

RIVER CITY GRACE COMMUNITY CHURCH

STATEMENT OF FAITH

Revised March 2012

The following statements reflect the core truths that we believe and teach as a church. These statements reflect our current expression of a never ending effort to clarify our understanding of the primary doctrines we accept.

We recognize that within the realm of doctrinal convictions, there are matters which are primary and essential for the unity and practice of true believers, and there are other matters which are secondary and non-essential as the basis for such unity. Therefore, members of River City Grace Community Church must be in general agreement with this doctrinal statement. Specific areas of differing convictions must be identified with the Elders, who will prayerfully determine whether such differences are of an essential or non-essential nature as related to church membership.

Under each heading, a summary of our doctrinal position is given in ***bold and italicized*** font, followed by an expanded explanation of what we believe and teach.

1. The Bible – The Holy Scriptures

We believe and teach that the Bible is the Word of God, the sixty-six Books of the Old and New Testaments, verbally inspired in all parts (plenary), and therefore wholly without error (inerrant), as originally given of God (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21).

We believe and teach that the Word of God is an objective, propositional revelation (1 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Corinthians 2:13), verbally inspired in every word (2 Timothy 3:16), absolutely inerrant in the original documents, infallible, and God-breathed. This written revelation from God to man is complete and final (Revelation. 22:18-19). We believe and teach the literal, grammatical-historical interpretation of Scripture which affirms the belief that the opening chapters of Genesis present creation in six literal days (Genesis 1:31; Exodus 31:17).

We believe and teach that the Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible, constitutes the only infallible, authoritative, and sufficient rule of faith and practice for all people, in all places, at all times, and in every age (Psalms 19:7-14; 119:98-100; Matthew 4:4; 5:18; 24:35; John 10:35; 16:12-13; 17:17; Acts 20:32; 1 Corinthians 2:7-14; 2 Timothy 3:15-17; Hebrews 4:12-13; 2 Peter 1:20-21).

We believe and teach that God spoke in His written Word by a process of dual authorship. The Holy Spirit so superintended the human authors that, through their individual personalities and different styles of writing, they composed and recorded God's Word to man (2 Peter 1:20-21) without error in the whole or in the part (Matthew 5:18; 2 Timothy 3:16).

We believe and teach that, whereas there may be several applications of any given passage of Scripture, there is but one true interpretation. The meaning of Scripture is to be found as one diligently applies the literal, grammatical-historical method of interpretation under the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit (Psalm 119:18; John

7:17; 16:12-15; 1 Corinthians 2:7-15; 1 John 2:20). It is the responsibility of believers to ascertain carefully the true intent and meaning of Scripture, recognizing that proper application is binding on all generations (Matthew 28:20; James. 1:22-25). Yet the truth of Scripture stands in judgment of men; never do men stand in judgment of it.

2. The One True God

We believe and teach that God exists eternally as three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19; Luke 3:22; 2 Corinthians 13:14). He is the infinite, eternal, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent Spirit (John 4:24), perfect in all His attributes, one in essence and nature, worthy of all worship, trust, and obedience.

We believe and teach that God the Father, the first Person of the Trinity, orders and disposes all things according to His own purpose and grace (Psalms 33:10-11; 145:8-9; 1 Corinthians 8:6). He is an infinite, personal spirit, perfect in holiness, wisdom, power, and love. He infallibly foreknows all that shall come to pass; He concerns Himself mercifully in the affairs of men; He hears and answers prayer; and He saves from sin and death all who come to Him through Jesus Christ (Luke 10:21-22; Matthew 23:9; John 3:16; 6:27; Romans 1:7; I Timothy 1:1-2; 2:5-6; I Peter 1:3; Revelation 1:6). He is the Creator of all things (Genesis 1:1-31; Ephesians 3:9). As the only absolute and omnipotent Ruler in the universe, He is sovereign in creation, providence, and redemption (Psalm 103:19; Romans 11:36). His fatherhood involves both His designation within the Trinity and His relationship with mankind. As Creator, He is Father to all men (Ephesians 4:6), but He is spiritual Father only to believers (Romans 8:14; 2 Corinthians 6:18). He has decreed for His own glory all things that come to pass (Ephesians 1:11). He continually upholds, directs, and governs all creatures and events (1 Chronicles 29:11). In His sovereignty, He is neither the author nor approver of sin (Habakkuk 1:13; John 8:38-47; James 1:13; 1 John 1:5), nor does He abridge the accountability of moral, intelligent creatures (1 Peter 1:17). He has graciously chosen from eternity past those whom He would have as His own (Ephesians 1:4-6). He saves from sin all who come to Him through Jesus Christ. He adopts as His own all those who come to Him. He becomes, upon adoption, Father to His own (John 1:12; Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:5; Hebrews 12:5-9).

3. The Lord Jesus Christ

We believe and teach in the preexistence and deity of Jesus Christ (John 1:13), His incarnation by virgin birth (John 1:1-14; Matthew 1:18-23), His sinless life (Hebrews 4:15), His substitutionary death (2 Corinthians 5:21), His bodily resurrection (Luke 24:36-43), His ascension into heaven and present ministry (Hebrews 4:14-16), and His coming again (Acts 1:11).

