

## WCBC Standard of Teaching Statement

### **Bibliology—The Doctrine of the Scriptures**

We teach the transcendent God has made Himself known to His creation by an act of self-revelation through the Scriptures (Heb 1:1). The Scriptures have been faithfully preserved in the 66 canonical books of the Old and New Testaments. The Holy Spirit authored the text of Scripture, guiding the human writers, with the result that the text of Scripture in the original autographs was verbally (every word) and plenary (entirely) inspired, or God-breathed (2 Tim 3:16). While God used the agency of human authors in the writing of Scripture, these writers were so directed, or “moved” by the Holy Spirit, that they accurately recorded the revelation of God without error (2 Pet 1:21). The Bible is therefore the very Word of God, and consequently is authoritative, infallible, and inerrant.

We teach the sufficiency of the Scriptures, meaning that the Bible contains everything that is necessary for life and godliness (2 Pet 1:3). The Bible is able to make one wise for salvation, and profitable for all manner of instruction and training in godliness, so that by it the man of God is made complete and thoroughly equipped for every good work (Ps 19:7–11; 119; 2 Tim 3:15–17). This is perfectly in keeping with the purpose of Scripture as God’s revelation to mankind—He has communicated to men in a manner sufficient to reveal His holy will, means of salvation, and instruction for how to live in a manner pleasing to Him.

The Scriptures are the revelatory foundation of the church built by the prophets and the apostles (Eph 2:20), and with the conclusion of the NT writings, the canon of Scripture remains closed. By God’s decree, nothing may be added to or taken away from the Scriptures (Rev 22:18–19). God has sovereignly preserved His Word (Isa 40:8; Matt 24:35), and translations that accurately preserve the meaning of the original autographs may be proclaimed and relied upon as the Word of God. Scripture must be interpreted in a normative fashion (i.e., literally, with appropriate respect for genre and literary devices), which is most faithfully accomplished through a literal, grammatical, historical hermeneutic that seeks to honor authorial intent.

#### Statement on Genesis 1-11

We teach that the opening 11 chapters of Genesis should be interpreted literally and read as principally comprising historical narrative. We therefore teach that the world was created out of nothing by the word of God (Gen 1:1; Heb 11:3), and that the days referred to in the creation account from Genesis 1:1–2:3 refer to literal, consecutive, 24-hour days. We teach that Adam was a historical man, created directly by God from the dust of the earth, and that Eve his wife was created from the side of Adam. Both Adam and Eve were created male and female in God’s image, with equal worth and dignity, and not evolved from another life form. Adam and his wife Eve are the parents of the whole human race. Adam’s rebellious fall imputed sin to all his descendants and introduced death and corruption into the formerly perfect creation. We teach that death did not exist prior to the fall (Gen 3). All life was created by God and designed to reproduce “after its kind” and therefore the biblical account is incompatible with the tenants of macro-evolution. We teach that Genesis 6–9 describes the historical judgement of God against sin in a worldwide flood that destroyed everything living except for Noah, his family, and those animals preserved in the ark.

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### The Doctrines of God

#### Theology Proper—The Doctrine of God

We teach with the testimony of the Scripture that there is one true and living God, Who is eternally self-existent and independent as Creator of all things and Sustainer of the world (Gen 1:1; Deut 6:4; Heb 1:3). God is a personal Being who is simultaneously transcendent and immanent (1 Kings 8:27; Ps 97:9; 139:7–12; 145:18; Isa 40:22; Jer 23:23; Acts 17:24). God's existence is revealed generally to all mankind in His glorious works of creation, and specially in His Word. The testimony of creation, the witness of the conscience, and the revelation of the Scriptures leave all mankind without the excuse of ignorance of the existence and eternal power of God (Rom 1:18–31; 2:15).

We teach the one true and living God has eternally existed in a glorious and mysterious Triunity of persons, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Gen 1:26–27; Deut 6:4; Mt 28:19; John 1:1–4; 8:58; 10:30; 16:7–11; 17:20; 2 Cor 1:21–22; 13:14; Eph 4:4–6; 1 Pet 1:1–2). The persons of the Godhead are united in one divine and simple essence, being co-eternal, co-powerful, and co-equal (John 10:30; 14:10; Phil 2:5–6). These three persons of the Godhead are distinct, each performing unique but harmonious offices while sharing equally in the divine perfections. The Scriptures unequivocally affirm that God is one, as the persons of the Godhead are of the same substance together (Deut 6:4; Jas 2:19). Therefore, the Trinity in no way impinges upon the oneness or unity of God.

