

# BETHESDA CHURCH STATEMENT OF DOCTRINAL FAITH

(Adopted by the Bethesda Church congregation in Annual General Meeting on May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2018.)

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## PREAMBLE

The Bible faithfully records the epic, historical drama of God's loving and relentless pursuit of His most favored creatures – human beings – who keep running away from Him in pride, independence, rebellion, guilt, fear, and shame. In the Bible, God graciously reveals that His sovereign, good, reconciling, and ultimate purpose is fulfilled in and through the work and Person of Jesus Christ. The Bible also teaches that the Christian life is both a lifestyle and a lifetime of working out our relationship of hope in God through faith in Jesus Christ expressed in obedience to Him, God's Spirit and Word guiding and equipping us. Historically, an essential aspect of being Christian and a Christian church involves accepting, believing, obeying, and teaching the Bible as God's Word written. Since our formation in July 1944 as an autonomous local congregation, Bethesda Church has stood in that strain of Bible-believing, Gospel-preaching, Spirit-borne churches characterized by historic Christian orthodoxy. Consequently, our *Statement of Doctrinal Faith* expresses a positive case for the fundamentals of what we believe the Bible teaches, what we are committed to teaching, and how we are committed to living in our time and place.

We pause to note that statements of doctrinal faith, however Biblically crafted and sincerely believed, do not ensure practical applications of God's truth resulting in manifestations of His love and joy, peace and patience, kindness and goodness, faithfulness and gentleness, humility and self-control, forgiveness and compassion, or purposeful unity in the congregation. In fact, they can be misused to divide rather than to unify. The Apostle Paul wrote, "*If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing*" (1 Cor. 13:2). Each of us must choose to submit ourselves in obedient faith to God's Word in the presence and by the power of His Spirit, pursuing both God's love and God's truth with equal passion.

Finally, we do believe that such a statement of sincere faith and Biblical doctrine can lead us to discover what God says about Himself and us; even transform us, our families, and our community; and serve to protect the Church and her local expressions from false teaching and practice. Sound Biblical doctrine moves God's people to worship Him and helps us to "*grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and to the Day of eternity. Amen*" (2 Pet. 3:18).

## 1. GOD'S REVELATION, THE BIBLE

We believe the Bible teaches that God reveals His goodness, wisdom, beauty, and power to the whole world through His work in creation, His provision and ongoing care for the world, and the witness of the human conscience.<sup>1</sup> God has revealed Himself in various special and personal ways throughout history, and Jesus Christ is God's supreme revelation of Himself and His Word.<sup>2</sup> Consistent with the way Jesus spoke about the Scriptures, the whole Bible – organized in thirty-nine books of the Old Testament and twenty-seven books of the New Testament – is the written Word of God, its original words having been breathed out by God the Holy Spirit without error through various human authors.<sup>3</sup> God has preserved His written Word throughout history so that the Bible may be faithfully translated, understood, believed, taught, and practiced by all peoples, in every language, and among every nation.<sup>4</sup> The Bible is completely true, trustworthy, relevant, and supreme in its authority, and the Bible teaches everything we need to know to be saved by faith and to live in joyful obedience and hope as disciples of Jesus Christ.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> On God's revelation in creation and ongoing care: Ps. 19:1; Jer. 10:12-13; Acts 14:17; Rom. 1:18-20. On God's revelation witnessed in the human conscience: Matt. 5:46-47; Rom. 1:18-25 and 2:14-15.

<sup>2</sup> For examples of God's special revelation throughout history, see: Gen. 2:16-17, 3:8-19, and 12:1-3; Josh. 1:8; Ps. 19:7-11 and 119:105 and 130; Isa. 8:20; Heb. 1:1-2. On the supremacy of God's revelation in Jesus Christ: Mark 12:6; Luke 24:44-47; John 1:14-18 and 5:39; Col. 1:15-20; Heb. 1:1-4.

<sup>3</sup> On Jesus's view of Scripture: Matt. 5:17-18, 21:42, and 26:54; Luke 4:21 and 24:27; John 2:22, 5:39, and 10:35. On Scripture's origin: 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20-21. On the New Testament writings regarded as Scripture: John 16:13; Col. 4:16; 1 Thess. 5:27; 1 Tim. 4:13 and 5:18; 2 Pet. 3:2 and 16.

<sup>4</sup> On God's preservation of Scripture as affirmed in the New Testament by both Jesus and the Apostle Paul: Matt. 24:35; Rom. 15:4 and 16:26; 1 Cor. 10:11.

<sup>5</sup> On the attributes of Scripture: Deut. 17:19 and 32:47; Ps. 19:7-11; Matt. 5:17-18 and 15:3; 2 Tim. 3:15-17; 2 Pet. 1:3 and 16-21.

