

Appendix A: Statement of Faith

1. THE SCRIPTURES

God and Revelation

Our eternal, transcendent, all-glorious God, who forever exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is by his very nature a communicative being. He both creates and governs through his words and has graciously revealed himself to humanity in order to commune with us. He has revealed himself through creation and providence in ways plain to all people, leaving no one without a testimony of himself. He also revealed himself through specific words, that we might come to a fuller knowledge of his character and will, learning what is necessary for salvation and life. Through the medium of human language, which is suitable and adequate for communication with those who bear his image, God has preserved in Holy Scripture the only authoritative and complete revelation for all humanity.

The Origin of Scripture

All of Scripture is breathed out by God, being accurately delivered through various human authors by the inspiration and sovereign agency of the Holy Spirit. We therefore receive the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments as the perfect, infallible, and authoritative Word of God. With the fullness of revelation given in Christ and his completed redemptive work, no new normative revelation will or need be given until Christ returns. In its original manuscripts, the whole of Scripture (and all its parts) is inerrant—without error in all it affirms. Because there is one divine author behind all of Scripture, we are able to arrive confidently at a harmonious, doctrinally unified understanding of the whole. Furthermore, God in his loving providence has determined to preserve his Word as pure and trustworthy throughout history, just as he guided the early church in discerning and identifying the canon of Scripture he inspired.

The Attributes of Scripture

Believers live by every word that comes from the mouth of God. The Word of God is therefore necessary and wholly sufficient for knowing the Father's love in Christ, experiencing his glorious plan of redemption, and being instructed in the way of fruitful and godly living. The Word of God is clear, and everything we need in order to know, love, and fellowship with God can be plainly understood through ordinary means, without appeal to any human authority. Although not all Scripture is equally plain, when its intended meaning is misunderstood, the fault lies not in the clarity of God's communication but in the recipient. Scripture alone is our supreme and final authority and the rule of faith and life. The Scriptures must not be added to or taken away from, and all creeds, confessions, teachings, and prophecies are to be tested by the final authority of God's Word.

The Reception of Scripture

We come to know that the Bible is God's Word through Scripture's own self-attesting authority and by the work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness through the Word in our hearts. As the Scriptures are preached and read, the Spirit delights to illuminate our minds so that we understand, cherish, and obey his Word. God's intended meaning is revealed through the intentions of the inspired human authors, rendering the truth of God's Word a fixed, historical reality.

Therefore, the Bible is to be prayerfully interpreted according to its context and original intent, with due regard to the progressive nature of revelation and the collective interpretation of believers through the ages. Ultimately, Scripture interprets Scripture, and the meaning of each text must be understood in light of the whole. As we devote ourselves to God's Word, we commune with God himself and are fortified in faith, sanctified from sin, strengthened in weakness, and sustained in suffering by his unchanging revelation in Scripture.

2. THE TRIUNE GOD

The Nature of God

There is only one true and living God, who is infinite in being, power, and perfections. God is eternal, independent, and self-sufficient, having life in himself with no need for anyone or anything. He is spirit, transcendent and invisible, with no limitations or imperfections, immutable, and everywhere present with the fullness of his being. His knowledge is exhaustive, including all things actual and possible, so that nothing—past, present, or future—is hidden from his sight. God is not divided into parts, but his whole being includes all of his attributes: he is entirely holy, loving, wise, just, good, merciful, gracious, and truthful. Our God is the infinite fountain of being who created all things, and all things exist by him and for him. He is supremely powerful to perform all his holy and perfect will, ruling over his creation with total dominion, righteousness, wisdom, and love. In his transcendence, God is incomprehensible in his being and actions, yet he reveals himself such that we can know him truly and personally.

The Holy Trinity

The one true God eternally exists as three persons— Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—infinately excellent and all-glorious. Each person is fully God, sharing the same deity, attributes, and essential nature, yet there is but one God. Each person is distinct, yet God is not by this distinction divided into three parts, natures, or gods. The Father has always existed as Father, the unbegotten fountain of all life. The Son has always existed as Son, eternally begotten of the Father, uncreated and without beginning, of one essence with the Father. The Holy Spirit has always existed as Spirit, eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son, and of one essence with them. The Godhead thus exists in a perfect unity, indivisible as to nature and substance, yet inseparably distinguished as persons who enjoy a fullness of fellowship and love.

The Relations and Actions of the Trinity

The persons of the Trinity, being one in nature, are also inseparably united in their external works, such that to deal with one person is to deal with the Trinity as a whole. Yet within this unity there are distinctions in the way the divine persons relate to each other and to creation, although there is no difference in essence or attributes. Within the Godhead, the ordered relations among the persons are eternal yet without any inequality. In the works of creation, providence, and redemption, the persons fulfill roles consistent with their eternal relations: the Father originates, the Son accomplishes, and the Spirit completes. Nevertheless, the three, thus distinct, are neither divided nor mixed, are of one and the same essence, are equal from all eternity, and are worthy to be worshipped as the one God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

3. GOD'S SOVEREIGN PURPOSES

God Ordains All Things for His Glory

From all eternity, God sovereignly ordained all that exists and all that occurs in his creation, in order to display the fullness of his glory. God's plans are efficacious, always coming to pass, and they are universal, encompassing all the affairs of nature, history, and individual lives. These decrees are an exercise of his free, unchangeable, wise, and holy will. Yet God, in his foreordination, is not the author of sin, nor do his decrees negate the will of his creatures, who act with the power of willing choice in accord with their nature. His ordaining and governing all things is compatible with his creatures' moral accountability such that God never condemns a person unjustly. Therefore, all persons are responsible for their actions, which have real and eternal consequences.

God's Grace in Election

God in his great love, before the foundation of the world, chose those whom he would save in Christ Jesus. God's election is entirely gracious and not at all conditioned upon foreseen faith, obedience, perseverance, or any merit in those whom God has chosen. His decision to set his saving love on the elect is based entirely on his sovereign will and good pleasure. The number of God's elect is fixed for eternity, and no one who has been chosen by God will be lost. In the mystery of his will, God passes over the non-elect, withholding his mercy and punishing them for their sins as a display of his holy justice and wrath.

