

What We Believe

As believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, we affirm the following as a summary of what we believe to be basic truths about God and his works.

Section A – The Bible

Throughout history God has revealed himself in a variety of ways, and God has preserved the substance of this revelation in the Bible. When we say “the Bible,” we mean the sixty-six books of the Old Testament and New Testament. These books were written by divinely chosen authors as they were prompted and guarded by the Spirit of God. Although those writers were genuine authors and in most cases not just secretaries taking dictation, the work of the Spirit was so complete that everything written in the biblical books taught the truth without any errors.

Strictly speaking, this inerrancy of the Bible, applies to its books as originally written, but we can be confident that we have the original text of the Bible in the copies and translations we possess today because God has preserved those writings. In any attempt to define what we ought to believe or how we ought to live, only the Bible can be used as a final authority. Traditional interpretations of the Bible and confessions of faith are useful guides, but they are always open to correction based on further study of the Bible. Any cooperation with others who profess to be Christians must be based on a shared commitment to the unique authority and complete truthfulness of the Bible. (Matthew 5:17-18; John 16:12-15; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21)

Section B – God

There is one, and only one, God, who is the creator of this universe. God, who is a God of love and justice, has always existed and will always exist. He is the ultimate authority over all persons and things, and he answers to no higher being or principle. In biblical terms we affirm that he is “holy,” which means that he is in every way unique and in a category all his own, free from all the limits and imperfections experienced by creatures. In both the majesty of his being and the moral purity of his nature and action, he is

uniquely perfect. Although God is one in his being, he exists eternally in three divine persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The idea of the Trinity is a mystery beyond our full comprehension, but we are compelled by the witness of the Bible to affirm it. (Genesis 1-2; Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Matthew 28:19-20; 2 Corinthians 13:14)

Section C – Christ

The supreme revelation of God is found in Jesus Christ, the God-Man. The Son of God is a fully divine person of the Trinity who has existed eternally. In order to save human beings he added to his divinity a full and perfect human nature and became Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus was miraculously conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of a Jewish virgin, Mary. He lived a sinless life in obedience to God the Father, and his obedience culminated in his death as a payment of the penalty for the disobedience of sinful humans. God vindicated him when he raised him bodily from the dead, and he ascended to heaven where he is free from the limits of this world. He now intercedes for us who believe in him and preserves us in our relationship with the Father while we await his personal return. (Matthew 1:18-23; John 1:1-18; Romans 5:12-19; 1 Corinthians 15:1-8)

Section D – The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is a fully divine person, not just an impersonal force. The Spirit makes the work of Jesus Christ effective in us by convincing us that we have sinned against God, that we therefore fail to meet God's standard for human life, that we are subject to God's judgment for that reason, and that Christ is the answer to our need. Christ gives the Spirit to indwell all those who believe in him, and the Spirit gives to believers a new spiritual ability to understand God's Word and live in obedience to it. By indwelling us he sets us apart as God's children; he continues to transform us into faithful followers of Christ; and he will in the end make us fully like Christ. (John 7:37-39; 14:16-17; Romans 8:9; 1 Corinthians 12:13)

Section E – Satan

Satan (also called the Devil) exists as an evil, personal, spirit-being who opposes the work of God in the world. Although created as a good, angelic being, he originated rebellion against God and continues to use his real but limited power to oppose all that would serve the glory of God and the good of humanity. (Genesis 3:1-15; Job 1:6-12; 2 Corinthians 11:13-15; 1 Peter 5:8-9)

Section F – Humanity

Human beings were created by God to be like him in every way. This is necessary in order to be in relationship with him. They serve as God's visible representatives in the exercise of responsible dominion over the created world. Our first parents sinned by disobeying an explicit divine command and thus brought ruin on the human race. The Bible describes this ruin in terms of "death": spiritual, physical and eternal death. Spiritual death involves corruption at the core of our being, so that human beings are by nature totally incapable of pleasing God. Physical death is the destiny of all humanity. And ultimately eternal death involves permanent separation from God as the destiny of all those who refuse to repent and respond to God's offer of grace. (Genesis 1:26-27; 3:1-24; Romans 5:12-19; Ephesians 2:1-3)

