



Statement of Faith and Governance

The Bible

We believe that God has clearly revealed His goodness, wisdom, eternal power and deity to all men in the light of nature and in the works of creation and providence.¹ Although man clearly perceives this revelation, he refuses to acknowledge or give thanks to God, preferring to worship the creature rather than the Creator, thus leaving him without excuse.² Because this revelation in nature is insufficient to give man a full knowledge of the will of God and of the way to salvation, it has pleased God to reveal himself in a special way through all things necessary for salvation, faith and practice that are contained within the Holy Scriptures.³ Nothing may be added or taken away from this revelation either by a new revelation of the Spirit or by the tradition of men.⁴

The Holy Scriptures consist of the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments. We are bound to read, search and interpret the Holy Scriptures⁵ under the guidance and inward illumination of the Holy Spirit,⁶ so that our faith may rest on the testimony of the Holy Scriptures and not on that of tradition or the Church.⁷ The infallible rule of interpreting the Holy Scriptures is Scripture itself. The Holy Scriptures are the full and final authority in all matters of faith and practice.

¹ Job 5:10; Ps. 19:1-6; 65:10; 74:16; Isa. 40:21; Acts 17:27; Rom. 1:19-21

² Rom. 1:20-24; Eph. 4:17-19; 1 Pet. 4:3

³ Luke 10:26; 12:32; 6:19; John 5:39; Rom. 4:3; 2 Tim. 3:16-17

⁴ Deut. 4:2; Prov. 30:6; Matt. 15:7-9; Mark 7:5-8; Gal. 1:6-9; Rev. 22:18-19

⁵ John 5:39; Acts 17:11; 2 Tim. 3:15,17

⁶ Luke 24:47-49; John 20:23; Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 3:16-17; 1 John 2:20,27

⁷ Matt. 15:3,6; Mark 7:7

God

The Holy Scriptures teach that there is one true God⁸ who is indivisible, immutable,⁹ infinite, perfect,¹⁰ immense,¹¹ almighty,¹² eternal,¹³ absolute¹⁴ and self-existent.¹⁵ He is a pure-Spirit,¹⁶ all-knowing,¹⁷ wise,¹⁸ holy,¹⁹ and truthful.²⁰ He is good,²¹ loving,²² gracious,²³ merciful,²⁴ faithful,²⁵ and long-suffering.²⁶ This God works all things according to His divine counsel and free will.²⁷ He is just in His judgments, hates all sin,²⁸ forgives iniquity and rewards those who seek Him.

⁸ Ex. 20:2-3; Deut. 6:4; 1 Kings 8:60; Isa. 45:5,21; Mark 12:29,32; 1 Cor. 8:4; Eph. 4:6

⁹ Ex. 3:14; Ps. 102:26-28; Isa. 41:4; 48:12; Mal. 3:6; Rom. 1:23; Heb. 1:11-12; Jas. 1:17

¹⁰ Job 11:7-10; Ps. 145:3; Matt. 5:48

¹¹ 1 Kings 8:27; Isa. 66:1; Ps. 139:7-10; Jer. 23:23-24; Acts 7:48-49; 17:27-28

¹² Job 9:12; Ps. 115:3; Jer. 32:17; Isa. 44:24; Matt. 19:26; Luke 1:37; Rom. 1:16-20; 4:17; 1 Cor. 1:24; Eph. 1:19; Heb. 1:3

¹³ Ps. 90:2; 102:12; Eph. 3:21

¹⁴ Gen. 14:19; Ex. 18:11; Deut. 10:14-17; Neh. 9:6; 1 Chron. 29:11-12; 2 Chron. 20:6; Jer. 27:5; Ps. 22:28; 47:2,3,7,8; 50:10-12; 95:3-5; 115:3; 135:5-6; Ps. 145:11-13; Luke 1:37; Rom. 1:16-20; 4:17; 1 Cor. 1:24; Eph. 1:19; Heb. 1:3

¹⁵ Ps. 33:11; 115:3; Isa. 40:18; Dan. 4:35; Acts 7:25; Rom. 9:19; 11:33-34; Eph. 1:5; Rev. 4:11

¹⁶ John 4:24; 1 Tim. 1:17; 6:15-16

¹⁷ Deut. 2:7; 1 Sam. 2:3; 16:7; 23:10-13; Ez. 3:6; 1 Chron. 28:9,17; Ps. 1:6; 33:13; 81:14-15; 94:9; 139:1-4; 147:4; Isa. 29:15; 40:27-28; 42:9; 48:18; Job 12:13; 23:10; Jer. 2:2-3; 17:10; 2 Kings 13:19; Matt. 11:21

¹⁸ Ps. 19:1-7; 33:10-11; Prov. 8; Rom. 8:23; 11:33; 1 Cor. 1:18-5; 2:7; Eph. 1:11-12; 3:10

¹⁹ Ex. 15:11; 1 Sam. 2:2; Isa. 57:15; Hos. 11:9; John 17:1; 1 Pet. 1:16; Rev. 4:8; 6:10

²⁰ Ex. 34:6; Num. 23:19; Deut. 32:4; Ps. 25:10; 31:6; Isa. 65:16; Jer. 10:8, 10-11; John 14:6; 17:3; Tit. 1:2; Heb. 6:18; 1 John 5:20-21

²¹ Ps. 36:6; 104:21; Matt. 5:45; 6:26; Luke 6:35; Acts 14:17

²² Matt. 5:44-45; John 3:16; 16:27; Rom. 5:8; 1 John 3:1

²³ Acts 14:3; Rom. 3:24; 2 Cor. 8:9; Eph. 1:6-7; 2:7-9; Tit. 2:11; 3:4-7

²⁴ Deut. 5:10; Ps. 57:10; 86:5; 1 Tim. 1:1; Tit. 1:4

²⁵ Num. 23:19; Deut. 7:9; Ps. 89:33; 1 Cor. 1:9; 2 Tim. 2:13; Heb. 6:17-18; 10:23

