

SALEM REFORMED BAPTIST
Confession of Faith

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Introduction

We believe that a clear statement of faith is a wonderful gift to the church of Jesus Christ. Christians have codified and summarized Christianity's core convictions and doctrines in brief and clear statements and confessions since the inception of the church. These clear doctrinal statements (creeds) were used by the early church as hymns and confessions of faith in order to teach the truth of the Gospel, hold strong to the apostolic tradition, prevent confusion, and protect the church from false doctrines and teachers.

Albert Mohler, president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, recently stated, "In a time of confusion, one of the greatest gifts that can be given to and by Christ's church is clarity, and clarity requires at times that matters of truth, matters of truth in particular times of trial, should be put into words in order to bear the testimony of that clarity."

A confession of faith is a response to God's revelation. Thus, the confessions of faith of a church must correspond to the boundaries and molds of biblical truth that God has revealed to us in the Scriptures. The Bible is and must always be the supreme authority in the life of the church in all matters of faith and practice. This Statement of Faith reflects substantially and accurately what our local church believes, teaches, and proclaims.

One important aspect of confessions is unity. A clear confession of faith can be very helpful in providing doctrinal unity in the life of a church. As Robert Gonzales Jr. stated, "A substantial amount of doctrinal agreement is necessary for biblical unity. A confession of faith can be a helpful tool in achieving this unity." Therefore, we confess that doctrinal clarity is extremely helpful for the Christian church! Contrary to our modern concept that "doctrine divides," we believe that a lucid and coherent statement of faith is the only way of achieving sound unity.

The things we omit in our declaration of faith, on the other hand, provide members of the church with freedom of conscience and space for disagreement in secondary matters.

The unity promoted by the statement of faith consequently brings peace among the members.

One other crucial aspect about declarations of faith, which is often neglected, is protection for the life of the church. Most creeds and confessions throughout the history of the church originated from the desire to protect the Gospel and the church from heresies and heretics.

Our statement of faith seeks to establish historical continuity and unity with other Christians. We aim to show that we are not given to theological novelties but stand with two feet firmly planted in the historic Christian tradition. This statement of faith relies much on documents such as the 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith, the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, and other historical and orthodox confessions. So here is what we believe:

SECTION I

The Holy Scriptures

We start this section by quoting from the 1689 London Baptist Confession (LBC),
The Holy Scripture is the only sufficient, certain, and infallible rule of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience, although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable; yet are they not sufficient to give that knowledge of God and his will which is necessary unto salvation. Therefore it pleased the Lord at sundry times and in divers manners to reveal himself, and to declare that his will unto his church; and afterward for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan, and of the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing; which makes the Holy Scriptures to be most necessary, those former ways of God's revealing his will unto his people being now ceased.

We believe that the Bible is God's written revelation to man, and thus all the books of the Bible given to us by the Holy Spirit constitute the plenary (inspired equally in all parts) Word of God (1 Corinthians 2:7-14; 2 Peter 1:20-21).

We believe that under the name of Holy Scripture, or the Word of God written, are now contained all the books of the Old and New Testaments, which are these:

OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

39 Books (24 According to the TaNaK Structure)

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, I Samuel, II Samuel, I Kings, II Kings, I Chronicles, II Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, The Song of Solomon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

27 Books

Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, The Acts of the Apostles, Romans, I Corinthians, II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, I Thessalonians, II Thessalonians, I Timothy, II Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, I Peter, II Peter, I John, II John, III John, Jude, and Revelation.

All of which are given by the inspiration of God, to be the rule of faith and life. The inspiration of Scripture refers to that act whereby the Holy Spirit came upon the authors of Scripture, causing them to write exactly what God intended, while simultaneously preserving each author's style and personality (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20-21) without error in the whole or in the part. This supernatural work of the Holy Spirit upon the human authors means that the author's words are God's words and therefore are reliable, trustworthy, and authoritative (Matthew 5:18; 24:35; John 10:35; 16:12-13; 17:17; 1 Corinthians 2:13; 2 Timothy 3:15-17; Hebrews 4:12; 2 Peter 1:20-21).

