

## WHAT WE BELIEVE

One of the most frequently asked questions we receive is - "What kind of church are you?" Although labels can at times be misleading, there are certain general characteristics of our church that are helpful to know.

### I. WE ARE EVANGELICAL

#### A. What We Believe About Scripture

We believe that the Bible is God's inspired, inerrant, infallible and all sufficient word and therefore our final authority in all matters of life and doctrine.

MARTIN LUTHER - "The Bible is God's greatest gift to mankind. From its pages, God Himself directs us in the way that we should go, imparting to us wisdom and understanding so that we may no longer be slaves of Satan but sons of God who share the inheritance of the saints in light."

**2 Timothy 3:14-17** But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it **15** and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. **16** All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, **17** that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

#### 1. It is God breathed (inspired) - expired/breathed out

WILLIAM HENDRICKSEN (2 Timothy) - "All scripture owes its origin and contents to the divine breath, the Spirit of God...As a result, what they wrote is not only without error but of supreme value for man. It is all that God wanted it to be. It constitutes the infallible rule of faith and practice for mankind."

**2. It is inerrant** - It contains no errors. It is wholly true in every detail. ALL scripture is God breathed.

**3. It is Infallible** - It will accomplish its purpose without fail. It does not mislead or deceive. In other word, those that base their life on God's word will not find that they have believed or followed in vain.

#### **4. It is authoritative**

MILLARD ERICKSON (Christian Theology) - "By the authority of the Bible we mean that the Bible, as the expression of God's will to us, possesses the right supremely to define what we are to believe and how we are to conduct ourselves.

#### **5. It is profitable**

JOHN MACARTHUR JR. - "God breathed Scripture provides for us the comprehensive and complete body of divine truth necessary to live as our heavenly Father desires for us to live. The wisdom and guidance for fulfilling everything He commands us to believe, think, say, and do is found in His inerrant, authoritative, comprehensive, and completed Word."

**Teaching** - instruction, doctrine, imparting knowledge re. God, what he is like and what we can expect of him, what he expects from us and how we can relate with him. People can't believe, do, etc., what they do not know.

**Rebuking** (reproof) - the goal is conviction of a sinner, warnings based on the word, truth that exposes false doctrine or ungodly conduct. Scripture is a plumb line by which we measure ourselves.

**Correcting** - restoration to an upright position or a right state

**Training** - the rearing of a child (an ongoing training, preparation for life)

**Fully equipped** - sufficient, complete, capable, proficient, able to meet all demands

JOHN STOTT - "Scripture is the chief means which God employs to bring the man of God to maturity."

#### **6. It is sufficient**

It is able to make us wise for salvation. In other words, all we need to know to live as a disciple of Jesus is there for us.

WAYNE GRUDEM - "The sufficiency of Scripture means that Scripture contained all the words of God he intended his people to have at each state of redemptive history and that it now contains everything we need God to tell us for salvation for trusting him perfectly and for obeying him perfectly.

## **B. What We Believe About the Gospel**

We believe people can only be saved by responding to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

**Romans 1:16-17** For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”

### **1. We are all sinners who need a Savior**

The Bible describes us in a variety of ways: dead, hostile, rebellious, enslaved, corrupted to the core, inflicted with a terrible and self generated incapacity. And the holy, just, all powerful, all knowing, creator/judge is justifiably angry with us.

**Romans 3:10-12** as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; 11no one understands; no one seeks for God. 12All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."

**Ephesians 2:1-3** And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— 3among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

### **2. Jesus is the only Savior**

**1 Timothy 1:15** The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners

**1 Corinthians 15:3-4** For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,

**2 Corinthians 5:21** For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

How did he save us? He came to earth as a man; lived a perfect life; died for our sins (in place of or in exchange for – at the heart of the gospel is satisfaction through substitution); rose from the dead as a validation of His death; and, ascended into heaven to reign until His return.

Our salvation includes forgiveness, acceptance, reconciliation and adoption, that can not be changed or revoked because it is not based on our performance but His.

Jesus is not just one of many possible saviors, but the only Savior.

*Acts 4:12* And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

*John 14:6* Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

### **3. We must turn and trust**

*Mark 1:14-15* Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”

### **4. Our need for the gospel doesn't end once we are saved**

Isn't the cross only for unbelievers? Isn't it just the gate we enter through? Does it have anything to do with anything other than our initial experience of salvation? That isn't the end of the story because we are called to go on to battle sin (sanctification) and serve the Lord and at times struggle and suffer.

The gospel is central to all we do because we only and always relate to and receive from God on the basis of it. It is a finished work with a continuing effect.

SINCLAIR FERGUSON - "In relation both to sin and to God, the determining factor of my existence is no longer my past. It is Christ's past."

JERRY BRIDGES (The Gospel For Real Life, 180) – “Just as we by faith look to Christ for our righteous standing before God, so by faith we are to look to Him for the enabling power to live the Christian life.”

DAVID PRIOR – “We never therefore, move on from the cross of Christ, only into a more profound understanding of the cross.”

## **II. WE ARE REFORMED**

While all genuine Christians believe that one can only be saved through the gospel, sincere believers differ on their understanding of God's part and man's part in that saving act. Did God choose certain people to be saved from the

foundation of the world or does God offer salvation to all men with men being free to either accept or reject that offer? At Crossway we understand salvation from a reformed perspective meaning that we place the emphasis on the activity of God and the glory of God in saving sinners.