²⁶ Ex. 34:6; Ps. 86:15; Rom. 2:4; 9:22; 1 Pet. 3:20; 2 Pet. 3:15

²⁷ Job 11:10; 33:13; Ps. 115:3; Prov. 21:1; Isa. 10:15; 29:16; 45:9; Matt. 20:15; Rom. 9:15-18, 20-21; 1 Cor. 12:11; Rev. 4:11

²⁸ Deut. 25:16; Ps. 5:4; 11:5; Zach. 8:17; Luke 16:15

The Trinity

In the unity of the Godhead²⁹ there are eternally three Persons,³⁰ of one substance, inseparable and without confusion, distinguished as the Father,³¹ Son³² and Holy Spirit.³³ The undivided essence of the Godhead belongs equally to each of the three Persons although their operation in the divine Being is marked by a certain definite order. The Father is neither begotten nor proceeds from any other person, the Son is eternally begotten of the Father,³⁴ and the Holy Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father and the Son.³⁵ The Trinity can be understood in some of its manifestations, but in its essential nature it transcends the understanding of the human mind and remains a mystery.

The Works of God

We believe that God from all eternity has sovereignly determined whatever will come to pass, and works His sovereign will in His entire creation, both natural and spiritual, according to His predestined plan.³⁶ In the plan God has freely and graciously chosen the Saints whom He wills to save in the Lord Jesus Christ.³⁷ He has done this without respect for the faith, good works or perseverance of men, but solely on the basis of His most wise and holy counsel. By this eternal decree some are called to everlasting life.³⁸ As God has appointed the believers, so has He foreordained all the means by which they are saved and kept in Christ.³⁹ All this has been done to the praise and glory of His most precious Name.⁴⁰

²⁹ John 1:1,3,15,30; 6:62; 8:58; 17:5; 2 Cor. 8:9; Col. 1:15-18

³⁰ Matt. 28:19; John 15:26; 1 John 5:7

³¹ John 1:14,18; 5:17-26; 8:54; 14:12-13

³² Matt. 8:29; 26:63; 27:40; John 1:14,18,49; 3:16-18; John 11:27; Gal. 4:4; 1 John 4:9

³³ Ps. 51:11; Isa. 63:10-11; John 14:26; 16:7-11; Rom. 8:26

³⁴ Ps. 2:7; John 1:14,18; 3:16,18; Heb. 11:17; 1 John 4:9

³⁵ John 15:26; Rom. 8:9; Gal. 4:6

³⁶ Ps. 33:11; 104:24; Prov. 3:19; Jer. 10:12; 51:15; Isa. 40:6; Job 23:13-14; Acts 2:23; 4:28

³⁷ Rom. 8:29; 9:11; 11:5; Eph. 1:4,9-11; 3:10; 2 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 1:9; 1 Pet. 1:20; 2:4

³⁸ Acts 4:28; Rom. 8:29-30; 9:11-13; Eph. 1:4,5,11; 1 Tim. 5:21

³⁹ Matt. 11:28; 18:14; John 3:16

⁴⁰ Matt. 20:14-15; Rom. 9:14-15

Creation

We believe that it pleased God the Father, Son⁴¹ and Holy Spirit⁴² to create, out of nothing,⁴³ the world and all things visible or invisible.⁴⁴ After God had created the world and all creatures, He created man,⁴⁵ male and female, in body and soul,⁴⁶ with knowledge, free will, righteousness and holiness, after His own image.⁴⁷ All this was good to God,⁴⁸ who directs, upholds, and governs all His creation by His wise and holy providence.⁴⁹ The end of all creation is to glorify God.⁵⁰

The Fall of Humanity

We believe our first parents, being seduced by Satan, sinned in eating the forbidden fruit. God permitted this sin although He is neither the author of sin nor approves of it,⁵¹ having purposed to order it to His own glory. By this sin they fell from their original state of righteousness and communion with God,⁵² became dead in sin,⁵³ and were defiled in all parts of the body and soul.⁵⁴ The guilt, death and natural corruption of this sin was imputed and conveyed to all their posterity, descending from them by ordinary generation.⁵⁵ From this original corruption, all people are totally inclined to all evil and do actually transgress against God. Every sin, both original and actual, brings guilt upon the sinner, the wrath and punishment of God,⁵⁶ death, misery and all the curses of the Law. The sinner has lost all ability to will any spiritual good accompanying salvation and is not able, by his own strength to convert himself.

⁴¹ John 1:3; 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:15-17

⁴² Gen. 1:2; Job 26:13; Ps. 104:30; Isa. 40:12-13

⁴³ Gen. 1:1; Ps. 33:6,9; 148:5; Rom. 4:7

⁴⁴ Gen. 1:1; Ps. 33:6; Isa. 42:5; 45:18; Neh. 9:6; 1 Cor. 1:16; Rev. 4:11; 10:6

⁴⁵ Gen. 1:26-27; 2:7, 21-23

⁴⁶ Gen. 2:7; Ecc. 12:7; Matt. 10:28; Luke 8:55; 2 Cor. 5:1-8; Phil. 1:22-24; Heb. 12:9

⁴⁷ Gen. 2; Ps. 8

⁴⁸ Gen. 1:31

⁴⁹ Rom. 11:36; Acts 17:28; Eph. 4:6

⁵⁰ Isa. 43:7; 60:21; 61:3; Ezek. 36:21-22; Luke 2:14; Rom. 9:17; 11:36; Col. 1:16; 1 Cor. 15:28;

Eph. 1:5-6, 9, 12, 14; 3:9-10

⁵¹ Job 34:10; Jas. 1:13

⁵² Eph. 2:1, 5, 12; 4:18

⁵³ Gen. 3:19; Rom. 5:12; 6:23

⁵⁴ Gen. 6:5; Ps. 14:3; John 5:42; Rom. 7:18, 23; 8:7; Eph. 4:18

⁵⁵ 1 Kings 8:46; Ps. 143:2; Prov. 20:9; Eccl. 7:20; Rom. 3:1-12, 19-20, 23; 5:18-19; Gal. 3:22;