We believe and teach that Jesus Christ, the second Person of the Trinity, possesses all the divine excellencies, and in these He is coequal, consubstantial, and coeternal with the Father (John 10:30; 14:9). We believe and teach that God the Father created all things according to His own will through His Son, Jesus Christ, by whom all things continue to exist and operate (John 1:3; Colossians 1:15-17; Hebrews 1:2). We believe and teach that in the incarnation God became man. Christ surrendered only the prerogatives of deity but nothing of the divine essence, either in degree or kind. In His incarnation, the eternally existing second Person of the Trinity accepted all the essential characteristics of humanity and so became the God-Man (Philippians 2:5-8; Colossians 2:9).

We believe and teach that Jesus Christ represents humanity and deity in indivisible oneness (Micah 5:2; John 5:23; 14:9-10; Colossians 2:9). We believe and teach that our Lord Jesus Christ was born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23, 25; Luke 1:26-35); that He was God incarnate (John 1:1,14); and that the purpose of the

incarnation was to reveal God, redeem men, and rule over God's kingdom (Psalm 2:7-9; Isaiah 9:6; John 1:18, 29; Philippians 2:9-11; Hebrews 7:25-26; 1 Peter 1:18-19).

We believe and teach that our Lord Jesus Christ accomplished redemption for His elect through the shedding of His blood and sacrificial death on the cross, and that His death was voluntary, vicarious, substitutionary, propitiatory, and redemptive (John 10:15; 11:51-52; Romans 3:24-25; 5:8; 1 Peter 2:24). We believe and teach that on the basis of the efficacy of the death of our Lord Jesus Christ, the believing sinner is freed from the punishment, the penalty, the power, and one day the very presence of sin. That he is declared righteous, given eternal life, and adopted into the family of God (Romans 3:25; 5:8-9; 2 Corinthians 5:14-15; 1 Peter 2:24; 3:18).

We believe and teach that justification of the elect is made sure by His literal, physical resurrection from the dead, and that He is now ascended to the right hand of the Father, where He now mediates for the elect as Advocate and High Priest (Matthew 28:6; Luke 24:38-39; Acts 2:30-31; Romans 4:25; 8:34; Hebrews 7:25; 9:24; 1 John 2:1). We believe and teach that in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave, God confirmed the deity of His Son and gave proof that God has accepted His atoning work on the cross. Jesus' bodily resurrection is also the guarantee of a future resurrection life for all believers (John 5:26-29; 14:19; Romans 1:4; 4:25; 6:5-10; 1 Corinthians 15:20, 23).

We believe and teach that Jesus Christ will return to receive the church, which is His Body, unto Himself at the rapture, and returning with His church in glory, will establish His millennial kingdom on earth (Acts 1:9-11; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Revelation 20). We believe and teach that the Lord Jesus Christ is the One through whom God will judge all mankind (John 5:22-23):

- Believers (1 Corinthians 3:10-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10)
- Living inhabitants of the earth at His glorious return (Matthew 25:31-46)
- Unbelieving dead at the Great White Throne (Revelation 20:11-15)

As the Mediator between God and man (1 Timothy 2:5), the Head of His Body the church (Ephesians 1:22; 5:23; Colossians 1:18), and the coming universal King who will reign on the throne of David (Isaiah 9:6; Luke 1:31-33), He is the final Judge of all who fail to place their trust in Him as Lord and Savior (Matthew 25:14-46; Acts 17:30-31).

4. The Holy Spirit

We believe and teach in the personality of the Holy Spirit (John 16:7-15), His deity (Acts 5:34), and His work in each believer: baptizing and indwelling at the moment of regeneration (1 Corinthians 12:13; Romans 8:9), and filling (Ephesians 5:18) to empower for Christian life and service (Ephesians. 3:16; Acts 1:8; Galatians 5:22-23).

We believe and teach that the Holy Spirit is a divine Person, eternal, underived, possessing all the attributes of personality and deity, including intellect (1 Corinthians 2:10-13), emotions (Ephesians 4:30), will (1 Corinthians 12:11), eternity (Hebrews 9:14), omnipresence (Psalm 139:7-10), omniscience (Isaiah 40:13-14), omnipotence (Romans 15:13), and truthfulness (John 16:13). In all the divine attributes, He is coequal and consubstantial with the Father and the Son (Matthew 28:19; Acts 5:3-4; 28:25-26; 1 Corinthians 12:4-6; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Jeremiah 31:31-34 with Hebrews 10:15-17).

We believe and teach that it is the work of the Holy Spirit to execute the divine will with relation to all mankind. We affirm His sovereign activity in creation (Genesis 1:2), the incarnation (Matthew 1:18), the written revelation (2 Peter 1:20-21), and the work of salvation (John 3:5-7). We believe and teach that the work

of the Holy Spirit in this age began at Pentecost, when He came from the Father as promised by Christ (John 14:16-17; 15:26) to initiate and complete the building of the Body of Christ, which is His church (1 Corinthians 12:13). The broad scope of His divine activity includes convicting the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment; glorifying the Lord Jesus Christ; and transforming believers into the image of Christ (John 16:7-9; Acts 1:5; 2:4; Romans 8:29; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Ephesians 2:22).

