

OUR STATEMENT OF FAITH

What we believe

THIS STATEMENT OF FAITH summarizes our beliefs as a church. Our theology is not innovative--anyone familiar with historic Christian doctrine will find that these statements fall in the center of evangelical theology ("evangelical" means theology derived from the *evangel*, or the Gospel; in other words, it's biblical theology rather than speculative theology or theology rooted in tradition).

We try not to be dogmatic about matters on which Bible-based believers have held divergent views. We want our core beliefs to be centered in Christ and His message as found in and supported by the clearest passages of Scripture. More obscure doctrine or teachings with less support are left to individuals to sort out on their own--we take no official position in these areas.

Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son.

2 John 9

Words to Live By

THE FOLLOWING PAGES contain our Statement of Faith. We've added a few explanatory comments to clarify and help apply these vital doctrines. As you read these statements, you will see they are rich with spiritual truth. Do not try to hurry through these pages, but read them slowly and thoughtfully. Ask yourself throughout, "What difference does this truth make in my life? If I didn't know or believe this, would it matter?"

The Bible

THE SOLE BASIS OF OUR BELIEF IS THE BIBLE, composed of the 66 books of the Old and New Testament. We believe that Scripture in its entirety originated with God and that it was given through the instrumentality of chosen men. Scripture thus at one and the same time speaks with the authority of God and reflects the backgrounds, styles, and vocabularies of the human authors. We hold that the Scriptures are infallible and inerrant in the original manuscripts. They are the unique, full, and final authority on all matters of faith and practice, and there are no other writings similarly inspired by God. (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:19-21)

COMMENTS

Human reason is a powerful tool, but our finite and often self-centered perspective distorts it. Reason alone cannot figure out the meaning to life, and cannot comprehend who God is beyond the simple awareness that He exists. If we are to have a relationship with God, we cannot get through our limitations to reach Him; He will have to break through and get to us. The Bible is the written summary of His attempts to do that. But the Bible isn't just a record of His words, it itself is the Word of God in written form. It is revelation--truth expressed not by means of humans groping in the dark for the right way to say it, but truth given by God Himself as He "carried people along" in their writing. Their message was and is His message. Because God cannot lie, this written Word is completely reliable, so we must let it judge us instead of us judge it. Though other books, both modern and ancient, may contain helpful spiritual truth, no other writings are "God-breathed" in the way the Bible is--truth is mixed

with error everywhere except in the Bible. That is why we base our beliefs on its teaching and submit all our thoughts and plans to its scrutiny.

SOME PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

We endeavor to regularly read and study the Bible, privately and publicly, to understand its message.

We reject claims that any human or ecclesiastical intermediary is necessary for us to know and relate to God--we have His Word, and we are each individually responsible to learn what it says.

All aspects of our life and conduct must be submitted to what the Bible teaches about that area--we must obey what we discover God has commanded.

Messages given by Grace Church teachers must provide teaching supported by Scripture.

We do not accept doctrines, no matter what is claimed as their source, if they do not square with what the Bible says; supposed "modern prophets", "new revelation", or any message--even if apparently given miraculously--must be tested by the Bible.

The Triune God

WE BELIEVE THAT THERE IS ONE TRUE, HOLY GOD, eternally existing in three persons--Father, Son and Holy Spirit--each of Whom possesses equally all the attributes of deity and the characteristics of personality. In the beginning God created out of nothing the world and all the things therein, thus manifesting the glory of His power, wisdom, and goodness. By His sovereign power He continues to sustain His creation. By His providence He is operating throughout history to fulfill His redemptive purposes. (Ex. 20:2-3; 1 Cor. 8:6; Rev. 4:11)