1 John 1:8-10; Jas. 3:2

⁵⁶ Gen. 6:5; Ps. 14:3; John 5:42; Rom. 7:18, 23; 8:7; Eph. 4:18

Salvation

The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works in which life was promised to Adam and his posterity⁵⁷ upon the condition of perfect and personal obedience. Because man by his fall had made himself incapable of life by that covenant, it pleased God to make a second covenant, a covenant of grace, in which He freely offered sinners life and salvation by the Lord Jesus Christ.⁵⁸ We believe that God in His eternal purpose⁵⁹ and according to His divine promise⁶⁰ chose and ordained the Lord Jesus Christ to be the only Mediator between God and man. When the fullness of time had come, this Son of God took upon Himself human nature, without original sin, being conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary⁶¹ so that the whole, perfect and distinct natures of the Godhead and manhead were inseparably joined together in one person, without confusion, change, division, or separation.⁶² In this way, the Word became flesh, the two natures existing in one person, being fully human and fully divine, the only Mediator between God and man. The Lord Jesus Christ was sanctified and anointed by the Holy Spirit. Full of grace and truth, He submitted Himself to all the demands of the Law and did perfectly fulfill it.⁶³ He suffered under temptation,⁶⁴ having become a curse for us,⁶⁵ was crucified, died, and was buried. On the third day He arose from the dead, with the same body in which He suffered.⁶⁶

He later ascended into heaven⁶⁷ and now sits at the right hand of the Father⁶⁸ making intercession for the elect.⁶⁹ By the perfect obedience of His life and the perfect sacrifice of His death,⁷⁰ He has fully satisfied the justice of God⁷¹ reconciling God to man.⁷²

⁵⁷ Gen. 3:12-13; Lev. 18:5; Ezek. 20:11, 13, 20; Luke 10:28; Rom. 7:10, 10:5

⁵⁸ Ps. 89:3; Isa. 42:6; Luke 22:9; John 6:38-39; John 10:18; 17:4; Eph. 1:4; 3:11; 2 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 1:9; Jas. 2:5; 1 Pet. 1:2

⁵⁹ Gen. 17-1-9; 2 Sam. 23:5; Ps. 89:3; Isa. 42:6; Eph. 1:4; 3:11; 2 Thess. 2:3; 2 Tim. 1:9; Jas. 2:5; 1 Pet. 1:2; Heb. 13:20

⁶⁰ Gen. 17:7; Jer. 31:33; 32:38-40; Ezek. 34:23-25, 30-31; 36:25-28; 37:26-27; 2 Cor. 6:16-18; Heb. 8:10

⁶¹ Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:18-20; Luke 1:34-35

⁶² John 1:14; Rom. 1:3-4; 8:3; Gal. 4:4-5; Phil. 2:6-11; 1 Tim. 3:16; Heb. 2:11-14; 1 John 4:2-3

⁶³ Rom. 8:3-4

⁶⁴ Matt. 4:1-11; Luke 22:28; John 12:27; Heb. 4:15; 5:7-8

⁶⁵ Deut. 21:23; Gal. 3:13

⁶⁶ Luke 24:39

⁶⁷ Luke 24:50-53; Acts 1:6-11; Eph. 1:20; 4:8-10; 1 Tim. 3:16; Heb. 1:3; 4:14; 9:24

⁶⁸ Matt. 26:64; Mark 16:19; Luke 24:26; John 7:39; Acts 2:23, 33-36; 5:31; Rom. 8:17, 34; Eph. 1:20; 4:10; 1 Pet. 3:22; 1 Tim. 3:16; Heb. 1:3; 2:9; 10:12; Rev. 3:21; 22:1

⁶⁹ John 17:9, 20

⁷⁰ Matt. 26:28; 1 Cor. 5:7; Eph. 5:2; 1 Pet. 1:18-19; Heb. 7:27; 9:14, 26; 10:12

⁷¹ Rom. 3:25; Heb. 2:17; 1 John 2:2; 4:10

⁷² Rom. 5:10-11; 11:15; 2 Cor. 5:18-21

Salvation (Continued)

He has purchased redemption,⁷³ gained final victory over all enemies,⁷⁴ and guaranteed inheritance in heaven⁷⁵ for all those whom the Father has given Him,⁷⁶ in all ages, from the beginning of the world.⁷⁷ For this reason, there is no satisfaction for God's justice and wrath but Christ alone.

We believe that all those whom God has called to life, and those only, He has effectually called to grace and salvation by the Lord Jesus Christ.⁷⁸ God has done this by His external call, made to all men⁷⁹ through the Church, and by His internal call, made to the believer, by which He changes the inner disposition of the soul, illuminates the intellect and arouses the emotion, enabling the believer to hear His call.⁸⁰

All this is done by a work of the Holy Spirit.⁸¹ Thus, man who comes freely and passively is effectually drawn to Jesus Christ. Man is made willing by His grace and becomes a new creation altogether, being made alive by a work of God without any aid or cooperation on the part of man. God then actively causes the regenerate sinner, in his conscious life, to turn to Him in repentance and faith, whereby the regenerate sinner repents in faith, puts away the old life, flees from sin, and strives for holiness of life.⁸² Infants dying in infancy and other persons who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word are regenerated and saved by the Lord Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit who works when and where He pleases.

