

what we believe | *Discovering Grace Church*

We believe that the Bible is God's word – and as such is “*living and active*” (Heb 4.12), and able to equip us for every good work (2 Tim 3.16). We are therefore committed to building the church, and our own lives, on the sure foundation of God's inspired word in the sixty-six books of the Bible. This is reflected in our **Confessional Statement (see attached)**.

At the same time, we want potential members to understand some of our theological distinctives. These are areas in which Bible-believing Christians have differing views. While we understand and appreciate that reality, we believe it's important to be clear on the contours of these distinctives.

A member need not agree to every element of these distinctive, but a member should be able to participate harmoniously (i.e., not act divisively) despite any possible disagreements over such distinctives. There are three main categories of distinctive that are important for you to be aware of and consider.

our theological distinctives: *baptistic*

We believe the only way to be reconciled to God is through faith in Jesus Christ. In this sense, we are **evangelical**. We also believe that an appropriate expression of saving faith in Jesus is to be baptized.

To be clear, baptism cannot contribute to or bring about our salvation. But baptism is a meaningful outward sign of an inward work which has already taken place in the believer. Here's why we say that:

- Baptism is for those who have already believed the gospel. This was the clear New Testament pattern: “*When they **believed** . . . they were baptized.*” (Acts 8:12). Therefore, we believe that only those who have believed the gospel and repented from their sins should be baptized.¹
- Baptism is a public identification with the Lord who has saved us: “*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, **baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit***” (Matthew 28:19).
- Baptism is a sign and symbol of the believer's union with Jesus in His death, burial, and resurrection: “*We were **buried therefore with him by baptism** into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life*” (Rom. 6:4). For this reason we practice baptism by immersion, which vividly illustrates the believer's union with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection.

The positions articulated above are characterized as **baptistic**. More than a label, it represents our wonderful privilege as a church to celebrate times of baptism together. We set aside specific times throughout the year for the baptism of new believers (or those who haven't yet been baptized), enabling us to rejoice together and to welcome new believers into the life of the church.

¹ We recognize that other Protestant groups, whom we deeply appreciate, have a different understanding of the timing of baptism as it pertains to a child born into a believing home. While we practice a “believer's baptism”, we do not require someone to be rebaptized to join this church if doing so would effectively violate their conscience.

our theological distinctives: *continuationist*

Jesus made an astounding statement to his disciples, saying: "... it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you...." (John 16.7). Jesus has since poured out the Holy Spirit upon his church and every believer is now indwelt by the Spirit of God (Rom 8.9). We want to value all the ways the Spirit works in our lives- like:

> THE HOLY SPIRIT'S BROAD WORK - It is not uncommon to focus narrowly on more dramatic aspects of this, such as miracles, healings, or prophecy. While those dramatic works are to be desired, Scripture portrays the Spirit's work in our lives as pervasive and multifaceted—what has been called "the broad work of the Spirit". For instance:

- The Holy Spirit accomplishes the new birth (regeneration): Titus 3.4-7
- The Holy Spirit transforms us progressively to be more like Jesus: 2 Cor 3.18
- The Holy Spirit bears "fruit" in our lives like love, joy, peace, patience, etc.: Gal. 5.22-23
- The Holy Spirit assures us of God's love and our adoption in Christ: Rom. 8.15-17
- The Holy Spirit glorifies Jesus as he points us to Jesus: John 16.14

> THE HOLY SPIRIT'S EMPOWERING WORK - While all genuine Christians are "indwelt" by the Holy Spirit (see Romans 8:9), God intends for His people to experience regular "empowerings" of the Spirit. One way that Scripture refers to this is being "filled with the Spirit."

- The first disciples were repeatedly "filled": see Acts 2.4, 4:8, 4.31, 9:17, 13:9, and 13:52
- We are to be repeatedly "filled" today: "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, **but be filled with the Spirit**" (Eph 5.18).