God is a Spirit (John 4:24), whose self-existence (Ex 3:14; John 5:26; 1 Tim 6:16), eternality (Job 36:26; Ps 90:2; Rev 1:8), infinitude (includes immensity and omnipresence; Job 11:7; 1 Kgs 8:27; Ps 139:7–10; Jer 23:24), omnipotence (Job 42:1–2; Isa 46:9–10; Matt 19:26), omniscience (Ps 147:5; Heb 4:13; 1 John 3:20), and sovereignty (Isa 46:9–10; Eph 1:11) are displayed in His creation and revelatory acts. His divine nature is immutable and impassible (Mal 3:6; Jas 1:17), free (Eph 1:5,9,11), and simple (Jas 2:19).<sup>1</sup> His divine perfections of love (1 John 4:8), mercy (Eph 2:4; Titus 3:5), grace (Heb 4:16; 1 Pet 5:10), holiness (Isa 6:3; Rev 4:8), justice (Gen 18:25; Isa 30:18), faithfulness (1 Thess 5:24; 2 Tim 2:13), righteousness (Ps 11:7), goodness (1 Chr 16:34), truthfulness (Ex 34:6), and patience (2 Pet 3:9), among so many others are attributes of His Being. The perfections of God are descriptions of His essential nature as disclosed to mankind through His creation, special revelation, and acts of redemption in Christ.

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### Christology—The Doctrine of Jesus Christ

We teach that God the Son, the second person of the Triune Godhead and eternal Word (John 1:1–5), became man in the incarnation of Jesus Christ (John 1:14; Gal 4:4; Phil 2:6–9; 1 John 1:1–2). Jesus Christ is fully God, and thus co-eternal, co-equal, and co-powerful with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. The deity of Jesus Christ is demonstrated by His fulfillment of OT Messianic prophecies that identify the Messiah as God (Isa 7:14 cf Matt 1:23; Isa 40:3 cf Matt 3:3; Isa 45:23 cf Phil 2:9–11). Moreover, the deity of Christ is affirmed by His miracles of healing (Mark 2:3–12; John 5:5–9), exorcism of demons (Matt 8:28–32), authority over creation (Lk 8:22–25), ability to discern thoughts (Mark 2:8–10), authority to forgive sins (Mark 2:5), and power to raise the dead (John 11:11–44). Further, the Father testified to the Sonship of Christ (Mark 1:11; 9:7), Christ testified to His own deity (John 8:58; 10:30), the demons recognized Him as the Son of God (Matt 8:28–30), the NT authors affirm His divinity, and He was declared to be the Son of God by His resurrection in power from the dead (Rom 1:4).

We teach that in the incarnation the Son of God became fully man (John 1:14; Phil 2:8), not merely in appearance but in nature and substance by means of the virgin birth, in fulfillment of OT prophecy (Isa 7:14; Matt 1:23). Christ never emptied Himself of His divinity, but in the incarnation added humanity to Himself (Phil 2:5–11). These two natures are united perfectly in the person of Christ so that He is fully God and fully man (Col 1:19). In His incarnation, He voluntarily emptied Himself of the rights and prerogatives of His divine nature and lived within the confines of His humanity in His earthly ministry (Phil 2:5–11). By His incarnation and atoning work, Christ perfectly fulfills the offices of prophet, high priest and king (Heb 4:14–16; 8:6). He can sympathize with human weakness as one who suffered in the flesh, and as one who was tempted in every respect as the rest of mankind, yet without sin (2 Cor 5:21; Heb 4:15). Because the divine and human natures are united in His person, Christ alone is fit to be the mediator between God and man (1 Tim 2:5).