As God has appointed the elect to glory, so has he foreordained all the means necessary to carry out his saving purposes. Those whom he has predestined are redeemed by Christ, effectually called to faith by his Spirit, justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by God's power to the end. God does all of this in order to demonstrate his mercy to the praise of his glorious grace. Although attended with mystery, the doctrine of election should not produce speculation, introspection, apathy, or pride⁹⁹ but rather humility, gratitude, assurance, evangelistic passion, and eternal praise for the undeserved grace of God in Christ.

4. CREATION, PROVIDENCE, AND MAN

God Creates and Rules All Things

In the beginning, the triune God freely created out of nothing the universe and everything in it by the word of his power, all for his own pleasure and the display of his glory. God declared the entirety of his creation to be very good, and even in its fallen state it tells of his greatness and is to be delighted in and stewarded for his glory. As supreme Creator, God is separate from and transcendent over all he has made. As sovereign Lord, he is present with his creation to sustain all things, govern all creatures, and direct all circumstances in accord with his holy and loving will. In everything God supremely acts for his glory and for the good of his people in Christ, granting us great comfort and unshakable hope in God's love, wisdom, and faithfulness to us in this life and in eternity.

Man's Creation in God's Image

God created man, male and female, in his own image as the crown of creation and the object of his special care. God directly created Adam from the dust of the earth, and Eve from Adam's side, as the parents of the entire human race. They were created to know and glorify their Maker by trusting in his goodness and obeying his word.

God gave them dominion over all creation, to fill, subdue, and steward the earth as his representatives. All human beings are likewise made in the image of God. Despite the effects of the fall on sinful humanity, all people remain God's image bearers, capable of fellowship with him and possessing intrinsic dignity and value at every stage of life from conception to death. Redemption in Christ progressively restores fallen men and women to their true humanity as they are conformed to the image of Christ.

Man as Male and Female

Men and women are both made in the image of God and are equal before him in dignity and worth. Gender, designated by God through our biological sex, is therefore neither incidental to our identity nor fluid in its definition, but is essential to our identity as male and female. Although the fall distorts and damages God's design for gender and its expression, these remain part of the beauty of God's created order. Men and women reflect and represent God in distinct and complementary ways, and these differences are to be honored and celebrated in all dimensions of life. To deny or seek to remove these differences is to distort a fundamental way in which we glorify God as male and female.

Marriage, Sexuality, and Singleness

Biblical manhood and womanhood enrich human flourishing in all its dimensions. God instituted marriage as the union of one man and one woman who complement each other in a one-flesh union that ultimately serves as a type of the union between Christ and his church. This remains the only normative pattern of sexual relations for humanity. Husbands are to exercise headship sacrificially and with humility, and wives are to serve as helpers to their husbands, willingly supporting and submitting to their leadership. Together these complementary roles bring joy and blessing to each other and display the beauty of God's purposes to the world. Single men and women are no less able to enjoy and honor God and no less important to his purposes. They also are to give expression to God's image in distinct and complementary ways, flourishing as his image bearers and bringing him glory in their singleness.

5. MAN'S SIN AND ITS EFFECTS

The Origin of Sin

God originally created man innocent and righteous, without stain or corruption. In this state, Adam and Eve enjoyed a fullness of life in communion with God, delighting in him and his righteous will yet capable of transgressing. Despite these privileges, they were led astray by Satan and willfully sinned against their Creator by doing what he had forbidden. In their rebellion they doubted his character, rejected his authority, and disobeyed his word. Man's trespass of God's command brought enmity with God and the curse of death. Because God had established Adam as the representative head of the human race, his sin was imputed to all his descendants, bringing guilt, condemnation, and death to humanity. Therefore, we are all by nature corrupt and inclined to evil from conception.

The Effects of Sin

From the inherited corruption of humanity arise all the sins that we commit. All people are now by nature enemies of God, living under the power of Satan, subject to the curse of the law, and deserving of eternal punishment. Moreover, the whole nature of man has been corrupted by the fall, and no part of man is untainted by sin. Although fallen people remain in the image of God and manifest the virtues of common grace, they are incapable of pleasing God, meriting his favor, or freeing themselves from their bondage to sin. Their hearts are hardened, their understanding is darkened, their consciences are corrupted, their spiritual sight is blinded, and their deeds are evil. Therefore, all people are dead in sin and without hope apart from salvation in Jesus Christ.

The curse of the fall corrupted not only mankind but the entire created order, subjecting the world to futility, decay, and death. Both the cursed creation and moral evil produce calamity, suffering, hostility, and injustice in the world. The groaning of the created order reminds us of our fallenness and causes us to long for the redemption of all things under Christ.

6. THE PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST

Incarnation and Two Natures

In the fullness of time God the Father sent his eternal Son, the second person of the Trinity, into the world as Jesus the Christ. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary, taking on himself a fully human nature with all its attributes and frailties, yet without sin. In this union, two whole, perfect, and distinct natures were inseparably joined together in the one person of the divine Son without confusion, mixture, or change. Our Redeemer acted in and through both his human and divine natures, in ways appropriate to each, with both natures being preserved and neither diminished by the other. Yet both his human and divine natures are united and find expression in the one person of the eternal Son.¹⁷⁰ Thus our Lord Jesus Christ, God the Son incarnate, is fully God and fully man, able to be our all-sufficient savior and the only mediator between God and man.

Earthly Life and Ministry

As God's incarnate Son, our Lord Jesus Christ inaugurated the kingdom of God, fulfilling God's saving purposes and all Old Testament prophecies about the One to come: he is the Seed of the woman, the Seed of Abraham, the Prophet like Moses, the Priest after the order of Melchizedek, the Son of David, the Suffering Servant, and God's appointed Messiah. As such he was anointed by the Holy Spirit and lived a sinless life in complete obedience to his Father. Jesus entered into full human existence, enduring the common infirmities, temptations, and sufferings of mankind. He perfectly revealed the character of God, taught with divine authority and utter truthfulness, extended God's love and compassion, and demonstrated his lordship through the working of miracles and the exercise of divine prerogatives.