"(The apostle Paul) uses a present tense imperative verb that could more explicitly be translated, 'Be continually being filled with the Holy Spirit', thus implying that this is something that should be repeatedly happening to Christians. Such fullness of the Holy Spirit will result in renewed worship and thanksgiving (Eph. 5.19-20), and in renewed relationships to others, especially those in authority over us or those under our authority (Eph 5.21-6.9)." - Wayne Grudem

In addition, the Holy Spirit empowers us through the spiritual gifts He gives for works of ministry in the church and in the world around us.

- All believers have spiritual gifts. "To **each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good**" (1 Cor 12:7). It should be noted that all spiritual gifts are supernatural, in that they are all viewed as being from God and empowered by the Spirit as a "*manifestation of the Spirit*".
- All the gifts of the Holy Spirit at work in the church of the first-century are available today. Scripture indicates that these gifts of the Spirit are given to the church until Christ's return, and nowhere in Scripture are we told that any of these gifts have ceased. (1 Cor 1. 7; 13.10-12)
- The gifts of the Spirit are to be earnestly desired for the "common good" (1 Cor 12.7): "**Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy**" (1 Cor. 14:1).

In this way we hold to a **continuationist** position. That means we believe all the spiritual gifts listed in Scripture *continue* today and are to be eagerly desired. We also want to ask for and pursue the ongoing empowerment of the Holy Spirit to be and to do all God desires for us (Eph 5.18f), including his empowering to boldly share the good news of Jesus (Acts 4.31).

In our view, Martyn Lloyd-Jones put it well when he wrote: "The great and constant danger is that we should be content with something which is altogether less than that intended for us."

our theological distinctives: *reformed*

We believe that all of life is about God's glory and supremacy, including the salvation that comes from him. God commands all people everywhere to turn to Jesus (Acts 17.30-31), but we believe that ability comes ultimately from him – to the praise of his glorious grace! (Eph. 1.3-14)

In Scripture we see the pervasive, corrupting effects of sin. Sin is not only what we do but also who we are: apart from God, we are sinners *by nature*. If we're truly "dead" in our sins (Eph. 2:1) and therefore powerless to change, how is it that we are able to respond to the gospel at all? It is here that the gracious nature of salvation becomes even more amazing: God acts, so that we *can* act.

- Chosen in eternity past. God's actions began in eternity past when He chose us and determined that He would save us. This is often referred to as "election": "...even as **he chose us in him before the foundation of the world...**" (Eph. 1:4-6).
- Effectively called. God's electing grace results in His drawing us to Himself. This does not mean that a person is saved apart from their own willing response to the gospel, but it does mean that a divine action brings about our saving response to the gospel: "*No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him*" (John 6:44, cf. Rom 8.30).
- Regenerated ("born again") by the Spirit. When God calls us, he then changes our heart so that we can freely respond. This change is called "regeneration." In regeneration, God unites the believer to the risen Christ and so imparts spiritual life to us. As a result, we become spiritually alive and are able to believe the gospel and repent of our sin: "*And you, who were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, **God made alive together with him (Jesus)***" (Col. 2:13).

In the above, the nature of our conversion can be seen as a supernatural work of God. In fact, in Scripture we find that repentance and saving faith are both required by God and a gift from God.

- Repentance is required and repentance is a gift.
 - Acts 17:30: "*Now (God) **commands** all people everywhere to repent*"
 - 2 Tim 2:25: "**God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth**"
- Faith is required and faith is a gift.
 - Acts 16:30-31: "*'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?'* And they said, '**Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household**'"
 - Acts 16.14: "**The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul**"

Recognizing that our repentance and faith are gifts from God does not eliminate our responsibility to repent and believe. Scripture plainly teaches the reality of human responsibility. However, when we see that God's "sovereign grace" ultimately enabled our response we exult all the more over God's amazing, undeserved, and glorious grace. Thus, we must act but God gets the glory!

