



PASEO
DEL REY CHURCH

AN EXPLANATION OF THE STATEMENT OF FAITH

SEPTEMBER 19, 2022

Introduction

This document attempts to briefly explain each of the items in our Statement of Faith. For a fuller discussion of items 1-10, please see *Evangelical Convictions: A Theological Exposition of the Statement of Faith of the Evangelical Free Church of America*, © 2011, Free Church Publications.

1. *We believe in one God, Creator of all things, holy, infinitely perfect, and eternally existing in a loving unity of three equally divine Persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Having limitless knowledge and sovereign power, God has graciously purposed from eternity to redeem a people for himself and to make all things new for his own glory.*

One God . . . three persons: There are many places in the Bible that indicate that God is one, including the declarative statement in Deuteronomy 6:4, "*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.*" (See also Mal 2:10, 15; 1 Co 8:6; Eph 4:6; 1 Ti 2:5). However, the Bible also makes clear that there are three persons in one God. While the term Trinity is not found in Scripture, it is clearly demonstrated. The Hebrew word for the first use of the word "God" in Gen 1:1 is Elohim, which is a plural word and is made apparent when God says, "*Let us make man . . .*" Further, throughout Scripture, Jesus, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are referred to as God and divine qualities are attributed to each. (Jn 5:18; Act 5:3, 4; Jn 15:26) Jesus also calls himself God (I Am, i.e., YAHWEH, Jn 8:58).

The Trinity is a divine mystery that can be difficult to understand, so much so, that various views arose in the early church, resulting in debate within the church as to what was the correct view. Views that were considered inconsistent with Scripture were deemed to be heresies, some of which still exist within some religious organizations. One of the major heresies is referred to as modalism, under which God is not comprised of three persons, but he instead manifests himself in three modes: at times he is God the Father, at other times Jesus the Son, and at others the Holy Spirit. Given God's references to his Son and to his Spirit and given that Jesus referred to the others in the third person, prayed to the Father, and sent the Spirit after he resurrected, we do not believe that modalism accurately reflects the mystery of our Triune God.

Another major heresy is known as Arianism, named for its proponent Arius, which holds that Jesus is a created being, created by God, therefore is not the same as God and not eternal as God is. Another heresy, Tritheism, ignores the oneness of God and posits three separate Gods.

Various church councils were held and creeds created that addressed the heresies and determined what was acceptable Christian belief. A council convened by Constantine in 325 decreed that the Father and Son were *homoousios* (the same substance or essence). Later, the Nicene Creed was written in part to counteract Arianism. Augustine was a major trinitarian proponent and his views strongly influenced the Athanasian Creed, written by Athanasius, a fourth century bishop. This creed was specifically drafted to defend and describe the Trinity.

Creator: Genesis 1 and 2 evidence God as creator of all things and he is recognized as creator throughout Scripture. The Psalms are replete with references to God's creation. Colossians 1:6 says, "*For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.*" (See also Neh 9:6; Act 17:24; 28; Rev 4:11) Creation was not a result of blind chance or in any way random. It was

specifically a work of God, which he himself declared was good throughout Genesis 1. (See also 1 Ti 4:4)

Holy: Merriam-Webster defines holy as “exalted or worthy of complete devotion as one perfect in goodness and righteousness”. This clearly describes the God we find in Scripture. Is 6:3 says, *“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!”* Even ground where God was present was called holy ground (Exo 3:5). (See also Lev 10:3; Lev 19:2; Exo 15:11; Isa 5:16; 1 Pet 1:16). Those who were faced with the holiness of God in their presence were filled with awe, fear, and reverence. (See Isa 6; 1 Sa 6:20; Luk 5:8; Rev 6:17)

Infinitely perfect: God is infinite in every way. He existed before time and before the foundation of the world. He is infinite in all of his attributes, e.g., holiness, justice, mercy. He is not bound by space or time. (Psa 90:2) God is without defect or fault. He is perfect in all he is and does.

Romans 11:33 *“Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!”* He is completely self-sufficient, needing nothing from anyone.

*“Can you find out the deep things of God?
Can you find out the limit of the Almighty?
It is higher than heaven—what can you do?
Deeper than Sheol—what can you know?
Its measure is longer than the earth
and broader than the sea.”* Job 11:7-9

Loving: God demonstrates his love throughout Scripture:

- His creation of us and his desire to have relationship with us
- His covenants with Israel and his patience with them
- His rescuing Israel from Egypt and leading them to the Promised Land
- That he sent his Son to take on our debt and that Jesus was willing to die for us
- That he has promised eternity to those whom he has saved

(See Exo 15:13; Num 14:18; Deu 7:8; many Psalms; Jn 3:16; 1 Jn 4:8, 16)

Limitless knowledge and sovereign power: In Job 38 and 39 God questions Job asking him whether he knows certain things, clearly indicating that God knows them—things impossible for a man to know. Only the Creator God would know these things. (See Psa 94:11; Psa 139; Mat 6:8, 24:36; Jn 16:30; Rom 11:33, 34)

Sovereignty is defined in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary as a: supreme power; b: freedom from external control; c: controlling influence. God, by definition, must be supreme, or he wouldn't be God. He is permanent as discussed under Infinite above. As God, he also has supreme authority. He created everything and everything exists in him and is under his control. His sovereignty is demonstrated throughout Scripture by his ability to successfully accomplish his plans. (See Act 4:24; 1 Ti 6:15; Rev 6:10)

Redeem a people: God's covenant with Abraham demonstrates his desire to redeem a people for himself and to bless all nations. He *"chose us in him before the foundation of the world . . ."* (Eph 1:4). (Gen 18:18, 22:18, 26:4; Psa 72:17; Rev 7:9-10)

To make all things new: While God has redeemed those he has saved, we and the Earth still bear the effects of the Fall. God has promised to make all things new (Rev 21:5). There will be a new heaven and earth (Rev 21:1). *"He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."* (Rev 21:4)

For his own glory: God's glory runs throughout Scripture. He makes clear that all he does, he does for his own glory. This includes what he does to "make a name for himself" (2 Sa 7:23). This includes his desire that people from all nations will be saved. He wants the world to know his name, his glory, and to receive praises and adoration. The gospel is not about us, it is all about God. (For an excellent discussion of the things that bring God glory and thus bring him pleasure, see *The Pleasures of God*, by John Piper. All of it is good, but particularly relevant here is his chapter "The Pleasure of God in his Fame").