Death, Resurrection, and Reign

Having fully obeyed his Father in life, our Savior was also obedient unto death. He was crucified under Pontius Pilate, dying a substitutionary death for the sins of his people. He was buried and arose bodily from the dead on the third day, vindicating his identity and saving work as God's Messiah and guaranteeing the defeat of death, our future resurrection, and the glorification of our physical bodies.

Forty days later Jesus ascended bodily to heaven, where he is now enthroned at the right hand of God, reigning over all things, and interceding for his people as their Great High Priest. One day he will return to judge all people and angels, putting all his enemies under his feet and dwelling with his people forever.

7. THE SAVING WORK OF CHRIST

The Humiliation of Christ in His Saving Work

In the entirety of his life and death, Jesus Christ humbled himself to serve as our mediator in obedience to his Father's saving purposes. As the second Adam, his sinless life of wholehearted obedience to God's law obtained the gift of perfect righteousness and eternal life for all of God's elect. In his substitutionary death on behalf of his people, Christ offered himself by the Spirit as a perfect sacrifice, which satisfied the demands of God's law by paying the full penalty for their sins. On the cross, Christ bore our sins, took our punishment, propitiated God's wrath against us, vindicated God's righteousness, and purchased our redemption in order that we might be reconciled to God and live with him in blessed fellowship forever.

The Efficacy of Christ's Saving Work

God the Father was pleased to accept Christ's sacrifice as a complete atonement for sin, raising him to new life² and vindicating his identity and work as the Messiah. For those who place their faith in Jesus Christ, God's righteousness requires no further sacrifice for sin, nor is there any human achievement or merit to be added to Christ's accomplishment. The atoning work of Christ is wholly efficacious, securing the full salvation of all the elect by purchasing the forgiveness of sins, the gifts of faith and repentance, eternal life, and every other blessing that comes to God's people. As the sole and sufficient atonement for sin, Christ's saving work is to be proclaimed to all people without exception as the only means of reconciliation with God. There is no other mediator between God and man than our Savior, Jesus Christ, and he will receive with redeeming love all who come to him in faith.

The Exaltation of Christ in His Saving Work

The exaltation of Christ in his resurrection, ascension, and reign reveals the full glory of his mediatorial work. Raised by the power of God, Christ triumphed over sin, death, and Satan,² and, as the firstfruits of the new creation, gives eternal life to all who are united to him by faith. Having ascended to the Father's right hand, Christ pours out the Spirit on his people and intercedes on their behalf as a Great High Priest, constantly advocating their cause and granting them access into God's presence. As the exalted Lord, Christ reigns with all authority as universal king and head of his church, governing the affairs of men and nations and empowering his people to be victorious over sin and Satan. The consummation of Christ's saving work will occur when he returns to judge the world in righteousness, deliver the kingdom to his Father, and receive eternal worship as King of kings and Lord of lords.

8. THE PERSON AND WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Person of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity, who proceeds eternally from the Father and the Son. He is equal in deity, attributes, and nature with the Father and the Son, and with them is to be worshipped and glorified.

The Spirit manifests God's active presence in the world, giving life in God's creation and new creation. Existing forever with the Father and the Son, the Spirit is the agent of all blessing to God's creatures and makes possible communion with him.

The Work of the Spirit Prior to Christ's Coming

The eternal Spirit was present at the beginning of God's creation, carrying out the creative word of God and giving life to all things. In God's work under the old covenant, the Spirit was present with God's people to consecrate, deliver, guide, and grant saving faith in the promises of God. He empowered prophets to reveal God's Word, appointed elders to render judgment, raised up judges to bring deliverance, anointed priests and kings as his representatives, and inspired the record of old covenant revelation. Through all the institutions and offices of the Old Testament, the Spirit's work pointed to the ultimate revelation of God through his Son, Jesus Christ.

The Work of the Spirit in Christ and the New Covenant

The Spirit's work in the new covenant centers on Christ and the church. It is by the Spirit that Jesus Christ was conceived and born of a virgin, anointed to fulfill his earthly ministry, empowered to offer his life as a sacrifice, and raised in resurrection power.²⁶⁹ After Christ ascended to the Father's right hand, the promised Holy Spirit descended at Pentecost and ushered in the new era of the Spirit's fullness, indwelling believers and empowering them for life and service. The Spirit glorifies Christ and bears witness to him, convicting the world concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment. He inspired the record of new covenant revelation and makes it effective in people's hearts through the gift of regeneration. He illuminates God's Word to his people, assures them of God's love, comforts them with his presence, intercedes on their behalf, and sanctifies them in conformity to the image of Christ. The Spirit is the bond of our union with Christ, the seal of our salvation, the firstfruits of our redemption, and the guarantee of our inheritance.

9. THE GOSPEL AND THE APPLICATION OF SALVATION BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Gospel

The gospel is the good news of Jesus Christ and all that he did in his life, death, resurrection, and ascension to accomplish salvation for humanity. Therefore, the gospel is not a human action or achievement but rather an objective, historical, divine achievement that remains true and unchanging regardless of human opinion or response. The gospel stands as the core message of the Bible, which in all its parts testifies to God's saving acts culminating in the person and work of Christ. This good news is the power of God for salvation for all who believe, providing hope for the lost and abiding comfort and strength for the believer. There is no salvation apart from Jesus Christ, for there is no other name given under heaven by which we must be saved.

Effectual Calling, Regeneration, and Conversion

God commands the gospel to be proclaimed to all people everywhere, but all people are spiritually dead and unable to respond to this saving news. Therefore, God graciously and effectually calls to himself those he chose to save in Christ.