## 2. GOD THE TRINITY

We believe the Bible teaches that there is only one true and living God.<sup>1</sup> God exists eternally in three distinct persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.<sup>2</sup> All three persons of this Holy Trinity are of one essence; uncreated; eternal; and equal in honor, power, and glory as God.<sup>3</sup> God is self-sufficient and self-sustaining in His being, not in any way dependent upon His creation, and yet He governs and sustains all things according to His will.<sup>4</sup> God is holy, perfect, and infinite in all of His attributes, including His sovereign goodness, power, knowledge, wisdom, faithfulness, righteousness, justice, mercy, compassion, and love.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> On there being only one true and living God: Gen. 1 ('Elohim' = "God"; plural noun and first person pronouns "Us" and "Our" with singular verb and third person pronouns "He," "Him," and "His") and Gen. 2 ('Yahweh Elohim' = "LORD God"); Ex. 3, esp. vv. 5-6 and 13-15 ('Yahweh' = "LORD," or "I AM that I AM," or "Self-Existing One," or "Living One"); Deut. 6:4; Isa. 45:21-22; Jer. 10:10; 1 Tim. 2:5.

<sup>2</sup> On the three persons of the Godhead: Matt. 3:16-17 and 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14; Gal. 4:6; 1 Pet. 1:2. Our affirmation of the Trinity – "One God, Three Persons" – stands in full agreement with the historically orthodox Christian Nicene and Athanasian creeds. As the Athanasian Creed says: "We worship One God in Trinity and the Trinity in unity, neither blending their persons nor dividing their essence."

<sup>3</sup> On the equality of the three persons of the Godhead: Matt. 28:17-20; John 1:1-3, 5:23, 8:58, and 14:16; Acts 5:3-4; 2 Cor. 1:3 and 3:17; Phil. 2:9-10; Col. 1:15-17; Heb. 1:2-3 and 8-12; Rev. 5:13. As the Nicene Creed affirms, the Son is "of the same essence as the Father." As the Athanasian Creed says: "What quality the Father has, the Son has, and the Holy Spirit has ... And yet, there are not three eternal beings; there is but One Eternal Being. So too, there are not three uncreated or immeasurable beings; there is but One uncreated and immeasurable Being."

<sup>4</sup> On God being sovereign, not dependent: Deut. 29:29; Ps. 115:3; Prov. 21:1; Isa. 40:9-18, 21-26, and 28; Matt. 10:29; Acts 17:24-27; Rom. 11:33-36; Eph. 1:11; Col. 1:16-17; Heb. 1:3.

<sup>5</sup> On the attributes of God: Ex. 34:6-7; Deut. 32:4; 1 Kings 8:27; Job 11:7-9; Ps. 90:1-2, 139:7-10, and 145:3; Isa. 6:3, 40:28, and 57:15; Jer. 23:23-24 and 32:17; Mal. 3:6; Matt. 19:26; Luke 1:37; Rom. 11:33; Eph. 3:8 and 20-21; James 1:13 and 17; 1 John 1:5.

### 3. CREATION

We believe the Bible teaches that God purposely created the universe and everything in it out of nothing.<sup>1</sup> God personally sustains everything that exists – animate and inanimate, visible and invisible, material and spiritual – by the power of His Word and for His own glory.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, since God created the world, all of creation reveals the existence and sovereign goodness, glory, and power of God.<sup>3</sup> God created everything good, whole, mature, and without the presence of sin or death.<sup>4</sup> However, sinfulness, evil, and death came into the world through the willful choices of God’s creatures – namely, fallen angels and human beings.<sup>5</sup> Some angels, God’s special servants, including and led by Satan, became rebellious against God and malign toward the rest of His creation.<sup>6</sup> Satan deceived and deceives humanity into sin.<sup>7</sup> Due to the especially corrupting effect of humanity’s sin, all creation now labors under the consequences of sin.<sup>8</sup> Yet, God continues to rule and reign over all things, and He uses the curse of frustration, disorder, even death in this world to serve His good and holy purpose.<sup>9</sup> Through the work of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, God is making all things new and He will make a new creation.<sup>10</sup> Ultimately, God will set all creation free from these conditions of frustration, disorder, and death, as He completes His redeeming work through the rule and reign of our Lord Jesus Christ who rose again as the first-fruits of God’s new creation – the new heavens and new earth – in which righteousness will dwell forever.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Gen. 1:1-2:4; Ps. 33:6; John 1:3; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2.

<sup>2</sup> Ps. 104:14-15; Isa. 40:26; Matt. 10:29; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:3; Rev. 4:11.

<sup>3</sup> Ps. 19:1; Jer. 10:12-13; Acts 14:17; Rom. 1:18-20.

<sup>4</sup> Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31, and 2:1-3 and 25; Rom. 5:12.

<sup>5</sup> Gen. 3:1-7; Rom. 5:12-14.

<sup>6</sup> Gen. 3:1-5; Isa. 14:12-14; Ezek. 28:11-19; Matt. 4:1-11 and 13:37-39; Luke 8:12; Eph. 4:27 and 6:11-12; 1 Tim. 3:6-7; 2 Tim. 2:26; James 4:7; 1 Pet. 5:8-9; 1 John 3:8; Rev. 12:7-12.

<sup>7</sup> Gen. 3:4-5; John 8:44; 2 Cor. 11:3.

<sup>8</sup> Gen. 3:14-19; Rom. 5:12-14 and 8:20.

<sup>9</sup> Ex. 4:11; Isa. 45:7; Amos 3:6; Rom. 8:20-21 and 11:36; Eph. 1:11.