2. *We believe that God has spoken in the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, through the words of human authors. As the verbally inspired Word of God, the Bible is without error in the original writings, the complete revelation of his will for salvation, and the ultimate authority by which every realm of human knowledge and endeavor should be judged. Therefore, it is to be believed in all that it teaches, obeyed in all that it requires, and trusted in all that it promises.*

We believe that God has spoken in the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments: The Scriptures, Old and New Testament, are inspired by God and hold God's special revelation to humankind. Certainly, God has given an implicit general revelation in men's hearts, and every human, regardless of ethnic and cultural background, feels the need to worship, to find life's meaning and to belong to something bigger than themselves (Act 17:22-23, Rom 1:18-21). This fact is evident as every culture has developed different religions, and even anti-theistic, totalitarian societies, have replaced ancient religions with the worship to the state and the leader. Even our western culture as it calls itself "Christian," adores materialism and hedonism in its search for meaning (Rom 1:21-23). While it's true that general revelation pushes us to seek God and gives us a rudimentary understanding of good and evil (Rom 2:14-15), it's insufficient to deal with man's fallen condition and does not provide any avenue to reconcile us with God. It is for this reason that God has given us his special revelation; it is God who communicates with man and it is God who teaches those things that are necessary to reconcile man to himself. The Bible holds the totality of God's special revelation (Luk 16:29-31; Col 2:3; 2 Ti 3:14-17).

through the words of human authors: God chose a particular way to give the special revelation to man. It could be argued (in a pragmatic and somewhat cynical way) that it would have been easier if God had sent by email a theology book with all questions answered. In reality, the only things written by God were the tablets of stone with the Law (Exo 24:12), which God gave to Moses. Moses broke them (Exo 32:19) and then had to rewrite them (Exodus 34:1). God chose human authors to give his revelation to man and he used their life and experiences to register his Word. The authors of the Bible recount their own lives and struggles, they wrote poetry, songs and prayers,

they sent letters and tell the story of their people (Deuteronomy 31:24, 30; Ecc 1:1; Isa 1:1; Joel 1:1; Luke 1:1-4). The Bible surprises the reader that reads it for the first time; it tells a story full of crimes, injustices and wars, and the heroes of the Bible don't seem to be any better than the rest (Rom 3:2-4). God used these imperfect authors to receive his Word and in a miraculous and providential way the Holy Spirit guided the thoughts and ideas of these authors so they wrote all those things that God wanted to communicate to us (2 Ti 3:16).

As the verbally inspired Word of God, the Bible is without error in the original writings: God inspired the biblical authors to communicate his Word, which constitutes the "complete revelation of His will for salvation" and is "without error in the original writings" (Heb 1:1-2; 2 Pe 1:20-21). The Bible in its original writings has no error (Psa 12:6, 119:89, 160), and thanks to the work of copyists, translators and scholars we have a very high degree of confidence in our modern translations. The Bible has come to us miraculously preserved by God's providence, regardless of the twists of history and the several maligned attempts to destroy it. When we declare that the Bible is inerrant it is important to highlight that its affirmations are true as they are to be judged according to their purpose, a passage should be understood as the author intended to communicate it (in its historical and cultural context) and should be read taking into account the rules for the literary genre in which they are written.

the complete revelation of his will for salvation, and the ultimate authority by which every realm of human knowledge and endeavor should be judged: The Bible contains all that God wanted to reveal to mankind, it teaches God's will for our salvation and it shows us his providence towards us. There is no other document that "completes" or "complements" the Bible (Gal 1:6-9). Through history, any attempt to add something to Scripture has led to errors (apocryphal writings, additions, misinterpretations or even traditions).

Therefore, it is to be believed in all that it teaches, obeyed in all that it requires, and trusted in all that it promises: The Bible is the final and ultimate authority regarding faith and behavior, and as such, God demands our faith and obedience to its teachings (Psa 119:44-45). Also, we can be certain that God will do according to his Word; he is faithful, and always fulfills his promises (2 Pe 1:4; Num 23:19; 2 Sa 7:28).

- We believe that God created Adam and Eve in his image, but they sinned when tempted by Satan. In union with Adam, human beings are sinners by nature and by choice, alienated from God, and under his wrath. Only through God's saving work in Jesus Christ can we be rescued, reconciled and renewed.*

God created Adam and Eve: Genesis 2 tells us he created Adam and then created Eve as a mate to him. This relationship somewhat mirrored the Trinity in that they were to live in loving unity as the Trinity does. It was through this relationship that God commanded that they be fruitful and multiply (Gen 1:28). This will have bearing on Point number 12 below.

In his image: *"Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."* (Gen 1:26-27). What does it mean to be in his image?

The Bible doesn't directly define this, but it seems we carry some of the attributes of God, though not anywhere near perfectly. He has made us rational, creative, social, relational, able to love, able to judge good and evil, able to communicate, able to appreciate beauty, etc. God, the ultimate authority and ruler, has given man authority and rule over Earth, commanding Adam to have dominion over the Earth.

(Said King Caspian) "I was wishing that I came of a more honorable lineage." You come of the Lord Adam and the Lady Eve," said Aslan. "And that is both honor enough to erect the head of the poorest beggar, and shame enough to bow the shoulders of the greatest emperor in earth."

(C. S. Lewis, *Prince Caspian*, pgs. 211-212)

It is because we are created in his image that we are to love others and treat them with respect and dignity. We are also to protect one another. This has significant bearing on Item 11 below.

But they sinned: Adam and Eve were tempted by Satan and believed his lies and decided they wanted to be like God. They decided that they wanted to be king over their own lives. The sin was pride and self-centeredness. When they disobeyed and ate the forbidden fruit, all of humanity fell into sin and all are born into it now. (Gen 3) David acknowledges his sinfulness at birth. (Psa 51:5) This is known as the Fall.

"Sin is the revolt of the self against God, the dethronement of God with a view to the enthronement of oneself. Ultimately, sin is self-deification, the reckless determination to occupy the throne which belongs to God alone."

(John Stott, *Roman's: God's Good News for the World*, pg 100)

As the first humans, Adam and Eve represented mankind. Their rebellion brought God's wrath upon us all. (Gen 3:24) When sin became rampant, God was grieved that he had created man (Gen 6:5-6) Paul makes clear in Romans 5 that sin and death entered through one man (Adam) and affects all mankind. (Rom 5:12, 14, 17, 19)

Human beings are sinners by nature and by choice: Clearly Adam and Eve had a choice. The only time man had a truly free will was before the Fall. At that time, we were able to sin, though we had not yet. After the Fall, we became captive to sin (not able not to sin). Our wills are now bound within our sinful nature. As such, our will is free within those bounds, but sin taints everything within those bounds. C. S. Lewis describes that from the moment a person becomes aware of God as God and of one's self as self, s/he has the "terrible alternative of choosing God or self" and that is the basic sin under which all particular sins fall.

". . . at this very moment you and I are either committing it, about to commit it, or repenting it. We try, when we wake, to lay the new day at God's feet; before we have finished shaving, it becomes *our* day and God's share in it is felt as a tribute which we must pay out of "our own" pocket, a deduction from the time which ought, we feel, to be "our own . . . Thus, all day long, and all the days of our life, we are sliding, slipping, falling away . . ." (C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, Chap 5, para 5)

An ominous sounding word now describes our state: we are in a state of total depravity. That doesn't mean we're as evil as we could be and that we can't do anything that is good and right.

Few of us are Hitlers or Jeffrey Dahmers, but we ALL have the stain and taint of sin which resides in every part of our being and can affect how we feel, what we think, and what we say and do. (To keep you reading and not leave you hopeless, there is hope! See points 4-10 below. Believers are new creations in Christ and while we are still in a fallen state, we are now able not to sin through the power of his Holy Spirit.)