We believe that the Word of God is an objective and propositional revelation (1 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Corinthians 2:13), verbally inspired in every word (2 Timothy 3:16), absolutely inerrant in the original autographs, infallible, and God-breathed. Because the Bible is inspired by God it is also true in all its teachings (inerrant). The word inerrant comes from the Latin and it means “not erring or no errors.” By inerrant we mean that all that the Bible in its original manuscripts declares is true. We believe that the Bible constitutes the only infallible rule of faith and practice.

We believe that the authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, depends not upon the testimony of any man or church, but wholly upon God (who is truth itself), the author thereof; therefore, it is to be received because it is the Word of God (2 Peter 1:19-21; 2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 John 5:9).

We believe that the infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself; therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched by other places in the Bible that speak more clearly (2 Peter 1:20, 21; Acts 15:15, 16). The supreme judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Scripture delivered by the Spirit, into which Scripture so delivered, our faith is finally resolved (Matthew 22:29, 31, 32; Ephesians 2:20; Acts 28:23).¹

SECTION II

The Triune God

As Chapter 2 of the 1689 LBC states,
The Lord our God is one, the only living and true God. He is self-existent and infinite in being and perfection... God has all life, glory, goodness, and blessedness in and of himself; he alone is all-sufficient in himself. He does not need any creature he has made nor does he derive any glory from them. Instead, he demonstrates his own glory in them, by them, to them, and upon them. He alone is the source of all being, and everything is from him, through him, and to him. He has absolute sovereign rule over all creatures, to act through them, for them, or upon them as he pleases. In his sight everything is open and visible. His knowledge is infinite and infallible. It does not depend upon any creature, so for him nothing is contingent or uncertain. He is absolutely holy in all his plans, in all his works, and in all his commands. Angels and human beings owe to him all the worship, service, or obedience that creatures owe to the Creator and whatever else he is pleased to require of them.

We believe in one (Deut. 6:4, Isa. 45:5-6) eternal (1 Tim. 1:17), knowable (Heb. 1:1-2), and sovereign God (Dan. 4:34-35). He knows all things (Psa. 139:1-4), and providentially oversees all things (Mt. 10:29-31). He is merciful (Exod. 34:6), and just (Acts 17:31), loving (1 Jn. 4:8), and holy (Rev. 4:8), great in power (Ps. 147:5) and good in purpose (Rom. 8:28). His glory is our chief concern (1 Cor. 10:31).

We believe that there is but one living and true God (Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah 45:5-7; 1 Corinthians 8:4), an infinite, all-knowing Spirit (John 4:24), perfect in all His attributes, one in essence, eternally existing in three

¹This paragraph is taken from paragraphs nine and ten from the first chapter of the 1689 London Baptist Confession.

Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit ([the Father is not the Son and the Son is not the Holy Spirit, yet each is truly Deity.] Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14)—each equally deserving worship and obedience.

GOD THE FATHER

We believe that God the Father, the first Person of the Trinity, orders and disposes all things according to His own purpose and grace (Psalm 145:8-9; 1 Corinthians 8:6). 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. Spiritually, He is the Father to only believers (Romans 8:14; 2 Corinthians 6:18).

GOD THE SON

We believe that Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God the Father. He possesses all the divine excellencies, and in these He is coequal, consubstantial, and coeternal with the Father (John 10:30; 14:9).

We believe that God the Father created all things according to His own will through His Son, Jesus Christ, by whom all things continue in existence and in operation (John 1:3; Colossians 1:15-17; Hebrews 1:2).

We believe that in the incarnation (God becoming 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 that Jesus Christ represents humanity and deity in indivisible oneness (Micah 5:2; John 5:23; 14:9-10; Colossians 2:9).

We believe that our Lord Jesus Christ was virgin born (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 1:29; Philippians 2:9-11; Hebrews 7:25-26; 1 Peter 1:18-19).