We believe and teach that the Holy Spirit is the supernatural and sovereign Agent in regeneration, baptizing all believers into the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13). We believe and teach that the Holy Spirit in effectual calling convicts, draws, and regenerates the elect, enabling them to exercise saving faith and to receive Christ, in all His offices, as both Lord and Savior (1 Corinthians 12:3). The Holy Spirit also indwells, sanctifies, instructs, and empowers them for service, and seals them unto the day of redemption (Romans 8:9; 2 Corinthians 3:6; Ephesians 1:13). Every believer possesses the permanent, indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit from the moment of salvation (John 1:12-13; Romans 5:5; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20; Ephesians 1:13-14; Titus 3:5), and it is the duty of all those born of the Spirit to be filled with (controlled by) the Spirit (John 16:13; Romans 8:9; Ephesians 5:18; 1 John 2:20, 27).

We believe and teach that the Holy Spirit is the divine Teacher who guided the apostles and prophets into all truth as they committed to writing God's revelation, the Bible (John 14:26; 2 Peter 1:19-21).

We believe and teach that the Holy Spirit administers spiritual gifts to the church (1 Corinthians 12:4-13). The Holy Spirit glorifies neither Himself nor His gifts by ostentatious displays, but He does glorify Christ by implementing His work of redeeming the lost and building up believers in the most holy faith (John 16:13-14; Acts 1:8; 2 Corinthians 3:18). We believe and teach, in this respect, that God the Holy Spirit is sovereign in the bestowing of all His gifts for the perfecting of the saints today. We believe and teach that there were two kinds of gifts given the early church: miraculous gifts of divine revelation and healing, given temporarily in the apostolic era for the purpose of confirming the authenticity of the apostle's message (Hebrews 2:3-4; 2 Corinthians 12:12); and ministering gifts, given to equip believers for edifying one another. With the New Testament revelation now complete, Scripture becomes the sole test of the authenticity of a man's message, and confirming gifts of a miraculous nature are no longer necessary to validate a man or his message (1 Corinthians 13:8-12). Miraculous gifts can even be counterfeited by Satan so as to deceive even believers (1 Corinthians 13:13-14; Revelation 13:13-14). The only gifts in operation today are those nonrevelatory equipping gifts given for edification (Romans 12:6-8). We teach that no one possesses the gift of healing today, but that God does hear and answer the prayer of faith and will answer in accordance with His own perfect will for the sick, suffering, and afflicted (Luke 18:1-6; John 5:7-9; 2 Corinthians 12:6-10; James 5:13-16; 1 John 5:14-15).

5. Man

We believe and teach that man is the direct creation of God, being made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-28), that he subsequently fell into sin resulting in spiritual death (Genesis 3:1-24; Romans 5:12), and that the new birth is necessary for his salvation (John 3:35).

We believe and teach that man was created directly and immediately by God, apart from any process of evolution (Gen. 1:26-28; 2:7). Man was created free of sin with a rational nature, intelligence, volition, self-determination, and moral responsibility to God (Genesis 1:28-31; 2:15-25; James 3:9). God's intention in the creation of man was that mankind should glorify God, enjoy God's fellowship, live his life in the will of God, and by this accomplish God's purpose for mankind in the world (Isaiah 43:7; Colossians 1:16; Revelation 4:11). We believe and teach that in Adam's sin of disobedience to the revealed will and Word of God, mankind lost his innocence, incurred the penalty of spiritual and physical death, became subject to the wrath of God, and became inherently corrupt and utterly incapable of choosing or doing that which is acceptable to God apart from

divine grace (Genesis 2:15-17; 3:17-19; Romans 3:10-12). We believe and teach that while man is a free agent choosing as he pleases, his will is in bondage to his sinful nature. Therefore, he always chooses darkness, being unable and unwilling to choose Christ (John 3:19-20; Romans 8:7-8). Apart from Christ, man is thus spiritually dead (Ephesians 2:1-3; Colossians 2:13).

We believe and teach that, because all of mankind was in Adam, a nature corrupted by Adam's sin has been transmitted to all men and women of all ages, Jesus Christ being the only exception. All men and women are thus sinners by nature, by choice, and by divine declaration (Psalm 14:1-3; Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 3:9-18, 23; 5:10-12). With no recuperative powers to enable him to recover himself, mankind is hopelessly and helplessly lost. The salvation of any man or woman is thereby wholly of God's grace through the redemptive work of our Lord Jesus Christ (Genesis 2:16-17; 3:1-19; John 3:36; Romans 3:23; 6:23; 1 Corinthians 2:14; Ephesians 2:1-3; 1 Timothy 2:13-14; Titus 3:3-7; 1 John 1:8).

6. Salvation

We believe and teach that salvation is by God's grace alone, received as the gift of God through personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and His finished work (Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5-7; 1 Peter 1:18-19).

We believe and teach that salvation is on the basis of the redemption of Jesus Christ, the merit of His shed blood, and not on the basis of human merit or works (John 1:12; Ephesians 1:7; 2:8-10; 1 Peter 1:18-19).