Through the proclamation of the gospel, the Holy Spirit regenerates the elect and brings them into a living union with Christ, bestowing new spiritual life, opening their eyes to see God's glory in Christ, and enabling them to respond to the gospel in faith and repentance. With a renewed heart and mind, we receive Christ and rely fully on him for salvation, turning from our sinful, self-seeking way of life to love and follow Christ in joyful obedience. Only those who respond to the gospel in this way will be saved, yet even this response is a gift of God's merciful grace, ensuring that he alone receives the glory for our salvation.

Justification and Adoption

In their union with Christ, believers freely receive all the benefits of the gospel. Those whom God effectually calls to himself, he justifies in Christ, forgiving all of their sins and declaring them righteous and acceptable in his sight. This declaration is judicial, addressing not our nature but our status with regard to God's law; it is definitive, being neither gradually gained nor able to be lost; and it is gracious, a free gift of God's righteousness based on nothing worked in us or by us, but received freely by faith. The sole ground of our justification is the righteousness of Christ, whose life of perfect obedience is imputed to us and whose substitutionary death on our behalf completely satisfies the demands of God's justice toward our sins. Those whom God justifies, he adopts into his family, granting them the full status, rights, and privileges of beloved sons. As God's children, we receive his name, enjoy access into his presence, experience his care and discipline, and eagerly await the glorious inheritance he promises his own.

Sanctification, Perseverance, and Glorification

As the all-sufficient Savior, Christ also sanctifies his people, cleansing them from the impurity of sin and setting them apart for God and his service. The renewing work of the Holy Spirit breaks their bondage to sin and Satan and raises them to new life, enabling believers to put sin to death and grow in likeness to Christ. Sanctification is therefore both a definitive act of God and a progressive work of the Spirit. Believers must persevere in faith and obedience in order to be saved. Yet this perseverance is also a gift of God in Christ, who preserves his own and keeps them safe forever. The ultimate goal of sanctification is our full conformity to Christ's image, which will finally come when believers are raised physically with Christ in glory, freed from sin and exulting in the presence of God forever.

10. THE EMPOWERING MINISTRY OF THE SPIRIT

The Filling of the Spirit

When Christ ascended, he poured out the Holy Spirit on the church, ushering in a greater experience of God's presence and power among his people. The Spirit transforms hearts by the miracle of regeneration and indwells all believers in abundant, new covenant measure. The Spirit also desires to fill God's people continually with increased power for Christian life and witness. To be filled with the Spirit is to be more fully under his influence, more aware of his presence, and more effective in his service. All Christians, therefore, must continually seek to be filled with the Spirit by living and praying in such a way that invites the Spirit's work among us, actively longing for God to accomplish his gracious purposes in us and through us. The filling of the Spirit brings to God's people a deeper knowledge of Christ, an increased desire for holiness, a stronger commitment to unity and love, a greater fruitfulness in ministry, and a deeper gratitude for our salvation.

The Gifts of the Spirit

Christ loves the church, his body, and provides for its health and growth through the Holy Spirit. In addition to giving new life, the Spirit sovereignly bestows gifts on every believer. Spiritual gifts are those abilities and expressions of God's power given by his grace for the glory of Christ and the building up of the church. The variety of these gifts—some permanent and some occasional, some more natural and some more remarkable—reflects the diversity of the members of Christ's body and demonstrates our need for one another. The gifts are not to be exercised with apprehension, pride, or disorder, but with faith, love, and order, and always in submission to the authority of Scripture as the final revelation of God. With the exception of those among the apostles who were commissioned as eyewitnesses of Christ and made recipients of normative revelation, the full range of spiritual gifts remain at work in the church and are given for the good of the church and its witness to the world. We are therefore to earnestly desire and practice them until Christ returns.

11. LIFE IN CHRIST

Growing in Christ

All believers, by virtue of their union with Christ, are progressively transformed into his image. Although the ruling power of sin in our lives has been broken, remnants of corruption remain in our hearts that we will fight throughout our lives. This lifelong process of growth takes place as the Spirit empowers us to abide in Christ and strive for holiness in every area of life. Resting in Christ's finished work never renders our effort unnecessary but rather enables the joyful pursuit of loving and pleasing God. Compelled by grace, believers grow in the knowledge of God, obey Christ's commands, walk by the Spirit, mortify sin, and pursue God's priorities and purposes. Although such actions are not the ground of our salvation, they demonstrate the authenticity of our salvation and are a means by which God keeps us faithful to the end. Among the many public and private means of grace, the Word of God, prayer, and fellowship are primary instruments of our sanctification, fostering communion with God and training us together to glorify him, love others, and testify to Christ in the world.

Waiting for Christ

Living the Christian life involves longing and waiting for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. Although believers are new creations in Christ and presently enjoy the blessings of his resurrection power, their sanctification remains partial and incomplete in this life. Furthermore, they continue to live in mortal bodies in a creation subject to futility, opposed by the world, the flesh, and the devil. The Word of God assures us that we are his beloved children, yet such an assurance does not remove the reality of suffering, sorrow, and persecution in this present age. The gospel enables us to rejoice in the midst of tribulations, assured that his purposes are working for our good even in circumstances we do not understand. Fixing our eyes on Jesus, we endure in faith and abound in hope, confident that a day is fast approaching when sin and sorrow will be no more.

12. THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

The Universal Church

The universal church is the true, worshipping community of God's people, composed of all the elect from all time. Throughout salvation history, God by his Word and Spirit has been calling sinful people out of the whole human race to create a new redeemed humanity, whom Christ purchased with his blood.

With the giving of the Spirit at Pentecost, God's people were reconstituted as his new covenant church, in continuity with the old covenant people of God but now brought to fulfillment by the work of Christ. All of God's people are united in one body—with Christ as the supreme, sustaining, and life-giving head— and set apart for God's own possession and purposes.