We believe that, in the incarnation, the second Person of the Trinity laid aside His right to the full prerogatives of coexistence with God and took on an existence appropriate to a servant while never divesting Himself of His divine attributes (Philippians 2:5-8).

We believe that our Lord Jesus Christ accomplished our redemption 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; Romans 3:24-25; 5:8; 1 Peter 2:24). He did not simply provide a potential salvation but Jesus actually saved His people with His death.

We believe 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; and 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 that our justification 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 as our only 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 that in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave, God confirmed the deity of His Son and gave proof that God has accepted the atoning work of Christ 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 that Jesus Christ will return, His second coming, to judge the living and dead and bring the consummation of all things (Revelation 20:11-15)

We believe that we can only magnify God the Father because of the redeeming life and death and resurrection of God the Son, Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:5-6). Without Him, we are alienated from God and under his wrath (Ephesians 2:3, 12-13). Therefore, our entire relationship with the Father rests on Jesus. All of life, now and in eternity, depends on the saving and sustaining work of Jesus (Hebrews 1:3). God's purpose is that all the nations glory in this mercy (Romans 15:9) and bow at the name of Jesus (Philippians 2:10). Thus, the name of Jesus shall fly like a banner over every moment and every ministry and every mission of our church and of our lives: "Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Colossians 3:17).

GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT

We believe 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), eternality (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 that it is the work of the Holy Spirit to execute the divine will with relation to all mankind. We recognize 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 that the Holy Spirit is the supernatural and sovereign Agent in regeneration, baptizing all believers into the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13). The Holy Spirit also indwells, sanctifies, instructs, empowers them for service, and seals them unto the day of redemption (Romans 8:9; 2 Corinthians 3:6; Ephesians 1:13).

We believe 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 (2 Peter 1:19-21). Every believer possesses the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit from the moment of salvation, and it is the duty of all those born of the Spirit to be filled with and controlled by the Spirit (John 16:13; Romans 8:9; Ephesians 5:18; 1 John 2:20, 27).

We believe that the Holy Spirit administers spiritual gifts to the church. 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; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11; 2 Corinthians 3:18).

We believe, in this respect, that God the Holy Spirit is sovereign in the bestowing of all His gifts for the perfecting of the saints today, and that speaking in tongues and the working of sign miracles in the beginning days of the church were for the purpose of pointing to and authenticating the apostles as revealers of divine truth, and were not intended to be typical of the lives of believers after those days (1 Corinthians 12:4-11; 13:8-10; 2 Corinthians 12:12; Ephesians 4:7-12; Hebrews 2:1-4).

SECTION III

God's Decrees & Divine Providence²

We believe that God has decreed in Himself, from all eternity, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, for His own glory, freely and unchangeably, all things, whatsoever comes to pass; yet so as thereby is God neither the author of sin nor hath fellowship with any therein; nor is violence offered to the will of the creature, nor yet is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established; in which appears his wisdom in disposing all things, and power and faithfulness in accomplishing his decree (Isaiah 46:10; Ephesians 1:11; Hebrews 6:17; Romans 9:15, 18; James 1:13; 1 John 1:5; Acts 4:27, 28; John 19:11; Numbers 23:19; Ephesians 1:3-5).

We believe that God the good Creator of all things, in his infinite power and wisdom upholds, directs, disposes, and governs all creatures and things, from the greatest even to the least, by his most wise and holy providence, to the end for the which they were created, according unto his infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of his own will; to the praise of the glory of his wisdom, power, justice, infinite goodness, and mercy. (Hebrews 1:3; Job 38:11; Isaiah 46:10, 11; Psalms 135:6; Matthew 10:29-31; Ephesians 1:11).