<sup>10</sup> Isa. 43:25; Micah 7:18-20; Matt. 26:26-29; 2 Cor. 5:17-21; Heb. 7:27; 1 John 2:2; Rev. 5:9-10 and Rev. 21:5.

<sup>11</sup> Isa. 65:17-25 and 66:22-23; Acts 3:18-21; Rom. 8:21; 1 Cor. 15:19-23; 2 Cor. 5:17; 2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1-4.

## 4. HUMANITY

We believe the Bible teaches that God created humanity in His image and likeness, male and female, to represent Him on the earth.<sup>1</sup> God has special regard for all human beings from the moment of conception onward, and He is pleased to promote the flourishing of human life and community.<sup>2</sup> God created all human beings to love Him with our whole being, to love one another as we love ourselves, and to serve as the good and faithful stewards of His creation.<sup>3</sup> God created man and woman for each other, yet neither man nor woman completes the other; whether single or married, only God in Christ Jesus completes us.<sup>4</sup> But from the beginning, God intended that marriage should be a holy, blessed, lifelong, and exclusive union between one man and one woman, and that such marriage should be the exclusive context for human sexual activity.<sup>5</sup> God intends for His people to live together with a holy regard for God, each other, marriage, and families.<sup>6</sup> In so doing, we reflect in our relationships in some real and representative way the glory of the relationship between Jesus Christ and His Church, as well as establish and nurture a secure and wholesome environment for all with whom we come into contact.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Gen. 1:26-27 and 5:1; James 3:9-10.

<sup>2</sup> On God's special regard for human life from conception onward: Ps. 22:9-10 and 139:13; Luke 1:15 and 41. On God's pleasure to promote the flourishing of human life and community: Ps. 72:7 and 92:12-13; Prov. 11:28 and 14:11; Hos. 14:4-7.

<sup>3</sup> On God's design and purpose for humanity: Gen. 1:26-28 and 2:15; Matt. 5:48 and 22:37-40; Luke 6:27-36; John 13:34-35 and 15:9-14; 1 Pet. 4:10.

<sup>4</sup> On men and women being completed in Christ alone, not by marriage: 1 Cor. 7:7-8; Col. 2:9-10.

<sup>5</sup> On God's design for marriage and sexuality: Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:3-9; Rom. 1:26-27; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; Eph. 5:3-5; 1 Thess. 4:2-6.

<sup>6</sup> On a holy regard for God, each other, marriage, and families: Gen. 2:15-25; Rom. 7:1-3; 1 Cor. 7:10-16; Eph. 5:21-33; Heb. 13:4.

<sup>7</sup> On God's intention for holy relationships, marriages, and families: Eph. 5:21-6:4; Col. 3:18-21; 1 Pet. 3:1-7.

## 5. SIN

We believe the Bible teaches that every desire, thought, word, and action contrary to God's will is sin, and that all sin is displeasing to God, harmful to ourselves and others, and a corrupting influence on creation and culture.<sup>1</sup> The essence and root of sin is our failure to love, obey, and trust God as He is worthy to be loved, obeyed, and trusted.<sup>2</sup> The human race sinned collectively against God when our first parents, Adam and Eve, disobeyed God's commandment.<sup>3</sup> Consequently and except for Jesus Christ, all people of the human race both inherit a sinful nature and earn an unrighteous standing before God.<sup>4</sup> Thus, apart from union with Jesus Christ through saving faith and rebirth in the Holy Spirit, all people are spiritually dead, enslaved to sin and self, and prone to the devil's deception and influence.<sup>5</sup> No one but Jesus Christ is inherently deserving of eternal life or able to enter into God's kingdom, except by God's grace.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> On sin involving desires, thoughts, words, and actions: Gen. 6:5; Matt. 9:4, 12:36, and 15:19; Mark 7:20-23; Acts 8:22; Rom. 1:21-23 and 2:16; 2 Cor. 10:4-5; Heb. 4:12-13; 1 John 3:4. On sin as displeasing to God, harmful to ourselves and others, and corrupting to creation and culture: Gen. 3:17 and 6:6; Ps. 7:11; Prov. 13:15; Rom. 1:18-32.

<sup>2</sup> Ex. 20:2-3; 2 Chron. 12:14; Ps. 10:4; Matt. 22:37-38; Rom. 14:23.

<sup>3</sup> Gen. 3:1-7; Rom. 5:12-14 and 19.

<sup>4</sup> Romans 3:10-20; Ephesians 2:1-3.

<sup>5</sup> On an inherited sinful nature: Rom. 5:12-14; Eph. 2:1-3 and 4:18. On an earned unrighteous standing before God: Rom. 3:10-23 and 5:15.

<sup>6</sup> Matt. 19:25-26; Luke 17:10; John 3:3-6, 6:44, and 14:6; Acts 11:18; Rom. 8:5-8; 1 Cor. 2:14; 2 Tim. 2:25.

