

A. ARTICLES OF FAITH

Introduction

The Bible tells one grand, unified story – a true account of the lavish and relentless love of a holy God. It is a drama in four acts: Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration. It calls us – not simply to be spectators – but to respond with living faith. God calls us to believe – placing our trust in him, personally committing ourselves to him, and accepting the truth of the gospel.

He calls us to embrace certain truths that define us as a believing community and then embody those truths in how we live. We must speak, then, of what we believe (Articles of Faith) and how we should then live (Articles of Practice). As the Missionary Church, we affirm the core truths of the Gospel, and then we enact those truths as a family of churches in Christian community committed to love God fully, to love our neighbors truly, and to carry out the Great Commission for God's glory and the salvation of the world.

The Triune God

We believe in one God, eternally existing in three divine persons, equal in power and glory – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God is the creator and sustainer of all things. His divine qualities – including love, holiness, justice, righteousness, faithfulness, infinite knowledge and power, self-existence, and omnipresence – all harmonize perfectly in the unity of his being.¹

The Father

We believe in God the Father, begotten² of none, the eternal Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. Since God is the creator, all things and all people are from him and exist for him. As the author of salvation, he adopts into his family all who are born again by faith. He gloriously upholds and providentially rules over all things, to accomplish the redemption of his people and the restoration of all creation.³

The Son

We believe in Jesus Christ, the eternally begotten² Son of the Father. He is the fully divine, living Word of God who also became fully human – conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. His sinless human life, humble obedience to his Father's will, sacrificial death and bodily resurrection made sufficient provision for the salvation of all people. In his ascension, he returned to his Father, where he reigns as Lord, Advocate, Great High Priest, and Coming Judge.⁴

The Holy Spirit

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the third person of the triune God, proceeding from and sent by the Father and the Son. He is the personal expression of God's power – instrumental in all his works. He is the author and illuminator of sacred Scripture. He convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. He is the agent of the new birth, the one by whom we are baptized into the Body of Christ. As the spirit of holiness, he indwells every believer and his Church, purifying and empowering his people for holy living. He guides them into truth, comforts and encourages them, and enables them to fulfill the Great Commission. He produces his fruit in the lives of believers and gives them spiritual gifts for the good of the Church.^{5 6}

The Bible

We believe that the Bible, consisting of the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments, is the written Word of God, verbally inspired by the Holy Spirit and, therefore, true, reliable, and without error in all it addresses. We believe the Bible has been safeguarded by the Holy Spirit and transmitted to the present day without corruption of any essential doctrine. The Bible forever remains the unchanging and final authority for faith and living.⁷

Humanity

We believe that God created human beings – male and female – as co-equal bearers of the image of God. Gender is divinely designed, part of the goodness of creation. Human sexuality is a gift, intended to be expressed exclusively in a monogamous, lifelong marital union between one man and one woman. The Bible also affirms the sacredness of the single state and that some may have the gift of lifetime celibacy.

We believe in the historicity of the first man, Adam, who along with his wife, Eve, were uniquely created by a direct act of God as recorded in Genesis. Made in his image, they are his crowning achievement. Adam and Eve were created without sin for perfect fellowship with God and were commanded to be fruitful and exercise benevolent dominion over the earth. Humankind was created for love of God and neighbor. That love was intended to find expression in every individual and every human institution.

Through the misuse of their wills, however, our original parents succumbed to Satan's temptation, disobeyed God's command and thus brought sin into the world and became subject to physical and spiritual death. They became corrupt in their nature, and have passed on that nature to all their descendants. As a result, all human beings – while still bearing God's image – are polluted in every aspect of their being. They are estranged from God by their sin and thus deserve God's wrath.

We believe that God desires all human beings to be restored to a right relationship with him. Redemption – the gracious design by which God intends to rescue humanity from the disastrous consequences of sin – has its origin in the love of God and is brought to fruition by his infinite wisdom and might.⁸

Salvation and the Spirit-Filled Life

We believe that Jesus Christ is God's only provision for our salvation. He voluntarily offered himself as our representative and substitute, and suffered and died on the cross in our place – taking upon himself God's righteous wrath. We believe in his bodily resurrection on the third day, which powerfully declared him to be the Son of God. By his death and resurrection, Jesus once for all conquered sin, death, hell, and the devil.

We believe that Christ is the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. Salvation is a divine gift given to any who repent and believe. Repentance and faith are the divinely-enabled human responses to the grace of God. By the power of the Holy Spirit, a sinner must turn away from sin and embrace God – thus appropriating the benefits of Christ's life, death and resurrection. All who truly believe and receive Christ are fully justified, reconciled to God, born of his Spirit, adopted as his children, and united with Jesus in his death and resurrection. They will one day see him in his glory and be glorified themselves, as God brings his redemptive work to completion.