Regeneration. We believe and teach that regeneration is a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit by which the divine nature and divine life are given (John 1:13; 3:3-7; Titus 3:5; 1 John 5:1-4). It is instantaneous and is accomplished solely by the power of the Holy Spirit through the instrumentality of the Word of God (John 5:24; Romans 10:17), when the repentant sinner, as enabled by the Holy Spirit, responds in faith to the divine provision of salvation. Genuine regeneration is manifested by fruits worthy of repentance as demonstrated in righteous attitudes and conduct. Good works are the proper evidence and fruit of regeneration (1 Corinthians 6:19-20; Ephesians 2:10), and will be experienced to the extent that the believer submits to the control of the Holy Spirit in his life through faithful obedience to the Word of God (Ephesians 5:17-21; Philippians 2:12; Colossians 3:16; 2 Peter 1:4-10). This obedience causes the believer to be increasingly conformed to the image of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18). Such conformity is climaxed in the believer's glorification at Christ's coming (Romans 8:17; 1 Peter 1:4-5; 1 John 3:2-3).

Election. We believe and teach that election is the sovereign act of God by which, before the foundation of the world, He chose in Christ those whom He graciously regenerates, saves, sanctifies, and glorifies (Romans 8:28-30; Ephesians 1:4-11; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Timothy 2:10; 1 Peter 1:1-2). We do not believe nor teach that God elected others to Hell, but rather He passed by them, abandoning them to their preference, which is self-glorification, sin, and a life void of Christ (Romans 1:18-32). We believe and teach that sovereign election does not contradict or negate the responsibility of man to repent and trust Christ as Savior and Lord (Ezekiel 18:23, 32; 33:11; John 3:18-19, 36; 5:40; Romans 9:22-23; 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12; Revelation 22:17). Nevertheless, since God's sovereign grace includes the means (faith) of receiving the gift of salvation as well as the gift itself (Ephesians 2:8-9), God will accomplish what He purposes in election. All whom the Father calls to Himself will come in faith, and all who come in faith the Father will receive (Matthew 11:25-30; John 6:37-40, 44, 65; Acts 13:48; James 4:8). We believe and teach that the unmerited favor that God grants to totally depraved sinners is not related to any initiative on their own part or to God's anticipation of what they might do by their own will, but is solely of His sovereign grace and mercy (Ephesians 1:4-7; Titus 3:4-7; 1 Peter 1:2). We believe and teach that election should not be looked upon as based merely on abstract sovereignty. God is truly sovereign, but He exercises this sovereignty in harmony with His other attributes, especially His omniscience, justice, holiness, wisdom, grace, and love (Romans 9:11-16). This sovereignty will always exalt the will of God

in a manner totally consistent with His character as revealed in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 11:25-28; 2 Timothy 1:9).

Justification. We believe and teach that justification before God is an act of God (Romans 8:33) by which He declares righteous those who, through faith in Christ, repent of their sins (Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 11:18; Romans 2:4; 2 Corinthians 7:10; Isaiah 55:6-7) and confess Him as sovereign Lord (Romans 10:9-10; 1 Corinthians 12:3; 2 Corinthians 4:5; Galatians 2:16; Philippians 2:11, 3:9). This righteousness is apart from any virtue or work of man (Romans 3:20; 4:6) and involves the imputation of our sins to Christ (Colossians 2:14; 1 Peter 2:24) and the imputation of Christ's righteousness to us (1 Corinthians 1:30; 2 Corinthians 5:21). By this means, God is enabled to "be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Romans 3:26).

Sanctification. We believe and teach that every believer is sanctified (set apart) to God by justification and is, therefore, declared to be holy and is, therefore, identified as a saint (Ephesians 1:1; 1 Peter 2:9-10). This sanctification is positional and instantaneous and should not be confused with progressive sanctification. Positional sanctification has to do with the believer's standing, not his present walk or condition (Acts 20:32; 1 Corinthians 1:2, 30; 6:11; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; Hebrews 2:11; 3:1; 10:10, 14; 13:12; 1 Peter 1:2). We believe and teach that there is also, by the work of the Holy Spirit, a progressive sanctification by which the state of the believer is brought closer to the standing the believer positionally enjoys through justification. Through obedience to the Word of God and the empowering of the Holy Spirit, the believer is able to live a life of increasing holiness in conformity to the will of God, becoming more and more like our Lord Jesus Christ (John 17:17, 19; Romans 6:1-22; 2 Corinthians 3:18; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-4; 5:23). In this respect, we believe and teach that every saved person is involved in a daily conflict—the new creation in Christ doing battle against fleshly lusts (Galatians 5:16-18; 1 Peter 2:11-12)—but adequate provision is made for victory through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. The struggle, nevertheless, stays with the believer all through this earthly life and is never completely ended. All claims to the eradication of sin in this life are unscriptural. Eradication of sin is not possible in this life, but the Holy Spirit does provide for victory over sin (Galatians 5:16-25; Ephesians 4:22-24; 6:10-18; Philippians 3:12; Colossians 3:9-10; 1 Peter 1:14-16; 1 John 1:5-2:2; 3:5-9). We believe and teach that there is no "second work of grace" universally required of all believers, but ongoing works of the Spirit, of varying degrees, in the life of the believer.