Augustine recounts a story from his youth that is quite telling of our depravity. (His *Confessions* are highly recommended as a beautiful book of confession and praise. EVERYONE should read it.)

I was willing to steal, and steal I did, although I was not compelled by any lack, unless it were the lack of a sense of justice or a distaste for what was right and a greedy love of doing wrong. For of what I stole I already had plenty, and much better at that, and I had no wish to enjoy the things I coveted by stealing, but only to enjoy the theft itself and the sin. There was a pear-tree near our vineyard, loaded with fruit that was attractive neither to look at nor to taste. Late one night a band of ruffians, myself included, went off to shake down the fruit and carry it away, for we had continued our games out of doors until well after dark, as was our pernicious habit. We took away all enormous quantity of pears, not to eat them ourselves, but simply to throw them to the pigs. Perhaps we ate some of them, but our real pleasure consisted in doing something that was forbidden. Look into my heart, O God, the same heart on which you took pity when it was in the depths of the abyss. Let my heart now tell you what prompted me to do wrong for no purpose, and why it was only my own love of mischief that made me do it. The evil in me was foul, but I loved it. I loved my own perdition and my own faults, not the things for which I committed wrong, but the wrong itself. My soul was vicious and broke away from your safe keeping to seek its own destruction, looking for no profit in disgrace but only for disgrace itself.

(Augustine, *Confessions*, Book 2, Chapter 4)

If we're honest, we can relate to this. We've all dwelt on impure thoughts, said or did things that are improper. At times we may even wonder where a thought, word, or deed came from and how or why it could have come to pass. That is our sin nature rearing its ugly head, taking pleasure in doing what is forbidden and/or out of a desire to do mischief. No one is guiltless and without sin:

- *Who can say, "I have made my heart pure; I am clean from my sin"?* (Pro 20:9)
- *All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags* (Isa 64:6)
- *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?* (Jer 17:9)
- *as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one;*
 - ¹¹ *no one understands;*
no one seeks for God.
 - ¹² *All have turned aside; together they have become worthless;*
no one does good,
not even one."
 - ¹³ *"Their throat is an open grave;*
they use their tongues to deceive."
"The venom of asps is under their lips."
 - ¹⁴ *"Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness."*

¹⁵ *"Their feet are swift to shed blood;
¹⁶ in their paths are ruin and misery,
¹⁷ and the way of peace they have not known."*

¹⁸ *"There is no fear of God before their eyes."* (Rom 3:10-18)

- *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.* (Rom 3:23)
- *If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.* (1 Jn 1:8)

Blaise Pascal wrote, "The greatness of man is great in that he knows himself to be miserable." (*Penses*, #397). Augustine confirmed this, centuries earlier when he wrote, "You have made us and drawn us to yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you." (*Confessions*, Book 1, Chapter 1). The only thing that will allow for us to rest in him is to be reconciled to him (see below).

Alienated from God: As a result of their sin and the broken relationship, God banished them from the garden. (Gen 3:23, 24). Various passages describe our alienation from God. See Col 1:21; Eph 2:1, 5; 4:18; Rom 5:10.

Under God's wrath: God warned in Gen 2:17 that if they ate the fruit they would surely die. Prior to the Fall, there was no death. Adam and Eve would have lived forever. After the Fall, they would someday die physically and they instantly died spiritually. (Eph 2:1) In addition, God cursed them in Gen 3:16-19, making life far from paradise. As a result of the Fall, we became objects of wrath (Eph 2:3). The early chapters of Romans describe our sin in detail and God's wrath on sin.

Only through . . . Jesus can we be rescued, reconciled, and renewed: As a result of the Fall, we are left with a total inability to save ourselves. The Israelites demonstrated this with their inability to faithfully obey God and his laws. Point 5 below will address Jesus' work more fully, but despite the broken relationship we have with God as a result of Adam and Eve's fall, Jesus' saving work has rescued those whose faith is in him from the consequences of sin, i.e., separation from him and eternal damnation. As the last Adam (1 Cor 15:45), Jesus represented us at the cross to replace the representation of the first Adam at the Fall. As the only mediator between God and men (1 Tim 2:5-6), he has reconciled the broken relationship and has renewed us through his Holy Spirit, opening our eyes to see our need for Jesus and writing God's law on our hearts, giving us power to resist sin. (1 Th 1:10, 5:9; Rom 8:1, 5:11; 2 Co 5:19; Rom 5:1, 8:16)

4. *We believe that Jesus Christ is God incarnate, fully God and fully man, one Person in two natures. Jesus—Israel's promised Messiah—was conceived through the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He lived a sinless life, was crucified under Pontius Pilate, arose bodily from the dead, ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father as our High Priest and Advocate.*

Jesus Christ is God incarnate, fully God and fully man, one Person in two natures: Jesus' identity has been controversial since the days he walked on this Earth. The gospels narrate how some people considered him to be a teacher, a prophet, a demon-possessed man, a crazy guy, a subversive revolutionary and, for some few elected ones, the Son of God. Jesus is perfect God and perfect man, the union of the divine nature and the human nature.

Jesus himself is God who *"emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men"* (Phi 2:6-11). He is fully God and fully man (Col 1:15-19; Heb 2:17). Jesus demonstrated his divine nature with great wonders and miracles. He healed sick people from several ailments,

repaired sight to the blind, gave speech to the mute, and resurrected dead people, He demonstrated power over natural phenomena as he calmed storms, walked over water, changed water into wine and multiplied an insufficient food supply. He also demonstrated a supernatural knowledge over people's lives (John 4:18), he knew their thoughts and he discerned their intentions (Mat 22:18). Jesus predicted future events, as he predicted his death and resurrection (Mat 20:17-19), Judas' treachery, the disciples' dispersion, Peter's denial (Mark 14:18, 27, 30) and the destruction of Jerusalem (Mat 24:2). Ultimately, Jesus demonstrated his divinity as death could not hold him; he raised from the dead and showed himself to his friends with a glorified body (Jn 20:27).

Jesus is fully God but he also is fully man. He was born of a woman, he was circumcised and presented in the temple according to Jewish customs. He grew every day in stature and wisdom, he learned to read and write, to say "please" and "thank you", and to work a job (Luk 2:52). Jesus' human nature comes across in the gospels; he felt hunger, he felt pain, he got tired and he felt the need for solitude, also he enjoyed good food with friends and family. Jesus attended weddings, funerals and celebrations; he rejoiced with those who were happy and cried with those who were suffering. He loved his mother, his brothers and his friends, and eventually he gave his life for them. Jesus lived a perfect life as he never sinned (1 Peter 2:22; Heb 4:15, 7:26) and he was crucified by the Roman authorities as they were pressured by the Jewish council. Jesus died hanging on a Roman cross (Luk 23:46; Jn 19:33), he was buried (Jn 19:38-42), he was resurrected on the third day (Mat 28:1-10 Luk 24:1-10), and he showed himself to his disciples, his friends and family as he fulfilled the scripture.

conceived through the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary: Jesus was conceived by the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit and was born from the virgin Mary. His miraculous conception joined the divine and human nature in Jesus' person. As the church's fathers wrestled with the notion of the joining of these two natures, several explanations were offered and rejected (Arianism, Nestorianism, Monophysitism and others). During successive councils the church gave final form (in somewhat technical language) to this article of faith. The Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325) defined that Jesus is fully God, of the same nature as the father (homoousios - consubstantial - of one substance), the Council of Ephesus (A.D. 431) defined that Jesus is the incarnate Logos, one person, fully God and fully man. Finally, during the Council of Chalcedon (A.D. 451) the creed reached its final form, Jesus is consubstantial with the Father and consubstantial with us, one person with two natures that are distinct, unchangeable, indivisible and inseparable.