We believe that God intends to transform his redeemed people by conforming them to the image of his Son through the infilling and sanctifying work of his Holy Spirit. Though this work begins with God's gracious initiative and can only be accomplished by his life-giving power, believers must cooperate and fully yield themselves to the Lordship of Christ. Believers are called to decisively surrender their wills, be renewed in their minds, and have their hearts purified as they continuously offer themselves as living sacrifices to God.

We believe that a living faith must express itself in a life of loving obedience to God and in loving service to others. Genuine faith will inevitably produce good works, which are born out of gratitude for salvation and ultimately done for God's glory. Christians are called to live by the power of the Holy Spirit as citizens of the kingdom, serving as God's agents of transformation for society, culture, and the created world.⁹

The Church

We believe that the invisible and universal Church is a spiritual body comprised of all believers, both living and dead—over which Christ himself is Head and Lord.

We believe that the local church is to be a loving community of Christ's followers who gather for worship, prayer, instruction in the Word, mutual encouragement and discipline. As the temple of the Holy Spirit, the Church is to display his holiness, bear his fruit, and be adorned by his gracious gifts. As a people called out of darkness, the Church will embody the pervasive, life-transforming power of God by equipping the saints for the work of ministry – bearing witness to the truth and exerting influence in every realm of the broader culture. The Church is called by Jesus to proclaim the gospel – locally, cross-culturally, and internationally – and to make disciples of everyone everywhere in the power of the Holy Spirit.

We believe that baptism and the Lord's Supper were instituted by the Lord Jesus himself – not as a means of salvation, but as outward signs of the salvation we have by faith. They are the divinely mandated means by which believers publicly affirm their faith in Christ. Water baptism symbolizes the spiritual union that every believer has with Jesus in his death, burial, and resurrection. Therefore, we believe that the biblical pattern is baptism upon profession of faith in Christ, and furthermore, that it should be administered by immersion whenever possible.

The Lord's Supper serves as not only a vivid memorial of Jesus' bodily sacrifice and shed blood, but also as a proclamation of his death until he returns. It symbolizes the believer's union with Christ and the spiritual unity shared by every believer. It provides a powerful inducement to self-examination, should be celebrated joyfully and regularly, and is open to all who are followers of Christ.¹⁰

The Last Things

We believe that the final years of human history will be characterized by worldwide persecution and divine judgment.

We believe that the return of Jesus will be personal, bodily, visible, and glorious. His second coming, the blessed hope for which we must be constantly prepared, is a source of encouragement and comfort, a motive for holy living, and an inspiration for ministry and mission.

We believe that when Jesus returns, he will subdue his enemies and establish his kingdom on earth and will reign in perfect righteousness.

For those in Christ, death is gain, because to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.

At the resurrection, we believe that every person will face one of two eternal destinies. We believe that no condemnation awaits those who are in Christ, because their sins were forgiven at the cross. They will have their lives and works judged only for reward, and will enjoy an eternal, embodied life in the presence of God and his angels, forever. Those who are not in Christ will be raised to appear before God for a final, irrevocable judgment. They will be consigned to a place of eternal, conscious punishment, separated from God in hell, with Satan and his angels.

We believe in the coming restoration of all things, where God – in accordance with his power and promises – will one day bring his purposes for all of creation to their glorious fulfillment. Here, God's handiwork – though disfigured by sin and subject to decay – will be fully restored in a new heaven and new earth. We believe that all of God's redemptive purposes will come to fruition, and death will be swallowed up in victory.¹¹

¹ Gen.1:1; Ex. 3:14, 34:6; Deut. 6:4, 32:4; 1 Kings 8:27; Neh. 9:6; Ps. 90:2, 103:8, 116:5, 147:5; Isa. 6:3, 40:28, 57:15; Jer. 23:23-24; Mal. 3:6; Matt. 28:19; John 1:1, 4:24, 10:30, 14:16; Acts 5:4-5, 17:28; 1 Cor. 8:4; 2 Cor. 13:14; Col. 1:17; 1 Tim. 1:17; Heb. 1:2, 12 and 11:3; 2 Pet. 3:9; 1 John 4:10-16

²The word “begotten” is the past tense of an old English word which means “to bring into being,” or (in that sense) “to father” or “to sire.” When we say that the Father is “begotten of none,” we mean that no one brought the Father into being. When we say that Jesus is the “eternally begotten son of the Father,” we mean that Jesus is the only example of a person who has always (for all eternity) been brought into being by God the eternal Father, and therefore is the only person of whom it can be said that He is truly the Son of the Father. Human fathers live in time and bring human sons into being at a point in time. The eternally existing Father brings His eternally existing Son into being. Human language is inadequate to fully describe this mysterious relationship between God the Father and God the Son.