SECTION IV

Man

We believe that in the beginning it pleased God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, for the manifestation of the glory of his eternal power, wisdom, and goodness, to create (or make) the world, and all things therein, whether visible or invisible by the power of his Word (John 1:2, 3; Hebrews 1:2; Job 26:13; Romans 1:20; Colossians 1:16; Genesis 1:31). After God had made all other creatures, He created man, male and female, with reasonable souls, rendering them fit unto that life to God for which they were created; being made after the image of God, in knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness; having the law of God written in their hearts, and power to fulfil it, and yet under a possibility of transgressing, being left to the liberty of their own will, which was subject to change. (Genesis 1:27; Genesis 2:7; Ecclesiastes 7:29; Genesis 1:26; Romans 2:14, 15; Genesis 3:6).³

²This chapter is derived from chapter five of the 1689 London Baptist Confession.

³This paragraph is derived from chapter four of the 1689 London Baptist Confession.

We believe that God directly created Adam from the dust of the ground and Eve from his side. We believe that Adam and Eve were the historical parents of the entire human race; that they were created male and female equally in the image of God, without sin; that they were created to glorify their Maker, Ruler, Provider, and Friend by trusting His all-sufficient goodness, admiring His infinite beauty, enjoying His personal fellowship, and obeying His all-wise counsel; and that, in God's love and wisdom, they were appointed differing and complementary roles in marriage as a type of Christ and the church.

We believe that God's intention in the creation of man was that man should glorify God, enjoy God's fellowship, live his life in the will of God, and by this accomplish God's purpose for man in the world (Isaiah 43:7; Colossians 1:16; Revelation 4:11).

We believe that in Adam's sin of disobedience to the revealed will and Word of God, man 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. With no recuperative powers to enable him to recover himself, man is hopelessly lost. Man's salvation 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; 1 John 1:8).

We believe that, because all men were in Adam, a nature corrupted by Adam's sin has been transmitted to all men (all mankind) of all ages, Jesus Christ being the only exception. All men are thus sinners by conception, by choice, and by divine declaration (Psalm 14:1-3; Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 3:9-18, 23; 5:10-12).

SECTION V

The Salvation of Man

We believe that salvation is wholly of God by grace 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). Through living a perfect life and dying in our place, the just for the unjust, Christ absorbed our punishment, appeased the wrath of God against us, vindicated the righteousness of God in our justification, and removed the condemnation of the law against us.

MAN'S RESPONSE TO THE GOSPEL

We believe that man's response to the gospel is rooted and grounded in the free and unconditional election of God for his own pleasure and glory. It is also true that the message of the gospel is only effectual to those who genuinely repent of their sins and, by God's grace, put saving faith in Christ. This gospel of grace is to be sincerely preached to all men in all nations. Biblical repentance is characterized by a changed life, and saving faith is evidenced by kingdom service or works. Saving faith is evidenced in the life of the Christian by the desire to deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Jesus through the narrow way of holiness.

ELECTION AND PREDESTINATION

We believe that election is the act of God by which, before the foundation of the world, He chose in Christ all those whom He graciously regenerates, saves, and sanctifies (Romans 8:28-30; Ephesians 1:4-11; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Timothy 2:10; 1 Peter 1:1-2).

We believe 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 sovereign grace includes the means of receiving the gift of salvation as well as the gift itself, sovereign election will result in what God determines. All whom the Father calls to Himself will come in faith, and all who come in faith the Father will receive (John 6:37-40, 44; Acts 13:48; James 4:8).

REDEMPTION

We believe that Jesus Christ' death was a powerful, salvific, and victorious death. Jesus died to redeem sinners, not to make sinners redeemable. We believe that having received the names of the elect from the Father in eternity past, Jesus Christ came into this world to purchase their salvation. Upon the cross, Jesus did not make the entire world somehow potentially savable. Rather, He actually saved. All for whom He died were truly saved through His death. Not one will perish (Matthew 1:21; 20:28; Luke 19:10; John 10:11, 14-16; 15:13; 17:9; Acts 20:28; Revelation 5:9-10).