Jesus—Israel's promised Messiah: Jesus is the true Messiah, expected by the people of Israel. He declared that he himself is the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophesy (Luk 4:17-21), the hope of the patriarchs (John 8:56), and how he is the fulfillment of the scriptures as he declares "that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled" (Luk 24:27, 44). During his lifetime Jesus proved his claims as he fulfilled numerous prophecies; eventually the disciples understood how the scripture and the liturgy were just like a shadow of the good things to come (Heb 10:1) and how Jesus is the Messiah, the actual fulfillment God's plan for humanity.

arose bodily from the dead, ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father as our High Priest and Advocate: After resurrecting in a glorified body, Jesus ascended into heaven and he is "seated at the right hand of God" (Col 3:1), having been exalted to the highest place (Phi 2:9). He has supreme authority over all things (Eph 1:22) and he acts for our benefit interceding for us as the perfect High Priest (Heb 7:23-25).

5. *We believe that Jesus Christ, as our representative and substitute, shed his blood on the cross as the perfect, all-sufficient sacrifice for our sins. His atoning death and victorious resurrection constitute the only ground for salvation.*

As noted in statement #4, we believe, with all reliable historians, that Jesus was an actual historical person, not a myth¹. As fully human, he experienced life's joys and sorrows as well as temptations' pulls, yet did so without sin (Heb 2:17-18).

We believe, as noted in statement #1, that God is holy and infinitely perfect. In that holiness lays God's righteous judgment requiring payment for wrongdoing. As noted in statement #3, we are by nature sinful, rebellious against God and therefore stand condemned in desperate need of the saving work of Jesus. Those destined for condemnation choose that path by rebelling and freely turning away from the light given them about God. (Rom 1:18-20)

God restrains himself to act within his nature. His attributes of holiness and justice demands a payment for all wrongdoing (sin). Juxtaposed to God's justice is God's love and grace. God's holiness does not allow him to overlook sin; therefore, a payment is required and God provided a sacrificial system to atone for sin.

shed His blood on the cross as the perfect, all-sufficient sacrifice for our sins: God the Father and God the Son conspired to provide a path back to peace with God. Jesus *"made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!"* (Phi 2:7-8). While we are not able to measure up to God's standard of holiness, Jesus, having lived the perfect holy life, is able, not only for himself but for all those who trust in him for salvation. The ultimate sacrifice was Jesus' death on the cross, and his death-defying resurrection.

His atoning death and victorious resurrection constitute the only ground for salvation: We believe that God completely reveals himself and his plan to reconcile people to himself through his Word as noted in statement #2. In his revealed plan, Jesus is exclusive in that he says he is the only way, truth and life, and *"No one comes to the Father except through me."* (Jn 14:6). Yet he is inclusive in that he invites ALL to believe in him, and those who do will not perish but have eternal life. (Jn 3:16). The blood of Jesus in his atoning death covers the sins of those who call upon him in repentance, casting aside the "old life" and taking on a "new life" in Christ. (Gal 2:20)

6. *We believe that the Holy Spirit, in all that he does, glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ. He convicts the world of its guilt. He regenerates sinners, and in him they are baptized into union with Christ and adopted as heirs in the family of God. He also indwells, illuminates, guides, equips and empowers believers for Christ-like living and service.*

¹ Ehrman, Bart D (2012b). *Did Jesus Exist?: The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth*. HarperOne. ISBN 9780062206442. "Serious historians of the early Christian movement—all of them—have spent many years preparing to be experts in their field. Just to read the ancient sources requires expertise in a range of ancient languages: Greek, Hebrew, Latin, and often Aramaic, Syriac, and Coptic, not to mention the modern languages of scholarship (for example, German and French). And that is just for starters. Expertise requires years of patiently examining ancient texts and a thorough grounding in the history and culture of Greek and Roman antiquity, the religions of the ancient Mediterranean world, both pagan and Jewish, knowledge of the history of the Christian church and the development of its social life and theology, and, well, lots of other things. It is striking that virtually everyone who has spent all the years needed to attain these qualifications is convinced that Jesus of Nazareth was a real historical figure." Pg. 4-5

Holy Spirit: Who is the Holy Spirit? He is harder to envision than a Father God and his Son, but clearly, he is a person referred to throughout the Bible, even as early as in creation (Gen 1:2) and then throughout by revelation to God's prophets, the usher of a new covenant, and him being poured out on all believers.

Jesus promises the Holy Spirit in multiple places. In John 14-16 he refers to him as "Counselor", or *paraklētōs* in the Greek. *Paraklētōs* refers to a person who comes along side to help, counsel, guide, and encourage. His personhood is further confirmed by the fact that he can be grieved (Eph 4:30), he has power and acts with purpose (1 Co 12:11), he can be lied to (Act 5:3), and he judges things (Act 15:28). An impersonal force could not do these things.

He is also listed equally with God and Jesus in various passages. (See Mat 28:19; 2 Co 13:14; 1 Pe 1:2)

glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ, convicts the world of guilt: The Holy Spirit's most important mission is to glorify Jesus. *"But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me."* (Jn 15:26) *"He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you."* (Jn 16:14) The Spirit does this through convicting of the truth (Jn 16:7-11), conversion (Act 10:44, 8:29), and discipleship.

The Bible is full of passages that speak of being called. There is a general call that goes out to all through evangelists, pastors, missionaries, us, etc., however, the call that goes to those that hear it leading to salvation, that call is a call of the Holy Spirit, where he calls, but regenerates the person so they are alive to hear and answer it. (See Rom 1:6-7; 8:30, 9:23-24; 2 Ti 1:9; Heb 9:15; Jud 1; 1 Pe 2:9; 1 Pe 5:10 and so many others.) (See also discussion below on the Spirit's regeneration, illumination, guiding, equipping, and empowering.)

J. I. Packer describes how the Spirit, like a floodlight illumines Jesus, allowing us to see his glory, to hear his word, to go to him and receive life, and taste his gift of joy and peace. (J. I. Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit: Finding Fullness in Our Walk with God*, 2nd ed., pg 57).