COMMENTS

The Bible begins with the phrase, "In the beginning, God. . . ." God has always existed--His nature and being are eternal. We also learn about God from His revelation to us that three distinct "persons" are called God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Because the Bible clearly teaches there is only one God (not three Gods), we understand that these three persons must fully share the one and only divine nature. We use the term "Trinity" as a label for the teaching that God has a singular nature but a plural personality. This creative God desired to share the "community" that always existed within Him, so He made a universe that would reflect His attributes. All that He created is dependent on Him--He made it out of nothing, keeps it together, can reshape it, and is Master over it. God crowned His creation with man and woman, fashioned in His personal image, with whom He could have a relationship, and who could relate to each other. They would reflect His nature by exhibiting unity in the presence of diversity, love in the midst of differences, ruling while remaining submissive all at the same time. God has been involved in the affairs of His creation from the very beginning, and continues to play an active role in relating to mankind, specifically in rescuing us from our rejection of His love and His legitimate right to be glorified as our Creator.

SOME PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS:

Knowing God is our highest priority--substituting any activity or allowing any passion to become stronger is idolatry.

We treat creation as something wonderful that God has made; we neither abuse it, nor worship it; we seek to cultivate all that God has shared with us so it can be used to further His purposes, treating it as a stewardship from Him which must be preserved without becoming more important than the people He made to enjoy it.

We cannot agree with any teacher or religious group which rejects God's revelation of Himself as Trinity (as is common among most "cult" groups).

We can count on God to be active throughout our lifetime; He will bring us good things, and He will turn evil things into some good; He works in our lives so we develop a vital relationship with Him based on deep trust that supersedes all other loyalties.

Jesus Christ

JESUS CHRIST IS THE ETERNAL SECOND PERSON OF THE TRINITY who was united forever with a true human nature by a miraculous conception and virgin birth. He lived a life of perfect obedience to the Father and voluntarily atoned for the sins of all by dying on the cross as their substitute, thus satisfying divine justice and accomplishing salvation for all who trust in Him alone. He rose from the dead in the same body, though glorified, in which He lived and died. He ascended into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of the Father, where He, the only Mediator between God and man, continually makes intercession for His own. He shall come again to earth, personally and visibly, to consummate history and the eternal plan of God. (Luke 1:35; John 1:1, 14; Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:18-25; Romans 3:23-25; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4; Romans 4:23-25; Matthew 28:6-7; Ephesians 1:20; 1 Timothy 2:5; 1 John 2:1-2.)

COMMENTS

Jesus is "the God-Man" who is unlike any person who has or ever will live. He is not part divine, part human--He is fully both; all of God dwelt in Him, and His humanity was complete. His birth evidences His humanity in that He was born in the normal way from a human mother, yet His divinity is established by virtue of the fact His mother was a virgin who conceived miraculously. In His humanity, He experienced every human limitation except sin; He was like us in every way except that He never disobeyed His heavenly Father. In His divinity, He was coequal with His Father and the Holy Spirit from all eternity. His death did not end His existence, but after He had paid for our sin on the cross, He arose from the dead on the third day. His resurrection not only shows His complete provision for sin's effects; it also serves as a prototype of our future resurrection when our bodies will be remade in the same way to live in eternity. Jesus continues to possess both full humanity (though glorified) and full divinity. He is our ongoing mediator between us and the Father, ever mindful of our needs, always concerned for our well being. His final words on earth included the promise to return to earth visibly and bodily for the purpose of consummating history.

SOME PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

We are Christians (not merely "Godians") because our message is about Christ--His work, His divinity, and our need to follow Him; any message that does not center on Christ, including His full humanity and divinity as well as His forgiveness for all sin, is not the Gospel.

Because our salvation was secured by a perfect sacrifice of a perfect person, we live knowing that we are totally and unconditionally forgiven from sin now, rather than hoping we will be forgiven at some future point; we are secure in the grace of God through Christ.

Knowing that Jesus will return some day, we hold on loosely to the things of this world, counting on the new heavens and earth to be our permanent home.