## **A. God's Electing Grace**

WAYNE GRUDEM - " Election is an act of God before creation in which he chooses some people to be saved, not on account of any foreseen merit in them, but only because of his sovereign good pleasure."

### **1. It is necessary because we are sinners**

*Ephesians 2:1* And you were dead in the trespasses and sins

*Romans 8:6-8* For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

R.C. SPROUL - "If the final decision for the salvation of fallen sinners were left in the hands of fallen sinners, we would despair of all hope that anyone would be saved."

### **2. It is possible because of grace alone**

*Ephesians 2:4-5* But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—

*2 Timothy 1:8-9* Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, **9** who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began

*Titus 3:3-5* For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. **4** But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, **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

ARTHUR CUSTANCE - "The grace of God makes men willing, not finds men willing."

SAMUEL STORMS - "Grace ceases to be grace if God is compelled to bestow it in the presence of human merit...Grace ceases to be grace if God is compelled to withdraw it in the presence of human demerit (for example man not choosing Him)...Grace is treating a person without the slightest reference to desert whatsoever, but solely according to the infinite goodness and sovereign purpose of God."

### **3. It is possessed by faith alone**

WAYNE GRUDEM – Conversion is "our willing response to the gospel call, in which we sincerely repent of sins and place our trust in Christ for salvation."

In other words we still must repent and believe. But we must understand that our response is made possible only by God's prior grace.

*Ephesians 2:8-9* For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

WAYNE GRUDEM (Systematic Theology, 730) – "Faith is the one attitude of heart that is the exact opposite of depending on ourselves. When we come to Christ in faith we essentially say, 'I give up! I will not depend on myself or my good works any longer. I know that I can never make myself righteous before God. Therefore, Jesus, I trust you and depend on you completely to give me a righteous standing before God.' In this way, faith is the exact opposite of trusting in ourselves, and our own merit but entirely on God's free gift of grace."

### **B. God's Sustaining Grace**

Because our salvation is totally dependent upon God's electing grace given to us before the foundation of the world, we don't believe that a genuine believer can ever lose that salvation.

*Romans 8:29-39* For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. **30** And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. **31** What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? **32** He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? **33** Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. **34** Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. **35** Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? **36** As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." **37** No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. **38** For I am sure that neither death nor life,

nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, **39** nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

### **C. Why It Matters?**

It is, of course, always important that we do our best to be Christians who are “rightly handling the word of truth.” (*2 Timothy 2:15*) But there are also some very practical reasons why this matters.

#### **1. It eliminates all human boasting so that God alone is glorified**

*Galatians 6:14* But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

#### **2. It makes us secure in the unchanging purpose of God**

*Jude 1:24-25* Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

### **III. WE ARE CHARISMATIC**

We believe in the present day work of the Holy Spirit in the many ways that the Spirit is described and manifested in Scripture.

GORDON FEE (God’s Empowering Presence) – “For Paul, the Spirit as an experienced and living reality was the absolutely crucial matter for the Christian life, from beginning to end. For the Christian life can only be lived in and by and through the power of the Holy Spirit.”

#### **A. The Spirit’s Broad Work**

We don’t want to have a one-dimensional doctrine of the Spirit. This is the failing of too many charismatic churches.

The Spirit is the third person of the Godhead – fully God (with all the qualities ascribed to God) and fully personal (vs. an impersonal power).

The Spirit gives life at regeneration (born of the Spirit), makes God known (inspiration and illumination) and empowers us for sanctification and service both inside (e.g. *1 Corinthians 12*) and outside (e.g. *Acts 1:8*) the church.

## **B. Broad Gifts for Service**

The Greek word charis means grace. Charisma means grace gifts.

WAYNE GRUDEM (Systematic Theology, 1016) – “A spiritual gift is any ability that is empowered by the Holy Spirit and used in any ministry of the church.”

*1 Corinthians 12:7* To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

*1 Peter 4:10-11* As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

### **1. Every Christian is gifted**

Peoples gifts may vary in kind, number and degree but each person is gifted in some way.

Biblical authors list spiritual gifts in at least five different places (*1 Corinthians 12:8-11* and *12:28*, *Romans 12:6-8*, *Ephesians 4:11*, *1 Peter 4:11*). There is overlap in these lists and none of these lists are exhaustive, i.e. they don't attempt to list all the possible spiritual gifts.

### **2. Gifts are to be used to serve others for God's glory**

*1 Corinthians 12:7* To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

*1 Peter 4:10-11* As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another...in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.

The gifts are given to edify the church and to glorify God, especially Jesus as Lord. They are expressions of His ministry among His people and care for His people. As stewards we are responsible for proper use of our gifts.

### **3. Gifts are to be eagerly desired**

*1 Corinthians 14:1* Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy.

### C. Living Filled with the Spirit

At regeneration we receive the full blessing of the Holy Spirit so that the broad work of the Spirit, including his empowering presence, is accessible to all believers.

**Acts 2:38-39** And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, **everyone** whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”

**1 Corinthians 12:13** 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.

However we can and should pursue fresh infillings of the Spirit as a lifestyle.

**Ephesians 5:18** And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, (*lit. – be continually being filled*)

GORDON FEE - "Paul does not see life in the Spirit as the result of a single experience of the Spirit at conversion. The Spirit is the key to all of Christian life, and frequently Paul implies there are further, ongoing appropriations of the Spirit's empowering."