These Biblical teachings make us "*reformed*" in our understanding of salvation. However, our loyalties are not to a man-made system of theology but to the Scriptures. Nor do we want to focus on more narrow aspects of Reformed theology at the expense of Biblical truths that are central and that we share with many other Christians. The gospel itself is what unites all true believers, and it is the gospel of Jesus Christ that matters most.

what we believe | *Confessional Statement*

We adhere, in its entirety, to the following *Confessional Statement* from “The Gospel Coalition”². Please speak to one of the elders if you have any concerns or questions about any of the items below.

- 1. The Triune God** We believe in one God, eternally existing in three equally divine Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, who know, love, and glorify one another. This one true and living God is infinitely perfect both in his love and in his holiness. He is the Creator of all things, visible and invisible, and is therefore worthy to receive all glory and adoration. Immortal and eternal, he perfectly and exhaustively knows the end from the beginning, sustains and sovereignly rules over all things, and providentially brings about his eternal good purposes to redeem a people for himself and restore his fallen creation, to the praise of his glorious grace.
- 2. Revelation** God has graciously disclosed his existence and power in the created order, and has supremely revealed himself to fallen human beings in the person of his Son, the incarnate Word. Moreover, this God is a speaking God who by his Spirit has graciously disclosed himself in human words: we believe that God has inspired the words preserved in the Scriptures, the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments, which are both record and means of his saving work in the world. These writings alone constitute the verbally inspired Word of God, which is utterly authoritative and without error in the original writings, complete in its revelation of his will for salvation, sufficient for all that God requires us to believe and do, and final in its authority over every domain of knowledge to which it speaks. We confess that both our finitude and our sinfulness preclude the possibility of knowing God’s truth exhaustively, but we affirm that, enlightened by the Spirit of God, we can know God’s revealed truth truly. The Bible is to be believed, as God’s instruction, in all that it teaches; obeyed, as God’s command, in all that it requires; and trusted, as God’s pledge, in all that it promises. As God’s people hear, believe, and do the Word, they are equipped as disciples of Christ and witnesses to the gospel.
- 3. Creation of Humanity** We believe that God created human beings, male and female, in his own image. Adam and Eve belonged to the created order that God himself declared to be very good, serving as God’s agents to care for, manage, and govern creation, living in holy and devoted fellowship with their Maker. Men and women, equally made in the image of God, enjoy equal access to God by faith in Christ Jesus and are both called to move beyond passive self-indulgence to significant private and public engagement in family, church, and civic life. Adam and Eve were made to complement each other in a one-flesh union that establishes the only normative pattern of sexual relations for men and women, such that marriage ultimately serves as a type of the union between Christ and his church. In God’s wise purposes, men and women are not simply interchangeable, but rather they complement each other in mutually enriching ways. God ordains that they assume distinctive roles which reflect the loving relationship between Christ and the church, the husband exercising headship in a way that displays the caring, sacrificial love of Christ, and the wife submitting to her husband in a way that models the love of the church for her Lord. In the ministry of the church, both men and women are encouraged to serve Christ and to be developed to their full potential in the manifold ministries of the people of God. The distinctive leadership role within the church given to qualified men is grounded in creation, fall, and redemption and must not be sidelined by appeals to cultural developments.
- 4. The Fall** We believe that Adam, made in the image of God, distorted that image and forfeited his original blessedness—for himself and all his progeny—by falling into sin through Satan’s temptation. As a result, all human beings are alienated from God, corrupted in every aspect of their being (e.g., physically, mentally, volitionally, emotionally, spiritually) and condemned finally and irrevocably to death—apart from God’s own gracious intervention. The supreme need of all human beings is to be reconciled to the God under whose just and holy wrath we stand; the only hope of all human beings is the undeserved love of this same God, who alone can rescue us and restore us to himself.
- 5. The Plan of God** We believe that from all eternity God determined in grace to save a great multitude of guilty sinners from every tribe and language and people and nation, and to this end foreknew them and chose them. We believe that God justifies and sanctifies those who by grace have faith in Jesus, and that he will one day glorify them—all to the praise of his glorious grace. In love God commands and implores all people to repent and believe, having set his saving love on those he has chosen and having ordained Christ to be their Redeemer.