## 6. GOD THE FATHER

We believe the Bible teaches that there is one God; the Father Almighty; Maker of heaven, earth, and all that exists – seen and unseen; King of the universe He created.<sup>1</sup> God the Father is eternal in His being and infinite in His character, making known in creation, Scripture, and the Person of Jesus Christ His sovereign perfections of holiness and goodness; righteousness and faithfulness; justice and mercy; and love, compassion, and grace.<sup>2</sup> God the Father is slow to anger, ready to forgive, compassionate, gracious, and abounding in love.<sup>3</sup> God the Father has made Himself known supremely and most personally through His Son, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, whom He sent to become fully human yet live without sin, to fulfill God's Law, to bear the judgment His people deserve, to be raised from the dead, and thus to reconcile the world to God.<sup>4</sup> God the Father has a good plan for the whole world, and He has made good promises for the blessing of people from all nations.<sup>5</sup> God the Father hears and responds to the prayers offered to Him in hope and faith, according to His own perfect will, wisdom, power, and love.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Includes a corporate paraphrase of the opening lines of *The Apostles'* and *Nicene creeds*, as well as Ex. 15:18; 2 Samuel 22:32; Ps. 10:16, 24, 29, 45:6, and 146:10; Heb. 1:10-12; Rev. 11:15.

<sup>2</sup> Deut. 32:4 and 33:27; 2 Sam. 22:31; Ps. 18:30, 90:2, and 103:6-7; Isa. 6:3-5, 26:4, and 40:28; Matt.5:48; James 1:16-18; 1 John 1:5.

<sup>3</sup> Ex. 34:6-7; Neh. 9:17 and 31; Ps. 86:15 and 103:8-14; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2.

<sup>4</sup> Ps. 2, 22, and 45:6-7; Is. 52:6-53:12; Matt. 11:27; John 1:18, 3:16-21, 14:9-10 and 18-24, and 17:25-26; Rom. 3:21-26, 4:25, and 5:8; 2 Cor. 5:18-21; Eph. 1:4-10; Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:2; 1 Pet. 1:20; 1 John 2:2 and 4:10.

<sup>5</sup> Gen. 12:1-3; Ps. 67:1-3 and 72:11; Isa. 66:18-19; Matt. 24:14; Luke 24:47; Rom. 16:26; Rev. 7:9-10.

<sup>6</sup> Ps. 10:16-18; Matt. 6:7-8 and 7:7-11; Rom. 8:26-27 and 34; Eph. 3:15-21; Heb. 4:15-16 and 7:25.

## 7. GOD THE SON, JESUS CHRIST

We believe the Bible teaches that our Saviour and Lord Jesus Christ is God, the only eternal Son of the Father, the Word of God made flesh.<sup>1</sup> God the Son, Jesus Christ is the supreme expression of God's Word and the exact imprint and embodiment of God's nature.<sup>2</sup> God the Son came into this world to save His people from our sins, reconcile the world to God, and bring glory to God the Father.<sup>3</sup> Jesus is the Messiah promised in the Old Testament Scriptures and the Christ revealed in the New Testament Scriptures – our great Prophet who makes God known and speaks God's Word to us; our great Priest who removes our sin and represents us before God the Father; and our great King who governs God's people, leads us in the spiritual battle, defends us from evil, brings us into unity with Himself and each other, and serves as our perfect example to follow.<sup>4</sup> God the Son, Jesus Christ was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of a virgin, full in His humanity, sinless in His life, attested by His miracles, and authoritative in His teaching.<sup>5</sup> Jesus Christ died for our sins as our Substitute, bearing in His body the penalty we deserve and providing atonement to God the Father for all who receive and trust in Him.<sup>6</sup> God raised Jesus Christ from the dead on the third day, according to the Scriptures.<sup>7</sup> The risen Jesus Christ ascended to the right hand of God the Father; He lives forever as the one Mediator between God and humanity; and He rules as Head of His Church and Lord over all things.<sup>8</sup> Finally, God the Son, Jesus Christ will come again, visibly and in great power and glory, to receive His people unto Himself and reign forever as God and King.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See: Isa. 45:23 with Phil. 2:9; John 1:1-4 and 14 and 8:58; Col. 2:9; 1 Pet. 3:15; Heb. 1:6-12.

<sup>2</sup> John 1:1-5, 9-14, and 16-18; Rev. 19:11-16. On Jesus's 'I AM' statements in the Gospel of John: John 6:35, 48, and 51; 8:12 and 9:5; 10:7 and 9; 10:11 and 14; 11:25; 14:1-6; and 15:1-17. On Jesus being "the exact imprint and embodiment of God's nature": 2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15-20; 1 Tim. 1:12-17; Heb. 1:1-4. See also our statements on "God the Trinity" and "God the Father" concerning the infinite perfections of God's character met fully in the Person of Jesus Christ.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. 1:18-25; Luke 1:30-33; John 1:14-18 and 17:1; 2 Cor. 5:18-21; 1 Tim. 1:15.

<sup>4</sup> On the Messiah as Prophet: Deut. 18:15. On the Messiah as Priest and King: Psalm 110. See also Acts 3:22-26 and 18:28; Heb. 4:14; Rev. 17:14.

<sup>5</sup> Matt. 1:23 and 7:24-29; Acts 2:22; Heb. 4:15.