³ Gen. 1:1; Ps. 90:2; John 13:3, 16:28; 1 Cor. 8:6; Eph. 1:3-4, 4:6; 1 Pet. 1:2-3; 1 John 2:23, 3:1

⁴ Isa. 53:6; Matt. 28:18-20; Luke 1:35; John 1:1, 14, 18; Acts 2:22, 24-32; Rom. 1:3-4, 8:34; 2 Cor. 5:18-19; Eph. 1:19-22; Col. 3:4; Tit. 2:13; Heb. 1:8, 4:15, 7:25; 1 Pet. 2:22, 24, 3:18; 1 John 2:1-2

⁵See section on “Salvation and the Spirit-Filled Life.”

⁶ Matt. 28:19; John 3:5-6, 14:16-18, 26, 15:26, 16:7-14; Acts 1:8, 2:1-4, 13:2-4, 15:28; Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 2:10-12, 6:19-20, 12:4-11, 13; 2 Cor. 6:16, 13:14; Gal. 5:22-23; Eph. 2:21-22; 2 Thess. 2:13; Tit. 3:5; 1 Pet. 1:2, 1 John 2:20-27

⁷ Ps. 119:9, 89, 105; Matt. 24:35; 1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; Heb. 4:12; 1 Pet. 1:25; 2 Pet. 1:21

⁸ Gen. 1:27, 3:13, 16-17; Ex. 20:11; Isa. 64:6; John 10:17-18; Acts 4:12; Rom. 3:23, 5:12-17, 6:23, 7:7ff; Eph. 1:5-6, 2:1-5; 1 Tim. 1:15, 2:5-6; Tit. 2:11-12; Heb. 2:9; 1 Pet. 3:18; 1 John 1:8

⁹ Ps. 51:3-4; Prov. 28:13; Isa. 6:1 5, 55:6-7; Matt. 1:21, 3:2, 8, 4:17, 16:24; Mark 1:15; Luke 13:3, 15:18, 18:13, 19:8; John 1:12, 3:3, 5, 14, 17, 5:24, 6:44, 16:8, 11, 17:17; Acts 11:18, 13:38-39, 15:8-9, 16:31, 20:21, 22:10; Rom. 2:4, 3:10, 12, 19, 20, 23, 4:3-5, 5:1, 9, 6:19, 22, 8:16, 33, 37, 10:9-10, 12:1-2; 1 Cor. 15:3, 8, 19, 23, 55-57; 2 Cor. 3:18, 5:17, 7:1; Gal. 2:20, 6:14; Eph. 2:8, 10, 5:26; Phil. 2:12-16, 3:20-21; Col. 2:6, 3:3; 1 Thess. 4:3, 5:23; 2 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 2:25; Heb. 11:6, 12:14, 13:12; James 2:17; 1 Pet. 1:2, 15-16; 2 Pet. 1:4-9, 3:18; 1 John 3:2, 5:6

¹⁰ Matt. 18:15-17, 16:13-18, 26:26-30, 28:18-20; Luke 22:15-20; John 13:35; Acts 1:8, 2:38-42, 46-47, 8:36-39, 20:7, 28, 32; Rom. 6:3-5; 1 Cor. 5:1-4, 10:16, 11:23-24, 12:12-27, 16:2; Eph. 1:5-6, 22-23, 3:21, 4:11-16; Col. 1:18, 2:12; Heb. 12:23; 1 Pet. 3:21, 4:11; 1 John 3:14, 4:2, 5:1-5; Jude 20-21; compare Mark 16:16

¹¹ Ps.2:7-9, 96:13, 98:9; Eccl.12:14; Isa. 9:3-7, 11:6-9, 65:17, 66:22; Dan. 7:13-14, 12:2; Matt. 24:14-31, 36-51, 25:1-46; Mark 9:42-48, 13:10, 32, 37; Luke 21:27-28; John 5:24, 28-29, 14:1, 3; Acts 1:11; Rom.8:1, 29; 1 Cor. 3:8-15, 4:2-5, 11:32, 15:24-25, 58; 2 Cor. 5:10; Eph. 1:3-14; Phil. 1:21-23, 3:20-21; Col. 3:1-4; 1 Thess. 4:13-5:11; 2 Thess. 1:8-9, 2:1-10; 2 Tim.4:8; Tit. 2:12-13; Heb. 9:27-28, 12:5-8; James 5:7-8; 2 Pet.3:13; 1 John 2:28-3:3; Rev. 1:7, 22:12-13; 6:1-19:21, 20:10-15, 21:1-22:7