MISSIONARY ENGAGEMENT

Due to man's fallen state, the work of redemption accomplished by Jesus, and His Great Commission, it is the responsibility and duty of every individual Christian to be involved somehow with the missionary activity of the church of Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:18-20; John 10:16; Romans 15:20-21). We believe that local churches must strive in the expansion of God's Kingdom through the preaching of the Gospel being proclaimed in order that those whom Jesus bought from every tribe, language, people, and nation may come to saving faith and be found before the throne of the Lamb (Revelation 5:9-10).

REGENERATION

We believe that regeneration is a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit by which the divine nature and divine life are given (John 3:3-7; Titus 3:5). 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) 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 2:12b; 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 a conformity is climaxed in the believer's glorification at Christ's coming (Romans 8:17; 2 Peter 1:4; 1 John 3:2-3).

JUSTIFICATION

We believe 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; Philippians 2:11). 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).

Thus, we believe that faith thus receiving and resting on Christ and his righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification; yet it is not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but worked by love (Romans 3:28; Galatians 5:6; James 2:17, 22, 26).⁴

SANCTIFICATION

We believe that every believer is sanctified (set apart) unto God by justification and is therefore declared to be holy and is therefore identified as a saint. This sanctification is positional and instantaneous and should not be confused with progressive sanctification. This 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 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 that every saved person is involved in a daily conflict—the new creation in Christ doing battle against the flesh—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 until he is in heaven. All claims to the eradication of sin in this life are unscriptural. Eradication of sin is not possible, but the Holy Spirit does provide for victory over sin (Galatians 5:16-25; Ephesians 4:22-24; Philippians 3:12; Colossians 3:9-10; 1 Peter 1:14-16; 1 John 3:5-9).

We believe that the Holy Spirit is the active agent in our sanctification and seeks to produce his fruit in us as our minds are renewed and we are conformed to the image of Christ. Though indwelling sin remains a reality, as we are led by the Spirit, we grow in the knowledge of the Lord, freely keeping his commandments and endeavoring to so live in the world that all people may see our good works and glorify our Father who is in heaven. All believers are exhorted to persevere in the faith knowing they will have to give an account to God for their every thought, word and deed. The spiritual disciplines, especially Bible study, prayer, worship and confession, are a vital means of grace in this regard. Nevertheless, the believer's ultimate confidence to persevere is based in the sure promise of God to preserve his people until the end which is most certain.

⁴This paragraph is derived from chapter eleven, paragraph two of the 1689 London Baptist Confession.

SECURITY

We believe that 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 Peter 1:5; Jude 24). We believe 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).

SECTION VI

The Church

We believe that God, by His Word and Spirit, creates the Church, calling sinful men out of the whole human race into the fellowship of Christ's body. By the same Word and Spirit, He guides and preserves that newly redeemed humanity. The Church is not a religious institution or denomination. Rather, the Church is made up of those who have become genuine followers of Jesus Christ and have personally appropriated the gospel. The Church exists to worship and glorify God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It also exists to serve Him by faithfully doing His will on earth. This service involves a commitment to see the gospel preached and churches planted in the entire world. The ultimate mission of the Church is to bring glory to God by making disciples. Upon conversion, newly redeemed men and women are added to a local church in which they devote themselves to teaching, fellowship, the Lord's Supper, prayer, and service (Acts 2:38-42 and 47; Ephesians 3:21; 4:13-16; 2 Timothy 2:2, 15; 3:16-17; 1 John 1:3).

We believe in 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 organizations (Titus 1:5). We teach that it is scriptural for local churches to cooperate with each other for the presentation and propagation of the faith.

We believe that according to the New Testament the two leadership offices in the church are the offices of elders (overseers) and deacons (Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:8-13). The elders have the duty of overseeing the church; they pastor the congregation with sound doctrine, protecting it from false teachings; guiding and teaching the church members to exercise their Christ-given gifts and authority. Deacons come alongside the elders to help them and the church primarily with the physical (material) needs of the church (see more below).