Security. We believe and teach that since regeneration is a sovereign act of God (John 1:12-13), all the redeemed, once saved, are kept by God's power and are thus secure in Christ forever (John 5:24; 6:37-40; 10:27-30; Romans 5:9-10; 8:1, 31-39; 1 Corinthians 1:4-8; Ephesians 4:30; Hebrews 7:25; 13:5; 1 John 5:11-13; 1 Peter 1:5; Jude 24). We believe and teach that it is the privilege of believers to rejoice in the assurance of their salvation through the testimony of God's Word, which, however, clearly forbids the use of Christian liberty as an occasion for sinful living and carnality (Romans 6:15-22; 13:13-14; Galatians 5:13, 25-26; Titus 2:11-14).

7. The Church

We believe and teach that there is one true church, the body and the bride of Christ (Ephesians 1:22-23; 5:25-32), composed of all true believers of the present age (1 Corinthians 12:12-13); and the organization of its members in local churches for worship, for edification of believers, and for worldwide gospel witness, each local church being autonomous but cooperating in fellowship and work (Ephesians 4:11-16).

We believe and teach that all who place their faith in Jesus Christ are immediately placed by the Holy Spirit into one united spiritual Body, the church (1 Corinthians 12:12-13), the bride of Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:23-32; Revelation 19:7-8), of which Christ is the Head (Ephesians 1:22; 4:15; Colossians 1:18).

We believe and teach that the formation of the church, the Body of Christ, began on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-21, 38-47), and will be completed at the coming of Christ for His own at the rapture (1 Corinthians 15:51-52; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). We believe and teach that the church is thus a unique spiritual organism designed by Christ, made up of all born-again believers in this present age (Ephesians 2:11-3:6). The church is distinct from Israel (1 Corinthians 10:32), a mystery not revealed until this age (Ephesians 3:1-6; 5:32).

We believe and teach that the establishment and continuity of local churches is clearly taught and defined in the New Testament Scriptures, Christ Himself being the One who builds His church (Matthew 16:18; Acts 14:23, 27; 20:17, 28; Galatians 1:2; Philippians 1:1; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:1). The members of the one spiritual Body are directed to associate themselves together in local assemblies (1 Corinthians 11:18-20; Hebrews 10:25).

We believe and teach that the one supreme authority for the church is the risen and reigning Christ (1 Corinthians 11:3; Ephesians 1:22; Colossians 1:18), and that matters of church leadership, gifts, order, discipline, and worship are all appointed and regulated through His sovereignty as found in the Scriptures.

We believe and teach that the biblically designated offices serving under Christ and over the assembly are Elders (also called bishops, overseers, pastors, pastor-teachers, and shepherds) (Acts 20:28; Ephesians 4:11; 1 Timothy 3:1-2; Titus 1:5-7; 1 Peter 5:1-3) and Deacons. Men who would fill these offices must meet biblical qualifications (1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:1-5). We believe and teach that these leaders are to lead or rule as servants of Christ (1 Timothy 5:17-22) and have His authority, through His revealed Word and enabling of His Spirit, in directing His church. The congregation is to submit to their leadership as unto Christ (Hebrews 13:7, 17).

We believe and teach the importance of discipleship (Matthew 28:19-20; 2 Timothy 2:2), mutual care and accountability of all believers to each other (John 13:34-35; Romans 12:9-21; 1 Peter 4:7-11), as well as the need for confrontation and discipline of sinning members of the congregation in accord with the standards of Scripture (Matthew 18:15-22; Acts 5:1-11; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; Galatians 6:1-2; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15; 1 Timothy 1:19-20; Titus 1:10-16).

We believe and teach the autonomy of the local church, free from any external authority or control, with the right of self-government and freedom from the interference of any hierarchy of individuals or organizations (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). We believe and teach that it is scriptural for true churches to cooperate with each other for the presentation and propagation of the faith, and we are eager to cooperate with other like-minded churches. Each local church, however, through its Elders and their interpretation and application of Scripture, should be the sole judge of the measure and method of its cooperation. The loyalty of any local church must be to Jesus Christ and His Word, not to any organization, institution, or affiliation of churches. The Elders should determine all other matters of local church membership, policy, discipline, benevolence, and government as well (Acts 15:19-31; 20:28; 1 Corinthians 5:4-7, 13; 1 Peter 5:1-4).

We believe and teach that the church, as accountable and responsible to God alone in matters of faith, must also be free from interference by any political authority. Therefore, Church and State must be kept separate as having different functions, each fulfilling its duties free from dictation or patronage of the other (1 Timothy 2:5; Romans 14:7-12). At the same time, we recognize that the church, as a non-profit organization, must be subject to the governing authorities, insofar as those authorities impose no laws upon the church which violate the Word of God (Matthew 22:21; Acts 5:29; Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-17).

We believe and teach that the purpose of the church is to glorify God (Ephesians 3:21) by building itself up in the faith (Ephesians 4:13-16), by instruction of the Word (2 Timothy 2:2, 15; 3:16-17), by fellowship (Acts 2:47; 1 John 1:3), by keeping the ordinances (Luke 22:19; Acts 2:38-42), and by advancing and proclaiming the gospel to the entire world (Matthew 28:19; Acts 1:8; 2:42). We believe and teach the calling of all saints to the work of service (1 Corinthians 15:58; Ephesians 4:12; 1 Peter 4:10-11; Revelation 22:12).