<sup>6</sup> *Atonement* is an exceptionally important Biblical and theological concept that runs throughout the Scriptures – from Genesis to Revelation – and which deserves a note of explanation. The term '*atone*' means "*to satisfy or make amends for wrongdoing or injury.*" We have rebelled against God's good and sovereign authority; we have broken God's holy Law; we have sinned against God, personally and corporately; and, we must somehow *atone* to God who is altogether sovereign, good, holy, righteous, and just. Embedded in the Biblical concept of *atonement* is: 1- Because of our sin, all human beings need to be made right with and reconciled to God; 2- Our sinful nature and our actual sins render us incapable of *atonement* for ourselves or for anyone else; 3- Only Jesus Christ is qualified to serve as our Substitute, due to His perfect keeping of God's Law and fulfillment of God's will during His life on earth; 4- Jesus Christ became our "*atonement sacrifice*" when He offered Himself freely and fully to God, dying on the cross in the place of all who would believe; and 5- Only those who receive Jesus's *substitutionary atonement* by faith, believing that God raised Jesus from the dead, are justified (declared "not guilty" by God, Him having accepted Jesus's atonement as thoroughly satisfactory on our behalf). On the Biblical concept and application of *atonement*, Cf. Isa. 52:13-53:12 (esp. 53:5); John 1:12-13; Rom. 3:21-26 and 8:3; Gal. 3:13.

<sup>7</sup> Acts 2:24; 1 Cor. 15:1-11; 1 Thess. 1:9-10; 2 Tim. 2:8.

<sup>8</sup> On the ascension of Jesus: Luke 24:50-53; Acts 1:9 and 2:33; Col. 3:1; Heb. 10:12; 1 Pet. 3:22. On Jesus as Intercessor, Head, and Mediator: Rom. 8:34; Col. 1:18; 1 Tim. 2:5.

<sup>9</sup> Matt. 16:27, 24:27, and 25:31; Mark 8:38; John 14:3; 1 Thess. 4:16; 2 Thess. 2:8; Rev. 22:20.



## 8. GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT

We believe the Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit is God, the Lord and Giver of life; He was with God the Father and God the Son in the beginning; and He is the very Presence of God in the world and of Jesus Christ in and among His people.<sup>1</sup> The Holy Spirit provided God's special revelation to Old Testament believers; He brought about the holy and divine conception of Jesus Christ, empowered Jesus throughout His earthly ministry and as He went to the cross, and raised Jesus from the dead.<sup>2</sup> God the Father and God the Son sent the Holy Spirit to lead God's people into all truth and to bring glory to Jesus Christ as our risen Saviour and Lord.<sup>3</sup> God speaks, guides, and illumines our hearts, minds, lives, and ministries by the Holy Spirit, and He does so through the Bible, prayerful reflection, the wise counsel of the Church, events and circumstances, and sometimes in spontaneous ways.<sup>4</sup> The Holy Spirit brings conviction to the world, regenerates and indwells God's people, transforms us into new creatures, and empowers every believer in Christ to live in conformity to the Word of God and the character of Jesus Christ, to spread the Gospel, and to do good works that glorify God and strengthen the Church.<sup>5</sup> The Holy Spirit baptizes and seals all who trust in Jesus Christ until the Day of redemption.<sup>6</sup> Finally, all Christians everywhere are called not to grieve the Holy Spirit by unbelief and sinful living but to be continually filled with and led by the Holy Spirit as we pray and follow God's will as He has made it known in the Bible.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Gen. 1:2; Ps. 104:30; John 14:16-17; Acts 5:3-4; 2 Cor. 3:17.

<sup>2</sup> On special revelation to Old Testament believers: Ex. 31:3; 1 Sam. 10:10; 1 Pet. 1:11. On the miraculous conception of Jesus: Matt. 1:18; Luke 1:35. On the Spirit's empowering of Jesus: Matt. 12:18; Luke 4:1, 14, and 18; John 1:32; Heb. 9:14. On the Spirit's role in the resurrection of Jesus: Rom. 1:4 and 8:11.

<sup>3</sup> Luke 24:49; John 14:26, 15:26, and 16:14; Acts 2:33; 2 Cor. 3:17; 1 Peter 1:12.

<sup>4</sup> On God speaking and guiding throughout the Bible: Ps. 119:105; Heb. 3:7. On God speaking through prayerful reflection: 2 Cor. 12:8-9; 2 Tim. 2:7. On God speaking through the Church: Prov. 12:15 and 24:6; Acts 15:22, 25, and 28. On God speaking through events and circumstances: 1 Cor. 16:8-9; 2 Cor. 2:12-13; Col. 4:2-3. For a few examples of God speaking spontaneously, see: Gen. 15; Ex. 3; Jeremiah 1; Acts 9:1-19, 10, and 16:6-10.

<sup>5</sup> On conviction by the Holy Spirit: John 16:8; Acts 2:37. On regeneration by the Holy Spirit: John 3:3-6 and 6:63; 2 Cor. 3:6. On empowerment by the Holy Spirit: Matt. 5:13-16; Acts 1:8; Rom. 8:9-11 and 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:7-11; Gal. 5:22-23; 1 Pet. 4:10-11.

<sup>6</sup> Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 1:13-14.

<sup>7</sup> Rom. 8:14; Gal. 5:16; Eph. 4:30, 5:18, and 6:18.