We believe that the elders of the local church have a major biblical role in leading the flock of Christ. We believe in elder-led congregationalism. The local church is ruled by Jesus, led by biblically qualified elders, and the authority to for major decisions based on the Scriptures is given to the whole church. All the members of the local church when assembled together have authority as a church, but the congregation is led and taught by the elders in how to use that authority (Matthew 18:15-17; Acts 6:1-5; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; 2 Corinthians 2: 6- 8; Galatians 1:8; 2 Timothy 4:3). The keys of the Kingdom were given by Jesus to the whole church and not just to the elders, the elders lead the congregation in how to use this authority.

We believe it is God's will that the universal Church find expression in local churches in which believers agree together to hear the Word of God proclaimed, to engage in corporate worship, to practice the ordinances

of baptism and the Lord's Supper, to build each other's faith through the manifold ministries of love, and to hold each other accountable in the obedience of faith through Biblical discipline.

CHURCH MEMBERSHIP AND CHURCH DISCIPLINE

We believe that all members of the church are to be a vital and committed part of a local church. In this context, they are called to live out the implications of the gospel as the people of God and demonstrate the reality of the kingdom of God. We believe in the importance of discipleship (Matthew 28:19-20; 2 Timothy 2:2) and mutual accountability of all believers to each other (Matthew 18:5-14), as well as the need for discipline of unrepentant professing members of the congregation in accord with the standards of Scripture (Matthew 18:15-22; Acts 5:1-11; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15; 1 Timothy 1:19-20; Titus 1:10-16).

CHURCH LEADERSHIP

We believe that the ascended Christ has given gift ministries to the Church for the equipping of Christ's body so that it might mature and grow (Ephesians 4:7-13). In the context of the local church, God's people receive pastoral care and oversight and the opportunity to steward their gifts for His glory and the good of the others (Acts 20:28; Ephesians 4:11). The biblically designated officers serving under Christ and over the assembly are elders (also called bishops, pastors, and pastor-teachers; Acts 20:28; Ephesians 4:11) and deacons, both of whom must meet biblical qualifications (1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:1-5), which includes being only men. We believe that these leaders lead or rule as servants of Christ (1 Timothy 5:17-22) and have His authority in directing the church. The congregation is to submit to their leadership (Hebrews 13:7, 17).

SPIRITUAL GIFTS

We believe 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 apostles' message (Hebrews 2:3-4; 2 Corinthians 12:12); and ministering gifts, given to equip believers for edifying one another (Romans 12:6-8). 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 be counterfeited by Satan so as to deceive even believers (1 Corinthians 13:13-14:12; Revelation 13:13-14). The main purpose of speaking in tongues and the working of sign miracles in the beginning days of the church was pointing to and authenticating the apostles as revealers of divine truth, and these gifts were not intended to be typical of the lives of believers after those days (1 Corinthians 12:4-11; 13:8-10; 2 Corinthians 12:12; Ephesians 4:7-12). We also affirm the power and sovereign freedom that God the Holy Spirit has to operate such signs again and we believe that the Holy Spirit can operate miracles as He so chooses.

CHURCH ORDINANCES

We believe that the Lord Jesus has given to His church two major ordinances, baptism and the Lord's Supper, that are normatively practiced as an entire local church. They are to be practiced publicly and corporately by the local church (Acts 2:38-42).

We believe that Christian baptism is by immersion (Acts 8:36-39) and is the solemn and beautiful testimony of a believer showing forth his faith in the crucified, buried, and risen Savior, and his union with Him in death to sin and resurrection to a new life (Romans 6:1-11). It is also a sign of fellowship and identification with the visible Body of Christ (Acts 2:41-42).

We believe that as with water baptism, the Lord's Supper is to be observed only by those who have become genuine followers of Christ. We believe that the Lord's Supper is the commemoration and proclamation of His death until He comes, and should be always preceded by solemn self-examination (1 Corinthians 11:28-32). We also believe that, whereas the elements of Communion are only representative of the flesh and blood of Christ, participation in the Lord's Supper is nevertheless an actual communion with the risen Christ, who indwells every believer, and so is present, fellowshiping with His people (1 Corinthians 10:16).