² This statement may be downloaded from The Gospel Coalition at: <http://thegospelcoalition.org/about/who>

6. **The Gospel** We believe that the gospel is the good news of Jesus Christ—God’s very wisdom. Utter folly to the world, even though it is the power of God to those who are being saved, this good news is Christological, centering on the cross and resurrection: the gospel is not proclaimed if Christ is not proclaimed, and the authentic Christ has not been proclaimed if his death and resurrection are not central (the message is: “Christ died for our sins . . . [and] was raised”). This good news is biblical (his death and resurrection are according to the Scriptures), theological and salvific (Christ died for our sins, to reconcile us to God), historical (if the saving events did not happen, our faith is worthless, we are still in our sins, and we are to be pitied more than all others), apostolic (the message was entrusted to and transmitted by the apostles, who were witnesses of these saving events), and intensely personal (where it is received, believed, and held firmly, individual persons are saved).
7. **The Redemption of Christ** We believe that, moved by love and in obedience to his Father, the eternal Son became human: the Word became flesh, fully God and fully human being, one Person in two natures. The man Jesus, the promised Messiah of Israel, was conceived through the miraculous agency of the Holy Spirit, and was born of the virgin Mary. He perfectly obeyed his heavenly Father, lived a sinless life, performed miraculous signs, was crucified under Pontius Pilate, arose bodily from the dead on the third day, and ascended into heaven. As the mediatorial King, he is seated at the right hand of God the Father, exercising in heaven and on earth all of God’s sovereignty, and is our High Priest and righteous Advocate. We believe that by his incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension, Jesus Christ acted as our representative and substitute. He did this so that in him we might become the righteousness of God: on the cross he canceled sin, propitiated God, and, by bearing the full penalty of our sins, reconciled to God all those who believe. By his resurrection Christ Jesus was vindicated by his Father, broke the power of death and defeated Satan who once had power over it, and brought everlasting life to all his people; by his ascension he has been forever exalted as Lord and has prepared a place for us to be with him. We believe that salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name given under heaven by which we must be saved. Because God chose the lowly things of this world, the despised things, the things that are not, to nullify the things that are, no human being can ever boast before him—Christ Jesus has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness, and redemption.
8. **The Justification of Sinners** We believe that Christ, by his obedience and death, fully discharged the debt of all those who are justified. By his sacrifice, he bore in our stead the punishment due us for our sins, making a proper, real, and full satisfaction to God’s justice on our behalf. By his perfect obedience he satisfied the just demands of God on our behalf, since by faith alone that perfect obedience is credited to all who trust in Christ alone for their acceptance with God. Inasmuch as Christ was given by the Father for us, and his obedience and punishment were accepted in place of our own, freely and not for anything in us, this justification is solely of free grace, in order that both the exact justice and the rich grace of God might be glorified in the justification of sinners. We believe that a zeal for personal and public obedience flows from this free justification.
9. **The Power of the Holy Spirit** We believe that this salvation, attested in all Scripture and secured by Jesus Christ, is applied to his people by the Holy Spirit. Sent by the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ, and, as the other *Paraclete*, is present with and in believers. He convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment, and by his powerful and mysterious work regenerates spiritually dead sinners, awakening them to repentance and faith, and in him they are baptized into union with the Lord Jesus, such that they are justified before God by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. By the Spirit’s agency, believers are renewed, sanctified, and adopted into God’s family; they participate in the divine nature and receive his sovereignly distributed gifts. The Holy Spirit is himself the down payment of the promised inheritance, and in this age indwells, guides, instructs, equips, revives, and empowers believers for Christ-like living and service.
10. **The Kingdom of God** We believe that those who have been saved by the grace of God through union with Christ by faith and through regeneration by the Holy Spirit enter the kingdom of God and delight in the blessings of the new covenant: the forgiveness of sins, the inward transformation that awakens a desire to glorify, trust, and obey God, and the prospect of the glory yet to be revealed. Good works constitute indispensable evidence of saving grace. Living as salt in a world that is decaying and light in a world that is dark, believers should neither withdraw into seclusion from the world, nor become indistinguishable from it: rather, we are to do good to the city, for all the glory and honor of the nations is to be offered up to the living God. Recognizing whose created order this is, and because we are citizens of God’s kingdom, we are to love our neighbors as ourselves, doing good to all, especially to those who belong to the household of God. The kingdom of God, already present but not fully realized, is the exercise of God’s sovereignty in the world toward the eventual redemption of all creation. The kingdom of God is an invasive power that plunders Satan’s dark kingdom and regenerates and renovates through repentance and faith the lives of individuals rescued from that kingdom. It therefore inevitably establishes a new community of human life together under God.