## 9. THE GOSPEL, REPENTANCE AND FAITH

We believe the Bible teaches that the Gospel is the power of God for salvation.<sup>1</sup> God works by His Spirit through the preaching of the Gospel message to bring people to a response of repentance from sins and a life of faith.<sup>2</sup> The Gospel is God's revelation of hope and good news concerning what Jesus Christ has accomplished in history – as both Saviour and Lord – to reconcile people to God by His sinless life on earth, His sacrificial death for our sins, His resurrection from the dead, and His return to God to intercede for His people.<sup>3</sup> Except for Jesus Christ and because of sin, the whole human race is unrighteous, deserving of God's everlasting judgment, and subject to His condemnation and wrath.<sup>4</sup> Even so, God has made gracious promises of blessing and reconciliation for the world revealed throughout the Old Testament Scriptures, all fulfilled in Jesus Christ whom God sent.<sup>5</sup> When He became a human being like us, Jesus overcame all of the temptations of the flesh, the world, and Satan; He lived a sinless life on earth; and He obeyed perfectly the Word and will of God the Father.<sup>6</sup> In His sacrificial death on the cross, Jesus served as the perfect Substitute for His people, and He satisfied God's righteous judgment for the sins of all who would ever believe in Him.<sup>7</sup> By raising Jesus from the dead and exalting Him, God the Father proved His acceptance of Christ's perfect sacrifice and proclaimed Jesus to be Saviour of His people and Lord over all things.<sup>8</sup> God promises and offers forgiveness, new spiritual life, the gift of His Holy Spirit, and everlasting fellowship to all who repent and hope in God through faith in Jesus Christ.<sup>9</sup> Genuine repentance involves humbly turning away from one's own sin in view of God's mercy and turning to God with a desire to follow His good will.<sup>10</sup> True saving faith involves receiving and believing the truth of Jesus Christ, trusting Him as risen Saviour and Lord, and hoping in and relying upon God to be faithful to His promises in the Gospel.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>1</sup> On the Gospel message as God's power: Rom. 1:16-17 and 10:17; 1 Cor. 1:18.

<sup>2</sup> On God's work through the ministry of preaching and teaching: Matt. 28:19-20; John 6:63 and 17:20; Acts 10:44; Rom. 1:13-17, 6:17, and 16:25; 1 Cor. 2:1-5; 2 Cor. 4:5-6; 2 Tim. 2:24-26 and 4:1-2; 1 Thess. 1:5; James 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:12 and 23.

<sup>3</sup> On the fundamental facts of Jesus Christ and the Gospel: Mark 1:1ff; John 3:16; Luke 24:44-47; Rom. 1:1-6 and 10:9; 1 Cor. 15:1-9; 2 Tim. 2:8. Note: The Gospel is not what we do; but rather, the Gospel tells us what God has done through Jesus Christ to rescue and restore sinful people.

<sup>4</sup> On the necessity of Jesus Christ's saving work: Rom. 1:18-32 and 3:23; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Eph. 2:1-3 and 5, 4:17-19, and 5:5-6; Col. 3:5-7. Humanity's sin necessitated Jesus Christ to come, die as the perfect and perfectly satisfactory, sacrificial Substitute for His people – becoming sin for us and bearing the condemnation, wrath, and judgment His people deserve – in such a way that God would be both just and merciful in His work of reconciling to Himself sinners and the world; see: Rom 3:21-26 and 8:3; 2 Cor. 5:18-21; Gal. 3:11-14; Heb. 9:22; 1 Pet. 3:18.

<sup>5</sup> On God's promises of blessing and reconciliation in the Old Testament to be fulfilled in Jesus Christ: Gen. 3:15 and 12:1-3; Ps. 22:22-31 and 72; Isa. 2:1-4, 9:1-7, and 52:13-53:12; Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:26; Matt. 5:1-17; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 4:16-21 and 24:46-48; Rom. 1:2; Gal. 3:8; and 1 Pet. 1:10-12.

<sup>6</sup> On Christ's sinless life, perfect righteousness, and obedience: Matt. 3:15 and 5:17; Rom. 5:12-21; Heb. 4:15.

<sup>7</sup> On the significance of Christ's death as our Substitute: Rom. 3:24-26 and 8:3; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13.

<sup>8</sup> On the significance of Christ's resurrection: Luke 23:46; Acts 2:36; Rom. 4:25 and 8:31-39; 1 Cor. 15.

<sup>9</sup> On the free offer of the Gospel to all: Luke 24:47; John 3:16; Acts 17:30 and 26:20; Rom. 1:16-17; 2 Pet. 3:9.

<sup>10</sup> On the nature of genuine repentance: Ps. 51; Isa. 55:7; Ezek. 14:6; Luke 18:13; 2 Cor. 7:10-11; 1 Thess. 1:9.

<sup>11</sup> On the nature of saving faith: John 1:12; Acts 15:11 and 16:31; Rom. 4:4-5 and 4:19-25; Gal. 2:20; Heb. 11:1-40. Hoping in God and relying on Him to be faithful to His promises in the Gospel includes trusting God for the gifts of His grace – namely, forgiveness, new spiritual life, the Holy Spirit, and everlasting fellowship with Him.