The Christian Life (The Holy Spirit)

THE ESSENTIAL ACCOMPANIMENT of a genuine saving relationship with Jesus Christ is a life of holiness and obedience, attained by believers as they submit to the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Trinity. He was sent into the world by the Father and the Son to apply to mankind the saving work of Christ. He enlightens the minds of sinners, awakens in them a recognition of their need of a Savior and regenerates them. At the point of salvation He permanently indwells every believer to become the source of assurance, strength and wisdom, and uniquely endows each believer with gifts for the upbuilding of the body. The Holy Spirit guides believers in understanding and applying the Scripture. His power and control are appropriated by faith, making it possible for the believer to lead a life of Christlike character and to bear fruit to the glory of the Father. (Matthew 28:19; Genesis 1:1-3; Hebrews 9:14; John 3:5-6; Mark 1:8; Romans 1:1-4; John 16:8-11; John 14:16-17; Ephesians 1:13-14; 1 Corinthians 12:4-6; John 14:26; Acts 5:30-32; Galatians 5:16-26.)

COMMENTS

The Holy Spirit is God, not just a force. Scripture describes Him with personal pronouns and reveals He has personal attributes. He works "behind the scenes" to prepare people to hear the Gospel and then applies the merits of Christ to them at the point of regeneration. Jesus promised the Spirit's presence to all His followers, assuring us He would actually indwell us in a permanent union. His ministry in us includes: helping us understanding the Bible, making us aware of things we do that don't please God, assuring us we are God's children, empowering us for witness, gifting us to uniquely serve others in the church, helping our prayer life through interceding for us, and producing in us the kind of character that makes us credible, persuasive representatives of Jesus Christ.

SOME PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

As saved people, we are continually striving to be more like the One who saved us; we are not content just to be forgiven; we want to exemplify Christlike behavior in every area of life--we will never give up the fight to resist sin and be like Him in word and deed.

The Christian life is more than just "being good"--we need the Holy Spirit to bear His fruit in us; therefore, our daily lives must be yielded to the Spirit in a moment-by-moment surrender or our self-improvement efforts will be useless.

When we share Christ with others, the message we present is effectual not because of our superior reasoning or irresistible presentation, but because of the Spirit being free to work through us and in the heart of the person we're talking to; therefore, we depend ultimately on His invisible activity through our limited understanding of what will reach the person.

Because the Spirit is resident in us, we will listen for His promptings, anticipating He wants to direct us and will do so if we are open to Him.

Salvation

THE CENTRAL PURPOSE OF GOD 'S REVELATION in Scripture is to call all people into fellowship with Himself. Originally created to have fellowship with God, man defied God, choosing to go

his independent way, and thus was alienated from God and suffered the corruption of his nature, rendering him unable to please God. The fall took place at the beginning of human history, and all individuals since have suffered these consequences and are thus in need of the saving grace of God.

The salvation of mankind is, then, wholly a work of God's free grace, not the result, in whole or in part of human works or goodness, and must be personally appropriated by repentance and faith. When God has begun a saving work in the heart of any person, He gives assurance in His Word that He will continue performing it until the day of its full consummation. (Jonah 2:9; Eph. 2:8; Acts 15:11; Rom.3:23-25; John 3:16; Matt. 18:11; Phil. 2:7-8)

COMMENTS

The common myth that humankind is basically good is not supported by the Bible. We were originally created good, but the first man and woman rebuffed God's rightful place in their lives, so we are all now infected with the disease called "sin" and are spiritually separated from God. This condition is without remedy through any human effort. If God had left us to ourselves, all of us would continue in disobedience and rejection of Him. The good news is that He has provided a way out of our dilemma through the death of Jesus Christ, which paid the penalty for our sins. Those who personally appropriate the forgiveness that God offers will be restored to a right relationship with Him. This new life is a gift; it cannot be earned by our activities nor revoked by our failures--what God begins, He finishes. We live with the undeserved promise that the change He's begun in His followers is only the beginning of a total transformation that culminates when we are taken into His very presence to live forever.