We believe and teach that our Lord commanded the church to preach the Gospel and to make disciples of all nations; and that every believer is to be a witness for Jesus Christ, trusting in the power of the Holy Spirit; and that we are responsible to pray for, support, and send missionaries into the world (Matthew 9:36-39; 28:10-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47-48; Acts 1:8; 8:1-4; Romans 10:13-15; 1 Corinthians 9:13-14).

We believe and teach the need of the church to submit to God as He accomplishes His purpose in the world. To this end, He gives the church spiritual gifts. He gives men chosen for the purpose of equipping the saints for the work of the ministry (Ephesians 4:7-12), and He also gives unique and special spiritual gifts to each member of the Body of Christ (Romans 12:5-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-31; 1 Peter 4:10-11).

8. The Christian Life

We believe and teach that true believers must exhibit a life of increasing righteousness, good works and separation unto God from the evil ways of the world (Romans 12:12), manifested by: speaking the truth (James 5:12), maintaining the sanctity of the home (Ephesians 5:22-6:4), settling differences between Christians in accordance with the Word of God (1 Corinthians 6:18), not engaging in carnal strife but showing a Christlike attitude toward all men (Romans 12:17-21), exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), and maintaining a life of prayer (Ephesians 6:18; Philippians 4:6), including the privilege, when sick, of calling for the Elders of the church to pray and to anoint with oil in the name of the Lord (James 5:13-18).

We believe and teach that separation from sin is clearly called for throughout the Old and New Testaments, and that the Scriptures clearly indicate that in the last days apostasy and worldliness shall increase (2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1; 2 Timothy 3:1-5). We believe and teach that, out of deep gratitude for the undeserved grace of God granted to us, faith in the precious promises of God given to us (2 Peter 1:3-9), and because our glorious God is so worthy of our total consecration, all the saved should live in such a manner as to demonstrate our adoring love to God and so as not to bring reproach upon our Lord and Savior (Matthew 5:13-16; Romans 12:1-2; Ephesians 4:1-2; 1 Peter 2:11-12). We also teach that separation from all religious apostasy and worldly and sinful practices is commanded of us by God (1 Corinthians 5:9-13; 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1; 1 John 2:15-17; 2 John 9-11). We believe and teach that believers should be separated unto our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thessalonians 1:11-12; Hebrews 12:1-2) and affirm that the Christian life is a life of obedient righteousness that reflects the teaching of the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:2-12) and a continual pursuit of holiness (Romans 12:1-2; 2 Corinthians 7:1; Hebrews 12:14; Titus 2:11-14; 1 John 3:1-10). Such a pursuit being made with the eyes of faith increasingly fixed on the glorious, living, blessed hope of seeing Jesus Christ in all His glory, face to face (John 14:1-3; 17:24; Romans 5:1-5; 2 Corinthians 4:16-18; Titus 2:11-14; Hebrews 12:1-3; 1 Peter 1:3-9; 1 John 3:2-3).

9. Ordinances

We believe and teach that Christians are commanded to observe the ordinances of our Lord Jesus Christ, which are baptism and communion. We believe in water baptism by immersion and practice the triune form (Matthew 28:19), baptizing once each in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. We participate in the communion of the bread and the cup in commemoration and proclamation of our Lord's

death until He comes, in the living hope of His presence among believers through His resurrection (Luke 22:14-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

Regarding the communion of the bread and the cup, we believe and teach that this ordinance, in remembrance and proclamation of the Lord's death until He comes, was instituted by Jesus Christ to be observed uniquely in remembrance of Him and His substitutionary death for the elect (Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:19-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26). The sharing in the bread and cup should always be preceded by solemn self-examination (1 Corinthians 11:28-32). We believe and teach that, whereas the bread and the cup are only representative of the flesh and blood of Christ, participation in these is nevertheless an actual communion with the risen Christ who indwells every believer, and so is present, fellowshiping with His people. Those who eat and drink in a worthy manner partake of Christ's body and blood, not physically, but spiritually, in that, by faith, they are nourished with the benefits He obtained through His death, and thus grow in grace (Jn. 6:53-57, 63; 1 Cor. 10:16,17).

10. Angels and Satan

We believe and teach in the existence of angels, both holy (spirit beings who worship and serve God – Hebrews 1:6-7; 2:6-7), and fallen (spirit beings who oppose God – Revelation 12:1-14). We believe and teach that Satan is the chief of the fallen angels, and as the great adversary of God and His people (Revelation 12:1-10), is under God's judgment (John 12:31), and will finally be doomed (Revelation 20:10).

Holy Angels. We believe and teach that angels are created beings and are, therefore, not to be worshiped. Although they are a higher order of creation than man, they are created to serve God, worship Him, and minister to His people (Exodus 20:3; Luke 2:9-14; Hebrews 1:6-7, 14; 2:6-7; Revelation 5:11-14; 19:10; 22:9).