## 10. SALVATION

We believe the Bible teaches that God saves His people from the just judgment, righteous condemnation, and holy wrath our sins deserve and that there is no eternal hope apart from God's mercy and grace in Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup> God gives eternal life to those whom He chooses, freely by His grace through faith, not on the basis of anything we do, earn, or deserve but only on the basis of what Jesus Christ has done.<sup>2</sup> God brings His people into a life of repentance and saving faith by calling us out of the darkness of unbelief, revealing Himself to our hearts through the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and causing us to be born again by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit.<sup>3</sup> All who trust in Jesus Christ as Saviour and surrender to Him as Lord are no longer under God's condemnation but are forgiven and justified on the sole basis of Jesus Christ's righteousness, sacrifice, and resurrection.<sup>4</sup> God adopts all true believers into His family; He assures us of eternal salvation; and He desires, is ready, and is able to fulfill all of His promises to keep us secure and bring us into His eternal glory.<sup>5</sup> God transforms all true Christians – progressively but truly – into the image and likeness of Jesus Christ through a lifetime of exposure to God's Word and personal experience in the Holy Spirit, growing us up in our hope in God, faith in Christ, and obedience to His will.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> On salvation from God's judgment in condemnation and wrath: John 3:36; Rom. 5:9; 1 Thess. 1:10. On no hope for anyone apart from God's mercy and grace: John 3:3-8; Eph. 2:1-3 and 12.

<sup>2</sup> John 5:24 and 17:3; Rom. 3:24 and 4:4-5; Eph. 2:8-10; Titus 3:5.

<sup>3</sup> John 3:3-8 and 5:24-25; Rom. 1:16 and 10:17; 1 Cor. 1:9, 18, and 30; 2 Cor. 4:6; Titus 3:5; 1 Pet. 1:23.

<sup>4</sup> Rom. 3:24, 5:1-3, and 8:1; Eph. 1:7. Please note: In the New Testament, 'justified' means "declared righteous" or "counted righteous" by God as Righteous Judge; this is the opposite of being 'condemned.' This 'justification' is not something any believer earns or deserves based on anything we do or who we are. Rather, believers are counted righteous – we are justified – in faith on the sole basis of what God has done in and through Jesus Christ's substitutionary death and resurrection. Jesus Christ's righteousness is counted to those who believe.

<sup>5</sup> John 10:28-29; Rom. 8:28-39; 1 Pet. 1:3-5.

<sup>6</sup> Rom. 12:1-2; 2 Cor. 3:18; Phil. 2:12-13; Col. 3:16.

## 11. THE CHURCH

We believe the Bible teaches that the Church – visible and invisible – is the household of the living God and the body of the living Christ.<sup>1</sup> The Church is comprised of all true believers in the one true and living God in all places and at all times throughout human history, and Jesus Christ is the only Saviour, Lord, and Head of the Church.<sup>2</sup> In His love and because of His grace, God adopts all true believers into His family on the sole basis of Jesus Christ's shed blood, death, and resurrection.<sup>3</sup> God calls His family on earth to be gathered and established throughout the world in local congregations; to manifest the character of Christ in the world, as revealed in His Word and empowered by His Spirit's presence; and to meet regularly and offer ministries of worship, Word, prayer, fellowship, discipleship, spiritual growth, outreach, and service.<sup>4</sup> Local churches should be taught by Biblically qualified pastors, led in partnership with a plurality of Biblically qualified elders, and served in partnership with Biblically qualified deacons.<sup>5</sup> The Lord Jesus has appointed ordinances of baptism and communion as visible signs of God's grace to us and to serve as means for us to express and be strengthened in our faith in Him.<sup>6</sup> God calls all believers to follow Jesus in baptism as an act of humble submission to God, personal repentance and faith, and as a reminder of our shared union with Jesus Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection.<sup>7</sup> God also calls all believers to share in the bread and cup of communion in humility, repentance, faith, and harmony with the local congregation, remembering and proclaiming the risen Lord Jesus Christ's death until He comes again in glory.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. 12:27; Eph. 2:19-22; 1 Tim. 3:15; 1 Pet. 2:5.

<sup>2</sup> Scripture speaks of 'the Church' in this universal, worldwide sense in Eph. 5:25-27; Col. 1:18; and Heb. 12:23. Note: The 'universal Church' can also be referred to as 'the invisible Church,' because it includes believers who have already died and because it is defined by the invisible realities of God's grace and the Holy Spirit.

<sup>3</sup> Gal. 3:13-14 and 29; Eph. 1:5 and 2:13-22; Rev. 1:5-6.

<sup>4</sup> On the Church being visibly expressed in local congregations and united in ministries of worship, Word, prayer, fellowship, spiritual growth, discipleship, outreach, and service: Matt. 18:15-20; Acts 2:42; Rom. 12:3-13 and 15:5-7; 1 Cor. 1:10 and 12:12-26; Eph. 2:19 and 4:1-3. On Christians meeting together regularly: Luke 24:1 and 13-49; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1-2; Heb. 10:25; Rev. 1:10. Note: It was the practice of the Early Church to gather on the first day of every week in remembrance and celebration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. On congregations comprised of baptized members who profess credible faith in Christ: Matt. 18:17 and 28:19-20; Rom. 6:1-4; 1 Cor. 5:1-13; Col. 2:6-12. Note: We believe all Christians everywhere are called to promote Biblical holiness, truth, and unity within the larger body of Christ while manifesting humility, wisdom, and love in relation to each other. We also believe members and leaders of local congregations should share a common Biblical faith; a purposeful sense of local and global mission; and a mutual care, accountability, and submission to the Lord Jesus Christ in true spiritual fellowship with the Lord Jesus and one another as brothers and sisters of Christ.