The Local Church

As an expression of Christ's universal church, the local church is the focal point of God's plan to mature his people and save sinners. Therefore, all Christians are to join themselves as committed members to a specific local church. A true church is marked by the faithful preaching of the Word, the right administration of the sacraments, and the proper exercise of church discipline. Even true churches are imperfect: they often contain a mixture of unbelievers hidden among the true flock and are vulnerable to theological error and moral failure. Yet Christ is unwavering in his commitment to build his church and will surely bring it to maturity. Christ has given the offices of elder and deacon to the church. Elders occupy the sole office of governance and are called to teach, oversee, care for, and protect the flock entrusted to them by the Lord. Deacons provide for the various needs of the church through acts of service. God gives these and other people as gifts to serve and equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ. In keeping with God's created design Scripture reserves the office of elder for men, yet men and women alike belong to a royal priesthood in which each member is gifted by God to play a vital role in the life and mission of the church.

The Sacraments of the Church

The sacraments are precious means of grace that signify the benefits of the gospel, confirm its promises to the believer, and visibly distinguish the church from the world. The Lord Jesus instituted two sacraments, baptism and the Lord's Supper, for faithful observance by the church until his return. Baptism is an initiatory, unrepeated sacrament for those who come to faith in Christ that pictures their remission of sins and union with Christ in his death and resurrection. Through immersion in water in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the believer publicly proclaims his faith in Christ and signifies his entrance into the body of Christ. Although commanded by Christ and a true means of grace, grace is not so inseparably tied to baptism that no one can be saved without it, or that everyone who is baptized is thereby saved. In the Lord's Supper, the gathered church eats bread, signifying Christ's body given for his people, and drinks the cup of the Lord, signifying his blood shed for our sins. As we observe this sacrament with faith and sober self-examination, we remember and proclaim the death of Christ, commune with him and receive spiritual nourishment for our souls, signify our unity with other members of Christ's body, and look forward to the Lord's triumphant return.

The Purpose and Mission of the Church

As the body of Christ, the church exists to worship God, to edify and mature his people, and to bear witness to Christ and his kingdom in all the world. Governed by Scripture, the church gathers for the teaching of the Word, prayer, the sacraments, congregational singing, fellowship, and mutual edification through the exercise of spiritual gifts. As the Father sent Jesus into the world, so Jesus has sent his people into the world in the power of the Spirit.

The church's mission is to make disciples of all nations, teaching them to observe all that Christ has commanded. We do this by proclaiming the gospel, planting churches, and adorning the proclamation of the gospel through our love and good works. There will always be a gathering of believers on earth because the Lord promises to build, guide, and preserve his church to the end of the age. When Christ returns, he will gather and perfect his church from every tribe, tongue, and nation as a people for his own possession, and he will dwell with them forever.

13. THE LAST THINGS

Death and the Intermediate State

Death entered God's good creation as a result of Adam's sin, and now all people are subject to God's curse of death. Yet believers have no need to fear, because Christ has conquered death and delivered us from its dominion. Although our bodies return to dust for a time, death for the Christian has become a doorway to paradise, where our souls enter immediately into God's presence to behold and enjoy our Savior and to rest from our labors. In company with all the spirits of the righteous made perfect, we will await the redemption of our bodies and our full and final salvation. The souls of the unredeemed, however, are cast immediately into hades to experience torment as they await final judgment for their sins.

Christ's Return and the Resurrection

At the appointed time known only to God, Jesus Christ will return to the earth in power and glory as Judge and King to whom every knee will bow. Christ's personal, physical, and visible return is the blessed hope of all who trust in him. At the end of the age the just and the unjust will be raised as their souls are reunited to their bodies: the just to a resurrection of life, the unjust to a resurrection of judgment. When the dead in Christ are raised, their perishable bodies will be redeemed and made like Christ's imperishable, glorious, powerful, spiritual body. Those in Christ who are alive shall likewise be changed, and thus will all God's glorified people forever bear the image of their Savior.

Judgment and the Consummation

On the last day all people will appear before Christ, who is the judge of all. Those who suppressed God's truth in unrighteousness and did not obey the gospel of Christ will suffer the righteous wrath of God and be justly cast into the hell of fire with the devil and his angels. There they will experience eternal, conscious punishment according to their sins. Those saved by Christ, whose names are written in the book of life, will be welcomed into the joy of their master and richly rewarded for every good work done in his name. God's glorified people will inherit the kingdom from which all sin, sorrow, suffering, and death will be banished. Christ as king will set all of creation free from its bondage to corruption, making new the heavens and the earth and establishing his eternal rule in his consummated kingdom. Surrounded by unimaginable beauty, we will enjoy unhindered communion with our triune God, beholding him, serving him, worshipping him, and reigning with him forever and ever. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

Appendix B: Statement on Church Discipline

Throughout its pages, the Bible sounds a recurring theme: those God loves, He disciplines.¹ Discipline is a sometimes challenging process of God correcting His people's thoughts, words and behavior so they can fulfill their calling to become like Him. God disciplines His people through a variety of means. He calls His people first to self-discipline. Each Christian is called to hear the Word of God as they read the Bible and hear the Bible taught and applied.² As they compare their life to God's Word, they adjust themselves to conform to their Savior. But individual interaction with God through His Word is not the only means that God uses to make His children holy. God also uses His people. "Brothers," writes Paul, "if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness...."³ As members of Sovereign Grace Church we take seriously our responsibility to "restore" members who fail to allow God to discipline them personally for their sins. This means that beginning with private confrontation and, if necessary, leading to public rebuke, we seek to help one another overcome any refusal to repent of those words and actions that the Bible clearly defines as sin.⁴ This includes not only sinful words and behavior, but also refusal to turn from heretical doctrine.

Jesus outlined a process for addressing another believer's sin in Matthew 18:15-17.⁵ As a church we agree that this is the way for us to approach someone who refuses to appropriate God's grace for change. Initially, church discipline should be informal: if a Christian sees sin in a brother or sister that appears to be continual, he should approach that person and inquire about it. If in fact there is unrepentant sin and a refusal to repent, then the concerned brother or sister should involve one or two others, which may include a pastor. If this group confirms that, in fact, sin continues without repentance, the process must move to formal church discipline.