Fallen Angels. We believe and teach that Satan is a created angel and the author of sin. He incurred the judgment of God by rebelling against his Creator through pride and selfish ambition (Isaiah 14:12-17; Ezekiel 28:11-19), by taking numerous angels with him in his fall (Matthew 25:41; Revelation 12:1-14), and by introducing sin into the human race by his temptation of Eve (Genesis 3:1-15). We believe and teach that Satan is the open and declared enemy of God and man (Isaiah 14:13-14; Matthew 4:1-11; John 8:44; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Revelation 12:1-10); that he is the prince of this world (Ephesians 2:2), who has been defeated through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (John 12:31-32; Romans 16:20); and that he shall be eternally punished in the lake of fire (Isaiah 14:12-17; Ezekiel 28:11-19; Matthew 25:41; Revelation 20:10).

We also believe and teach that the believer is removed from Satan's authority and dominion, and that a true believer, while being an object of severe oppression and attacks, cannot be indwelt bodily by a demon (John 12:31; Colossians 1:13-16; 2:15; 1 John 4:4). We believe and teach that the believer's warfare is waged by the "full armor of God"; and, therefore, doesn't involve binding or commanding Satan directly, but resisting him through the armor of the Word of God, earnest prayer, repentance from sin, and a holy life (Matthew 4:1-11; Ephesians 6:10-19; James 4:8-11; 1 Peter 5:6-10; 2 Corinthians 10:3-6).

11. The Second Coming of Christ

We believe and teach in the personal, visible, and imminent return of Christ to remove His church from the earth (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17), before the tribulation (1 Thessalonians 1:10; Revelation 3:10), and afterward to descend with the Church to establish His millennial kingdom upon the earth (Revelation 19:11-20:6).

The Rapture of the Church. We believe and teach the personal, bodily return of our Lord Jesus Christ before the seven year tribulation (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; Titus 2:13) to remove His church from this earth (John 14:1-3; 1 Corinthians 15:51-53; 1 Thessalonians 4:15-5:11), and, between this event and His glorious return with His saints, to reward believers according to their works (1 Corinthians 3:11-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10).

The Tribulation Period. We believe and teach that immediately following the removal of the church from the earth (John 14:1-3; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18), the righteous judgments of God will be poured out upon an unbelieving world (Jeremiah 30:7; Daniel 9:27; 12:1; 2 Thessalonians 2:7-12; Revelation 16), and that these judgments will be climaxed by the return of Christ in glory to the earth (Matthew 24:27-31; 25:31-46; 2 Thessalonians 2:7-12). At that time, the Old Testament and tribulation saints will be raised, and the living will be judged (Daniel 12:2-3; Revelation 20:4-6). This period includes the seventieth week of Daniel's prophecy (Daniel 9:24-27; Matthew 24:15-31; 25:31-46).

The Second Coming and the Millennial Reign. We believe and teach that, after the tribulation period, Christ will come to earth to occupy the throne of David (Matthew 25:31; Luke 1:31-33; Acts 1:10-11; 2:29-30) and establish His messianic kingdom for 1,000 years on the earth (Revelation 20:1-7). During this time, the resurrected saints will reign with Him over Israel and all the nations of the earth (Ezekiel 37:21-28; Daniel 7:17-22; Revelation 19:11-16). This reign will be preceded by the overthrow of the Antichrist and the False Prophet and by the removal of Satan from the world (Daniel 7:17-27; Revelation 20:1-7).

We believe and teach that the kingdom itself will be the fulfillment of God's promise to Israel (Isaiah 65:17-25; Ezekiel 37:21-28; Zechariah 8:1-17) to restore them to the land that they forfeited through their disobedience (Deuteronomy 28:15-68). The result of their disobedience was that Israel was temporarily set aside (Matthew 21:43; Romans 11:1-26), but will again be awakened through repentance to enter into the land of blessing (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:22-32; Romans 11:25-29).

We believe and teach that this time of our Lord's reign will be characterized by harmony, justice, peace, righteousness, and long life (Isaiah 11; 65:17-25; Ezekiel 36:33-38), and will be brought to an end with the temporary release of Satan before he is thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:7-10).

12. The Future Life

We believe and teach in the conscious existence of the dead (Philippians 1:21-23; Luke 16:19-31), the resurrection of the body (John 5:28-29), the judgment and reward of believers (Romans 14:10-12; 2 Corinthians 5:10), the judgment and condemnation of unbelievers (Revelation 20:11-15), the eternal life of the saved (John 3:16), and the eternal punishment of the lost (Matthew 25:46; Revelation 20:15).

Death. We believe and teach that physical death involves no loss of our immaterial consciousness (Revelation 6:9-11), that the soul of the redeemed passes immediately into the presence of Christ (Luke 23:43; Philippians 1:23; 2 Corinthians 5:8), that there is a separation of soul and body (Philippians 1:21-24), and that, for the redeemed, such separation will continue until the rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17). This initiates the first resurrection (Revelation 20:4-6), when our soul and body will be reunited to be glorified forever with our Lord (Philippians 3:21; 1 Corinthians 15:35-44, 50-54). Until that time, the souls of the redeemed in Christ remain in joyful fellowship with our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:8).

We believe and teach the bodily resurrection of all men, the saved to eternal life (John 6:39; Romans 8:10-11, 19-23; 2 Corinthians 4:14) and the unsaved to judgment and everlasting punishment (Daniel 12:2; John 5:29; Revelation 20:13-15).