<sup>5</sup> On teaching pastors: Eph. 4:11; 1 Tim. 4:13; 2 Tim. 4:1-5. On a plurality of elders in every local church: Acts 14:23 and 20:28; 1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5. On deacons as servants: Acts 6:1-7; Rom. 16:1-2; Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:8-13.

<sup>6</sup> On Jesus appointing ordinances of baptism and communion: Matt. 28:19-20; Luke 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:23-34.

<sup>7</sup> On baptism: Matt. 3:13-15 and 28:19-20; Acts 2:38 and 8:12; Rom. 6:3-4; Col. 2:12; 1 Pet. 3:21.

<sup>8</sup> On communion: Matt. 26:26-29; 1 Cor. 10:16 and 11:23-34.

## 12. ULTIMATE EXPECTATIONS: JUDGMENT, GRACE, AND GLORY

We believe the Bible teaches that God is and God will be the Judge of all people through Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup> God is perfectly righteous and just in all of His judgments, taking into account all of the thoughts, words, actions, and secrets of the heart of every person.<sup>2</sup> God's final judgment will not involve wrath or condemnation for those who are in union with Christ Jesus, because God already condemned our sin in Jesus as our Substitute by His death on the cross.<sup>3</sup> God's merciful judgment of believers in Christ will confirm our faith and result in eternal reward from God the Father, according to how we have lived in faith and hope toward God in Christ Jesus and love for Him and other human beings.<sup>4</sup> When we who are in union with Christ Jesus die physically, our souls enter into God's presence and are graciously received by Him, perfected and set free from the presence and power of sin, and united with others who have died in Christ, awaiting together the resurrection of our bodies.<sup>5</sup> The soul of every person who does not hope in God through faith in Jesus Christ continues in unrighteousness forever.<sup>6</sup> Ultimately, our risen Lord Jesus Christ will come again – personally and visibly – in great power and glory.<sup>7</sup> He will raise the bodies of all people, reuniting bodies with souls, and He will reveal fully God's good, righteous, and everlasting judgment.<sup>8</sup> The unbelieving and unrighteous will bear for themselves God's judgment of condemnation and wrath, involving darkness and destruction, fire and misery, and separation from God and His grace forever.<sup>9</sup> All who are in union with Jesus Christ will inherit the new heavens and new earth, where we will reside in God's presence and share in fellowship with Him and His people, joyfully worshipping and serving God in the fullness of His grace and glory, forevermore.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>1</sup> On God's present work of judgment within human history: Ps. 9:7-8; Rom 1:18; 1 Cor. 11:29-33; 1 Pet. 4:17. On God's appointed Day of final judgment: Matt. 7:22-23 and 12:36; Acts 17:31; Rom. 2:16 and 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10; James 4:12; Rev 20:11-15.

<sup>2</sup> On God's judgment being altogether righteous and just: Matt. 12:36 and 25:31-46; Rom. 2:1-16; 1 Cor. 4:5; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 20:11-15.

<sup>3</sup> Jesus's death on the cross as our perfect and perfectly satisfactory Substitute – His perfectly righteous life given on behalf of and in place of true believers – is fundamental to an historically orthodox Christian understanding of the Biblical Gospel. On God's judgment involving "no condemnation" for believers: Rom. 3:21-28, 5:1, 8:1-3, and 8:33-34; Gal. 2:16, 3:11, and 3:13; Eph. 2:8; Tit. 3:7. Note: Believers have been forever counted righteous (justified) by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Justification is the opposite of condemnation.

<sup>4</sup> On God's judgment involving reward for believers: Matt. 5:12; 6:4, 6, and 18; 10:41-42; and 25:21 and 23; Luke 19:17; 2 Cor. 5:10.

<sup>5</sup> On believers being "with the Lord" immediately after death: Luke 23:43; 2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:23; Heb. 12:23.

<sup>6</sup> On the continued existence of the unrighteous: Luke 16:22-24; 2 Pet. 2:4.

<sup>7</sup> On Jesus's coming again: Matt. 25:31; Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26; Acts 1:11; 1 Thess. 4:15-17; Rev. 1:7.

<sup>8</sup> On the bodily resurrection of all people and revelation of God's final judgment: John 5:28-29; Rom. 8:18-25; 1 Cor. 15:12-58; Phil. 3:20-21; 2 Pet. 3:7-13.

<sup>9</sup> On the eternal state of the unrighteous: Matt. 8:12, 13:50, 22:13, and 25:30; Mark 9:43; Luke 3:17 and 13:28; John 5:29; 2 Thess. 1:6-10; Rev. 20:11-15 and 21:8.

<sup>10</sup> On the eternal state of the righteous: Matt. 13:43 and 25:30 and 46; John 14:2-3; Eph. 2:7; 1 Thess. 4:17; Titus 2:13; 2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 20:11-22:5.