⁷³ Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45; Acts 20:28; Rom. 3:24; 1 Cor. 1:30; 6:20; 7:23; Eph. 1:7; 1 Tim. 2:6; 1 Pet. 1:18-19; Tit. 2:14; Heb. 3:12-15; Rev. 5:9; 14:3-4

⁷⁴ Matt. 6:13; 1 Cor. 15:54,57; Col. 1:4; 2:15; Gal. 1:4; Heb. 2:10, 14-15

⁷⁵ Rom. 8:12-25; Gal. 4:7

⁷⁶ John 10:11,15; Acts 20:28; Rom. 8:32-35; Eph. 5:25-27

⁷⁷ Ps. 32:5; 51:1-3, 9-11; 103:3, 12; Isa. 43:22; Rom. 3:3; 6:16; Gal. 3:6-9

⁷⁸ 1 Cor. 1:9; 1 Thess. 2:12; 1 Pet. 5:10

⁷⁹ Ps. 81:11-13; Prov. 1:24-26; Ezek. 3:19; 33:11; Matt. 22:2-8, 14; Mark 1:15; 16:15-16; Luke 14:16-24; John 6:29; 2 Cor. 5:20

⁸⁰ In the intellect, 1 Cor. 2:14-15; 12 Cor. 4:6; Eph. 1:18; Col. 3:10

In the will, Ps. 110:3; Phil. 2:13; 2 Thess. 3:5; Heb. 13:21

In the emotions, Ps 42:1-2; Matt. 5:4; 1 Pet. 1:8

⁸¹ 1 Cor. 1:23-24; 1 Pet. 2:9

⁸² 2 Kings 5:15; 2 Chron. 33:12-13; Luke 19:8-9; John 4:29, 39; 9:38; Acts 8:30; 9:5; 10:44; 16:14

Justification

We believe that those whom God in His mercy effectually calls, regenerates, and converts, He also freely justifies. This justification is not by good works, imputed faith, or infused righteousness on the part of the believer, but solely by faith alone in Jesus Christ.⁸³ God has decreed from all eternity that Christ by His obedience and death would pay the debt of all those that are justified and did make a proper, real, and full satisfaction to the Father on their behalf. Justification takes place once and for all in the life of the believer⁸⁴ at the time when God declares the sinner not guilty under the curse and bondage of the Law, removes all guilt and every penalty, and forgives all sin, past, present, and future⁸⁵ on the basis of the work and merit of the Lord Jesus Christ. The sinner then receives peace with God,⁸⁶ assurance of salvation and the full inheritance among them that are justified.⁸⁷ The justified are not without sin but remain both saint and sinner before the heavenly throne of God, being clothed in the righteousness of Christ, which removes all guilt and pays all debts. Faith alone is the sole means of receiving justification and saving work of Jesus Christ. Yet faith that remains alone is not true faith.⁸⁸ True and genuine faith always produces good works. These good works are not the grounds for justification, but the fruit, which flows from it, and are the sign of all God's elect. The justification of the elect in the Old Testament is the same in every respect with that of the believers in the New Testament.⁸⁹

⁸³ Rom. 3:24-25, 28, 30; 5:1, 9, 19; 10:4; 1 Cor. 1:30; 6:11; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 2:16; 3:11

⁸⁴ Isa. 44:22; Rom. 3:24; 5:21; 8:1, 32, 34; Heb. 10:14

⁸⁵ Ps. 103:12; Isa. 44:22; Rom. 5:21; 8:1, 32, 34; Heb. 10:14

⁸⁶ Rom. 5:10

⁸⁷ John 1:12; Acts 26:18; Rom. 8:15-17; Gal. 3:14, 26-27; Gal. 4:5-6

⁸⁸ Jas. 2:14-26

⁸⁹ Rom. 4:3, 9, 22; Gal. 3:6

Sanctification

Those who are justified, being declared “not guilty” and having a new heart and a new spirit are further sanctified by the Word and Spirit dwelling with them.⁹⁰ Sanctification is a gracious and continuous operation of the Holy Spirit⁹¹ by which He delivers the justified sinner from the pollution of sin,⁹² renews his whole nature⁹³ in the image of God⁹⁴ and enables him to do good works.

The justified sinner who is yet imperfect in his life⁹⁵ actively seeks to express his true faith in genuine good works,⁹⁶ confession of sin,⁹⁷ a seeking after righteousness and a reliance upon the Word, Spirit, and Sacraments. He is constantly aware of the struggle within him between the flesh and spirit.⁹⁸ Yet his trust is in the ultimate and final victory, which Christ has won for him over sin and death. Whereas justification is once and for all, sanctification is a process, which lasts throughout the lifetime of the believer.⁹⁹

The good works of sanctification are only such as God has commanded in His Holy Word, done in obedience to His ordinances and commandments,¹⁰⁰ as the fruit and evidence¹⁰¹ of a true and genuine faith, not for the welfare of man but for the glory of God.¹⁰² The ability to do such good works rests entirely on the work of the Holy Spirit¹⁰³ and no one can pride himself with either attaining perfection or having the ability within himself to pursue such an end.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁰ 1 Pet. 1:22, 2:2; 2 Pet. 1:4

⁹¹ Rom. 8:11, 15:16; 1 Pet. 1:2

⁹² Rom. 6:6; Gal. 5:24

⁹³ Jer. 31:34; Ezek. 36:25-27; John 6:45; Rom. 6:12; 1 Cor. 6:15, 20; 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 5:24; 1 Thess. 5:23; Phil. 2:13; Tit. 1:15; Heb. 9:14

⁹⁴ Rom. 6:4, 5, 11; Gal. 2:19; Col. 2:12; 3:1-2

⁹⁵ 1 Kings 8:46; Prov. 20:9; Eccl. 7:20; Jas. 3:2; 1 John 1:8

⁹⁶ John 15:5; Rom. 7:4; 8:12-13; 2 Cor. 7:1; Col. 3:5-14; 1 Pet. 1:22; 2 Pet. 1:5-10; Gal. 6:2; Jas. 2:14, 17, 20-22

⁹⁷ 1 John 1:9

⁹⁸ Rom. 7:7-26; Gal. 5:16-24; Phil. 3:10-14

⁹⁹ 1 Kings 8:46; Prov. 20:9; Rom. 3:10-12; Phil. 3:21; Heb. 12:23; Jas. 3:2; 1 John 1:8; Rev. 14:5; 21:27

¹⁰⁰ Deut. 6:2; Isa. 1; 29:13; Matt. 15:9

¹⁰¹ Matt. 7:17-18; 12:33

¹⁰² Rom. 12:1; 1 Cor. 10:31; Col. 3:17, 23

¹⁰³ 1 Cor. 5:10; Phil. 2:13

¹⁰⁴ 1 Kings 8:46; Prov. 20:9; Eccl. 7:20; Rom. 3:10; Jas. 3:2; 1 John 1:8

Sanctification (Continued)

Those who are effectually called, justified and sanctified can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace, but shall persevere to the end and be eternally saved through the continuous operation of the Holy Spirit, by which the works of divine grace that are begun in the heart are continued and brought to completion.¹⁰⁵ This perseverance depends entirely upon the work of God and not upon any power, ability or good works on the part of the believer. For this reason, the justified, who truly love Christ and walk after Him, may in this life be certainly assured that they are in a state of grace¹⁰⁶ and may hope in their future inheritance.