He regenerates sinners: (Regeneration is a theological term that means being born again.) As a result of the Fall, mankind is dead in trespasses and sins. We are dead (Eph 2:5) so our hearts are cold, our eyes are blind (Isa 35:5; Jn 9:39; Rev 3:17), our ears are deaf (Isa 42:19, 43:8), and our minds are absent. We need to be illuminated and born to new life to even be able to see the Kingdom of God, as Jesus told Nicodemus (Jn 3:3). The Spirit facilitates the new birth by regenerating us, i.e., renewing true life in us. Our eyes and mind are illumined, our ears are opened, and our hearts of stone are transformed into hearts of flesh (Ez 36:25-27), upon which God's laws have been written. Consider the following:

- *But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.* (John 1:12-13)
- *... no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except in the Holy Spirit* (1 Co 12:3)
- *And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses,* (Gal 2:13)

- *even when we were dead in our trespasses, [God] made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved* (Eph 2:5)
- *he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit* (Tit 3:5)
- See also (2 Co 5:17-18; Gal 6:15; 1 Pe 1:3, 23)

The famous 19th century British preacher, Charles Spurgeon said the following:

Every regeneration is really instantaneous. Its evidences, its outward manifestations may be gradual, but there must be a time when the man begins to live. There must be a period when the first ray of light darts on the opened eye. There must be a time when the man is condemned, and a period when he is not condemned. And there must be an instant when the change takes place. (Sermons 12.35)

in him they are baptized into union with Christ: The New Testament uses the phrase “in Christ” dozens and dozens of times. It speaks to our being in union with him. This is described in various forms including him being our king, the head of a body (the church, of which we are a part), the cornerstone of the temple of which we are apart, as our bridegroom, as a vine on which we are branches, and as the second Adam, representing us in reconciling what the first Adam destroyed.

Jesus even prays for this unity in John 17, *“²¹that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²²The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, ²³I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. ²⁴Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. ²⁵O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. ²⁶I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”*

The Spirit has baptized us into that union. *“For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.”* (1 Co 12:13)

adopted as heirs in the family of God: Theologian J. I. Packer argues in his book *Knowing God*, that adoption is the highest privilege, higher even than justification. While justification is essential to be adopted, it is only a legal event, but while adoption has a legal aspect, its ultimate goal is the formation of a familial bond, hopefully with great love. In justification God is the judge, while in adoption he is our father. (J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, pgs186-187) God becomes the father of all who believe, as they have been adopted. See Jn 1:12-23; Rom 8:17, 23; Gal 3:26-4:7; Eph 1:5, 3:6; Tit 3:7, all of which speak of adoption or of being heirs, which generally applies to the children of the parent.

Jesus called God “Abba” (essentially “daddy”) when praying to him (Mar 14:36), and now we are able to call him the more endearing Abba (daddy) as well. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, *“Abba! Father!”* (Rom 8:15, see also Gal 4:6). What a rich blessing to be adopted by our Abba and to be his heirs!

He also indwells, illuminates, guides, equips and empowers believers: The New Testament mentions many times the indwelling of the Spirit. It tells us that we are in the Spirit and he is in us. *"⁹You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. ¹¹If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you."* (Rom 8:9, 11) (See also 1 Co 3:16; 2 Co 1:22; Eph 1:13, 4:30) Note: the Bible also refers to being filled with the Spirit. All believers are always IN the Spirit as part of our new being, but they may not necessarily be filled. The Bible encourages us to be filled with the Spirit (Eph 5:18), which implies it is not a permanent state. Paul is indicating that it is the state of a healthy Christian (Act 6:3, 11:24). There are also occasions where God seems to fill believers with the Spirit to accomplish a temporary filling for a particular purpose (Act 4:8; Mat 10:19-20).

As for the healthy Christian being filled, one might ask, how does that happen? It happens by fostering our relationship with Jesus, including time reading and studying his Word, praying, growing in him, fellowshiping with other believers, etc.

The Spirit works to illumine us. This happens at regeneration (see above) where he opens our blind eyes and deaf ears, renews our minds, and gives us hearts of flesh, where now we can understand and see Jesus as Lord and savior. As we move along in our journey after that, he continues to illumine us as we read and study Scripture, listen to teaching, etc., by helping us to understand it.

⁹But, as it is written,

*"What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,
nor the heart of man imagined,*

what God has prepared for those who love him"—

¹⁰these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit.

¹²Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. ¹³And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. (1 Co 2)

See also Eph 1:17-18.

The Spirit guides us along our spiritual journey and growth. Remember, he is called Counselor. *"¹²So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. ¹³For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God."* (Rom 8:12-14). (See also Gal 5:16-18, 22) He also gives specific direction (Act 8:29, 13:2, 20:22-23).

The Spirit equips all believers. *"All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills."* (1 Co 12:11) He gives gifts to believers to be used to encourage and build up the church (1 Co 12; Heb 2:4; Rom 12:6). These gifts are never intended to be held by the believer for his/her own benefit. They are intended to be used to bless the church.

Finally, the Spirit empowers believers to grow in the image and likeness of Christ, known as the process of sanctification. God's will is no longer external through his laws and prophets. Now it is internal with the Spirit indwelling us and with God's law written on our hearts, and the Spirit working

within us and through us. *“And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”* (2 Co 3:18)

His empowering also helps us be able to do things we couldn’t do without him. Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. *“For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.”* (Rom 8:26)

Charles Spurgeon had this to say:

If you could pray the best prayer in the world without the Holy Spirit, God would have nothing to do with it. But if your prayer be broken and lame and limping, if the Spirit made it, God will look upon it and say, as he did upon the works of creation, “It is very good.” (Sermons 5.216)

Without the Spirit of God we can do nothing. We are as ships without wind or chariots without steeds. Like branches without sap, we are withered. Like coals without fire, we are useless. As an offering without the sacrificial flame, we are unaccepted. (Sermons 20.16)

7. *We believe that the true church comprises all who have been justified by God’s grace through faith alone in Christ alone. They are united by the Holy Spirit in the body of Christ, of which he is the Head. The true church is manifest in local churches, whose membership should be composed only of believers. The Lord Jesus mandated two ordinances, baptism and the Lord’s Supper, which visibly and tangibly express the gospel. Though they are not the means of salvation, when celebrated by the church in genuine faith, these ordinances confirm and nourish the believer.*

We believe that the true church comprises all who have been justified by God’s grace through faith alone in Christ alone. They are united by the Holy Spirit in the body of Christ, of which he is the

Head: The colloquial understanding of the word “church” refers to the building where religion is practiced. Throughout history, beautiful churches have been built and they are standing witnesses to the ability of architects, engineers, artists and handymen. Unfortunately, this is not the real meaning of the word church. In the New Testament the Greek word for church was “ekklesia”, which means assembly, and was used to describe the joining of the believers in two ways, the universal church (Act 9:31) and the local church (1 Co 4:17).

The universal church is comprised of all believers from all times and all places. This is the community of all who have been justified by faith and redeemed by the power of the Holy Spirit, and submitted to the lordship of Christ. God, who knows the human heart, knows those who belong to him and are part of his people. The universal church is described as the bride of Christ, who is loved and protected by him (Eph 5:25-32). Those who constitute part of the universal church are part of the community of believers that emphasizes unity in Christ and transcends historical, ethnic, cultural and social barriers. Each member in the church has the responsibility to serve and minister to others in love, using their gifts and talents (Gal 6:10). Jesus clearly stated that the world would know his disciples if they loved each other (Jn 13:35).