SECTION VII

Angels and Demons

We believe 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 and to worship Him (Luke 2:9-14; Hebrews 1:6-7, 14; 2:6-7; Revelation 5:11-14; 19:10; 22:9).

We believe that Satan is a created angel and the author of sin. He incurred the judgment of God by rebelling against his Creator, 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 also believe that Satan is the open and declared enemy of God and man (Matthew 4:1-11; Revelation 12:9-10); that he is the prince of this world but he has been defeated by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and thus being bound and placed under the sovereign reign of Christ (Romans 16:20). His defeat and binding does not imply that Satan is inactive; the Bible is clear that he is still at work in the earth among the sons of disobedience and is on the prowl seeking whom he may devour (Ephesians 2:2; 1 Peter 5:8) but he has no power to stop the church of Christ. We believe that Satan shall be eternally punished in the lake of fire (Matthew 25:41; Revelation 20:10) and all his activities will cease when Jesus returns to judge the living and the dead.

SECTION VIII

The Last Things

We believe that those who by faith saw Christ's day before it came and those who saw it later were and are all washed in the same blood, all redeemed with the same ransom price, and made members of the same body. Before the first advent of Christ, all the types and shadows pointed one way—they pointed to Christ, and to Him all the saints looked with hope. In Christ, the dividing wall between Jew and Gentile has been destroyed (Ephesians 2:11-22). It cannot be rebuilt. The two peoples (Jews and Gentiles) have been made one in Christ. Among those who are united to Christ by grace alone, through faith alone, there is no Jew nor Gentile (Romans 10:12; Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:11). The church has always been the Israel of God and the Israel of God has always been the church. God "grafted" the Gentiles into the people of God (Romans 11).

We believe that with the advent, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ we have already entered what the Scriptures call "the last days." We believe that in Jesus all the promises of God are "amen and amen." We believe that the New Testament teaches that the Kingdom of God has already been inaugurated with the first coming of Jesus but it has not yet been consummated. We believe that the consummation of all things waits the second coming of the Lord Jesus.

We believe that Jesus will return to earth personally, visibly, and bodily as King of kings and Lord of lords (Acts 1:11). At his appearing the dead shall be raised and the living and the dead will be judged (1 Corinthians 15:20-28). The wicked and unbelieving will be consigned to eternal punishment in hell (Revelation 14:15; 20:10). Those belonging to Jesus will have eternal life in the new heavens and the new earth and live in ever-increasing joy to the glory of God (Revelation 21:1-5). Married to Christ as his Bride, the Church will be in the presence of God forever, serving Him and giving Him unending praise and glory. Then shall the eager expectation of creation be fulfilled and the whole earth shall proclaim the glory of God who makes all things new.

We believe in 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 that hell is a real place of eternal wrath. We believe 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 of Judgment (Revelation 20:11-15) and shall be cast into hell, the lake of fire (Matthew 25:41-46), cut off from all the blessings of God forever (Daniel 12:2; Matthew 25:41-46; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).

SECTION IX

About Marriage, Sexuality, and the Sexes

We believe that marriage is a God-given institution, ordained by the Creator. The Word of God defines marriage as a lifelong covenant (commitment to one another) between only one man (male at birth) and only one woman (female at birth) (Genesis 2:24, Matthew 19:1-9, Mark 10:1-12). Though various cultures and customs have changing definitions of marriage, it is God alone who has ultimate authority to prescribe and describe the marital relationship. We strongly reject the concept of “homosexual marriage.”

We believe that sexual intimacy is only properly exercised and pursued within the confines of this marital relationship. Sexual immorality, defined as any sexual activity outside of the boundaries of the sacred marital relationship between one man and one woman, is clearly and expressly prohibited by the Lord (Matthew 15:19, 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, 1 Thessalonians 4:3, Hebrews 13:4).