All this being so, we believe that the wrath of God no longer condemns the sinner and condemnation is no longer present before them.¹⁰⁷ They have been freed from the vicious cycle of sin and been truly forgiven of sin, and have been adopted by God.¹⁰⁸ They share in the glory of Christ,¹⁰⁹ being assured of salvation, comforted in their trials, delivered from the hand of enemies, released from the sting of death, and freed from the bondage of sin. They love God, not out of a slavish fear but in a childlike obedience, in all holiness, righteousness and grace. For if God be for them, who can be against them.¹¹⁰ Their heart has been bound to the Word of God and no one shall be Lord of their conscience but God alone who has revealed His will in the Holy Scriptures. Thus, the believer is free at last and may rejoice in the hope of His glorious future. For He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all, will He not also freely give us all things with Him.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁵ John 10:27-29; Rom. 11:29; Phil. 1:6; 2 Thess. 2:3; 2 Tim. 1:12; 4:8

¹⁰⁶ Heb. 3:14; 6:11; 10:22; 2 Pet. 1:10; Rom. 5:10

¹⁰⁷ Rom. 5:10

¹⁰⁸ Luke 24:27; Acts 3:19; 2:28; 10:43; 13:38; Rom. 3:22; Heb. 2:10

¹⁰⁹ John 3:2; Rom. 8:17, 23

¹¹⁰ Ps. 118:6; Rom. 4:1; 8:31

¹¹¹ John 3:16; Rom. 4:5; 5:8; 8:32

The Church

We believe in the universal Church of which the Lord Jesus Christ is the only head.¹¹² The universal Church is both a visible and invisible Church. The visible Church consists of all those throughout the world who profess the true religion.¹¹³ The invisible Church consists of the whole number of believers who have been or shall be gathered under Christ.¹¹⁴ Christ has given to the universal, visible Church all the ministry, oracles and ordinances of God necessary for the gathering and perfecting of the elect, the preaching of the Word,¹¹⁵ the administration of the sacraments,¹¹⁶ and the exercise of discipline.¹¹⁷ All this is made effectual by the presence and Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Sacraments

All believers are united with the Lord Jesus Christ by His Spirit and by faith, and have communion with one another, sharing their gifts and graces. The sacraments, of which only two are ordained by Christ in the Gospel, baptism¹¹⁸ and the Lord's Supper,¹¹⁹ are the signs and seals¹²⁰ of the covenant of grace, immediately given by God, to represent Christ and his benefits.¹²¹

¹¹² Matt. 16:18-19; 23:8-10; John 5:1-8; 13:13; 1 Cor. 12:5; Eph. 1:10, 20-23; 2:20-22; 4:15; 5:30; Col. 1:18; 2:19; 3:11

¹¹³ 1 Cor. 10:32; 11:22; 12:28; Eph. 4:11-16

¹¹⁴ Eph. 1:22; 3:10, 21; 5:23-25, 27, 32; Col. 1:18, 24

¹¹⁵ John 8:31-32, 47; 14:23; 1 John 4:1-3; 2 John 1:9

¹¹⁶ Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:42; 1 Cor. 11:23-30

¹¹⁷ Matt. 18:18; 1 Cor. 5:1-5, 13; 14:33, 40; Rev. 2:14-15, 20

¹¹⁸ Matt. 28:19,20; Eph. 5:25-26; 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:27

¹¹⁹ Matt. 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:17-20; 1 Cor. 10:16-17, 21; 11:20-30

¹²⁰ Acts 22:16; Rom. 4:11; Eph 1:12-13

¹²¹ Matt. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 22:17-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-29

What is a Sacrament?

A Sacrament is a holy ordinance instituted by Christ in which, by visible signs, the grace of God in Christ and the benefits of the covenant of grace are represented, sealed and applied to believers, and these, in turn, give expression to their faith and allegiance to God.

Word and Sacrament

The Word of God is complete as a means of grace, but the sacraments are not complete without the Word. The Word and the sacraments differ in the following particulars:

- The Word is absolutely necessary, while the sacraments are not.
- The Word serves to beget and to strengthen faith, while the sacraments can only strengthen it.
- The Word is for the entire world, but the sacraments are only for believers and their children.

Three Parts of a Sacrament

Outward/Visible Sign - Each of the sacraments contain an outward or external element. This consists of water in baptism and of bread and wine in the Lord's Supper.

Inward/Spiritual Sign - The inward sign points to something that is signified, which is the internal matter of the sacrament (i.e., righteousness, forgiveness of sins, faith).

Union of Sign and What is Signified - The union constitutes the essence of the sacrament, which is received in faith, and the grace of God accompanies it.

Eternal Life

We believe that the bodies of men after death return to dust,¹²² but their souls return to God who gave them.¹²³ The souls of the righteous are received into heaven¹²⁴ and the souls of the wicked are cast into hell.¹²⁵ At the last day, Christ shall come again¹²⁶ and all persons who have ever lived shall appear before Him¹²⁷ to give an account of their lives and shall be judged accordingly.¹²⁸ All this shall be done to the glory of God.