The true church is manifest in local churches, whose membership should be composed only of believers (1 Co 12:12-27): In contrast with the universal church, it is in the local church where

Christian living is practiced and where the Lord's supper and baptism are celebrated. The local church is comprised by members of the universal church that meet to worship God and teach the Word. The local church is a microcosm of the universal church where Jesus is present and the gifts of the Holy Spirit are used to minister to the needs of the saints, to preach the good news, to make disciples and send missionaries. In Paul's letters to various local churches is easy to see a different emphasis for each community, it is evident that each local church had its unique challenges and needs.

Paul exemplifies pastoral care where he exercises discipline (1 Co 5, 1 Th 5:12-15, Phil 4:2-3), gives encouragement (Phil 2:1-4), answers theological deviations (2 Ti 2:16-18), loves deeply, denounces sin, manages day to day stuff (1 Ti 5:3-10) and collects funds for missionary work and the poor (2 Co 9). It is in the local church where Christian living is practiced and where the love for God is shown. Each local church should strive to form its membership of believers only, knowing that at the end, only God knows who belongs to him and who doesn't. Jesus warned us that the weeds and the wheat will grow together until harvest (Mat 13:24-30).

The Lord Jesus mandated two ordinances, baptism and the Lord's Supper, which visibly and tangibly express the gospel. Though they are not the means of salvation, when celebrated by the church in genuine faith, these ordinances confirm and nourish the believer: Jesus instituted two visible sacraments (ordinances), baptism (Mat 28:18-20) and the Lord's Supper (Luk 22:14-19; 1 Co 23-26). Unlike rites invented by man, these two ordinances are surprisingly simple and common, there is nothing "magical" in them and by themselves, there are only a bath and a meal. But when the sacraments are celebrated in the local church, they take on a special meaning and become a tangible spiritual blessing for those who practice them with faith.

In baptism the new believer is confirmed in his faith and incorporated into the universal church, having testified of his death to sin and his new life in Christ (Mat 28:18-20). The Lord's Supper is celebrated in memory of Christ's death and resurrection and reminds us of his imminent return. The bread and the wine are symbols of his body that was broken and his blood that was spilled for the forgiveness of our sin (Mat 26:26-29).

8. *We believe that God's justifying grace must not be separated from his sanctifying power and purpose. God commands us to love him supremely and others sacrificially, and to live out our faith with care for one another, compassion toward the poor and justice for the oppressed. With God's Word, the Spirit's power, and fervent prayer in Christ's name, we are to combat the spiritual forces of evil. In obedience to Christ's commission, we are to make disciples among all people, always bearing witness to the gospel in word and deed.*

We believe that God's justifying grace must not be separated from his sanctifying power and purpose: "[God] has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace." (2 Ti. 1:9). "The same grace of God that takes away our sin also gives us new life—a life that reflects a new desire to love God and love our neighbor, to enter into the spiritual battle and to obey Christ's Great Commission. God's gospel, by its very nature, compels us to Christ-like living and witness to the world."²

² Evangelical Free Church of America, *Evangelical Convictions: A Theological Exposition of the Statement of Faith of the Evangelical Free Church of America*, (Minneapolis, MN: Free Church Publications, 2011), 209

In this statement we find two theological terms that together help us maintain a correct understanding of the role of good works in our relationship with God: justifying and sanctifying. Justification is God's action pronouncing those who have sinned against him as righteous in his sight.³ We have been declared holy (justification), but we must then act out our holiness in our daily living (sanctification).

God's love for us and his desire to reconcile us unto himself is manifest in the death and resurrection of his son, Jesus Christ, as noted in statement #5. This paved the way for our acceptance of God's free gift of grace to justify us before him.

We are to live in the freedom provided by God's grace yet follow the direction he has set forth in our lives, resisting the extremes of legalism—thinking our compliance to God's law will earn his favor—and license, thinking our willful disobedience has no consequence. We must also accept that Jesus is now master of our lives and we must follow as he leads.

God commands us to love him supremely and others sacrificially, and to live out our faith with care for one another, compassion toward the poor and justice for the oppressed: Although we are not saved by our works, our works give evidence of saving faith. As James 2:14-17 says, *"¹⁴ What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them?¹⁵ Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶ If one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? ¹⁷ In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead."*

Paul explains this balance in Ephesians 2:8-10. First, he says, *"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast."* And then he explains the purpose of his life-giving grace, *"¹⁰ For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."*

The Apostle Paul instructs the Galatians that when we have put our faith in Jesus Christ, *"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."* (Gal 2:20). Likewise, Paul writes to the Corinthian church, *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here!"* (2 Co 5:17). As Christians, we are to submit to Christ as master and to become like Christ, as we yield to his will.

Throughout Scripture, we see that our faith is expressed in our physical care for 1) the marginalized, poor and oppressed⁴, and 2) one another. Practically, we are to care for the alien, the poor, the widow, and the orphan as we act as the hands and feet of Jesus. Likewise, Jesus said, *"By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."* (Jn 13:35). Paul reinforces this when he tells the Galatians, *"Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. ¹⁰ Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers."* (Gal. 6:9-10). The New Testament is filled with "one another" instructions of devotion and love for each other in the family of believers.

³ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 968.

⁴ Key passages include Isa. 1:16-17; Jer. 22:3; Eze. 18:16; Zech. 7:10; Prov. 22:22-23, 23:10-11; Ps. 68:5; Jam 1:7.

With God's Word, the Spirit's power, and fervent prayer in Christ's name, we are to combat the spiritual forces of evil: The Apostle Paul often refers to life's struggles in combat terms such as a fight or battle. (Phi 1:29-30; 1 Ti 1:18; 2 Ti 2:3). Paul tells us that this fight is not of this world but in the spiritual realm when he says, *"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."* (Eph 6:12)

God does not send us into "battle" alone but equips us with his Word (see article #2), the Holy Spirit's power (see article #6), and prayer. Paul tells the Ephesian church that we, as Christians doing battle against the devil, are to put on the full armor of God, consisting of a *"belt of truth," "a breastplate of righteousness," "the gospel of peace," "the shield of faith," "the helmet of salvation," and the sword of the Spirit, which is the work of God."* (Eph 6:11-17) Paul continues by instructing the Christian to pray in the Spirit on all occasions (Eph 6:18), and to do so continually (1 Th 5:17).

When we pray, we are to pray in the name of Jesus Christ. To ask in the name of Christ is as though Christ himself were asking. We can only ask God for what Christ would ask. To ask in the name of Christ is therefore, to set aside our own wills, accepting God's.

In obedience to Christ's commission, we are to make disciples among all people, always bearing witness to the gospel in word and deed: As Matthew 28:19-20 records, after his resurrection, Jesus commissioned his disciples to *"go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."* Likewise, Luke records for us in Acts 1:8 Jesus' words, *"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."* We believe these commissions are meant for all disciples since then and as such, we are to share the good news of the gospel with all the world both in our actions and our speech.