When the church begins to formally discipline a member, the church's pastors inquire with the individual member in question to confirm fact and to appeal for change. If change is not forthcoming, the pastors will inform the church of the member and their sin, urging members to contact the erring member and appeal for repentance. During this time, the member under discipline may not participate in the Lord's supper or attend meetings for the purpose of fellowship. Instead, their participation with members should revolve around their need for change. If, after a reasonable period of appeal, no repentance is forthcoming, the pastors will inform the church again, this time announcing that they must revoke membership and that the church must now treat the unrepentant person as they treat unbelievers: in other words, when they interact with this person they should not have "fellowship" as the Bible defines it, but they should appeal for the former member to put their faith in Jesus' work on the cross for them and turn from their sin.

Church discipline has nothing to do with “shunning” a person. It involves first confronting in love and gentleness and, if unsuccessful, withholding fellowship. It is not rejection of a relationship but a change in the nature of a relationship. If a person under discipline is not factious, disruptive or a harmful influence, they are welcome to attend all church meetings that are open to unbelievers with the exception of small groups that meet for the purpose of fellowship. The pastors may decide to abbreviate or eliminate the process of appeal for repentance if the sin is especially notorious, or if the member proves to be factious, disruptive, or leading others into sin or error. In these cases, the pastors may ask church members to avoid all contact with an individual in order to mitigate their sinful influence.

At times a member may seek to withdraw from the church to avoid church discipline and its consequences. Just as a good shepherd will go after a sheep that has wandered from the flock (Matt. 18:12-14; Ezek. 34:4,8,16), so shall the pastors and members of this church seek to restore a wandering member to the Lord through biblical discipline. Therefore, discipline may be instituted or continued either before or after a member seeks to withdraw from membership if the Board of Governing Pastors determines that such discipline may serve to guard and preserve the honor of God, protect the purity of the church, or restore the wandering member to the Lord.

While the church cannot force a withdrawing member to remain in this congregation, the church has the right and the responsibility to encourage restoration, to bring the disciplinary process to an orderly conclusion, and to make a final determination as to the person’s membership status at the time withdrawal is sought or acknowledged. In doing so, the Board of Governing Pastors, at its discretion, may temporarily suspend further disciplinary proceedings, dismiss any or all charges pending against the accused, or proceed with discipline and pronounce an appropriate censure.

If a member leaves the church while they are under the scrutiny of the disciplinary process or while a censure against them is still in effect, and if the Board of Governing pastors learns that they are attending another church, the Board may inform that church that the person is currently under church discipline and may ask that church to encourage the accused to repent of his sin and to be restored to the Lord and to any people whom he has offended. Such communications enhance the possibility that a person may finally repent of their sin, and, at the same time, serve to warn the other church to be on guard against the harm that the accused might do to their members (see Matt. 18:12-14; Rom. 16:17; 1 Cor. 5:1-13; 2 Thess. 3:6-14; 2 Tim. 1:15; 2:16-18; 4:9, 14-15; 3 John 9-10).

Once the pastors make a sin publicly known, they commit as well to inform the church of repentance and restoration to fellowship as appropriate to the situation and the good of the church.

Christians who attend Sovereign Grace Church and have been excluded from fellowship from another church will not be allowed to participate in fellowship at Sovereign Grace Church unless they repent of their sins and make confession and restitution with their former church or the pastors of Sovereign Grace Church are able to determine that the former church did not apply church discipline according to Scripture.

_____	_____	_____
<i>Print Name</i>	<i>Signature</i>	<i>Date</i>
_____	_____	_____
<i>Print Name</i>	<i>Signature</i>	<i>Date</i>
_____	_____	
<i>Pastor</i>	<i>Date</i>	

¹And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives". (Hebrews 12:5-6 ESV, see also verses 7-13)

²See John 15:3, 10, 20; John 17:17; 2 Thessalonians 3:14; 2 Timothy 3:16; Hebrews 4:11-13

³Galatians 6:1 ESV

⁴Other New Testament passages (besides Galatians 6:1 and Matthew 18:15-17 ESV) that support this practice include: 1 Corinthians 5; Acts: 20:28ff; Galatians 2:11-14; 1 Timothy 5:20; Titus 3:10-11; Romans 16:17; 2 Corinthians 2:5-11.

⁵If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector." (ESV)

Appendix C:

Statement on Divorce and Remarriage

For Members of Sovereign Grace Church

In attending to the issues of divorce and remarriage, the pastors of Sovereign Grace Church have attempted to develop a position that reflects the teaching and proportionality of Scripture.

1. Marriage and the Gospel

Because we are a gospel centered church, all doctrinal stances must be grounded in the good news that ‘Christ died for our sins.’ The gospel is particularly concerned with marriage as that mystery which represents the relationship between Christ and the church that he died to save. Any discussion of Biblical allowances for divorce (enumerated below) must be set in the context of Biblical teaching that divorce undermines this glorious intent for marriage—to proclaim the gospel to the world through the one-flesh, life-long relationship of a husband and wife. This being said, we must also remember that the sins of believers that lead to divorce are forgiven by the atoning blood of Christ.

2. Marriage and God’s Glory

As the Westminster Shorter Catechism states, the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. This all-of-life demeanor from created man to his Creator is the foundation stone for our teaching about marriage/divorce. Despite the overwhelming cultural accommodation to divorce, believers are called to live differently, not led by sin but for God’s glory. Convenience and self-centeredness, often the prevailing world view in relation to divorce, can have no place in our consideration of how we live our lives. God’s glory must be the goal of every decision we make in relation to our marriage and in the event of divorce and remarriage.

3. Marriage and God’s Word

God created marriage. Marriage is a sacred covenant between a man and a woman, conceived in the mind of God and given as God’s gift.

“Then the Lord God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.” 19 Now out of the ground the Lord God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. 20 The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. 21 So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. 22 And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. 23 Then the man said, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.”