We teach the Son offered Himself as a kinsmen redeemer, ransoming sinners from the weakness of their sinful flesh (Rom 8:2–4). He accomplished this by being born of a woman, yet without original sin by virtue of the virgin birth (Matt 1:18–23). He lived with perfect righteousness, and offered Himself as the substitutionary blood offering to satisfy the wrath of God against sin on the cross (Rom 3:23–25; 2 Cor 5:21). In witness of His satisfaction with the sacrifice of the Son, the Father bodily raised Jesus Christ from the dead on the third day, according to the Scriptures (Rom 1:4; 1 Cor 15:3–4). The Son has ascended into heaven to sit at the right hand of the Father where He intercedes for all believers (Rom 8:34; 1 Pet 3:22). From there He will return to claim His bride, the church (1 Thess 4:15–18), and then to rule and judge the nations (Ps 110:6; 2 Tim 4:1; 1 Pet 4:5). It is the Incarnate Jesus Christ who is the central and supreme figure of redemptive history (Col 1:15–20), of whom all Scripture testifies (Lk 24:25–27, 44), in whom every promise of God is kept (2 Cor 1:20), who sustains the universe (Heb 1:3), who is head of the church (Col 1:18), and whom every person will one day confess is Lord to the glory of the Father (Phil 2:9–11).

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### Pneumatology—The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit

We teach the Holy Spirit is the third person of the Triune God. The Holy Spirit is therefore co-equal, co-eternal, and co-powerful with the Father and the Son, and is fully God. The deity of the Spirit is evident by 1) His activity with the other members of the Godhead (Gen 1:2; 1 Cor 6:11; Titus 3:5; Heb 9:14), 2) His use of divine prerogatives (Ps 139:7; Isa 40:13; 1 Cor 2:11b), 3) that the Scriptures He inspired are described as “God-breathed” (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:21), and 4) that He enjoys equality with the Father and the Son (Matt 28:19; Lk 3:22; 1 Cor 2:10–11; 6:19; Eph 4:4–6). The Holy Spirit is not merely an impersonal spiritual force or influence, but is a person. The Holy Spirit exhibits the marks of personality, such as life, intelligence, knowledge and will (Rom 8:2, 27; Eph 4:30), and relates to others personally (Mark 3:29; Acts 5:3; 7:51; Heb 10:29).

The Holy Spirit’s activity in the OT is evident in creation (Gen 1:2), in specially filling and enabling individuals (Gen 41:38–40; Num 27:18; Judg 15:14; Ezek 2:2), and in the theocratic anointing (Saul-1 Sam 10:6; David-1 Sam 16:13; Solomon-1 Kgs 4:29; Christ-Isa 11:1–2; Mark 1:10). In relation to the NT ministry of Christ, the Holy Spirit superintended the virgin conception of Christ (Lk 1:35), filled Christ (Luke 4:1), directed Christ (4:1) and is the promised Helper (John 14:16; 16:13). Additionally, the Spirit “bore along” the human authors who wrote the inspired text of Scripture (2 Pet 1:21).

In His present ministry, the Holy Spirit testifies to the ministry of Christ and exalts the Son (John 15:26), and convicts the world of sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16:8–11). The Spirit is also involved in the work of salvation, with particular reference to regeneration, baptism, and sanctification (Gal 5:16–25; Titus 3:5). Regeneration is the spiritual rebirth by which the Holy Spirit animates those who were formerly dead in trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1), giving them new spiritual life so that they can and will respond to the gospel call (John 3:5; Titus 3:5). The baptism of the Holy Spirit is the act that binds all believers and unites them into the church of Jesus Christ as one body (Rom 6:1–11; 1 Cor 12:13; Titus 3:5). The Spirit is intimately involved in the process of sanctification, transforming believers into the image of Christ (Rom 15:16; 1 Cor 6:11; 1 Pet 1:2). We believe the Holy Spirit illumines the understanding of believers so that they can comprehend the mysteries of God contained in the Scriptures. This is not to be mistaken for subjective spiritual impressions, but instead is the way the Spirit illumines the mind of the believer to understand the objective truths of God’s Word that the natural man cannot (1 Cor 2:10–16).