9. *We believe in the personal, bodily and glorious return of our Lord Jesus Christ. The coming of Christ, at a time known only to God, demands constant expectancy and, as our blessed hope, motivates the believer to godly living, sacrificial service and energetic mission.*

We believe in the personal, bodily and glorious return of our Lord Jesus Christ: Jesus announced to his disciples that he would come back with power and great glory (Mat 24:30) and that his return would be unmistakable. Jesus warned us not to believe anyone who claims that Christ is here or there, because there would be a multitude of false prophets that will deceive many (Mat 24:23-24). Jesus' return is a central theme of the New Testament and it has been the central hope of the church (1 Th 4:16; Tit 2:13; Jam 5:7-9). Jesus will return in person, in a physical body, tangible and unmistakable, and even if we don't know the exact nature of his glorified body, the references in the gospels leave no doubt that his glorified body could be seen, touched, and perceived by our senses.

The coming of Christ, at a time known only to God, demands constant expectancy and, as our blessed hope, motivates the believer to godly living, sacrificial service and energetic mission: The sequence of events laid out in Revelation 19 and 20 describes the end of the great tribulation and the return of Jesus mounting a white horse. Jesus himself was very clear about this terrible period before his return when *"nation will rise against nation..., with great earthquakes, famines and pestilences"* (Luk 21:10-11). In addition to these events, he spoke of mighty signs in the heavens,

“roaring and tossing of the sea,” “heavenly bodies shaken” and a general feeling of anxiety (Luk 21:25-28). Jesus also said that the church will be in grave danger, believers will be betrayed by their families and some will be killed (Luk 21:16). Before the end of times God will punish the world with disasters and plagues, some human made and some of a supernatural nature and then “they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory” (Luk 21:27).

When will these things happen? Too many believers have put too much morbid attention to this question. Jesus himself declared that he didn’t know the hour (Mat 24:36), and after his resurrection he sidestepped the question (Acts 1:7). What Jesus made very clear is that we should be always ready because this would happen without warning (Matt 24:44). Every human attempt to predict, date, or forecast these events has been grossly mistaken and too many believers pay too much superstitious attention to this question (2 Thes 2:1-3). The announced signs of his return help us to be vigilant and the constant expectation of his return compel us to live with sober mind and focused on the mission he has given us (1 Pet 4:7).

Jesus warned us to keep watch (Matt 24:42) and that the “faithful and wise servant” whose master finds him doing his job will be rewarded (Matt 24: 46). The triumphal return of Jesus is the hope of the believer, the promise of a better future and the motivation to live in godly obedience.

10. *We believe that God commands everyone everywhere to believe the gospel by turning to him in repentance and receiving the Lord Jesus Christ. We believe that God will raise the dead bodily and judge the world, assigning the unbeliever to condemnation and eternal conscious punishment and the believer to eternal blessedness and joy with the Lord in the new heaven and the new earth, to the praise of his glorious grace. Amen.*

We believe that God commands everyone everywhere to believe the gospel by turning to him in repentance and receiving the Lord Jesus Christ: After the Fall man became estranged from God through disobedience. The Old Covenant laws and regulations and Israel’s inability to obey them is a clear indication that we are stiff-necked and disobedient. God, in his great love and mercy, had the New Covenant in mind as the solution to our sin and estrangement from God. Those who would repent and believe would be reconciled to God and saved from their sin and condemnation.

At the beginning of his ministry, Jesus declares, “*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe.*” (Mar 1:15) That is a clear imperative, thus we are commanded to repent and believe.

Acts 17:30 reiterates this in saying, “*The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.*” In addition, throughout the New Testament, there are also a number of occasions in which people were admonished to obey the truth or obey the gospel. (Rom 2:8; 2 Th 1:8)

While repentance alone does not save, it is an inherent part of believing the gospel. What are we to repent of? Our disobedience and disbelief in God and our savior, Jesus. We are to repent of our ways and thinking and to believe in the God who saves us through our faith in him. By this, we are reconciled to him.

“Repentance and faith are like Siamese twins. If one is sick the other cannot be well, for they live but one life. If ever you are asked which comes first, repentance or faith, you may answer by another question: “Which spoke of a wheel moves first when the wheel begins to move?” (C.

We believe that God will raise the dead bodily and judge the world, assigning the unbeliever to condemnation and eternal conscious punishment and the believer to eternal blessedness and joy with the Lord in the new heaven and the new earth, to the praise of his glorious grace: The Bible speaks to judgement in the end and what seems to be a conscious eternal existence, resulting from the judgement.

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. ³² Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. ³⁴ Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. . . . ⁴¹ “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. . . . ⁴⁶ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” (Mat 25:31-34, 41, 46)

The Bible indicates that we will have an eternal bodily existence and that it will be conscious. We will be conscious of God’s judgment and of reward for those in Christ, or punishment for those not in Christ. Jesus seems to make this clear in not only Matthew 25 above, but in various other places. He often speaks of reward and judgment. This also comes out throughout the Bible. Consider, for example:

- Daniel 12:2, *“And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.”*
- John 5:28-29, *“Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgement.”*
- The parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16, where the rich man is in torment and Lazarus is with God.
- Jesus is preparing a place for those who are his (John 14:2)
- Mark 9:42-48 describes hell as an unquenchable fire and “where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched”

Some might have difficulty with the idea of God eternally condemning and punishing people. He promised Adam and Eve that if they ate the fruit, they would surely die (spiritually as well as physically). While, in his great love, he gave them a stay of physical execution, death came into the world and we all physically die. God must carry through with what he said and as a holy God, he must judge and punish sin. If not, how would his holiness, righteousness, and justice be satisfied? All of the places in Scripture that admonish us to leave judgment to God and that he will repay evil would be empty lies if he did not carry through with his judgement of it. We can rest in knowing that no good will go unrewarded and that no evil will go unpunished.

There are many references throughout Scripture that hell is a place of burning fire, burning sulfur, and of darkness. We don’t know if it will be a literal burning and darkness, or whether this is figurative language for living in a world of physical torment where disease and maladies continue, where God’s common grace is lacking and where he has given us up to our own desires, where absence from God’s presence brings unrestrained sin, loneliness, restlessness, the absence of good, and the

absence of love—basically, an extremely horrible world and existence. This will be forever!

Some may argue for a concept called annihilationism, whereby those judged outside of Christ will cease to exist after judgement and that, because it is irreversible, it is eternal. Most early church fathers condemned this view⁵ and it seems to ignore the passages that clearly indicate an eternal conscious awareness of the punishment. Revelation 21 and 22 have a number of passages that compare and contrast the eternal state of the saved from the unsaved.

Judgement will be based on whether we have faith and have admitted we are sinners and have accepted Jesus' death for our sin and his resurrection, overcoming death. That said, various places indicate that judgement is based on what we have done. Taking such passages at face value would seem to say that, but we must look much more deeply and in the context of other verses that say our faith is what saves us. These "works" passages are really referring to how our works demonstrate our faith (See the sheep and goats judgement in Matt 25; James 2:14-26). Scripture also seems to indicate that there may be degrees of reward, e.g., 1 Cor 3.