Christian Life

We believe that in the Holy Scriptures, God declares His love for the world and His desire that all men shall be saved. For this reason, Christ has called all believers to go into the world and make disciples of all nations.¹²⁹ All believers are therefore commanded and obligated to observe the ordinances of the Christian faith and to contribute their prayers, gifts, and personal efforts to the advancement of the Kingdom of God.¹³⁰ They are bound to preach good news to the poor, proclaim release to the captives, set at liberty those who are oppressed and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.¹³¹ All this is to be done to the glory of God forever and ever, Amen.

¹²² Eccl. 2:7; Matt. 2:20; 10:28; Mark 3:4; Luke 6:9; 12:4; 14:26; John 12:25; 13:37-38; Acts 15:26; 20:24; Jas. 2:26

¹²³ Dan. 12:2; Matt. 10:28; 11:21-24; 12:41; Luke 24:23; John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 2:5-11; 20:13-15

¹²⁴ Luke 20:35-36; John 5:25-29; 1 Cor. 15

¹²⁵ Job 21:13; Ps. 9:17; Prov. 5:5; 7:27; 9:18; Prov. 15:24; 23:14

¹²⁶ Matt. 16:28; 24:30; Heb. 10:25; Jas. 5:9; 1 Pet. 4:5; 1 John 2:18

¹²⁷ Eccl. 12:14; Ps. 50:4-6; Matt. 12:36-37; 25:32; John 5:24; Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 20:12

¹²⁸ Matt. 12:36; 25:23, 31; John 5:27; 10:42; 12:31; Phil. 2:30; 2 Tim. 4:1

¹²⁹ Matt. 28:18-20; Luke 24:44-49; John 20:21; Acts 1:8; Col. 3:12-17; 4:2-4

¹³⁰ Eph. 6:10-20; Phil. 4:4-9

¹³¹ Luke 4:18-19

The Lord's Supper (Communion)

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body." Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you; I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom."

- Matthew 26:26-29

What This Signifies:

- The Lord's death
- The believers' participation in His death
- The giving of life, strength and joy
- The union of believers

The Presence of Christ

Transubstantiation – The Roman Catholic doctrine taught that the communion bread and wine were changed into the actual body and blood of Christ.

Consubstantiation - Luther maintained that the body and blood of Christ are somehow present in, under and through the elements of bread and wine.

Zwingli – Taught the memorial view of the Lord's Supper that represents the body of Christ.

Calvin – Calvin denied the physical presence of Christ at the Lord's Supper but affirmed the real presence of Christ. He taught that although Christ's body and blood remain in heaven, they are spiritually made present to us by Jesus' omnipresent divine nature.

How to Receive Communion:

- Repentance
- Faith
- Thanksgiving

The Historical and Biblical Perspective of Baptism

Throughout history, people have tended to either elevate the importance of baptism or devalue it. It is commonly understood to be a sacrament of the church. Some call it an ordinance. These words will be used interchangeably in this section. So why do we practice the sacrament or ordinance of baptism? We baptize because Jesus instructed us to do so:

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

- Matthew 28:18-20

Over the years, the church has practiced baptism in different ways. There are three primary views that have been adopted. We will expand on each of these views. At Orchard Hill, we recognize the debate that has taken place around this issue and we practice both views #2 and #3. While this may seem incongruous to some, we believe that we can practice both views. We reject view #1. The outline for views #2 and #3 includes questions that are commonly asked about baptism.

In all the discussion over the mode of baptism and the disputes over its meaning, it is easy for Christians to lose sight of the significance and beauty of baptism and to disregard the tremendous blessing that accompanies this ceremony. The amazing truths of passing through the waters of judgment safely, of dying and rising with Christ, and of having our sins washed away, are truths of momentous and eternal proportion and ought to be an occasion for giving great glory and praise to God. If churches would teach these truths more clearly, baptisms would be the occasion of much more blessing in the church.

- Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, pg. 969

View #1: Baptism is a Means of Salvation – Non-Biblical View

Over the years, many religious groups have insisted that baptism was a necessary part of salvation. Some have asserted that the act of baptism itself causes regeneration. In this view, baptism is the means by which the church grants to people saving grace. Ludwig Ott, in *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, says it this way:

- *“Baptism is that Sacrament in which man being washed with water in the name of Three Divine Persons is spiritually reborn.” - pg. 250 (Ott gives John 3:5, Titus 3:5 and Ephesians 5:26 as support for this statement)*
- *“Baptism... effects: a) the eradication of sins, both original sin and, in the case of adults, also personal, mortal or venial sins; b) inner sanctification by the infusion of sanctifying grace.” - pg. 354*
- *“Baptism by water... is, since the promulgation of the Gospel, necessary for all men without exception for salvation.” - pg. 356*
- *“Faith, as it is not the effective cause of justification... need not be present. The faith which infants lack is... replaced by the faith of the Church.” - pg. 359*

The essence of View #1 is held by many Protestant and Catholic teachers. The Bible is clear and consistent in teaching that faith alone is the determinant of salvation and that faith is received through grace.

For it is by grace that you have been saved through faith, it is a gift of God not of works so that no man can boast.

- Ephesians 2:8-9

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

- Romans 6:23

If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

- Romans 10:9,13

If baptism were necessary for salvation, then Jesus would not have been able to assure the thief on the cross that he would be with Jesus in paradise “today” (Luke 23:43). Baptism is not a requirement of salvation.

At Orchard Hill, we consider this position to be unbiblical. This is significant because it deceives many into thinking that they have a right standing with God, when in fact, the only way to have a right standing with God is through personal faith.

View #2: Baptism is a Sign and Seal of Covenant Relationship

This is typically the viewpoint of Presbyterian, Episcopalian, and Reformed churches.