Upon conversion, the Holy Spirit indwells, fills, eternally seals, and intercedes for believers (Rom 8:11; 8:26–27; 1 Cor 6:19–20; Eph 1:13; 4:30; 2 Tim 1:14). The Spirit equips believers for ministry and service with helps and gifts (1 Cor 12:1–11). We believe that the miraculous, or “sign” gifts of the Spirit (healings, tongues, prophecy, etc.) served as an authenticating witness for the 1<sup>st</sup> century church (1 Cor 14:22; Heb 2:3–4), but with the end of the apostolic age and the close of the NT canon, the sign gifts ceased to be normative. The offices of apostle and prophet ceased once the canonical foundation of the church—the Scriptures—were completed (Eph 2:20). Other offices, such as pastor/teacher and evangelist, and gifts of exhortation, administration, giving, mercy, service, teaching, etc. are ongoing and permanent ministries and gifts of the Spirit operative in the church today (Rom 12:6–8; Eph 4:11; 1 Pet 4:10–11).

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### Angelology—The Doctrine of Angels, Demons and Satan

We teach the existence of mighty angelic beings who are ministering spirits, created by God to worship Him, accomplish His works, and serve the elect (Neh 9:6; Isa 6:1–3; Heb 1:14). They are an unnumbered host (Heb 12:22), who delight in continuously praising God, worshiping Him for His marvelous character and deeds (Rev 4:8; 5:11–12). While angels are immortal, they are created beings and are not omniscient, omnipresent, or omnipotent. Consequently, it is wrong to worship angels who are fellow servants of God (Col 2:18; Rev 22:8–9).

We teach that within the host of heaven are various classifications of angelic beings (cherubim and seraphim) and ranks that denote unique functions and order. The cherubim appear in connection with guarding the holiness of God (Gen 3:24; Ex 25:20–22), and seraphim who extol the holiness and glory of God (Isa 6:2–3). Moreover, we believe various ranks and order among the angels is implied by the identification of Michael as an “archangel” and his apparent authority (Jude 9; Rev 12:7–8). Angels serve as divine messengers (Matt 1:20–21; Lk 1:11–13), heavenly warriors (2 Kgs 6:17; Dan 10:13), avengers of God’s wrath (Gen 19:13; Isa 37:36; Ps 78:49), ministers of providence (Dan 12:1–2; Rev 7:1), and protectors of the elect (Acts 5:19; 12:7).

The angel Satan (referred to as “Lucifer” or the “Devil”), though created more beautiful and glorious than the rest of the heavenly host, despised his creator and idolatrously desired worship reserved for God alone (Isa 14:12–14). Satan and a third of the angels rebelled against their Creator, and have been cast out of heaven (Isa 14:12–14; Ezek 28:15–17; Jude 6). By his malevolent deception in the Garden of Eden, he enticed mankind in the first Adam to enter into his sinful rebellion (Gen 3:1–6), and now delights to corrupt the minds of men from the truth of God (2 Cor 4:4) and deceive the nations (Rev 20:3). Lucifer has been styled in Scripture as the Devil, Satan, Apollyon, as a tempter, accuser, liar, murderer, and by many other detestable names and descriptions. He has been temporarily permitted to exercise a limited reign over the fallen earth under God’s ultimate authority, being described in the Scriptures as the “ruler of this world” (John 14:30), and the “god of this world” (2 Cor 4:4). Satan and his demons afflict people with their deceptions (1 Tim 4:1), oppression, and even possession of unbelievers. While Satan and his demonic forces are presently permitted to torment the righteous (Eph 6:12; 1 Tim 4:1; 1 Pet 5:8), they are subject to the sovereignty of God (Job 1:6–12), and believers are able to resist the devil by submitting to God and His Word (Jas 4:7).

Nonetheless, the decisive (though not final) blow has been struck against his reign in the coming of the second Adam, Jesus Christ (Gen 3:15; Mark 3:26–27; John 12:31). Christ, by his life of perfect obedience to the will of God, his sinless sacrifice for sin, and victorious resurrection, has been vested with all authority in the heavens and on the earth (Matt 28:18). Satan and his demonic host therefore await their imprisonment during the millennial reign of Christ (Rev 20:1–3), and their final judgement, when they will be cast into the lake of eternal fire (2 Pet 2:4; Jude 1:6; Rev 20:10).