24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. 25 And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.” Genesis 2:18-25

The marriage covenant is literally, physically binding. It is God’s intention that this covenant would be permanent until the death of one spouse. Through the declaration and consummation of the marriage vows, God joins a man and a woman together. He literally knits the two into one. Therefore, Jesus says:

“For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother, and the two shall become one flesh; so they are not longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.” Mark 10:7-9

It is important to note what Jesus underscores in Mark 10:9. “What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.” Jesus illustrates the holiness of marriage by reiterating that it is the work of God’s hands—that God joins two people into one. Marriage is not merely a contract between two people. Marriage is a creative act of God, intended to last as long as the man and wife are both still living. Jesus sternly reminds us that we, as creatures, would be foolish to vandalize or destroy what God has created.

4. The Origin of Divorce and God’s Perspective on Divorce

Divorce was birthed out of man’s hardness of heart—separating what God has joined.

“And Pharisees came up and in order to test him asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” He answered them, “What did Moses command you?” They said, “Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away.” And Jesus said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two but one flesh. 9 What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” Mark 10:2-9

Divorce stems from the sinfulness of mankind. Specifically, divorce reveals our propensity to destroy even the best, most mysteriously beautiful gifts that God gives us. Given the sanctity of marriage and the nature of divorce, there is not a single instance recorded where God communicates any feeling other than hatred for divorce. All sin that leads to divorce, though certainly forgiven in the gospel, should be rejected as contrary to God’s Word.

In addition to sin that leads to divorce, sin often follows divorce in cases of unbiblical remarriage. With two exceptions (enumerated below), the Bible categorizes remarriage after divorce as adultery—thus highlighting the seriousness of divorce in

God's mind. If God has made two people into one, how can they be separated again, and if they part ways and "join" elsewhere, what is that but adultery? Furthermore, Jesus' teaching categorically condemned the rampant divorce and remarriage that characterized the culture of the 1st century and continues today.

5. Is Divorce and Remarriage Ever Permissible?

Matthew and Paul specify two instances where divorce is permissible.

A. God allows for divorce in the case of adultery

"It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' 32 But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery." Matthew 5:31-32

"He said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. 9 And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery." Matthew 19:8-9

It is important to see this exception as allowing for divorce but not making divorce inevitable. Adultery does not automatically lead to divorce. Forgiveness can overcome any sin—even the sin of adultery. Matthew is not commending divorce in these passages. He is simply saying that in such cases divorce is permissible.

For the innocent spouse, it is worth noting that as Christians in relationship with one another, we should look to the full counsel of God's word regarding such things as forgiving one another as God in Christ has forgiven us (Col. 3:13), forbearance, pursuing peace, and ultimately God's enacting redemption in the face of sin. However, adultery does undermine the sanctity of the marriage bond and the innocent spouse is allowed by God's Word to divorce and is then free to remarry a believer.

B. God allows for divorce in the case of an unbelieving spouse "leaving" or "abandoning" the marriage.

"But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace." 1 Corinthians 7:15

This passage does not allow for divorce in the case of "abandonment" by a spouse who claims to be a believer. However, in such a case, a period of confrontation of that spouse by the church would be initiated and would eventually lead to church discipline if the deserting spouse was unrepentant. If unrepentance continued indefinitely, the pastors would eventually identify that person as acting as an unbeliever (through church discipline) and the innocent spouse would be free to remarry.

6. Conclusions

- God loves marriage. God conceived the idea of marriage and actively creates each marriage bond. He even uses marriage to illustrate the relationship between Christ and the church. (Eph. 5)
- Marriage is intended to bring God glory—both as the Designer and the Sustainer of marriage.
- God provides grace to persevere and honor him during difficult moments and seasons in marriage. No marriage is free of conflict, but God is rich in grace and our aim should be to apprehend His grace in order to glorify Him through the marriage He has given us.
- God hates divorce. Insofar as divorce reflects the dissolution of a precious bond He created, God hates divorce. Therefore, divorce should be a sad affair to believers.
- In the instances where Scripture allows divorce, we should proceed with caution, taking care that any pursuit of divorce is done with God at the center of our thoughts, affections, and actions.
- Given the diagnosis of Scripture on divorce, we should always be suspicious of the hardness of our hearts—watching out for anger, self-righteousness, bitterness, unforgiveness, etc.—and not looking for biblical loop holes. The hope of the gospel reminds us that we have been the recipients of grace and now we can extend it to others freely.
- Remarriage is only permissible after a biblically permissible divorce.

Appendix E:

The 10 Affirmations of the Danvers Statement

The "Danvers Statement" summarizes the need for the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW) and serves as an overview of our core beliefs. This statement was prepared by several evangelical leaders at a CBMW meeting in Danvers, Massachusetts, in December of 1987. It was first published in final form by the CBMW in Wheaton, Illinois in November of 1988.

We have been moved in our purpose by the following contemporary developments which we observe with deep concern:

1. the widespread uncertainty and confusion in our culture regarding the complementary differences between masculinity and femininity;
2. the tragic effects of this confusion in unraveling the fabric of marriage woven by God out of the beautiful and diverse strands of manhood and womanhood;
3. the increasing promotion given to feminist egalitarianism with accompanying distortions or neglect of the glad harmony portrayed in Scripture between the loving, humble leadership of redeemed husbands and the intelligent, willing support of that leadership by redeemed wives;
4. the widespread ambivalence regarding the values of motherhood, vocational homemaking, and the many ministries historically performed by women;
5. the growing claims of legitimacy for sexual relationships which have Biblically and historically been considered illicit or perverse, and the increase in pornographic portrayal of human sexuality;
6. the upsurge of physical and emotional abuse in the family;
7. the emergence of roles for men and women in church leadership that do not conform to Biblical teaching but backfire in the crippling of Biblically faithful witness;
8. the increasing prevalence and acceptance of hermeneutical oddities devised to reinterpret apparently plain meanings of Biblical texts;
9. the consequent threat to Biblical authority as the clarity of Scripture is jeopardized and the accessibility of its meaning to ordinary people is withdrawn into the restricted realm of technical ingenuity;
- 10.** and behind all this the apparent accommodation of some within the church to the spirit of the age at the expense of winsome, radical Biblical authenticity which in the power of the Holy Spirit may reform rather than reflect our ailing culture.