Section G – Salvation

Although God could have left all human beings in their sin and guilt, in love, he freely and graciously chose to deliver us from our ruined condition. He provided his eternal Son to become human in order to save us. Christ's saving work focused on his death, in which he bore the penalty which is justly ours, thus satisfying the demands of God's moral law and turning away the wrath of God which is poured out on unrepentant sinners. God signified his approval of Christ's work by raising him from the dead and exalting him as Lord in heaven. On the basis of this work of Christ on our behalf, God accepts as perfectly righteous all those who trust in Christ who died and rose again. We come to believe in Christ because God does a special work of grace to overcome our sinful disposition and draw us to himself. Then God continues this work of grace, so that all who have been drawn to faith in Christ will be preserved in faith and salvation and will enter into the perfect conditions of eternal life in the age to come. (John 6:35-40; Romans 3:19-26; 8:28-30; 1 Peter 1:18-23)

Section H – Future Things

We believe that Jesus Christ will return personally, bodily, and gloriously, just as he promised and his apostles affirmed. In the end, Christ will raise from the dead all who have ever lived, and he will declare God's perfect judgment concerning every person. Those who have been saved will live eternally in the perfect, renewed creation, and those who have been unrepentant will exist eternally in the conscious punishment of hell. (Matthew 25:31-46; John 5:28-29; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Revelation 20-22)

Section I – The Church

The universal church, the community of believers in Christ, is manifested in local churches throughout the world. A properly ordered local church is a loving community of persons who have confessed their faith in Christ by being immersed in Christian baptism, and who by their baptism have committed themselves to one another as well as to Christ. Together they seek to proclaim the gospel of Christ, to build up each other as growing followers of Christ, to transmit the Christian faith to succeeding generations, and to worship God as his people called to be a distinct society in this world. Each local church is called to acknowledge Christ as Lord and Head of the church and to use its divinely given abilities and opportunities to make Christ known in its community. Each church needs to be served by two kinds of leaders: some who carry out a ministry of teaching and governing (known in the Bible as elders, overseers, or pastors), and some who lead in the practical implementation of ministry (known in the Bible as deacons). (Romans 12:3-8; Ephesians 4:1-16; 1 Timothy 3:1-15; 1 Peter 2:9-10)

Section J – Symbols of the Gospel

Among the things commanded by Christ, there are two visible symbols of the gospel, which he instituted for observance by his followers until he returns, one as a sign of Christian initiation and the other as a means of ongoing nurture.

1. Baptism is the immersion in water of a confessing believer, designed to occur at the beginning of Christian experience as the formal means of response to the gospel and

initiation as a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. The act is a powerful symbol of union with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection, with all that this implies about our death to our old life and our spiritual rebirth. (Matthew 28:19-20; Romans 6:3-4)

2. The Lord's Supper is a symbolic meal in which believers together partake of bread and wine as a tangible reminder of the body and blood of Christ, which were offered up for our salvation. By this act of eating and drinking, the whole community of believers proclaims the Lord's death until he returns. (Luke 22:19-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-34)

Section K – The Church and State

Both church and state have divinely ordained functions to perform in obedience to God, but the two are not to be confused. The state is responsible to seek public justice for the good of all, not to give a special status to any particular religious community. (Matthew 22:21)

Section L – Religious Liberty

Although God calls all people to believe in him and to come to him through Jesus Christ, this profession is to be a genuine personal response and not one imposed by civil law. Therefore, every person should have the civil right to practice and promote his own beliefs. (Romans 14:11-12)

Section M – Sunday

We affirm the tradition of the early church, which recognized the special character of the first day of the week, the day on which our Lord arose from the dead. Although every day is to be lived for the glory of God in obedience to Christ, the first day of the week is in a special sense an appropriate day for corporate worship and service. (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2)

Section N – Civil Government

Civil government, in its various forms, is designed by God as a means to protect the welfare and good order of society as a whole. Christians are responsible to pray for those who are given this awesome responsibility and to conscientiously obey the laws imposed by these governing authorities. However, in view of the fact that Jesus Christ is the ultimate Lord of all and the ruler of the earthly authorities, laws, which are opposed to the revealed will of Christ, must be disobeyed by his followers. This is the exception, not the rule, however, and such civil disobedience must occur only as a last resort when it is absolutely necessary. (Acts 5:29; Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-17)