Believers can hope in and rejoice for a promised future paradise in God's presence in a new heaven and new earth, full of God's love and without sin, death, mourning, or pain.

"What you have chosen here shall be your portion hereafter. If you loved sin, you shall be steeped up to the throat in it, and it shall burn around you like liquid fire. But if your delights have been with your God, you shall dwell with him." (C. H. Spurgeon Sermons, Vol 23, pgs 514, 515)

In addition to the foregoing statements of faith, Paseo del Rey Church also believes the following, which are not a part of the EFCA Statement of Faith:

11. We believe that God, as Creator, is the author of life and that he has created man in his image, and that such life is of inestimable value, no matter the stage or condition of life, whether pre-born, the aged, the physically or mentally challenged, or any other stage or condition from conception through natural death. Therefore, we believe that the life of every person must be protected and that every person should be afforded compassion, love, kindness, respect, and dignity. (Psa 139:13-16)

God, as the author of life, has designed and created everything, out of nothing. God then breathed his spirit (ruakh) bringing life to his creation. God's *Ruakh* is the "life-animating energy" present in all creation.⁶

What distinguishes all people, from all other creatures is that we are made in the image of God. That indeed is what it means to be human because it is only humans about which God said mankind would be made in his image. It is for this reason that human life is of inestimable value at every stage of life. The intrinsic value of human life is founded not in the person's ability to productively contribute to, or be a burden on, society, but in the fact that God is the giver of life.

As God has dominion over all things, he has granted humans dominion over the plants and animals, giving further evidence of the supreme value of human life over the rest of the animal and plant

⁵ (Wallace, J. Warner. "What Did Early Christians Believe About Hell", <https://www.christianity.com/wiki/bible/what-did-early-christians-believe-about-hell.html>)

⁶ Drimalla, Shara, *Bible Project: How Do We Make Sense of the Book of Genesis?*, <https://bibleproject.com/blog/how-do-we-make-sense-of-the-book-of-genesis/> (accessed January 23, 2022)

kingdom. (Gen 1:26-30). However, with dominion given to humans comes responsibility to protect and sustain that which is given in our domain and the environment in which it lives.

Every person matters and should be valued, ministered to, and protected, regardless of race, gender, age, intelligence, or life choices.

As image bearers of God, we are to hold the life and dignity of every person with compassion, love, kindness and respect, regardless of our differences. God gives and sustains life in us; therefore, it is only by God, or God's decree, that life is to be taken.

As God has commanded that we provide and protect the weaker and marginalized people in our societies, we must take up the mantle to do so when and where we are able, reflecting the compassion of our savior Jesus Christ.

12. *We believe that God creates each person as male or female and that God instituted and ordained marriage as the lifelong union of one man and one woman. We believe that any marriage or sexual relationship that does not conform to God's ordained marriage between a man and a woman is not as he has designed it, is a violation of his will, and is not recognized by God. We also believe that when the Bible addresses the relationship of a male and female, or man and woman, that it refers to the genetic state of each individual at birth. (Gen. 2:18-25)*

As an introduction to this section, some may ask why this area is highlighted out of all of the other sins that plague us. Clearly all sin is evil and displeasing to God. However, sexual sin seems to carry additional concern. As Paul tells us in 1 Co 6,

¹⁵ Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! ¹⁶ Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, "The two will become one flesh." ¹⁷ But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. ¹⁸ Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. ¹⁹ Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, ²⁰ for you were bought with a price. So, glorify God in your body.

Unfortunately, society and politics have also thrust this area upon the church. While we are not a political church and will never tell someone how to vote, the Bible does speak to this area and we believe for transparency, we should make clear what we believe God's word to say in this area. Also, given the varied views and beliefs that different churches hold in this area, we believe it has become necessary to make our beliefs clear.

We realize that there are aspects of this area which are very sensitive and emotional. As with any sin, our desire is always to lead with love as Jesus did to those he encountered, such as the woman caught in adultery, the woman at the well, the rich young ruler, Zaccheaus, and many more (see below). Those who have not yet come to spiritual awakening in which they can acknowledge their sin, their need for a savior, and to acknowledge that Jesus is the master of their lives are always welcome to attend Paseo. We desire to minister to them, speak God's word to them, and to disciple them to bring them to a right understanding of the gospel. Professed believers who continue in sin may be subject to the steps toward loving restoration. (Mat 18:15-17; 1 Co 5:1-5; Gal 6:1)

Male or female: God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (Gen 1:27; also 5:2; Mat 19:4; Mar 10:6). Males and females are his created order, established at creation and reiterated and confirmed by Jesus.

God instituted and ordained marriage as the lifelong union of one man and one woman: Therefore, a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. (Gen 2:21-24; Mat 19:5; Mar 10:7). Marriage, between one man and one woman, was instituted by God at creation and affirmed by Jesus. Marriage should be characterized by mutual love and respect and conformed to 1 Co 13:4-7 and Eph 5:22-33.

Any marriage or sexual relationship that does not conform to God's ordained marriage between a man and a woman is not as he has designed it, is a violation of his will, and is not recognized by God: The Bible discusses sexual immorality as being outside of God's will. The only place sanctioned for sexual relations are within the bond of marriage. (Gen 2:21-24; Lev 18; Lev 20:10-21; Deu 22:13-30; 1 Co 6:9-10; 1 Ti 1:9-1; Heb 13:4) God intended the sexual relationship to occur within marriage between the lifelong union of a man and woman. Any sexual relationship outside of this is not as God designed or intended. Marital unfaithfulness, whether physically or emotionally, violates the marriage covenant. Pornography, fantasies, and affairs of the mind also violate the marriage relationship. We should always strive to love our spouse as God loves us and as Jesus loves his bride, the church.

refers to the genetic state of each individual at birth: We understand that there are many who are confused about their gender and we love them. To the extent this may have been precipitated by past broken or adverse relationships, ungodly influences, abuse, etc., we mourn for those and want to see healing. As those who claim Jesus as our master, we must acknowledge his creative design and will, that he created us as male or female. (see "Male or female" above)

We also acknowledge that there are many churches that have failed to treat the LGBTQ+ community with love and compassion. Instead, many have been hateful. We deplore such hate and disrespect. We believe everyone is created in God's image and is deserving of respect, the dignity that comes from being made in his image, and love.

We believe that we should exhibit the love of Christ in such a way that there is no doubt in the LGBTQ+ community that Christianity is where love and salvation can be found. While we firmly believe this, we also do not believe that love means affirming behaviors that are outside of God's will.

"Jesus rarely started a relationship with the law, and he never offered his 'stance' on political issues. He usually began the relationship with love and always showed acceptance (*not of the sin, but of the person*), especially with those rejected by the religious elite." (Preston Sprinkle, *People to be Loved: Why Homosexuality is Not Just an Issue*, pg 75).

It is not our job to condemn people, but to show them Jesus and instruct them from Scripture (not as a club, but with love). The Holy Spirit will illuminate, guide, and empower them as he wills.

For a really good treatment of the biblical view of homosexuality and how the church should view and handle it, see Preston Sprinkle's book, *People to be Loved: Why Homosexuality is Not Just an Issue*.