Purposes:

Recognizing our own abiding sinfulness and fallibility, and acknowledging the genuine evangelical standing of many who do not agree with all of our convictions, nevertheless, moved by the preceding observations and by the hope that the noble Biblical vision of sexual complementarity may yet win the mind and heart of Christ's church, we engage to pursue the following purposes:

1. To study and set forth the Biblical view of the relationship between men and women, especially in the home and in the church.
2. To promote the publication of scholarly and popular materials representing this view.
3. To encourage the confidence of lay people to study and understand for themselves the teaching of Scripture, especially on the issue of relationships between men and women.
4. To encourage the considered and sensitive application of this Biblical view in the appropriate spheres of life.
5. And thereby
 - to bring healing to persons and relationships injured by an inadequate grasp of God's will concerning manhood and womanhood,
 - to help both men and women realize their full ministry potential through a true understanding and practice of their God-given roles,
 - and to promote the spread of the gospel among all peoples by fostering a Biblical wholeness in relationships that will attract a fractured world.

Affirmations

Based on our understanding of Biblical teachings, we affirm the following:

1. Both Adam and Eve were created in God's image, equal before God as persons and distinct in their manhood and womanhood (Gen 1:26-27, 2:18).
2. Distinctions in masculine and feminine roles are ordained by God as part of the created order, and should find an echo in every human heart (Gen 2:18, 21-24; 1 Cor 11:7-9; 1 Tim 2:12-14).
3. Adam's headship in marriage was established by God before the Fall, and was not a result of sin (Gen 2:16-18, 21-24, 3:1-13; 1 Cor 11:7-9).
4. The Fall introduced distortions into the relationships between men and women (Gen 3:1-7, 12, 16).
 - In the home, the husband's loving, humble headship tends to be replaced by domination or passivity; the wife's intelligent, willing submission tends to be replaced by usurpation or servility.
 - In the church, sin inclines men toward a worldly love of power or an abdication of spiritual responsibility, and inclines women to resist limitations on their roles or to neglect the use of their gifts in appropriate ministries.
5. The Old Testament, as well as the New Testament, manifests the equally high value and dignity which God attached to the roles of both men and women (Gen 1:26-27, 2:18; Gal 3:28). Both Old and New Testaments also affirm the principle of male headship in the family and in the covenant community (Gen 2:18; Eph 5:21-33; Col 3:18-19; 1 Tim 2:11-15).

6. Redemption in Christ aims at removing the distortions introduced by the curse.
 - In the family, husbands should forsake harsh or selfish leadership and grow in love and care for their wives; wives should forsake resistance to their husbands' authority and grow in willing, joyful submission to their husbands' leadership (Eph 5:21-33; Col 3:18-19; Tit 2:3-5; 1 Pet 3:1-7).
 - In the church, redemption in Christ gives men and women an equal share in the blessings of salvation; nevertheless, some governing and teaching roles within the church are restricted to men (Gal 3:28; 1 Cor 11:2-16; 1 Tim 2:11-15).
7. In all of life Christ is the supreme authority and guide for men and women, so that no earthly submission-domestic, religious, or civil-ever implies a mandate to follow a human authority into sin (Dan 3:10-18; Acts 4:19-20, 5:27-29; 1 Pet 3:1-2).
8. In both men and women a heartfelt sense of call to ministry should never be used to set aside Biblical criteria for particular ministries (1 Tim 2:11-15, 3:1-13; Tit 1:5-9). Rather, Biblical teaching should remain the authority for testing our subjective discernment of God's will.
9. With half the world's population outside the reach of indigenous evangelism; with countless other lost people in those societies that have heard the gospel; with the stresses and miseries of sickness, malnutrition, homelessness, illiteracy, ignorance, aging, addiction, crime, incarceration, neuroses, and loneliness, no man or woman who feels a passion from God to make His grace known in word and deed need ever live without a fulfilling ministry for the glory of Christ and the good of this fallen world (1 Cor 12:7-21).
10. We are convinced that a denial or neglect of these principles will lead to increasingly destructive consequences in our families, our churches, and the culture at large.

Appendix F: Statement on Leaving the Church

God will sometimes call someone to leave a Church and be joined to another local Church. This is an opportunity to walk carefully, soberly and by faith, especially if you are working through differences. Since the New Testament puts a high priority on maintaining the unity of the Church, it is crucial that this truth be primary in your process of leaving the Church. We believe that the application of the truth found in Ephesians 4:1-3 should be lived out in the following manner for the unity of the Church and the glory of God.

“I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” Ephesians 4:1-3

Before you decide to leave:

1. Pray
2. Let your current pastor know about your thinking before you move to another church or make your decision to relocate to another city. Ask for his counsel.
3. Weigh your motives. Is your desire to leave because of sinful, personal conflict or disappointment? If it's because of doctrinal reasons, are these doctrinal issues significant?
4. Do everything within your power to reconcile any broken relationships.
5. Be sure to consider all the “evidences of grace” you've seen in the church's life—places where God's work is evident. If you cannot see any evidences of God's grace, you might want to examine your own heart once more. (Matthew 7:3-5)
6. Be humble. Recognize you don't have all the facts and assess people and circumstances charitably (give them the benefit of the doubt).

If you go:

1. Don't divide the body.
2. Take the utmost care not to sow discontent even among your closest friends. Remember, you don't want anything to hinder their growth in grace in this church. Deny any desire to gossip (sometimes referred to as “venting” or “saying how you feel”).
3. Pray for and bless the congregation and its leadership. Look for ways of doing this practically.
4. If there has been hurt, then forgive—even as you have been forgiven.

Adapted from “What is a Healthy Church?” by Mark Dever.