We believe and teach that the souls of the unsaved at death are kept under punishment until the second resurrection (Luke 16:19-26; Revelation 20:13-15), when the soul and the resurrection body will be united (John 5:28-29). They shall then appear at the Great White Throne Judgment (Revelation 20:11-15) and shall be cast into hell, the lake of fire (Matthew 25:41-46), cut off from the life of God forever (Daniel 12:2; Matthew 25:41-46; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).

The Judgment of the Lost. We believe and teach that following the release of Satan after the 1,000 year reign of Christ (Revelation 20:7), Satan will deceive the nations of the earth and gather them to battle against the saints and the beloved city. At this time, Satan and his army will be devoured by fire from heaven (Revelation 20:9). Following this, Satan will be thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone (Matthew 25:41; Revelation 20:10), whereupon Christ, who is the Judge of all men (John 5:22), will resurrect and judge the great and small at the Great White Throne Judgment.

We believe and teach that this resurrection of the unsaved dead to judgment will be a physical resurrection, whereupon receiving their judgment (John 5:28-29), they will be committed to an eternal, conscious punishment in the lake of fire (Matthew 25:41; Revelation 20:11-15).

Eternity. We believe and teach that after the closing of the millennium, the temporary release of Satan, and the judgment of unbelievers (2 Thessalonians 1:9; Revelation 20:7-15), the saved will enter the eternal state of glory with God. After which, the elements of this earth are to be dissolved (2 Peter 3:10) and replaced with a new earth, wherein only righteousness dwells (Ephesians 5:5; Revelation 20:15; 21:1-27; 22:1-21). Following this, the heavenly city will come down out of heaven (Revelation 21:2) and will be the dwelling place of the saints, where they will enjoy fellowship forever with God and one another (John 17:3; Revelation 21-22). Our Lord Jesus Christ, having fulfilled His redemptive mission, will then deliver up the kingdom to God the Father (1 Corinthians 15:24-28) that in all spheres the triune God may reign forever and ever (1 Corinthians 15:28).

13. What It Means To Be A Christian

Being a Christian is more than identifying yourself with a particular religion or affirming a certain value system. Being a Christian means you have embraced what the Bible says about God, mankind, and salvation. Consider the following truths found in Scripture.

God Is Sovereign Creator. Contemporary thinking says man is the product of evolution, but the Bible says we were created by a personal God to love, serve, worship, and enjoy endless fellowship with Him. The New Testament reveals it was Jesus Himself who created everything (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16). Therefore, He also owns and rules everything (Psalm 103:19). This means He has authority over our lives, and we owe Him absolute allegiance, obedience, and worship.

God Is Holy. God is absolutely and perfectly holy (Isaiah 6:3; 1 John 1:5), therefore, He cannot commit or approve of evil (James 1:13). God requires holiness of us as well. 1 Peter 1:16 says, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”

Mankind Is Sinful. According to Scripture, everyone is guilty of sin, “There is no man who does not sin” (1 Kings 8:46). This doesn’t mean we’re incapable of performing acts of human kindness, but we’re utterly incapable of understanding, loving, or pleasing God on our own (Romans 3:10-12).

Sin Demands a Penalty. God’s holiness and justice demand that all sin be punished by death (Ezekiel 18:4). This is why simply changing our patterns of behavior can’t solve our sin problem or eliminate its consequences.

Jesus Is Lord and Savior. Romans 10:9 says, “If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved.” Even though God’s justice demands death for sin, His love has provided a Savior who paid the penalty and died for sinners (1 Peter 3:18). Christ’s death satisfied the demands of God’s justice, and Christ’s perfect life satisfied the demands of God’s holiness (2 Corinthians 5:21), thereby enabling Him to forgive and save those who place their faith in Him (Romans 3:26).

The Character of Saving Faith. True faith is always accompanied by repentance from sin. Repentance is agreeing with God that you are sinful, confessing your sins to Him, and making a conscious choice to turn from sin (Luke 13:3,5; 1 Thessalonians 1:9) and pursue Christ (Matthew 11:28-30; John 17:3) and obedience to Him (1 John 2:3). It isn’t enough to believe certain facts about Christ. Even Satan and his demons believe in the true God (James 2:19), but they don’t love and obey Him. True saving faith always responds in obedience (Ephesians 2:10).

14. Additional Statements and Positions

Because of the ever-present danger and spiritually destructive nature of false teaching (Matthew 7:15-20; Acts 20:28-31), it has been necessary throughout the history of the church for biblically accurate doctrinal positions to be articulated and clarified. Each generation of church Elders must be alert to the particular doctrinal attacks present in their time, and be diligent to “***contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints***” (Jude 3). To that end, we affirm our agreement with the following statements that have been put forth in recent years.

Regarding Biblical Inerrancy – The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (1978) produced by the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy (link to ICBI, and then the Chicago Statement at www.alliancenet.org).

Regarding the Biblical Roles of Men and Women – The Danvers Statement (1988) produced by the Council on Biblical Manhood & Womanhood found at www.cbmw.org/about/danvers.php.

Regarding the Centrality and Content of the Gospel – The Together for the Gospel Statement (2006) found at www.t4g.org/T4TG-statement.pdf.