11. **God's New People** We believe that God's new covenant people have already come to the heavenly Jerusalem; they are already seated with Christ in the heavenlies. This universal church is manifest in local churches of which Christ is the only Head; thus each "local church" is, in fact, the church, the household of God, the assembly of the living God, and the pillar and foundation of the truth. The church is the body of Christ, the apple of his eye, graven on his hands, and he has pledged himself to her forever. The church is distinguished by her gospel message, her sacred ordinances, her discipline, her great mission, and, above all, by her love for God, and by her members' love for one another and for the world. Crucially, this gospel we cherish has both personal and corporate dimensions, neither of which may properly be overlooked. Christ Jesus is our peace: he has not only brought about peace with God, but also peace between alienated peoples. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both Jew and Gentile to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. The church serves as a sign of God's future new world when its members live for the service of one another and their neighbors, rather than for self-focus. The church is the corporate dwelling place of God's Spirit, and the continuing witness to God in the world.
12. **The Nature of Marriage and Sexuality** We believe the term "marriage" has only one meaning, and that is marriage sanctioned by God which joins one man and one woman in a single, exclusive union, as delineated in Scripture. We believe that God intends sexual intimacy to only occur between a man and a woman who are married to each other. We believe that God has commanded that no intimate sexual activity be engaged in outside of a marriage between a man and a woman. We believe that we are all sinners and all prone to sexual sin. However, we also believe that any form of sexual immorality, such as: adultery, fornication, homosexuality, bisexual conduct, bestiality, incest, pornography or any attempt to change one's sex, or disagreement with one's biological sex, is sinful and offensive to God. We believe that God offers redemption and full reconciliation to him for all who confess and forsake their sin, seeking His mercy and forgiveness through Jesus Christ. We believe that every person must be afforded compassion, love, kindness, respect, and dignity. Hateful and harassing behavior or attitudes directed toward any individual are to be repudiated and are not in accord with Scripture or the doctrines of the church. *Gen. 2:24; Lev. 18:1-30; Rom. 1: 26-32; 1 Cor. 5:1-2; 6:9; 1 Thess. 4:1-8; Heb. 13:4; 1 Cor. 7:10; Eph. 5:22-23; Mark 10:6-9*
13. **Baptism and the Lord's Supper** We believe that baptism and the Lord's Supper are ordained by the Lord Jesus himself. The former is connected with entrance into the new covenant community, the latter with ongoing covenant renewal. Together they are simultaneously God's pledge to us, divinely ordained means of grace, our public vows of submission to the once crucified and now resurrected Christ, and anticipations of his return and of the consummation of all things.
14. **The Restoration of All Things** We believe in the personal, glorious, and bodily return of our Lord Jesus Christ with his holy angels, when he will exercise his role as final Judge, and his kingdom will be consummated. We believe in the bodily resurrection of both the just and the unjust—the unjust to judgment and eternal conscious punishment in hell, as our Lord himself taught, and the just to eternal blessedness in the presence of him who sits on the throne and of the Lamb, in the new heaven and the new earth, the home of righteousness. On that day the church will be presented faultless before God by the obedience, suffering and triumph of Christ, all sin purged and its wretched effects forever banished. God will be all in all and his people will be enthralled by the immediacy of his ineffable holiness, and everything will be to the praise of his glorious grace.