SOME PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

Our message to seekers contains the call to turn from fruitless attempts to earn God's favor and to cast themselves without reservation on the perfect and reliable provision of God in Christ.

We live secure in the knowledge that the Christian life we live is a "thank you" to God for the salvation He has fully and completely provided; we neither think our obedience "enhances" His provision for us (as if we could add something to the death of Christ) or treat His grace in a cavalier way (as an excuse to live sinfully).

Knowing we are all sinful, we will never naively assume we're immune to temptation or evil; though confident of being rescued from the penalty of sin, we prudently conduct our lives mindful of sin's ongoing potential to misdirect us.

The Church

THE COROLLARY OF UNION with Jesus Christ is that all believers become members of His body, the Church. There is one true Church universal, comprised of all those who acknowledge Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. The Scripture commands believers to gather together to devote themselves to worship, prayer, the teaching of the Word, the observance of baptism and Communion as the ordinances established by Jesus Christ, fellowship, service to the body through the development and use of talents and gifts, and outreach to the world. (Romans 12:4-5; Ephesians 1:22-23; 2:11-22; 1 Corinthians 12:12-13; Acts 2:41-47; Hebrews 10:24-25; Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-5; Matthew 28:19-20.)

Wherever God's people meet regularly in obedience to this command, there is the local

expression of the church. Under the watch care of elders and other supportive leadership, its members are to work together in love and unity, intent on the one ultimate purpose of glorifying Christ.

COMMENTS

The Church is first and foremost an organism, not an organization. It is the living body of Christ, made up of all people everywhere who are His followers. It is not defined by the limits of any particular denomination but includes all true believers. The local expression of this body is found wherever His children gather in His name. Scripture describes some of the activities of a church, but it is Christ in our midst that makes us His church, not anything we do.

SOME PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

Non-Christians can belong to an organization, but making us members of the Church is something Christ does; our participating membership system recognizes this invisible work of Christ as distinct from the flexible, human-controlled membership in a local fellowship.

We are a nondenominational church with a Baptist heritage, emphasizing that all true believers are one with Christ and each other, regardless of denominational background.

Every gathering of believers is a gathering of the Church; every Missional Community is in fact the Church meeting together in its smallest unit.

Missional Community leaders function as shepherds of their "flock"; all leaders are connected to one another through the Missional Community infrastructure, and ultimately, the elders can provide watch care, through those leaders, for the entire church.

All believers must have opportunities to learn about and develop their spiritual gifts; we structure our ministry to implement this value so that everyone can participate in some aspect of the church based on their passion and giftedness.

Disunity hurts the body of Christ and His cause. We guard our unity and diligently seek to honestly confront and work through differences in God-honoring ways that both respect the individual (made in God's image) and preserve the oneness in Christ we need to manifest.

Eternal Destiny

EACH NEW GENERATION OF BELIEVERS has been given the biblical expectation of the imminent return of the resurrected Christ to receive them to Himself at the rapture of the Church; thus avoiding the Great Tribulation that God will bring upon the earth; and afterwards of participating in the millennial reign of Christ upon the earth. (1 Thess.4:13-18; 2 Thess.1:7-10; Rev. 3:10; 6-19; 20:7-9)

DEATH SEALS THE ETERNAL DESTINY of each person. For all mankind, there will be a resurrection of the body into the spiritual world and a judgment that will determine the fate of each individual. Unbelievers will be separated from God into condemnation. God's judgment will reveal His justice in consigning them to eternal separation from Himself and eternal retribution for their own rejection of God. Believers will be received into eternal communion with God and will be rewarded for works done in this life. (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Hebrews 9:27; 1 Corinthians

15:38-57; 2 Corinthians 4:13-15; Hebrews 4:13; Romans 5:12-21; Revelations 20:11-15; John 6:47-51; Matthew 16:27.)