We believe that God created only two sexes (see Section IV Man) and that it is sinful to intend or desire to surgically alter one’s biological birth sex to a different sex. Since the body is a creation of God, the church holds sexual identity to be biologically determined, and associated sexual norms are to be observed as fitting to biblical standards. Disagreement with one’s biological sex only leads to spiritual confusion and emotional chaos (Genesis 1:27, Romans 1:26-32, 1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

We believe that though sinful sexual expression is egregious (as is all sin), the gospel provides redemption and restoration to all who confess and forsake their sin, seeking mercy and forgiveness through Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 6:9-11, Ephesians 2:1-10, Titus 3:3-7).

We believe that women play a vital role in the life of the Church but in keeping with God's created design, they are not permitted "to teach or to have authority over a man" (1 Timothy 2:11). From the very beginning, women fulfilled a vital role in the Christian church (Acts 1:12–14; 9:36–42; 16:13–15; 17:1–4, 10–12; 18:1–2, 18, 24–28; Romans 16; 1 Corinthians 16:19; 2 Timothy 1:5; 4:19), but not one of leadership. The apostles were all men; the chief missionary activity was done by men; the writing of the New Testament was the work of men; and leadership in the churches was entrusted to men. Although the Apostle Paul respected women and worked side by side with them for the furtherance of the gospel (Romans 16; Philippians 4:3), he appointed no female elders or pastors. In his letters, he urged that men were to be the leaders in the church and that women were not to teach or exercise authority over men (1 Timothy 2:12). Therefore, although women are spiritual equals with men and the ministry of women is essential to the body of Christ, women are excluded from leadership over men in the church. Men and women stand as equals before God, both bearing the image of God Himself. Without making one inferior to the other, God calls upon both men and women to fulfill the roles and responsibilities specifically designed for them, a pattern that can be seen even in the Godhead (1 Corinthians 11:3). In fulfilling the divinely given roles taught in the New Testament, both women and men are able to realize their full potential because they are following the plan of their own Creator and Designer.

For a more articulate and detailed view of our beliefs relevant to this section, see the Nashville Statement from A Coalition for Biblical Sexuality.⁵

SECTION X

About the Roles or Jurisdictions of Church, Family, and Civil Magistrates

We believe that the key roles of the church are delineated in Section VI (The Church).

We believe that God has ordained families (i.e., parents and children) to be the normative social unit for executing particular functions. Some of these functions include Christian parents having the primary authority over and being commanded to raise their children in the nurture, discipline, and instruction of the Lord (Ephesians 6:1-4); parents providing the general education (e.g., reading, writing, morals, values) of children; parents having the duty and authority to provide for the physical needs of their children; and men learning to manage their households well (I Timothy 3:1-7). God designated the parents, not the state and not the church, to be the primary caregivers and decision makers for their family unit. All the aforementioned are to be done with the instruction and support of the church. We believe that the church and the family were designed by God to be complementary, compatible, and harmonious.

We believe that God, the supreme Lord and King of all the world, has ordained civil magistrates to be under Him, over the people, for his own glory and the public good; and to this end has armed them with the power of the sword, for defense and encouragement of them that do good, and for the punishment of evil doers. (1 Romans 13:1-4). Civil magistrates being set up by God for the ends aforesaid; subjection, in all lawful things commanded by them, ought to be yielded by us in the Lord, not only for wrath, but for conscience' sake; and we ought to make supplications and prayers for kings (e.g., governors, presidents, prime ministers) and all that are in authority, that under them we may live a quiet and peaceable life, in all godliness and honesty (Romans 13:5-7; 1 Peter 2:17; 1 Timothy 2:1,2).⁶

⁵Nashville Statement by A Coalition for Biblical Sexuality, <https://cbmw.org/nashville-statement/> (accessed August 31, 2017).

⁶This paragraph is derived from chapter 24 of the 1689 London Baptist confession.