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### Anthropology and Hamartiology—The Doctrines of Man and Sin

We teach that uniquely among all living creatures, God created mankind in His own image (Gen 1:26–27). God accomplished this through an act of new creation, fashioning man from the dust of the earth on the sixth day (Gen 1:24–27; 2:5–7). We believe man is created in God’s image in order to be the visible representation of the invisible God. This divine image-bearing contains two parts: (1) man is bestowed with the responsibility to exercise dominion over creation (Gen 1:27–30), and (2) designed to reflect the communicable attributes of God such as holiness (Lev 19:2; 1 Pet 1:16), love (John 15:12; 1 John 4:11), mercy (Col 3:13), unity (John 17:11) etc. In consequence of this divine image, man is given moral agency and responsibility for his actions. We believe the Bible reveals that man is composed two parts: body/outer man and soul/inner man (Ps 63:1; Matt 10:28; Acts 2:27). The redeemed will possess glorified resurrection bodies in the age to come (1 Cor 15:35–49).

Because it was not good for man to be alone, God created the woman, Eve, from the flesh of Adam, not as a replica of Adam but as his suitable helper (Gen 2:18–25). God herein ordained the institution of marriage to be a covenantal union between one man and one woman. The whole counsel of the Scriptures holds forth this pattern for marriage as the timeless ordinance of God (Matt 19:4–6; Mark 10:5–9; Eph 5:22–33; 1 Pet 3:1–7). It is exclusively within the confines of the one-flesh, marital covenant that sexual intercourse finds its righteous expression for the God-appointed purposes of intimacy (Gen 2:24), pleasure (Prov 5:15–19; Song of Solomon) and procreation (Gen 1:28). All other modes of sexual gratification reject God’s holy will and are consequently under His wrath (Rom 1:18–32). As reflected in the order of creation, husbands are entrusted with the calling to love their wives and provide Christlike servant leadership/headship (1 Cor 11:3; Eph 5:25–33; 1 Pet 3:7), while wives are called to love their husbands and joyfully submit to them (Eph 5:22–24; 1 Pet 3:1–6). Men and women are equal in essence, worth and dignity as beings made in the image of God (Gen 1:27), and this equality is not impoverished by their unique and differentiated roles and functions as complementarian.

We teach that the first man, Adam, was created in righteous perfection and enjoyed moral freedom of the will, unencumbered by a sin nature. His natural condition was that of obedience to the commands of God, but God endowed Adam with a will with which to make moral choices. From this blessed and happy state mankind fell by Adam’s volitional disobedience and rebellion against the command of God (Gen 3:6). This sinful rebellion inaugurated the curse of sin upon the whole of creation (Gen 3:16–17). Adam incurred both physical and spiritual death not only for himself, but as the federal head of humanity, upon the whole human race (Rom 5:12–19; 1 Cor 15:22), and as the vice-regent of God, upon all of creation (Gen 3:17; Rom 8:19–22). Consequently, all persons are born in a state of original sin (Ps 51:5), and the taint of this hereditary fallen nature extends to the whole person, resulting in radical depravity.<sup>2</sup> This radical depravity does not mean that each person is as bad as they could be, but that the effects of sin extend to the whole of the person. The heart of every person is proud and consumed by self-worship, is deceitful and wicked (Jer 17:9; Mark 7:21), serving evil passions (Rom 3:10–18; Jas 4:1–3), alienated from the life of God (Eph 4:18), and dead in trespass and sin (Eph 2:1–3). The proud heart of man drives his sinful behavior (Jas 4:1–3). Mankind are sinners by nature and by

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<sup>2</sup> The term “radical depravity” here means simply that the depravity of man has affected the fundamental nature of man. This term is used instead of “total depravity” in order to avoid confusion that implies man is completely depraved to the maximal extent in every facet of his being and actions.

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their works (Titus 3:3). In consequence, the will of man is not free, but is constrained by his conditional and volitional depravity. The image of God remains in man, but is grievously marred as a result of sin. The wrath of God is therefore righteously incensed against sinners (Rom 1:18), and can be satisfied only through the shedding of blood for remission of sins (Heb 9:22). All attempts of unholy sinners to keep the law of God are vain (Isa 64:6).