THE DESTINY OF THE DEVIL, Satan, is also finalized at the resurrection of the dead. The Devil is a real person and was created by God as an angel, but motivated by his own pride rebelled against God and became God's enemy. Down through the ages of time Satan has opposed the work of God as the unholy god of this age and the ruler of all the fallen, wicked angels who chose to follow him in his rebellion against God's authority. At God's final White Throne Judgment Satan along with all his army of fallen wicked angels will be condemned to a judgment of eternal justice in the lake of fire. (Ezekiel 28:11-19; Isaiah 14:12-15; Matthew 4:1-11; 2 Corinthians 4:4; John 8:44; 1 Peter 5:8; Ephesians 6:11; Revelation 20:10)

COMMENTS

There are no "second chances" after we die. Our relationship to God for eternity is set by how we respond to Him in this life. God has not only saved our souls, but (as He did for Jesus) God is going to resurrect our bodies in a form that will be suited to the environment of the eternal life we will inherit. The only hope for spending eternity with God will be to claim the merits of Christ. Any attempt to hold out one's good deeds as sufficient for God's approval will discover that those behaviors weren't enough, and that one's misconduct was far more serious than anticipated (now that it's brought into the searing light of a holy God). Because we are made in God's image and have the mark of His handiwork on us, He does not destroy us after we die—He is the God of the living, "for all live to Him," said Jesus. Rather, He fixes our eternal condition based on our life preferences: heaven and hell are simply the fulfillment of our spiritual aspirations as manifested in life. If we welcomed His presence and cooperated with Him in our earthly life, He is pleased to continue that relationship for all eternity. If on the other hand we looked for ways to avoid Him and sought to live in behavior He condemned, He will allow us to continue unbothered by His presence and commands forever. Hell is God's provision for those who have longed for Him to stop interfering with their plans and who wish He would leave them alone. There, they will be "protected from God" forever, while those in heaven, whose highest delight in life was God, will be able to enjoy forever the One who gave them pleasure.

SOME PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

We reject the teaching of reincarnation--we must make good choices with the one life we have and urge others not to count on some later incarnation to work out their problems.

Knowing that our eternity is infinitely longer and more significant than our 70 or so years on earth, we order our lives here so that they take into account this eternal perspective; we choose our activities and priorities based on God's pleasure, recognizing that His approval supersedes every other consideration.

The message of the Gospel brings life to those who would perish eternally without Christ; we therefore seek to present His saving message publicly and privately as often as we can being sensitive to our listeners' needs as well as communicating naturally through our own evangelistic "style").

As we relate to people throughout life, we see them as the "eternal beings" that they are and accord them due respect; we have never related to an "average" person--everyone matters to God and deserves to be treated lovingly.

Faith and Practice

THE BIBLE IS THE FINAL AUTHORITY in all matters of faith and practice. This church recognizes that it cannot bind the conscience of individual members in areas where the Bible is silent. Rather, each believer is to be led in those areas by the Lord, to whom he or she alone is ultimately responsible. (Psalms 119:105, 160; Philippians 2:12-18; 2 Timothy 1:13; 8:16-17.)

COMMENTS

We believe what we have said in this Statement of Faith is not teaching of our own design, but an accurate reflection of the Bible's main themes, true for all people at all times in every place. This final statement simply asks that everyone in our fellowship agree that, even if they have differing opinions, there be no divisiveness.

SOME PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

No person ever has the right to dictate the beliefs of another person; we submit to God's authority through His Word--it stands over and judges all of us, including our leaders.

We do not take stands on controversial issues about which the Bible is silent; individuals are left to their own conscience before the Lord rather than depending on the church to tell them what to think or do.

We are free to express our own opinions among our brothers and sisters, but we don't want to ever harm the church by gathering a following around ourselves (or an interpretation of a controversial issue) to create a splinter group.

We value the well-being of Christ's body above our desire for self-expression; though no authority has a right to police our thoughts, we agree not to speak with unwarranted conviction when our opinions pertain to non-biblical matters or when our views differ from this Doctrinal Statement.