arius *denied the true divinity of Jesus Christ*. He taught that the Son was not eternal but was *created* by the Father; therefore the Son was not God by nature; he had a changeable nature. His honor and dignity, Arius said, were earned from the Father by Jesus' righteous life on earth, rather than being inherent in Jesus' identity as God. He said the Holy Spirit was begotten by the Logos (Christ), and therefore was less than either the Son or the Father. The Nicene Creed was written to refute this particular heresy, not to articulate the core beliefs of the Christian faith. It is nonetheless helpful.