### Soteriology—The Doctrine of Salvation

We teach that the gospel that brings salvation is principally an act of God to bring glory to Himself by means of rescuing and redeeming His fallen creation (Rev 1:6). Both salvation and judgement bring glory to God, and God is therefore glorified in those who are redeemed, and by those who will experience His unending wrath against sin. Both salvation and condemnation reveal more of God's eternal power and Godhead for men to worship than would otherwise be known (i.e., love, mercy, grace, compassion, justice, righteousness, etc. see Rom 9:17, 22–23). All members of the Trinity are engaged in the work of redemption. The Father has willed the plan of salvation (Acts 2:22–24), the Son has accomplished the work of salvation (1 Pet 2:24), and the Holy Spirit applies salvation to men (Titus 3:3–4). Redemption is ultimately an expression of the love of God (John 3:16), for apart from His saving grace, all men are dead in trespass and sin (Eph 2:1–10).

God eternally foreknew and elected those persons whom he would redeem in Jesus Christ (Rom 8:28–30; Rev 13:8). This election is unconditional in that it is not conditioned upon any merit in the recipient, but is wholly the result of God's sovereign grace (Eph 1:4–5; 2 Tim 1:9). Conversely, those whom God passes over in election are condemned to damnation—the eternal conscious suffering of the wrath of God in hell (Matt 25:41–46; Rom 1:20–28; Jude 4; Rev 20:11–15). The doctrine of election in no way subverts the agency of man. In election, God miraculously and sovereignly *transforms* the will of man to desire God and believe in Christ (2 Cor 5:17). God *gives over* the reprobate to their own rebellious will, who persist in their rebellion despite a clear knowledge of the truth (Rom 1:18–32). Therefore, both the elect and the reprobate receive the outcome of their will.

We teach that salvation is made possible through the penal substitutionary atonement and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Christ satisfied the righteous requirements of the law by living without committing sin (2 Cor 5:21; Heb 4:15), and without a sin nature as a result of His virgin birth and divine nature. On the merits of His perfect obedience, in His humanity He offered Himself as a substitutionary atoning sacrifice for the sins of His people (1 John 3:5), paying the penalty for sins with His own body and blood on the cross (1 Pet 1:18–19). In so doing, Christ became the propitiation—that is, the One who satisfied the wrath of God against sin—for the elect (Rom 3:25). Christ demonstrated His great love for men by dying for them while they were still sinners (Rom 5:6–8), becoming their ransom (1 Tim 2:6), means of reconciliation with God (Rom 5:8; 2 Cor 5:18), and way of eternal life (John 11:25–26). We believe this was a particular atonement, for while Christ's atonement is sufficient for all (John 3:16; 1 John 2:2), Christ died to redeem His elect bride (Matt 1:21; John 10:15; Eph 5:25), and His atonement does not accomplish the redemption of all people. After dying to atone for sins, Christ rose again the third day to justify the ungodly (Rom 4:25), so that all who believe in Him by grace through faith receive eternal life (Rom 3:23–28). This is the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ (1 Cor 15:3–5), and there is salvation in no one else (Acts 4:12).

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The natural man, being fallen and radically corrupted, is incapable of meriting salvation through acts of righteousness (Isa 64:6), and unable to accept the truth of the gospel (1 Cor 2:14; Eph 2:1). An act of regeneration or new spiritual birth from God is the necessary precursor for men to receive the truth and respond in faith (John 3:3–8; Eph 2:4–5; Col 2:13; Titus 3:5). This new birth God affords to the elect as a part of His irresistible and special grace in salvation. Recipients of this special grace in regeneration manifest its fruits in faith and repentance. Both repentance (turning from sin and turning to God) and faith are necessary for saving belief in Jesus Christ (Matt 4:17; Mark 1:15; Acts 3:19; Eph 2:8–9). Those who have repented of sin and turned to Christ in faith God declares righteous in Christ (Rom 3:28). This is the legal declaration of justification, where the sin of the sinner is imputed to the perfect sin-bearer, Christ, and the perfect righteousness of Christ is imputed to the sinner (Rom 10:4; 2 Cor 5:21; Gal 3:13). The believer is therefore united to Christ, so that being positionally *in Christ* results in receiving a new nature (2 Cor 5:17; 2 Pet 1:4). Moreover, the believer is not merely justified and united to Christ in faith, but is made a child of God by adoption (Gal 4:4–6). By this adoption the believer enters into all the rights and privileges of the family God, including calling God “Father” (John 1:12; Rom 8:15), being co-heirs of eternal life with Christ (Rom 8:17), and fellowship among the family of believers (Gal 6:10). Thus the one who was formerly God’s enemy is made God’s dear child.