In this view, baptism is the New Testament Rite of Old Testament circumcision. When a child was eight days old in the Old Testament, they were brought to the temple to be dedicated by the family to God. This was marked by the ceremony of circumcision. Circumcision marked a child as a member of the visible community of God. The child was too young to make a profession of faith. The parents and family members, along with the priests, made a commitment to raise this child until the age where he or she could mentally, emotionally, and spiritually make their own commitment to God in true faith. This usually took place when a child was 12 or 13 years old at the Bar Mitzvah service. At this time, the child was not only a member of the outward, visible community of God, but also became a member of the inward, invisible community. In this view, baptism has replaced circumcision just as communion has replaced the Passover celebration.

In Him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

- Colossians 2:11-12

It is also argued that baptisms in the Bible were practiced on entire households and that this most likely would have included children. (Acts 16:32-33)

The significant thinking behind this position is that there is continuity between the Old Covenant (roughly how God worked in the Old Testament) and the New Covenant (roughly how God works in the New Testament) and that baptism is a means of including people in the Covenant Community of God and is a means of extending grace to them. Saving faith will hopefully follow.

If infant baptism doesn't bring salvation and doesn't celebrate salvation, what does it do?

Michael Green explains this in *Baptism: Its Purpose, Practice and Power* on pages 76-77.

"Infant baptism stresses the objectivity of the gospel. It points to the solid achievement of Christ crucified and risen, whether or not we respond to it.... Not that we gain anything from it unless we repent and believe. But it is the standing demonstration that our salvation does not depend on our own very fallible faith; it depends on what God has done for us. Infant baptism stresses the initiative of God in salvation.... Should it be attached primarily to man's response, or to God's initiative? That is the heart of the question.... For the Baptist, baptism primarily bears witness to what we do in responding to the grace of God. For the paedobaptist, it primarily bears witness to what God has done in making it all possible."

Who makes the vows at baptism?

The parents, family members, friends and congregation make the vows to raise the child until the day that the child can make his or her own profession of faith in Jesus Christ.

View #3: Baptism is a Symbol of the Relationship between God and a Person

This is typically the viewpoint of Baptist, Missionary Alliance, and Reformed Baptist churches.

In this view, baptism is to take place after a person has come to his or her own place of faith in Jesus Christ. Those who support this view assert that this was the pattern in the Book of Acts (8:12; 10:44-46; 18:7-8) and that it best pictures saving faith. (Romans 6:1-4) In this view, baptism is seen as a public identification with Christ. (Mark 8:38)

Those who practice this view typically do so by immersion. Support for immersion is found in the meaning of the Greek word baptize, which means to plunge, dip, or immerse something in water. Further, it is noted that the sense of immersion is referenced several times in the Bible. For example, Jesus was baptized "in" (Greek word en) not beside or by or near the Jordan River (Mark 1:5-10). Additionally, it is stated that the sense of baptism is best pictured by immersion because of the texts that talk about baptism representing the death to self, the burial, and the being raised up to new life:

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

- Romans 6:3-4

You were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.

- Colossians 2:12

Perhaps most significantly, those who hold this view often argue that only those who believe are the rightful participants in baptism. The logic is that since baptism is a symbol of beginning the Christian life, it should only be given to those who have begun the Christian life through faith. The Book of Acts would be cited as an example (Acts 2:41, 8:12, 10:44-48). The texts that speak of whole households being baptized (Acts 16:14-15, 32-33; 1 Corinthians 1:16) are seen as not necessarily including infants or children before they reached an age of personal faith. We see in 1 Corinthians 16:15 that those who were baptized worked to serve others indicating that there was saving faith.

There are many who hold this view and still see baptism as a sign and seal of the Covenant as in view #2. However, they see this as being administered differently.

Conclusion and General Questions

At Orchard Hill, we celebrate both historical positions of the church on this issue. Periodically, we schedule infant baptisms and dedications for celebration during weekend services. Believer Baptism is also periodically scheduled to occur during weekend services. Registration forms are available online at orchardhillchurch.com.

We believe that these practices demonstrate grace and genuine Christian community. It allows us to demonstrate the acceptance of differing opinions on matters of practice, while holding firmly to the essential precept of our faith - which salvation is by grace alone through faith.

If I have never been baptized, do I need to be baptized?

As explained above, baptism is not necessary for a right standing with God. However, we believe that it is a sacrament or ordinance instituted for God and that participation is an individual act of obedience to God.

Is there any special means of grace that comes to a person who participates in baptism?

John Murray answers this question by saying, "Baptism is a means of grace and conveys blessing, because it is the certification to us of God's grace and in the acceptance of that certification we rely upon God's faithfulness, bear witness to his grace, and thereby strengthen our faith." (John Murray, *Collected Writings (Volume 2)* - p. 367) All obedience to God brings grace to our lives, but there is a special sense of that grace through participation in His prescribed sacraments.

How can a church simultaneously embrace two seemingly opposite views of something as significant as baptism?

While this position may not be satisfying to everyone, we feel that the church has unnecessarily divided over this issue. We believe that it is possible to honor two historically held positions within the same church and to allow people to choose how they want to practice this sacrament.

What about private baptism?

Because baptism is a right of public declaration and dedication, private baptisms are not consistent with this goal.

Can I be baptized a second time as a believer if I was baptized as an infant?

Yes. There is biblical precedent for this. (Acts 19:1-5) If a person who was baptized as an infant would like to be baptized a second time, when it is his or her decision rather than his or her parents' decision, we would honor that request.

Many churches require baptism to become a member, while others do not require baptism for membership or membership for baptism. The church is Christ's body here on earth and is used by Him to bring about His will in this world.

God has placed everything under the power of Christ and has set Him up as the head of everything for the Church. For the Church is His body, and in the body lives fully the One who fills the whole wide universe. (Ephesians 1:22-23)

Baptism is a sign of joining the outward, visible church. For a believer, this is a public statement of what should be a reality. For a child, when he or she is old enough to understand the Gospel message, he or she can officially join the church by becoming a member during his or her junior or senior year of high school.