While the believer is definitively sanctified at conversion (1 Cor 6:11; 2 Thess 2:13; Heb 10:10; 13:12), growth in holiness and into the image of Christ is a progressive, life-long process (Rom 12:1–2; 2 Cor 4:18; 5:18; 1 Jn 1:8). Thus, while the believer continually struggles with indwelling sin (Rom 7:14–25; 1 Jn 2:1), yet their lives should manifest submission to the will of God (1 Cor 6:19–20; 1 Thess 4:3), growth in personal holiness (Col 3:5–10), and evidence of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 2:20; 5:16; Col 3:5; 1 John 3:9). The one who has truly been united to Christ in faith must persevere in faith to the end to which God has predestined him (Rom 8:28–30; 1 Pet 1:3–9). Believers are therefore not merely those who show immediate manifestations of belief, but those whose perseverance and preservation mark them as recipients of God-given faith (Matt 13:3–8). The ultimate end and aim of sanctification and of salvation is glorification, which is the perfection of the image of Christ in the believer (Rom 8:28–30; 1 John 3:2). This final consummation of God’s redemptive purpose is not fully realized in the believer’s life on earth, but is the expectant hope of the future resurrection to glory.

### **Ecclesiology—The Doctrine of the Church**

We teach the church is the bride of Christ whom He purchased with His own blood, and therefore Christ is the head of the church (Eph 5:25–27; Col 1:18). The church as the Body of Christ is a living organism wherein all members share in common their union with Christ. The church is comprised of all true believers who have entered into the Body through the baptism of the Holy Spirit and are united to Christ by faith (1 Cor 12:12–14). All believers are heirs together of eternal life, and are a royal priesthood before God (Gal 3:28; 1 Pet 2:9). The church exists in the present age to worship God in truth, evangelize the lost, and edify believers in pursuit of maturity in Christ (Matt 28:18–19; Eph 4:11–16; 1 Pet 2:9). The church is the new covenant bride of Christ and is distinct from the old covenant people of God, ethnic Israel (Rom 11). The church has not replaced Israel, nor become a “new” Israel, as evidenced by the distinctions between the covenants, unique origin of the church, and difference in destiny as revealed by the unfulfilled promises made to Israel, and the future salvation of “true” Israel (Rom 11:1–5). While



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the church and Israel are distinct, all those united to Christ by faith are united as the one people of God who await glory in the age to come.

We teach the church began at Pentecost and will remain until Christ comes to rescue her from the wrath to come (Acts 2; 1 Thess 1:10). The Body of Christ visibly consists of local churches, which are assemblies of baptized believers who gather together to celebrate the ordinances, are united by faith in the Gospel, observe biblical polity, and uphold the faith once for all given to the saints (Acts 2:41–42; Heb 10:25; Jude 3). The local church is autonomous from human ecclesial bodies or authorities, with independent authority over membership, practice, discipline, ordinances, polity, etc., under the direct headship of Jesus Christ, who is the sole head and authority over the church (Col 1:17–18).

We teach the form of church polity that is best understood from the New Testament is that of elder-led congregational authority. The authority of the local congregation is demonstrated in the New Testament by the writings of the apostles addressed to specific local congregations. While elders play an important role as overseers and shepherds of the flock, providing pastoral care guiding the sheep in the truth and protecting the church against false doctrine (1 Pet 5:1–4), they are not to exercise a ruling authority over the church. That authority resides with the local congregation itself. While individual believers are to humbly submit to the leaders the church has recognized and appointed, it is the collective congregation who recognizes, affirms and appoints these leaders. The two offices of the church are that of elder and deacon. Elders and deacons share the same character/moral fitness requirements, except elders must demonstrate the ability to teach the word (1 Tim 3:1–13; Titus 1:5–9). The role of the elder is synonymous with that of the “overseer,” “bishop,” or “pastor.” Elders exercise spiritual leadership in the church through prayer for the body, preaching/instruction from the word, and protecting the church from false doctrine and false teachers (Acts 6:4; 20:17, 28–31; 1 Tim 3:2; 5:17; 2 Tim 4:2; Titus 1:7–9; Jas 5:14; 1 Pet 5:1–2). The role of elder is reserved for men, in keeping with the function of male spiritual leadership denoted in the created order (1 Tim 2:12–14). Deacons serve the church by ministering to the physical needs of the congregation, with particular care for the widows/fatherless (Acts 6:1–7).