By having parents and/or baptism candidates attend Discovering Orchard Hill and become members, we can know that they have fully investigated Orchard Hill, understand our history and beliefs and have begun a relationship with Orchard Hill Church. More importantly, it allows us to know that people being baptized, or parents of children being baptized have clearly understood and responded to the Gospel message. We don't want to baptize people who have no intention of following Christ but are merely looking for a religious symbol in their lives.

What is infant dedication?

Infant dedication occurs when parents bring their children before the Lord as an act of worship and commitment. It is a time when parents publicly declare their desire to raise their children in a way that they come to a point of personal faith. We currently offer both infant baptism and infant dedication as options for parents.

How old should a believer be before partaking in Believer Baptism?

Age is not seen as a primary issue. All that is necessary is a believable profession of faith. In the instance of a child, we would celebrate his or her baptism without the requirement of official church membership.

Church Structure

Authority in the Church

Christ - The Head of the Church

Christ is the Head of the Church, which is His Body. He is the source of all that the Church is and does. His glory is the objective of every action and function of His Body. He is recognized as the head over all things including His Church.

And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

- Ephesians 1:22-23

The Word of God - The Guide of the Church

God has provided His Word to guide and direct His Church.

It contains everything necessary to lead the Church, including His words, counsel and purpose for the Church and every believer.

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

- 2 Timothy 3:16-17

The Holy Spirit - The Power of the Church

The Holy Spirit is the source of all power in the Church. The Holy Spirit interprets God's teaching to the Church and to each individual believer.

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

- Acts 1:8

The Government of the Church

Elder

Role

Elders have ultimate responsibility for overseeing and governing church affairs including maintenance of doctrine, financial oversight, stewardship of resources, church discipline and protection of the church and its members. The Elders, as led by the Holy Spirit, seek God's purpose, mission, vision, and values for the church to function. According to the Bible, this is a shepherding role performed with loving pastoral care and a humble servant attitude.

Qualifications

The Elder position is filled by male individuals, 25 years of age or over, who have been members of Orchard Hill Church for at least two years. Each Elder will satisfy the requirements of and be held accountable to the biblical standards applicable to Elders as described in the New Testament and adopted by the Board. The Senior Pastor is also a member of the Board of Elders.

Terms of Office

The Board consists of six to nine elected positions. Elders serve for a term of three years and no Elder serves for more than two consecutive terms. An individual who has served two consecutive terms must remain off the Board of Elders and Board of Servant Leaders for at least one year before being eligible to serve again as an Elder or Servant Leader.

Servant Leader

Role

Servant Leaders advise and assist the Elders in the management of church affairs, share specific talents, and represent the breadth of the ministries of the church. They meet regularly with the Elders to provide input, support, wisdom, and expertise in nearly every facet of church function.

Qualifications

The Board of Servant Leaders is comprised of at least three male or female members of Orchard Hill Church. Each Servant Leader must satisfy the requirements and standards established by the Board of Elders.

Terms of Office

The number of Servant Leaders is determined by the Board of Elders. Each member of the Board of Servant Leaders shall be elected for a term of three years.

Nomination and Election of Elders and Servant Leaders

A Nominating Committee comprised of at least three Elders and members of Orchard Hill Church shall recommend at least one qualified person for each Elder/Servant Leaders position to be filled. The Board reviews the recommendations and selects one candidate for each Elder/Servant Leader position to be filled.

The slate of candidates approved by the Board is posted at the Orchard Hill Welcome Desk for two consecutive weekends immediately preceding the Annual Meeting of the members of Orchard Hill Church. During the congregational Annual Meeting, the attending members of Orchard Hill Church will elect or refuse each person presented by the Nominating Committee.

Biblical Qualification for Elders and Servant Leaders

Elders are chosen based on clearly defined spiritual qualifications of leadership that have been previously exhibited in their lives. These qualifications are described in the Scriptures.

Two passages that clearly define these qualifications are:

If anyone aspires to the office of bishop, he desires a noble task. Now a bishop must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, sensible, dignified, hospitable, an apt teacher, no drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, no lover of money. He must manage his own household well, keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way; for if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how can he care for God's Church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may be puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil; moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, or he may fall into reproach and snare of the devil.

- 1 Timothy 3:1-7

If any man is blameless, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of being profligate or insubordinate. For a bishop, as God's steward, must be blameless; he must not be arrogant or quick tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of goodness, master of himself, upright, holy, and self-controlled; he must hold firm to the sure word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to refute those who oppose it.

- Titus 1:6-9

These verses teach the following guidelines of personal and spiritual characteristics to be identified in the life of the Elders and Servant Leaders:

- **Above reproach:** Blameless, presenting no patterns of scriptural disobedience or grounds for accusation.
- **Husband of one wife:** Devoted, loyal spouses in a pure marriage relationship without adultery.
- **Temperate:** Not given to excess in any area of life.
- **Sensible:** Sober, sensible, of sound mind, and wise in judgment.
- **Dignified:** Demonstrate a well-ordered life that is respected by others.
- **Hospitable:** Willing to share home and possessions with others.
- **Able to teach:** Knowledgeable of sound doctrine and has the ability to use this knowledge in the teaching of others.
- **Not addicted to wine:** Free from chemical addiction.
- **Not violent or quick-tempered:** Not quick to anger, but gentle, patient, and forbearing with others.
- **Not quarrelsome:** Not quarrelsome or argumentative.
- **Free from the love of money:** Free from the love of money and material things.
- **Manage own household well:** An orderly household and a healthy balanced family life. Their children are taught to be submissive and respectful.
- **Not a new Christian:** Not a new believer but demonstrates true maturity and depth in the way life is lived.
- **Good reputation with outsiders:** Well-respected by non-believers.
- **Not self-willed:** Willing to set own needs aside in order to serve of others.
- **Love what is good:** Desire what is best in every situation and in all relationships.
- **Just:** Fair and impartial with judgments based on a wise application of Scripture.
- **Devout:** Reverently desire freedom from sin and devoted to a godly life.
- **Holding fast to God's Word:** Consistently obedient to the Word of God and be continually controlled by the Holy Spirit.