Christ instructed the church to continue to observe the ordinances of baptism and communion (Matt 28:18–19; Mark 14:22–25; 1 Cor 11:23–26). In baptism, a believer comes before the church and publicly professes faith in Jesus Christ by obediently entering the waters of baptism and being baptized by immersion. This baptism does not save or confer righteousness, but instead serves as an act of obedience, a public identification of union with Christ, a symbol of Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection, and marks the entrance of a believer into the covenant community of the visible church (Rom 6:3–4). Water baptism outwardly pictures the internal reality of the Spirit’s baptism that occurs at conversion.

The Lord’s Supper is a communion meal of fellowship, remembrance, and expectation that Christ commanded his disciples to observe and has been committed to the church (1 Cor 11:17–34). In this meal, the church remembers the body and blood of Christ, calling to mind the horrific price of sin and the glorious purchase of redemption (Lk 22:18–20). This remembrance compels believers to pursue living righteously as the blood bought people of God, and warns against partaking in a manner of unrepentant sin unworthy and inconsistent with professing a fellowship in Christ (1 Cor 11:27–33). This meal is a communion meal of fellowship in that it unites Christians who share in common their union with Christ. It is therefore not to be taken or

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administered in private, but is a fellowship meal to be enjoyed when the church assembly is gathered together. Finally, the Lord's Supper is a meal of expectation, for it anticipates the consummation of the coming marriage feast of the lamb (Mark 14:25).

The church as the household of God is called to be the pillar and buttress of the truth (1 Tim 3:15). The church is to be marked by purity and unity that properly adorn the gospel of Christ (Eph 4:4–16; Titus 2:10). The church is for the mutual encouragement and edification of believers, and as a witness to unbelievers. This requires that all believers use their spiritual gifts for the health of the body (1 Cor 12), and that issues of sin be addressed within the church family, which is the household of God (1 Cor 6). The practices of church membership and church discipline are consequently essential characteristics of a healthy church.

### **Eschatology—The Doctrine of the Last Things**

We teach that God is sovereignly orchestrating the events of history in order to consummate His purposes of redemption and final judgement, for the sake of His own glory. While Christ inaugurated the inbreaking of the Kingdom of God in His first coming, the Kingdom awaits its full realization until Christ returns. Moreover, the created perfection of Eden, despoiled by the corruption of sin, anticipates final renewal in the new heavens and new earth when God dwells again with His people. Those who have rejected God and persisted in their wicked way, await final judgement and the ensuing eternal conscious punishment for their unrepentant wickedness. God has prophetically revealed to His people the events preceding these last things, so that believers may know how to live in light of Christ's return, in hope and confidence of their final victory in Christ.

We teach the imminent return of Jesus Christ to redeem his people and judge the nations. We recognize a redemptive distinction between the church and Israel, and that the church has not replaced Israel, for whom their remains an eschatological, redemptive future (Rom 9–11). Both the church and true Israel will be eternally united as the one people of God.

We teach that upon the final defeat of Satan, the great white throne judgement will occur, and the old heavens and earth will pass away (Rev 20:11–15). Even as it has been appointed for all men to die, so it has been appointed for all to be judged, and all men will be judged by God according to their works (Heb 9:27; Rev 2:11–12). Those who are not united to Christ in faith and whose names are not found in the book of life will be thrown into the lake of fire (Rev 20:12–15). This is a place of horrific and unimaginable eternal, conscious torment and affliction of the wrath of God against sin and sinners (Dan 12:2; Matt 13:50; 25:46; Lk 16:24–28; Rev 14:11; 20:10). Those who are united to Christ and whose names are recorded in the Book of Life will enter into eternal life and worship in the New Heaven and New Earth (John 10:28; Titus 1:2; 1 Pet 1:3–9; Rev 21). Thus, in the New Heaven and New Earth, the promise of Eden will be renewed, and the righteous God will righteously reign over a kingdom which his image-bearers fill and have subdued (Rev 21). The telos of redemptive history is therefore the coming kingdom of God, where God is supremely glorified, Whose throne is an everlasting throne, Whose rule will never cease (Ps 45:6). Amen. Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus.