



*Growing in and sharing our new life in Christ.*

Welcome to the New Member Class!

Whether you are new to our church, new to our area, new to faith in Jesus Christ—whatever reason you are here—we are delighted that you are interested in learning more about New Life Church, Vicenza, Italy

This notebook is designed to give you information you need for worship, service, and life as a disciple of Jesus. It will introduce you to

- the benefits and obligations of church membership,
- the historic Christian faith,
- Presbyterian distinctives in theology, worship, and the Sacraments, and
- the ethics, or way of living, of a disciple of Jesus,

or to put it another way, the Truth we believe, the Life in Christ we enjoy, and the Way we live together as disciples of Christ. We hope that this class will help you to feel a sense of community, not only with this congregation of believers, but with the whole body of believers in the Church of Jesus Christ.

A congregation is no stronger than her individual members. If we are to be a strong congregation together, one that is growing spiritually in faith and good works, we as individual members must be strong and growing spiritually.

I hope that you will find this class to be a breath of fresh air, a time of spiritual encouragement, and a time you will look back to and say, “That class brought me closer to Jesus Christ.” It is our prayer that New Life Church will have a positive impact on your life and that you will have a positive impact on New Life Church.

Come, let us, walk together in the light of the LORD.

We’re delighted to have you with us,

Frank C. Ellis, Jr.

Pastor

## **HOW TO JOIN NEW LIFE CHURCH VICENZA**

### **Attend the New Member Class**

The class is designed to help you learn about the church's ministries, some of our doctrinal distinctives, and our form of government. It is an informal class that will give you a bird's eye view of New Life Church. Also, during the class sessions, you will have an opportunity to discuss any questions you may have about who we are and what we believe and do. An alternative to in-class discussion is to schedule an appointment with the pastor.

Normally, everyone who joins New Life Church is required to attend this class, but attendance does not obligate you to join.

### **Have an Interview with the Pastor**

After you have attended the New Member Class, you will be invited for an interview. At this meeting you will have an opportunity to tell your story of faith in Jesus.

### **Be Introduced to the Congregation and Affirm the Membership Vows**

On a Lord's Day after the meeting all of the new members will be introduced to the rest of the New Life family at the morning worship services. That is when you will take the vows of membership and officially become members of New Life Church. The membership vows are:

- Do you acknowledge yourself to be a sinner in the sight of God, justly deserving His displeasure, and without hope save in His sovereign mercy?
- Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and Savior of sinners, and do you receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation as He is offered in the Gospel?
- Do you now resolve and promise, in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, that you will endeavor to live as becomes the followers of Christ?
- Do you promise to support the Church in its worship and work to the best of your ability?
- Do you submit yourself to the government and discipline of the Church, and promise to study its purity and peace?

## WHY JOIN A CHURCH?

There are many good and practical reasons for joining a local congregation. Here's a few of them:

- **Commitment** – membership establishes a relationship that merely regular attendance can't have
- **Help** – one of the benefits that the formal commitment of membership gives is the assurance of help, shepherding, and care from the leaders and within the congregational family.
- **Community** – to be a member of a congregation is to be a member of a group, a family. Individualism and independence are not Christian virtues, but life together in the community of Christ is, as one man put it, “grace, nothing but grace.”
- **Accountability** – within the community of grace, there is the privilege of accountability to others who are of a like mind, and the grace of church discipline

These are some of the benefits of church membership, but the real *reason* to join together with a local congregation of the Church is simple obedience. Christ did not die to save a collection of individuals; he died to redeem for himself a Church, a people – the people of God.

In the Old Testament, from the beginning when the LORD called Abraham, those who came to believe in the LORD were expected to join themselves outwardly with God's covenant people (Genesis 17:9-14, 23-27; 34:14-17). This command to God's people was never abolished in the Old Testament.

After the exodus, when the Children of Israel were in the wilderness, before he gave the covenant to Moses, the LORD called to Moses out of the mountain and said,

*“Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.” So Moses came and called the elders of the people and set before them all these words that the LORD had commanded him. (Exodus 19:3-7)*

God's intentions were for a people, his people, to be

- A treasured possession among all the peoples of the earth
- A kingdom of priests
- A holy nation.

This command and commitment to be a people in community continued into the New Testament Church. Baptism is, by its very nature, an introductory ordinance, bringing the one baptized into the community of faith, the people of God. And what the LORD said to Moses in Exodus was applied to the New Testament people of God by the Apostle Peter:

*You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.... You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Peter 2:5, 9-10)*

Furthermore, church government and membership is assumed at various places in the New Testament. Believers are commanded to submit to their church leaders in 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 and Hebrews 13:17, and so to enable their leaders to shepherd them “with joy and not with groaning.” In 1 Corinthians 5:5, the Apostle commands that a wanton sinner be delivered to Satan, that is put out of the Church until he repents. How can one be put out of the Church unless first one has been brought into it? Formal church membership is both commanded and expected in the Scriptures.

## WHY JOIN A CHURCH?

It is [the Church] who keeps us for God and seals for the kingdom the sons she has borne. If you abandon the Church and join yourself to an adulteress, you are cut off from the promises of the Church. If you leave the Church of Christ you will not come to Christ's rewards, you will be an alien, an outcast, an enemy. You cannot have God for your Father unless you have the Church for your mother.

St. Cyprian of Carthage,  
*On the Unity of the Catholic Church*, iv

...outside the Church sins are not remitted. For the Church alone has received the pledge of the Holy Spirit, without which there is no remission of sins—such, at least, as brings the pardoned to eternal life.

St. Augustine of Hippo,  
*The Enchiridion on Faith, Hope, and Love* LXV

...let us learn even from the simple title “mother” how useful, indeed how necessary, it is that we should know her [that is, the Church]. For there is no other way to enter into life unless this mother conceive us in her womb, give us birth, nourish us at her breast, and lastly, unless she keep us under her care and guidance until, putting off mortal flesh, we become like the angels. Our weakness does not allow us to be dismissed from her school until we have been pupils all our lives. Furthermore, away from her bosom one cannot hope for any forgiveness of sins or any salvation...

John Calvin, *Institutes* IV.i.4

It ought to be observed, that we cannot become acceptable to God without being united in one and the same faith, that is, without being members of the Church; for it is not necessary for us to run to Jerusalem, or to Mount Zion, because in the present day Zion is as wide and extensive as the whole world, which is entirely devoted to God. All that is necessary therefore is, that the same faith dwell in us, and that we be joined together by the bond of love. If this be wanting, everything about us is heathen, and we have nothing that is sacred or holy.

John Calvin, *Commentary on Isaiah* 18:7

The visible Church, which is also catholic or universal under the Gospel (not confined to one nation, as before under the law), consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion; and of their children: and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, ***out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation.***

WCF 25.2

### **What does God require of us, that we may escape his wrath and curse due to us by reason of the transgression of the law?**

That we may escape the wrath and curse of God due to us by reason of the transgression of the law, he requires of us repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, and the diligent use of the outward means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of his mediation.

### **What are the outward means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of his mediation?**

The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicates to his Church the benefits of his mediation, are all his ordinances; especially the word, sacraments, and prayer; all which are made effectual to the elect for their salvation.

WLC 153, 154

## **WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO JOIN A CHURCH?**

*You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation,  
a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies  
of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.*

1 PETER 2:9

When you join a church, you are received into membership because you have made a credible profession of faith in our Triune God: God the Father, maker of heaven and earth; God the Son, your Lord and Savior; and God the Holy Spirit, the One unites you to Christ and who enables you to be Jesus' faithful disciple to your life's end.

But what are your obligations as a member? What does it mean to be a church member?

When you come into fellowship at New Life Church, you vow before God and the congregation "to support the church in its worship and work to the best of your ability, to submit yourself to the government and discipline of the church, and to study its purity and peace." How do you express your vows of membership in our practical, everyday life together in this local manifestation of the Body of Christ? What exactly are you committed to because you are a member of this church? When you join New Life Church, you promise:

### **TO MAKE DILIGENT USE OF THE MEANS OF GRACE**

The Christians in apostolic times "*devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers*" (Acts 2:42).

The grace of God ordinarily comes to us when we come together to hear his Word, as we partake of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper (and also as we consider and improve our Baptism), and as we engage in prayer, all with the attitude of faith. To neglect these means of grace is to starve your spirit and stunt your soul. Our Lord has taken care to design these means of grace to suit both his work and our nature, and when we use them diligently in faith, we will "*grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*" (2 Peter 3:18).

### **TO SHARE FAITHFULLY IN THE WORSHIP OF THE CHURCH**

We are told in God's Word not to neglect "*to meet together*" for the public worship of God (Hebrews 10:25).

Except for illness or works of necessity and mercy, Christians ought always to attend the weekly services on the Lord's Day. Where even "*two or three*" are gathered together in Christ's name, he is present (Matthew 18:20), and where he is present, we should not be absent. Our response should be, "*I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the LORD'*" (Psalm 122:1).

### **TO SHARE FAITHFULLY IN THE SERVICE OF THE CHURCH**

Every child of God has at least one gift of grace given to him or her for service in the Church. Among these many gifts are teaching, service, exhortation, giving, leadership, mercy (Romans 12:4-8).

Both you and the church have a responsibility to make sure that these gifts of grace are used "*for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ*" so that the church "*builds itself up in love*" (Ephesians 4:12-13, 16).

Whatever special gift of grace you may have, however, everyone can serve by being good missionaries or evangelists for Christ – inviting others to public worship, greeting worshippers in a friendly way, and witnessing to Christ day by day in word and deeds of love and mercy (Matthew 5:16, Philemon 6, 1 Peter 2:12).

If you know someone who is interested in church membership or who has questions and wants to know more about what it means to be a disciple of Jesus, or even who Jesus is, you can serve by inviting that person to church, and/or to Sunday School and by introducing that person to others in the church, perhaps even the pastor.

Remember the apostle's saying, *"Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him"* (Colossians 3:17).

### **TO GIVE OF YOUR SUBSTANCE AS THE LORD MAY PROSPER YOU**

We are taught in God's Word to support the Lord's work by giving regularly, proportionately, and joyfully: *"On the first day of the week, each one of you put aside something, saving up to whatever extent he has prospered"* (1 Corinthians 16:2), for, *"the point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work"* (2 Corinthians 9:6-8).

The biblical model is this: count your blessings, consider the need, and then give accordingly with thanksgiving and joy in your heart.

## WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO JOIN A CHURCH?

**Spiritual Gifts** – see the booklet in the Resources list on the website

**Financial Stewardship** – see the pamphlet in in the Resources list on the website

### NOTES

## WHO ARE WE?

### DISCLAIMER

In the next unit, we will try to describe to you New Life Church's place in the undoubted faith of Jesus Christ once delivered to the saints. This is no easy thing to do. The human forces and movements throughout the history of the Church that have produced us are many and complex. Bruce Shelley's *Church History in Plain Language* (a recommended book) runs to 544 pages, and it is really an overview account. No brief description, then, can be adequate to depict all of the harmonies and the differences within the Christian community. Every assertion that we make is, to the best of our knowledge, true. But simply true statements are not always sufficient. A diamond is truly described as a hard refractive mineral composed entirely of carbon atoms bonded to each other at every possible point. Anyone who has ever stared into a diamond, however, will find that description woefully inadequate. So it is with the Church. Her fire and brilliance far surpass mere human description. But we must try. To God alone be the glory.

*The Church's one foundation  
Is Jesus Christ her Lord,  
She is His new creation  
By water and the Word.  
From heaven He came and sought her  
To be His holy bride;  
With His own blood He bought her  
And for her life He died.*

*Elect from every nation,  
Yet one o'er all the earth;  
Her charter of salvation,  
One Lord, one faith, one birth;  
One holy Name she blesses,  
Partakes one holy food,  
And to one hope she presses,  
With every grace endued.*

*The Church shall never perish!  
Her dear Lord to defend,  
To guide, sustain, and cherish,  
Is with her to the end:  
Though there be those who hate her,  
And false sons in her pale,  
Against or foe or traitor  
She ever shall prevail.*

*Though with a scornful wonder  
Men see her sore oppressed,  
By schisms rent asunder,  
By heresies distressed:  
Yet saints their watch are keeping,  
Their cry goes up, "How long?"  
And soon the night of weeping  
Shall be the morn of song!*

*'Mid toil and tribulation,  
And tumult of her war,  
She waits the consummation  
Of peace forevermore;  
Till, with the vision glorious,  
Her longing eyes are blest,  
And the great Church victorious  
Shall be the Church at rest.*

*Yet she on earth hath union  
With God the Three in One,  
And mystic sweet communion  
With those whose rest is won,  
O happy ones and holy!  
Lord, give us grace that we  
Like them, the meek and lowly,  
On high may dwell with Thee:*

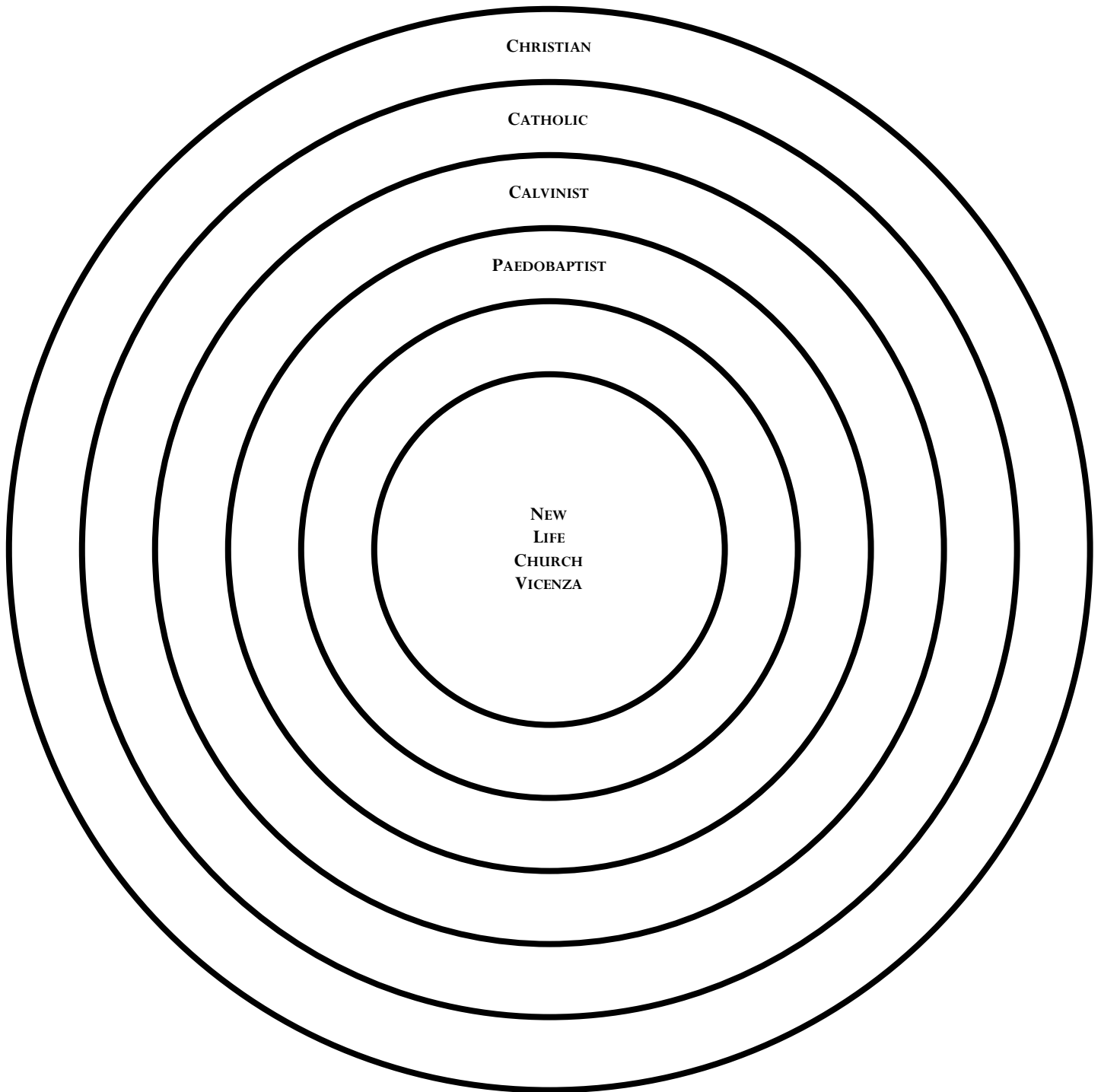
— Samuel J. Stone



**WHO ARE WE?**

*I am first a Christian, next a catholic, then a Calvinist, fourth a paedobaptist,  
and fifth a Presbyterian. I cannot reverse this order.*

~Rev. Prof. John Duncan, 1796-1870



## WE ARE CHRISTIAN

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Mar Johanan, the Nestorian bishop, when solicited by high-churchmen to separate himself from non-prelatical Christians, exclaimed, "All who love the Lord Jesus Christ are my brethren." Above all the narrow, meagre patriotism on earth is the large, free, ecumenical patriotism of those who embrace in their love and fealty the whole body of the baptized. All who are baptized into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, recognizing the Trinity of Persons in the Godhead, the incarnation of the Son and his priestly sacrifice, whether they be Greeks, or Arminians, or Romanists, or Lutherans, or Calvinists, or the simple souls who do not know what to call themselves, are our brethren. Baptism is our common countersign. It is the common rallying standard at the head of our several columns. It is our common battle-flag, which we carry forward across the enemy's line and nail aloft in the heights crowned with victory. We will be confined in our love and allegiance by no party lines. We follow and serve one common Lord. Hence there can be only "one Lord, one faith, one baptism," and hence only one indivisible, inalienable "sacramental host of God's elect."

— A. A. Hodge, "The Sacraments—Baptism" in  
*Evangelical Theology*

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### BACKGROUND

The term Christian is somewhat ambiguous. It appears only three times in the New Testament (twice in Acts, once in 1 Peter). Originally it was used by outsiders (pagans) to refer to followers of Jesus Christ, and it was the official Roman designation for members of the Church. In modern times it has lost any creedal significance, insofar as it is used rather vaguely to refer to ethical goods ("Christian values") or social conventions ("Christian name") or cultural identity ("Christian nation"). For our purposes it refers in a technical sense to "saints by profession" (WCF 26.2—those who are baptized and profess faith (however loosely) in Christ.

### CHRISTIANITY

- ❖ The visible community on earth that professes faith in Christ in the broadest sense of the term.
- ❖ Includes Latin Rite Churches (Roman Catholicism, the Eastern Catholic Churches), Eastern Orthodox Churches (the autocephalous Eastern Rite Churches), Oriental Orthodox Churches, Protestant Churches, and indigenous Christian groups whose roots are not in any of the preceding, but are parallel to them in Christian history. Heretical and Semi-Christian cults (Mormonism, Christian Science, Jehovah's Witness, *etc.*) are not legitimate Christian churches, but because they are spin-offs of Christianity, they are often listed by category with legitimate Christianity.
- ❖ Characteristic affirmations:
  - That God is an eternally self-existent Spirit, who is real, personal, and knowable
  - That God has revealed Himself to mankind generally in creation and specifically in the written words of Holy Scripture
  - That Jesus Christ was born of a virgin and is the divine/man and Savior of humanity
  - That Jesus Christ died a real death on the cross and rose bodily on the third day.
  - That the gospel is *the power of God that results in salvation for everyone who believes* (Romans 1:16)
- ❖ Confession – *If you confess with your mouth that Jesus Christ is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth once confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame."* (Romans 10:9-11)

## WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

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The gospel is the dynamic center of the biblical narrative, the heart of the Christian faith. The term means to announce good news as well as the content of the good news, that is, God's redemptive action in Jesus Christ for the salvation of humankind.

— W. R. Shenk, "Gospel" in  
*Global Dictionary of Theology*

Our God and Savior's plan for man is his restoration from the fall and his return from the alienation of disobedience to kinship with God. For the sake of this are Christ's sojourn in the flesh, his example of an evangelical way of life, his sufferings, his cross, his burial, his resurrection. And so the man who is saved receives back that original adopted sonship by imitating Christ.

— St. Basil the Great (4<sup>th</sup> Century) in  
*On the Holy Spirit*

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### THE BIBLICAL STORY

- ❖ In the beginning, God created all things from nothing by his powerful word in the space of six days, and all very good (Genesis 1, 2; WCF 4.1; "How could God be called Maker and Artificer if His ability to make depended on some other cause, namely on matter itself? If he only worked up existing matter and did not Himself bring matter into being, He would not be the Creator but only a craftsman." – St. Athanasius the Great, *On the Incarnation*). Humankind, male and female, he made in the his image and likeness, happy and holy, with immediate fellowship with God.

In Genesis 3, humankind rebels and commits the first sin against God by disobeying him. Death enters the world, and from that time on, men and women suffer from fractured relationships and disordered love. In our relationships, we are alienated

- Human beings from God
- Human beings from the rest of the created order
- Human beings from each other
- Human beings from themselves

The image of God in us is defaced, but not effaced.

But God was unwilling to abandon the work of his hands to Satan and to death. "It would, of course, have been unthinkable that God should go back upon His word and that man, having transgressed, should not die; but it was equally monstrous that beings which once shared the nature of the Word should perish." (*On the Incarnation*).

The rest of the Bible tells the story of God's unceasing work to restore our ability to love and the relationships fractured by sin, to restore the defaced image of God in humankind, and to restore the whole of the created order from its *bondage to corruption* (Romans 8:21). "Indifference to the ruin of His own work before His very eyes would argue not goodness in God but limitation.... It was impossible, therefore, that God should leave man to be carried off by corruption, because it would be unfitting and unworthy of Himself.... The first fact that you must grasp is this: *the renewal of creation has been wrought by the Self-same Word Who made it in the beginning*. There is no inconsistency between creation and salvation; for the One Father has employed the same Agent for both works, effecting the salvation of the world through the same Word who made it in the beginning" (*On the Incarnation*).

- ❖ The Old Testament Gospel in a nutshell:
  - **Genesis 3:** A human hero (the seed of the woman) will destroy the serpent and his seed, but at a cost to himself
  - **Genesis 12, 15, 17, 22:** The Lord will be God to Abraham and to his children after him; the seed of Abraham will conquer his enemies, and all nations of the earth will be blessed in this seed of Abraham; God himself will be Abraham's reward.
  - **Exodus 19:** The God who redeems will make his redeemed and beloved people a holy nation of royal priests
  - **2 Samuel 7; the Psalms:** The seed of David will destroy his enemies and will rule in the Lord's name forever over the earth in a kingdom of justice, peace, and righteousness.
  - **Jeremiah 31:** God will deal definitively with the sins of his people, will write the words of his law upon their hearts, and the mother promise made in all the covenants—*I will be their God, and they shall be my people*—will be fulfilled.
  - **Isaiah 52:7-10:**
    - <sup>7</sup> *How beautiful upon the mountains  
are the feet of him who brings good news,  
who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness,  
who publishes salvation,  
who says to Zion, "Your God reigns."*
    - <sup>8</sup> *The voice of your watchmen—they lift up their voice;  
together they sing for joy;  
for eye to eye they see  
the return of the LORD to Zion.*
    - <sup>9</sup> *Break forth together into singing,  
you waste places of Jerusalem,  
for the LORD has comforted his people;  
he has redeemed Jerusalem.*
    - <sup>10</sup> *The LORD has bared his holy arm  
before the eyes of all the nations,  
and all the ends of the earth shall see  
the salvation of our God.*

➤ **Zephaniah 3:14-20:**

- <sup>14</sup> *Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion;  
shout, O Israel!  
Rejoice and exult with all your heart,  
O daughter of Jerusalem!*
- <sup>15</sup> *The LORD has taken away the judgments against you;  
he has cleared away your enemies.  
The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst;  
you shall never again fear evil.*
- <sup>16</sup> *On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem:  
“Fear not, O Zion;  
let not your hands grow weak.*
- <sup>17</sup> *The LORD your God is in your midst,  
a mighty one who will save;  
he will rejoice over you with gladness;  
he will be quiet in his love;  
he will exult over you with loud singing.*
- <sup>18</sup> *I will gather those of you who mourn for the festival,  
so that you will no longer suffer reproach.*
- <sup>19</sup> *Behold, at that time I will deal  
with all your oppressors.  
And I will save the lame  
and gather the outcast,  
and I will change their shame into praise  
and renown in all the earth.*
- <sup>20</sup> *At that time I will bring you in,  
at the time when I gather you together;  
for I will make you renowned and praised  
among all the peoples of the earth,  
when I restore your fortunes  
before your eyes,” says the LORD.*

This is the Gospel that Jesus went about proclaiming; this is what Jesus meant when he said that the whole of the Old Testament was about him.

But – how did God accomplish all this?

❖ The Gospel of Jesus Christ

- **John 3:16, 17:** *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.*
- **Galatians 4:4, 5:** *When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!”*
- **Romans 3:21-26:** *But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.*

- **1 Corinthians 15:1-5:** *Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.*
- **1 John 3:2-3:** *Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.*

To say that we are Christian, that we believe the Bible is not specific enough to define who we are, because various people and groups contest everything in the Bible. To say that we believe in God, that our faith is in Jesus, and that we proclaim the Gospel also is not specific enough, because in the history of the Church, down to this very day, many errors and heresies, many false gospels have been brought in. As Jesus said in Matthew 24:24: *For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.*

## WE ARE CATHOLIC

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Lest we suffer [the poison of the heretics' teachings], we must keep the rule of faith unswervingly, and perform the commandments of God, believing in God and fearing Him, for He is Lord, and loving Him, for He is Father. Action, then, comes by faith, as "if you do not believe," Isaias says, "you will not understand"; and the truth brings about faith, for faith is established upon things truly real, that we may believe what really is, as it is, and believing what really is, as it is, we may always keep our conviction firm. Since, then, the conserver of our salvation is faith, it is necessary to take great care of it, that we may a true comprehension of what it is.

— St. Irenaeus of Lyons (2<sup>nd</sup> Century) in  
*On the Apostolic Preaching*

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### I. BACKGROUND

The general meaning of the word 'Catholic' is universal, and in the earliest days, its meaning, when applied to the church was essentially 'Christian.' In the first century, St. Ignatius of Antioch wrote in a letter to the church at Smyrna, "Wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the catholic church." However, as time went on and errors and heresies crept into the church, 'Catholic' became the equivalent to 'Orthodox.' For us, as it was for St. Vincent of Lérins in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, it expresses a combination of those ideas. His maxim, which has its flaws, was, the Catholic faith is "what all men have at all times and everywhere believed..." Though we are Protestant, the Protestant reformers did not abandon the idea of the Catholic church. Indeed, they saw themselves as seeking "to restore the face of the Apostolic and Catholic Church by reforming it in accordance with its apostolic foundation and in agreement with the Catholic doctrine of the Ecumenical Councils of the undivided Church" (Douglas Kelly, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1).

New Life Church is a part of the one Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church because we believe and confess what the Apostles taught, as interpreted by the seven ecumenical councils of the Undivided Church.

These councils, through the doctrines and creeds they delivered, defined orthodox Christianity, particularly as it concerns what we must believe about the Triunity of God and about the humanity/divinity of Jesus Christ—"things truly real, that we may believe what really is, as it is, and believing what really is, as it is, we may always keep our conviction firm."

### THE CATHOLIC FAITH

#### ❖ Characteristic Affirmations

- That God is a Triune God:
  - He is eternally existent in three consubstantial Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
  - The Lord Jesus Christ, who is the eternally begotten Son of God and the second Person of the Trinity, assumed a truly human nature when He was born of the Virgin Mary
  - The Holy Spirit has personality, distinct personal status, and full deity (His historical proceeding from the Son as well as the Father reflects the inter-Trinitarian relationship)
- That the Lord Jesus Christ is both fully divine and fully human,
  - He possesses two distinct but inseparable natures in one person;
  - His divine attributes are not communicated to His human ones
- That the Lord Jesus Christ will return literally and bodily to judge the living and the dead
- That everlasting damnation as a judgment upon true moral guilt before a Holy God will be the portion of those who refuse to receive Christ as Savior and Lord
- That the state, just war, and private property are established and affirmed by God in the Scriptures

## THE APOSTLES' CREED

*The APOSTLES' CREED is the most ancient of the creeds. Although it was not written by the Apostles, it is called the Apostles' Creed because of its great antiquity. From the beginning a baptismal creed, it is a statement of personal faith. Forms of this creed can be found from very early times in the Church, a half-century or so from the last writings of the New Testament. Clearly Trinitarian, its primary intent was to affirm the true humanity of Christ.*

**I believe in** God the Father Almighty,  
Maker of heaven and earth;

**And in** Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord:  
Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost;  
Born of the Virgin Mary;  
Suffered under Pontius Pilate;  
Was crucified, dead, and buried;  
He descended into hell.  
The third day He rose again from the dead;  
He ascended into heaven;  
And sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty;  
From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

**I believe in** the Holy Ghost;  
The holy Catholic Church;  
The communion of saints;  
The forgiveness of sins;  
The resurrection of the body;  
And the life everlasting. AMEN.



## THE NICENE CREED

*The NICENE CREED originated at the first ecumenical council of the undivided Church, the Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325), and an expanded form was adopted by the second ecumenical council, the Council of Constantinople (A.D. 381). It was formulated to answer heresies that denied the biblical doctrine of the Trinity and of the eternal deity of Christ the Second Person of the Trinity. It differs slightly from the Apostles' Creed in that it is not just a statement of personal faith. Rather, it is a statement of what the Church believes – what we all together confess as the one true faith.*

**We believe in** one God, the Father Almighty,  
Maker of heaven and earth,  
of all things visible and invisible.

**And in** one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God,  
begotten of his Father before all worlds,  
God of God, Light of Light,  
very God of very God,  
begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father;  
by whom all things were made;  
who for us, and for our salvation came down from heaven,  
and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary,  
and was made man;  
and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate;  
he suffered and was buried;  
and the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures,  
and ascended into heaven,  
and is seated at the right hand of the Father;  
and he shall come again, with glory,  
to judge both the living and the dead;  
whose kingdom shall have no end.

**And we believe in** the Holy Ghost, the Lord and giver of life,  
who proceeds from the Father and the Son;  
who with the Father and the Son  
together is worshipped and glorified;  
who spoke by the prophets;  
and we believe one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church;  
we acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins;  
and we look for the resurrection of the dead,  
and the life of the world to come. AMEN.

## THE SYMBOL OF CHALCEDON

*The SYMBOL, OR CREED, OF CHALCEDON was adopted by the fourth ecumenical council of the undivided Church at Chalcedon, opposite Constantinople, in October, A.D. 451. It embraces the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed that had been adopted at the second ecumenical council in A.D. 381, and the Christology set forth by Leo the Great at Ephesus in 449. While the First Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325) had established the eternal, pre-existent deity of Christ, this creed speaks about the nature of the incarnate Word of God. It essentially completes the orthodox Christology of the ancient Church. This symbol is well summarized in the Westminster Shorter Catechism #21, which teaches, "The only Redeemer of God's elect is the Lord Jesus Christ, who, being the eternal Son of God, became man, and so was, and continues to be, God and man in two distinct natures, and one person, forever."*

**F**ollowing, then, the holy Fathers, we all unite with one consent in teaching all people to confess the one and only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. He himself is perfect in deity and also perfect in humanity; truly God and truly man, with a rational [that is, a human] soul and a body. He is of one substance with God as far as his deity is concerned and of one substance with us ourselves as far as his humanity is concerned. Thus, he is like us in all respects, except for sin. Before time began, he was begotten of the Father, according to his deity, and now in these last days, for us and for our salvation, he himself was born of the Virgin Mary, who is God-bearer according to his humanity.

**W**e also teach that we understand and receive this one and only Christ, Son, Lord, Only-Begotten, in two natures; and we do this without confusing the two natures, without transmuting one nature into the other, without dividing them into two separate categories, without contrasting them according to area or function. The distinctiveness of each nature is by no means taken away by the union, but rather, the properties of each nature are preserved, and both natures concur in one Person and in one hypostasis [reality, substance]. They are not divided or cut into two persons, but are together the one and only and only-begotten Word of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus have the prophets of old testified; thus the Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us; thus the Symbol of Fathers [that is, the Nicene Creed] has handed down to us.

## THE ATHANASIAN CREED

*The ATHANASIAN CREED is thought to have been written late in the fifth century A.D.; it is often called the “Quicumque Vult” (Latin for “Whosoever will”) from its Latin opening words. After setting forth the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity, the creed gives significant attention to the Incarnation and the two natures of Christ, in agreement with the Chalcedonian Symbol. Along with the other ecumenical creeds, it has long been recognized in the Western Church as “a brief sum of the Christian faith, agreeable to the Word of God and anciently received in the churches of Christ.”*

**Whosoever will be saved**, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic faith;

Which faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.

**And the catholic faith is this:**

**That** we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; Neither confounding the persons nor dividing the substance. For there is one person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Spirit. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit is all one, the glory equal, the majesty co-eternal. Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Spirit. The Father uncreated, the Son uncreated, and the Holy Spirit uncreated. The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the Holy Spirit incomprehensible. The Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Spirit eternal. And yet they are not three eternal but one eternal. As also there are not three uncreated nor three incomprehensible, but one uncreated and one incomprehensible. So likewise the Father is almighty, the Son almighty, and the Holy Spirit almighty. And yet they are not three almighties, but one almighty. So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God;

**And yet** they are not three Gods, but one God. So likewise the Father is Lord, the Son Lord, and the Holy Spirit Lord; And yet they are not three Lords but one Lord. For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity to acknowledge every Person by himself to be God and Lord; So are we forbidden by the catholic religion to say; There are three Gods or three Lords. The Father is made of none, neither created nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone; not made nor created, but begotten. The Holy Spirit is of the Father and of the Son; neither made, nor created, nor begotten, but proceeding. So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Spirit, not three Holy Spirits. And in this Trinity none is afore or after another; none is greater or less than another. But the whole three persons are co-eternal, and coequal. So that in all things, as aforesaid, the Unity in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped. He therefore that will be saved must thus think of the Trinity.

**Furthermore** it is necessary to everlasting salvation that he also believe rightly the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. For the right faith is that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and man. God of the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds; and man of substance of His mother, born in the world. Perfect God and perfect man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting. Equal to the Father as touching His Godhead, and inferior to the Father as touching His manhood. Who, although He is God and man, yet He is not two, but one Christ. One, not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh, but by taking of that manhood into God. One altogether, not by confusion of substance, but by unity of person. For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man, so God and man is one Christ; Who suffered for our salvation, descended into hell, rose again the third day from the dead; He ascended into heaven, He sits on the right hand of the Father, God, Almighty; From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. At whose coming all men shall rise again with their bodies; and shall give account of their own works. And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting and they that have done evil into everlasting fire.

**This is the catholic faith,**

which except a man believe faithfully he cannot be saved.

### III. THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

- ❖ On the night he was betrayed, our Lord Jesus prayed to the Father for his people the Church. One of the things that he prayed for was that we would be united as one:
  - **John 17:20–23:** *I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.*
  - The catholic or universal Church, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the Head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all. (WCF 25.1)
  - The visible Church, which is also catholic or universal under the gospel (not confined to one nation, as before under the law), consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion; and of their children: and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation. (WCF 25.2)
  - This catholic Church hath been sometimes more, sometimes less visible. And particular Churches, which are members thereof, are more or less pure, according as the doctrine of the Gospel is taught and embraced, ordinances administered, and public worship performed more or less purely in them. (WCF 25.4)
  - The purest Churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error; and some have so degenerated as to become no Churches of Christ, but synagogues of Satan.. Nevertheless, there shall be always a Church on earth to worship God according to His will. (WCF 25.5)
- ❖ This unity of the Church, though fractured institutionally, is real, and it has real and practical implications. We call this the communion of the saints:
  - All saints, that are united to Jesus Christ their Head, by His Spirit, and by faith, have fellowship with Him in His grace, sufferings, death, resurrection, and glory: and, being united to one another in love, they have communion in each other's gifts and graces, and are obliged to the performance of such duties, public and private, as do conduce to their mutual good, both in the inward and outward man. (WCF 26.1)
  - Saints by profession are bound to maintain an holy fellowship and communion in the worship of God, and in performing such other spiritual services as tend to their mutual edification; as also in relieving each other in outward things, according to their several abilities and necessities. Which communion, as God offereth opportunity, is to be extended unto all those who, in every place, call upon the name of the Lord Jesus. (WCF 26.2)

It should be noted that some Churches have departed from historical Catholic affirmations so much as to become anti-Christian, *i.e.*, they do not even affirm the basic tenets of the holy Catholic faith, such as existence of the Trinity, the virgin birth and resurrection of Christ, and the visible return of Christ.

Because of this, a more careful and biblical specification of the fundamental articles of the Christian faith has become necessary.

## WE ARE CALVINIST

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Some opponents [of Calvinism] seem to harbor the ridiculous notion that this set of doctrines was the new invention of the Frenchman John Calvin. They would represent us in this thing as followers of him instead of followers of the Bible. This is a stupid historical error. John Calvin no more invented these doctrines than he invented this world which God created.... He found substantially this system of doctrines just where we find them, in the faithful study of the Bible...We draw our doctrines, not from human philosophy, but from the Holy Ghost speaking in the Bible.

— Robert L. Dabney (19<sup>th</sup> Century) in  
*The Five Points of Calvinism*

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### BACKGROUND

Along with the Anglican Communion, Methodism, Lutheranism, Baptist Churches, and others, we Calvinists belong to the segment of the Catholic Christian Church that broke away from Rome at the time of the Reformation. With them, we share these characteristic affirmations (at least historically; some denominations, to one degree or another, have abandoned these affirmations):

- ❖ Sole authority of the Bible for Christian doctrine and living (*Sola Scriptura*);
- ❖ Justification by grace alone (*Sola Gratia*) through faith alone (*Sola Fide*) in Christ alone (*Solus Christus*), apart from meritorious good works;
- ❖ Two sacraments or ordinances of Baptism and The Lord's Supper;
- ❖ The priesthood of the believer (personal salvation and the religious dignity of one's calling not mediated by, or dependent upon, church officials);
- ❖ That the death of Christ on the cross was as a sinless substitute for sinners and that by taking the sinner's penalty he established a reconciliation between God and sinners who receive him as savior (substitutionary atonement);
- ❖ After death, those righteous in Christ are consciously in Heaven, while those apart from Christ are consciously in Hell.

And these characteristic denials:

- ❖ The propitiatory sacrifice of the Mass;
- ❖ Mary's intercession, the Treasury of Merit, prayers to saints or for the dead, the necessity of auricular confession, penance, purgatory, and indulgences;
- ❖ Ecclesiastical infallibility;
- ❖ Papal infallibility and/or apostolic succession;
- ❖ That the sacraments (or ordinances) are automatically efficacious or necessary as means of salvation or blessing.

Calvinists share these essential affirmations and denials with other Protestant Christians, but our place within the Catholic Christian faith is more fully defined by other non-essential (that is, not absolutely necessary for salvation) distinctives. These distinctives deal with covenant theology (how God has chosen to deal with humankind) and with the *mechanism* of salvation rather more than with the *way* of salvation. As we move deeper into the Reformed faith, we move from what C. S. Lewis called "mere Christianity" into a deeper understanding of what the Bible teaches us about God and about His plan for creation. Thus, a more careful biblical exposition of the articles of the Christian faith becomes necessary.

**CONCERNING THE HOLY SCRIPTURES**

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The B-I-B-L-E,  
Yes that's the book for me!  
I stand alone on the Word of God,  
The B-I-B-L-E

— Children's Sunday School Song,  
Author unknown

Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Holy Scriptures or by evident reason—for I can believe neither pope nor councils alone, as it is clear that they have erred repeatedly and contradicted themselves—I consider myself convicted by the testimony of Holy Scripture, which is my basis; my conscience is captive to the Word of God. Thus I cannot and will not recant, because acting against one's conscience is neither safe nor sound. God help me. Amen.

— Martin Luther,  
At the Diet of Worms, 1521

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**I. BACKGROUND**

It is difficult to find the exact place for our affirmations concerning the Scriptures in the taxonomy that we are using. Without doubt, we believe what the Apostle Paul says concerning the Scriptures in 2 Timothy 3:16:

*All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable  
for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness...*

However, in response to many attacks, errors, and heresies throughout the history of the Church, down to this very day, a carefully developed doctrine of Scripture has come about. We affirm these teachings handed down from the Fathers concerning the Scriptures:

- ❖ Be contentious and zealous, brothers, but about the things that relate to salvation. You have searched the Scriptures, which are true, which were given by the Holy Spirit; you know that nothing unrighteous or counterfeit is written in them. —St. Clement, Bishop of Rome to the Church at Corinth, ca. A.D. 80
- ❖ [That the Scriptures contradict themselves] – I will not have the effrontery at any time either to suppose or to say such a thing. If a Scripture which appears to be of such a kind be brought forward, and there is a pretext for regarding it as contradictory, since I am totally convinced that no Scripture is contradictory to another, I shall admit instead that I do not understand what is spoken of, and shall strive to persuade those who assume that the Scriptures are contradictory to be rather of the same opinion as myself. —St. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, ca. A.D. 155
- ❖ If, however, we are not able to find explanations for all those passages of Scripture which are investigated, we ought not on that account seek for another God besides Him who exists. This would indeed be the greatest impiety. Things of that kind we must leave to God, the One who made us, knowing full well that the Scriptures are certainly perfect, since they were spoken by the Word of God and by His Spirit. —St. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, late 2<sup>nd</sup> Century
- ❖ All of these prophets were under the influence of the Holy Spirit and were fittingly honored by the Word Himself. Like musical instruments, they had the Word ever in themselves, as if He were the plectrum; and when moved by Him, they announced what God willed. Not by their own power did the prophets speak—let there be no mistake about that—nor did they make announcements according to their own pleasure. —St. Hippolytus of Rome, *The Antichrist*, ca. A.D. 200

- ❖ We who extend the accuracy of the Spirit to every letter and serif [of Scripture] will never admit, for it would be impious to do so, that even the smallest matters were recorded in a careless and hasty manner by those who wrote them down. We hold that even these matters have been kept in mind for the present time. —St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *In Defense of his Flight to Pontus*, A.D. 362
- ❖ Nothing of discrepancy will be found in Sacred Scripture, nor will there be found any statement in opposition to any other statement. —St. Epiphanius of Salamis, *Panacea against All Heresies*, ca. A.D. 375
- ❖ I think it is dangerous to believe that anything in the Sacred Books is a lie.... For if we once admit in that supreme monument of authority even one polite lie, no shred of those books will remain. Whenever anyone finds anything therein that is difficult to practice or hard to believe, he will refer to this most pernicious precedent and explain it as the idea or practice of a lying author. —St. Augustine of Hippo, in a letter to St. Jerome, A.D. 394 or 395.

Calvin, in many places, affirms what we have received from the Fathers: “When that which is set forth is acknowledged to be the word of God, there is no one so deplorably insolent—unless devoid also both of common sense and of humanity itself—as to dare impugn the credibility of Him who speaks. Now daily oracles are not sent from heaven, for it pleased the Lord to hallow his truth to everlasting remembrance in the Scriptures alone. Hence the Scriptures obtain full authority among believers only when men regard them as having sprung from heaven, as if there the living words of God were heard” (*Institutes*, I.vii.1).

Concerning the Scriptures, then, as Calvinist Catholic Christians, we affirm:

- ❖ That the whole of the Bible is the **God-breathed Word, inerrant** in the original writing, and the only **infallible** rule of faith and practice
  - Although the word Paul uses in 2 Timothy 3:16 is sometimes translated ‘inspired,’ that is not what Paul is saying. What he says, as it is correctly translated above, is that Scripture is “**God-breathed**, the product of the creative breath of God. In a word, what is declared... is simply that the Scriptures are a Divine product, without any indication of how God has operated in producing them. No term could have been chosen, however, which would have more emphatically asserted the Divine production of Scripture.... God’s breath is the irresistible outflow of His power (B. B. Warfield, “Inspiration”).
  - **Inerrant** – without any admixture of error in all that the Scriptures assert, not just in matters of salvation, but in historical and other areas as well.
  - **Infallible** – Since the Bible is in its essence inerrant, it is our infallible rule for faith and practice. Infallibility has to do with the incapability of the inerrant Word to teach, lead, or require anything which is not true altogether.
  - Thus, creation as described in the Bible is historical and non-evolutionary, that prophecy and miracles described in the Bible are historical, that the histories recorded really describe things that happened (according to the historiographic practices of the author’s era and culture).
- ❖ **Scripture is inspired** – here we are asserting something about how God produced the Scriptures, how the Spirit worked in the men he chose to write them:
  - **Organically inspired** – The Holy Spirit acted upon the writers in an organic way, using each writer’s character, temperament, talents, vocabulary, education, culture, style, research, and experience. The Spirit also illumined their minds, repressed the influence of sin, guided their thoughts even in the choice of words. Nevertheless, each writer was involved in the activity of writing, using his whole person in the expression of his thoughts.

- **Verbally inspired** – The very words were chosen by the Holy Spirit in His guiding and controlling the human authors. Not just the ideas are inspired; inspired ideas must be communicated through inspired words so that the true idea is truly communicated and understood.
- **Plenarily inspired** – Scripture is fully, the whole of it, inspired by God.
- ❖ **Scripture is authoritative** – The Bible is God’s authoritative instruction for all time in every area to which it speaks; and it speaks to everything necessary for salvation. For the individual Christian, there is no situation in which he can find himself which is not addressed in the Bible. The believer’s constant aim will be to conform him- or herself to the teachings of Scripture, and he or she will use Scripture to judge all human ideas. For the Church: “The supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture” (WCF 1.10).
- ❖ **Scripture is most necessary for salvation** – “Although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable; yet they are not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of his will, which is necessary unto salvation” (WCF 1.1).
- ❖ **Scripture is sufficient** – Because the Bible is inerrant, infallible, perspicuous and authoritative, it therefore is all-sufficient to accomplish the spiritual work that God has given us as individuals and as the Body of Christ to do: evangelism, sanctification, guidance, social reform.
- ❖ **Scripture is self-authenticating** — “The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man, or Church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof: and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God” (WCF 1.5). The Bible cannot be “proved” to be the Word of God by anything external to God Himself; therefore, it is the Holy Spirit, “bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts,” who persuades and assures us that the Bible is God’s very Word.
- ❖ **Scripture is complete** — The Canon is closed. Holy Scripture contains ALL that we need to know of God and of ourselves (spiritually) in this life: his being, his nature, our sinfulness, his redemption of us, his will for our lives. The Holy Spirit speaks to us through God’s Word; there is no new revelation either directly or through our experience.

“...how would we be advantaged by a supernatural redemption of which we knew nothing? Who is competent to uncover to us the meaning of this great series of redemptive acts but God himself?...Two thousand years ago a child was born in Bethlehem, who thrived and grew up nobly, lived a life of poverty and beneficence, was cruelly slain and rose from the dead. What is that to us? After a little, as his followers sat waiting in Jerusalem, there was a rush as of a mighty wind, and an appearance of tongues of fire descending upon their heads. Strange; but what concern have we in it all? We require the revealing Word to tell us who and what this goodly child was, why he lived and what was wrought by his death, what it meant that he could not be holden of the grave, and what those cloven tongues of fire signified...before they can avail as redemptive facts to us.” — B.B. Warfield



## WE ARE CALVINIST II

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[The old style of Gospel preaching] was always and essentially a proclamation of Divine sovereignty in mercy and judgment, a summons to bow down and worship the mighty Lord on whom man depends for all good, both in nature and in grace. Its center of reference was unambiguously God. But in the new gospel the center of reference is man. This is just to say that the old gospel was religious in a way that the new gospel is not. Whereas the chief aim of the old was to teach men to worship God, the concern of the new seems limited to making them feel better. The subject of the old gospel was God and His ways with men; the subject of the new is man and the help God gives him. There is a world of difference. The whole perspective and emphasis of gospel preaching has changed...to recover the old authentic, biblical gospel, and to bring our preaching back into line with it, is perhaps our most present pressing need.

— J. I. Packer, in “Introductory Essay” to  
John Owen’s *The Death of Death in Christ*

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### BACKGROUND

Basic to the distinctives of true Calvinism is stress on the sovereignty of God, which embraces everything that comes into the biblical picture of God as Lord and King of His creation, the One who *works all things according to the counsel of His will* (Ephesians 1:11), directing every process and ordering every event for the fulfilling of His own eternal plan, all without becoming the author of sin or offering violence to the will of His creatures (WCF 3.1).

❖ Characteristic affirmations:

- Confessionalism
- God’s fore-ordination of every event, yet man’s freedom and responsibility;
- God’s eternal predestination of the saved and reprobation of the lost (see attachment on Election);
- Regeneration solely by the Holy Spirit, prior to faith in Christ, and apart from man’s cooperation or the Church’s baptism;
- The abiding validity, usefulness, and goodness of the moral law:
  - **LC 94 Is there any use of the moral law to man since the fall?**  
Although no man, since the fall, can attain to righteousness and life by the moral law: yet there is great use thereof, as well common to all men, as peculiar either to the unregenerate, or the regenerate.
  - **LC 95 Of what use is the moral law to all men?**  
The moral law is of use to all men, to inform them of the holy nature and the will of God, and of their duty, binding them to walk accordingly; to convince them of their disability to keep it, and of the sinful pollution of their nature, hearts, and lives: to humble them in the sense of their sin and misery, and thereby help them to a clearer sight of the need they have of Christ, and of the perfection of his obedience.
  - **LC 96 What particular use is there of the moral law to unregenerate men?**  
The moral law is of use to unregenerate men, to awaken their consciences to flee from wrath to come, and to drive them to Christ; or, inexcusable and under the curse thereof.
  - **LC 97 What special use is there of the moral law to the regenerate?**  
Although they that are regenerate, and believe in Christ, have been delivered from the moral law as a covenant of works, so as thereby they are neither justified nor condemned; yet, besides the general uses thereof common to them with all men, it is of special use, to show them how much they are bound to Christ for his fulfilling it, and enduring the curse thereof in their stead, and for their good; and thereby to provoke them to more thankfulness, and to express the same in their greater care to conform themselves thereunto as the rule to their obedience.

- Rejection of the physical presence of Christ in or around the communion elements in favor of his real presence through the working of the Holy Spirit:
  - Transubstantiation: the doctrine of the church of Rome; the substance of the elements actually becomes the body (bread) and blood (wine) of Christ, without any change in the appreciable attributes;
  - Consubstantiation: the doctrine of the Lutherans; Christ is physically present in, over, under, and around the elements (much as a sponge absorbs and contains water without actually becoming water itself);
  - Zwinglian: the elements are merely symbolic of Christ's body and blood;
- Affirmation of the real spiritual presence (that is, a real presence by the mysterious power of the Spirit of Christ) of Christ to the worthy recipient (that is, those who eat and drink in faith) of the elements;
- Necessity of sanctification (growth in holiness) for those who are saved;
- Impossibility of moral perfection in this life, before glorification;
- The primacy of preaching:
  - The means by which God ordinarily draws sinners to Himself is through the proclamation of the Word;
  - The emphasis is on God's Spirit at work in the hearts of people rather than on the skill, inventiveness, passion, or zeal of the preacher;
  - Expository preaching—the Scriptures set forth and explained, though not necessarily sequentially through a book;
  - Application of the Word to the individual's life, time, and culture;
- Regulative principle of worship (whatever is not according to the Scriptures is forbidden) – thus, rejection of superstitious rites, icons, human innovations;
- Necessity of church discipline;
- Church government separate from and independent of the civil government;
- The doctrines of grace (so-called “Five Points of Calvinism”) (see attachment on the Doctrines of Grace).
- ❖ Characteristic rejections:
  - Legalism/Antinomianism
  - Mystical means of piety
  - Continuing charismatic revelations today

## THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION

*God's Sovereign Plan for His own Glory*

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*...knowing brethren beloved by God, His choice of you. — I Thessalonians 1:4*

God from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass...

...yet [He hath] not decreed any thing because he foresaw it as future...

By the decree of God, for the manifestation of His glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life; and others foreordained to everlasting death.

Those of mankind that are predestinated unto life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to His eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel of His will, hath chosen, in Christ, unto everlasting glory, out of His mere free grace and love, without any foresight of faith, or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving Him thereunto: and all to the praise of His glorious grace.

— from The Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter III

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- ❖ Election is gracious
  - When we come to election, we see nothing but mercy on every side — John Calvin
  - This doctrine takes grace to its logical conclusion: If God saves me without my works, then he must choose me apart from them, too. — Michael Horton
- ❖ The Doctrine of Election is offensive to the natural man

The reason people today are opposed to [the doctrine of election] is because they will have God to be anything but God. He can be a cosmic psychiatrist, a helpful shepherd, a leader, a teacher, anything at all...only not God. For a very simple reason — they want to be God themselves. —D. James Kennedy
- ❖ The Doctrine of Election is not food for babes
  - Human curiosity renders the discussion of predestination, already somewhat difficult of itself, very confusing and even dangerous. No restraints can hold it back from wandering in forbidden bypaths and thrusting upward to the heights. If allowed it will leave no secret to God that it will not search out and unravel...it is not right for man unrestrainedly to search out things that the Lord has willed to be hid in himself...Let this, therefore, first of all to be before our eyes: to seek any other knowledge of predestination than what the Word of God discloses is not less insane than if one should purpose to walk in a pathless waste, or to see in darkness. And let us not be ashamed to be ignorant of something in this matter wherein there is a certain learned ignorance. — John Calvin
  - The doctrine of this high mystery of predestination is to be handled with special prudence and care, that men...may...be assured of their eternal election. — WCF 3.8
- ❖ The Doctrine of Election, as revealed in Scripture

Ephesians 1:4,5 — *...just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will...*
- ❖ Election becomes evident in life

I Thessalonians 1:3,4 — *...remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father, knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God.*

- ❖ Election is sovereign and unconditional
  - I Corinthians 1:26-28 — *For consider your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are...*
  - Ephesians 2:8 — *For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God...*
- ❖ Election is just
 

Romans 9:14,15 — *What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion."*
- ❖ Election is immutable and effectual; the elect actually reach heaven at last
  - They obtain salvation
 

Romans 11: 7 — *What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded.*
  - God's "chain" cannot be broken
    - Romans 8:28-30 — *And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these he also glorified.*
    - Romans 11:29 — *For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.*
    - II Timothy 2:19a — *Nevertheless, the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: "The Lord knows those who are His"...*
- ❖ Election affects life in all its phases; it is not abstract; it produces fruit
 

Colossians 3:12-17 — *Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.*
- ❖ Election concerns individuals
  - Philippians 4:3b — *...and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life.*
  - Romans 16:13a — *Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord...*
  - Acts 9:15a — *But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine..."*
  - Election comprehends these individuals "in Christ," so that they are definitely viewed as one body
  - Ephesians 1:5 — *...having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will...*
- ❖ Election is not only unto salvation, but also unto obedience and service
 

Colossians 3:12-17

- ❖ Election is taught not only by Paul, but by Jesus Himself
  - John 10:11,14,28 — *I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep...I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own...And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.*
  - John 17:2,9,11,24 — *...You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him...I pray for them. I do not pray for the world, but for those whom You have given Me; for they are Yours...Now I am no longer in the world; and but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom you have given Me, that they may be one, as We are...Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory, which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.*
- ❖ Election has as its final aim God's glory, and it is the work of his delight

I Corinthians 15:23-28 — *But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming. Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to the God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. For He has put all things under His feet. But when He says "all things are put in under Him," it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.*
- ❖ The Issue of Free Will

When considering the issue of free will, it is essential to define the term properly. If by free will one means the ability to choose **any** of all the moral options offered in a given situation, then man does not have a free will. This liberty to choose was lost through the Fall; the loss is part of the burden of original sin. However, man is perfectly free to exercise his will according to his nature: **we do exactly what we want to do in any given moment.** As Christ said: *A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things* (Matthew 12:35). **The problem is not with our will, but rather with our nature.**

  - **Only Adam** (apart from Christ Himself) was truly at liberty to make a moral choice between good and evil. He was free to obey God perfectly and acceptably, or to disobey God.
  - **Fallen man** has a free will, but he is free only to act according to his nature. As a result of Adam's sin, our nature is corrupted and therefore, we are unable to obey and please God perfectly and acceptably.
  - **Redeemed Man** also has a free will, able to act according to his nature. By the grace of regeneration, the will of man is freed from the bondage to sin and a permanent love of righteousness (an inclination of the heart to the way of living that pleases God) is restored. Thus the converted sinner is able freely to will and to do that which is pleasing to God, yet in this life, imperfectly.
  - Free will and accountability and responsibility before God are not the same thing. Though fallen man does not have true moral liberty, he is always responsible morally and will give an account to God the Father as the Judge at the last Day.

In fine, unbelieving men are ever striving to paint the doctrine of election as the harsh, the exclusive, the terrible doctrine, erecting a hindrance between sinners and salvation. But properly viewed it is exactly the opposite. It is not the harsh doctrine, but the sweet one, not the exclusive doctrine, not the hindrance of our salvation, but the blessed inlet to all the salvation found in this universe. It is sin, man's voluntary sin, which excludes him from salvation; and in this sin God has no responsibility. It is God's grace alone which persuades men both to come in and remain within the region of salvation; and all this grace is the fruit of election. I repeat, then, it is our voluntary sin which is the source of all that is terrible in the fate of ruined men and angels. It is God's election of grace which is the sweet and blessed source of all that is remedial, hopeful, and happy in earth and heaven. God can say to every angel and redeemed man in the universe: "I have chosen thee in everlasting love; therefore in loving kindness have I drawn thee." And every angel, and saint on this earth and in glory responds, in accordance with our hymn:

“Why was I made to hear his voice  
And enter while there's room,  
While others make a wretched choice  
And rather starve than come?  
‘Twas the same love that spread the feast  
That sweetly drew me in;  
Else I had still refused to taste  
And perish in my sin.”

— R. L. Dabney

*A Prayer of John Calvin*

*Grant, Almighty God, ...that through our whole life we may strive to seal in our hearts the faith of our election...that having cast away and renounced all confidence in our own virtue, we may be led to Christ only as the fountain of thy election, in whom also is set before us the certainty of our salvation through thy gospel, until we shall at length be gathered into that eternal glory which He has procured for us by his own blood. Amen.*

**THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE**  
A.K.A. The Five Points of Calvinism

The Five Points are included in the Calvinist System, but do not exhaust its meaning. The Five Points are in no way all that the Calvinist believes, for Calvinism is much broader, encompassing a comprehensive worldview. The issues with which the Five Points deal, however, are crucial to a proper understanding of the Gospel. Those issues are of the utmost importance when considering one's concept of:

- ❖ God
- ❖ Man
- ❖ Sin
- ❖ The work of Christ
- ❖ The Christian life
- ❖ The mission of the Church

The Five Points grew historically out of the controversy in Europe in the days following the Reformation between those who held strongly to the Sovereignty of God and the inability of man to initiate salvation or have any merit in it, and those who held to a lesser view. The Remonstrance group in Holland was the reaction to Calvinism.

- ❖ **Total Depravity** of man in the Fall. Man is not totally sinful (in degree; people will be as wicked as they possibly can be after the Final Judgment, in Hell), but is affected by sin in the whole of his being, and his will is in moral bondage to sin.
- ❖ **Unconditional Election.** God chooses some out of the mass of fallen humanity for reasons which reside entirely in His mind and heart. Nothing in anyone can or does prompt God's sovereign election.
- ❖ **Limited Design of Atonement.** Rather than the atonement of Christ being a general redemption, leaving the results to human response, it is biblical to say that Christ died for the sins of his People. He knew specifically for whom he died, and he died as their substitute. In other words, rather than making salvation possible for everyone, Christ accomplished the salvation of the elect. This is also known as Particular Redemption.
- ❖ **Irresistible Grace.** When God works sovereignly through the outward call of the Gospel by giving an inward call of the Gospel in the sinner's heart, that sinner will finally come to repentance and faith. It is not as though someone is dragged kicking and screaming into salvation, rather, the grace of God is such that when the Holy Spirit gives spiritual life to the sinner's heart, that sinner runs to Christ for the redemption he accomplished.
- ❖ **Perseverance of the Saints.** True salvation is eternal salvation; the elect are eternally secure in Christ. Those for whom Christ died will not only be justified, but also sanctified and glorified in Heaven at last.

## WE ARE PAEDOBAPTIST

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### Why should infants be baptized?

Because the covenant God made with Abraham is still in effect.

— Joseph P. Engels (19<sup>th</sup> Century) in  
*The Catechism for Children*, Q130

The children of believing parents are baptized by reason of the fact that they are the children of the covenant and, as such heirs of all the promises made by God at the institution of this covenant, included in which are the promises of the remission of sins and of the Holy Spirit for their regeneration and sanctification. In the covenant God endows children with certain gifts in a definite and objective manner; He requires that in due course they should accept these gifts by faith, and He promises that through the operation of the Holy Spirit these gifts will become a living reality in their life.

— Pierre Charles Marcel (1910-1992) in  
*The Biblical Doctrine of Infant Baptism*

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## I. BACKGROUND

What is baptism? Baptism is, among other things,

- ❖ the Christian rite of initiation,
- ❖ a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, and thus of membership in the Church,
- ❖ the sign and seal of union with Christ, in virtue of his death and the power of his resurrection (John Murray, *Christian Baptism*, 45)
- ❖ the solemn (that is, public and formal) declaration that the one baptized is a member of the body of Christ,
- ❖ the expression of “a relationship to the person into whom or into whose name persons may have been baptized. It is this fact of relationship that is basic” (*Christian Baptism*, 3).

Our understanding of the church is one launching point for understanding what we believe. As we saw in our discussion of the visible Catholic Church, we confess:

The visible Church, which is also catholic or universal under the gospel (not confined to one nation, as before under the law), consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion; *and of their children*: and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation. (WCF 25.2; emphasis added)

As Paedobaptist Calvinist Catholic Christians, we believe that the children of at least one believing parent are members of the Church by right of inheritance. And Christ, as the one unto whom all authority in heaven and earth had been given, commanded that members of his Church be baptized *into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost* (Matthew 18:29). Therefore, we believe infant baptism.

This doctrine of infant baptism is not directly based on exegetical grounds, how we interpret this or that verse; we readily admit that there is no verse, or collection of verses, that explicitly commands or authorizes infant baptism. Rather, our understanding of who belongs to the Church, and thus of who should be baptized, is **according to Scripture**—based on the way that we read the unfolding story of redemption that the whole Scripture is telling. “The basic premise of the argument for infant baptism is that the New Testament economy is the unfolding and fulfilment of the covenant made with Abraham and that the necessary implication is the unity and continuity of the church.” (*Christian Baptism*, 45)



So, we agree with the Reformers Calvin, Luther, Cranmer, Knox, and Zwingli and affirm that the practice of infant baptism is firmly rooted in Biblical *precept and principle*. We understand that infant baptism rests in God's plan of salvation (Covenant of Grace), which is essentially the same in all ages and has always been accompanied by God-given signs and seals. We affirm:

- ❖ The unity of God's people in all ages (Christ is the True Israel, the True Vine, and we are branches of him neither more nor less than the people of God in the Old Testament);
- ❖ The underlying unity of all the biblical covenants, which supplement (not supplant) each other in the unfolding story of redemption and all finding their fulfillment in the Anointed One Jesus;
- ❖ That the sacraments are true means of grace (not mere memorials)—signs and seals of the covenant of grace (something we will discuss later in some detail);
- ❖ The baptism of believers' infants because they are included in the covenant of grace today, no less than Abraham's children were.

## II. THE ARC OF GOD'S COVENANT STORY:

- ❖ God's covenant with Abraham—Genesis 17:1-14

*When Abram was ninety-nine years old the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly." Then Abram fell on his face. And God said to him, "Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. **And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God.**" And God said to Abraham, "As for you, you shall keep my covenant, **you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised. Every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring, both he who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money, shall surely be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant. Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.**"*

- ❖ The covenant promise embraces not just Canaan, but the whole world— Romans 4:13

*For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith.*

- ❖ The covenant promise embraces not just Abraham's physical descendants, but all the nations

- Genesis 22:17-18: *I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice."*
- Romans 11:17-18: *But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches. If you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you.*
- Galatians 3:29: *And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.*

- Galatians 4:28-31: *Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now. But what does the Scripture say? "Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman." So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman.*
- ❖ Children of at least one believing parent are included in the covenant
  - 1 Corinthians 7:14: *For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.*

**III. CIRCUMCISION HAVING BEEN FULFILLED IN CHRIST, BAPTISM IS ESTABLISHED AS THE COVENANT SIGN**

So, we have seen that God has dealt consistently with his people from the beginning to this day: in God’s everlasting covenant with Abraham, children are in the covenant by right of inheritance, and they are thus entitled to the sign and seal of the covenant. But, how can we say that baptism has replaced circumcision?

Again, there is no Bible verse or collection of verses that directly say that baptism has replaced circumcision, but we do know that:

- ❖ “It is this covenant [with Abraham] that is unfolded in the New Testament and it is in terms of this covenant that the blessing of Abraham comes upon the Gentiles” (*Christian Baptism*, 46);
- ❖ Circumcision was abolished in Christ,
- ❖ Christ instituted baptism for his people,
- ❖ Christ is the one in whom all the blessings of God are always and only to be found. He was the foundation of the blessings of circumcision no less than he is the foundation of the blessings of baptism.

And, if we compare, we can see that the blessings promised and offered in each are comparable. Other than the outward sign, which is now ordained for males and females, there is no significant difference:

	<b>Circumcision</b>	<b>Baptism</b>
<b>The Promise</b>	<i>I will be your God, and you shall be my people</i>	
<b>The Promise manifested by</b>	God’s fatherly favor Salvation Eternal life	
<b>Things Represented</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Union and communion with Jehovah, the God of Israel</li> <li>• The cutting away of defilement (that is, Regeneration)</li> <li>• The seal of the righteousness by faith (that is, justification)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Union and communion with Christ, and thus with the Father and the Holy Ghost also</li> <li>• Purification from the defilement of sin (Washing of regeneration)</li> <li>• Purification from guilt of sin (that is, remission of sin)</li> </ul>
<b>External Benefits</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Admission to the fellowship and worship of the people of God</li> <li>• Access into the story of Israel –the great things God has done, he has done for us→you</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Admission to the fellowship and worship of the people of God</li> <li>• Access into the story of the people of God from the beginning – the great things God has done he has done for us→you</li> </ul>

Further, in both rites, there is a commitment on the part of the recipient to keep the covenant. In the case of infants (both in circumcision and baptism) there is both a commitment by the parents to teach the truth and to rear the child in the way of the covenant and an expectation that one day, the recipient will embrace the promises of the covenant personally and from the heart. Thus, Calvin is correct when he says that “there is no difference in the inner mystery, by which the whole force and character of the sacraments are to be weighed. What dissimilarity remains lies in the outward ceremony, which is a very slight factor, since the most weighty part depends on the promise and the thing signified” (*Institutes* IV.xvi.4). John Murray says as much also: “It is of paramount importance to take due account of the fact that it was by divine institution and command that the sign and seal of [God’s] blessing was administered to infants in the old economy. Circumcision, signifying what in principle is identical with that signified by baptism, was administered to infants who were born within the covenant relation and privilege.... If children of the faithful were given the sign and seal of the covenant and therefore of the richest blessing which the covenant disclosed, if the New Testament economy is the elaboration and extension of this covenant of which circumcision was the sign, *are we to believe:*

- ❖ *That infants in this age are excluded from that which was provided by the Abrahamic covenant?*
- ❖ *That infants may not now properly be given the sign of that blessing... enshrined in the new covenant?*
- ❖ *That the new covenant in this respect is less generous than was the Abrahamic?*
- ❖ *That there is less efficacy, as far as infants are concerned, in the new covenant than in the old?*
- ❖ *That infants in the new dispensation are [less qualified for] the grace of God?*

These are questions that cannot be lightly dismissed” (*Christian Baptism*, 48, 49).

#### IV. HISTORICALLY:

- ❖ Household baptisms are recorded in the New Testament.
- ❖ The great majority of confessing Christians has, from ancient times until the present, baptized infants as well as newly professing adults. Within one hundred years of the time of the Apostles, Origen (195-254 A.D.) recorded that “Little children are baptized agreeable to the usage of the Church; who received it from the Apostles, that this ordinance should be administered to infants.”

#### V. TO SUM UP:

- ❖ Both circumcision and baptism bear essentially the same significance in terms of substance (which is Christ), promise, internal blessings and external benefits. While baptism indicates more fully what the blessings are, and how they may be obtained, it does not signify a different or greater blessing than did circumcision.
- ❖ Children have been included in the covenant since the covenant sign was first given to Abraham; they have never been excluded. According to our reading, those who claim that the New Testament does not specifically include children undercut the New Testament’s covenantal foundation.
- ❖ Why, under the fullest expression of God’s Eternal Covenant, the Covenant of Grace, are children (suddenly) excluded? By what directive or authority?
- ❖ Children of believers are members of the Church (God’s covenant people) and entitled to the covenant sign by birthright.
- ❖ Infant baptism carries with it covenantal obligations for parents; it can be thought of as a covenant renewal rite. Believing parents in faith offer their children to God and they also vow to keep the terms of God’s covenant with respect to the rearing of their children (see vow 3 below)

## VI. CONFIRMATION

The doctrine of infant baptism does not entail a belief that one may rest in baptism for salvation, and parents must understand that their baptized children are obliged to come to personal salvation by grace through faith in Christ as they embrace for themselves God's covenant promises offered in baptism. All do not necessarily do this, and thus they fail to obtain the internal and everlasting blessings that are on offer in Christ (cf. Romans 9:6-13).

As we have said, infant baptism signifies that a child is indeed a member of the covenant, and one of the outward blessings of the covenant is that the child is set apart into the church. Unlike the children of unbelievers, they are directly exposed to the Word of God, to the promises of God in the Gospel, and to the means of obtaining those promises, all within the covenant family of God. All these things working together serve as the means through which the child may, as the Holy Spirit works through his promised means, be brought to saving faith in Christ. This is why the Baptism of infants is accompanied by solemn vows made by God's people to raise the child in the "training and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4).

Every infant who receives the external covenant sign ought also to receive the outward blessings that result from being in God's covenant community (this assumes that parents are faithful to their vows). They are to be taught to love God and to obey and serve him in Jesus Christ. Further, they ought to learn, as a minimum and as early as possible, the Apostles' Creed as the summary of our faith in Christ, the Lord's Prayer as the summary of our life in Christ, and the Ten Commandments as the summary of our walk in the way of Christ, using the catechisms of the Church as guides for instruction.

Parents must understand that every baptized child is required to come to personal salvation by grace through faith in the Christ as they embrace God's promises in baptism for themselves. All do not necessarily do this and thus receive the internal blessings of personal salvation (Romans 9:10-13).

The ordinance of confirmation, which is the necessary counterpart and outflow of infant baptism, is the bringing of those have been baptized and then trained and instructed in the faith before the Church publically to profess their faith in Christ and voluntarily to claim for themselves the vows that were made on their behalf by their parents at their baptism. The result of this confirmation in the faith is that they will be admitted to the full communion of the Church and admitted to the Table of the Lord. There is no set time for this.

Indeed, it is most evident that the covenant which the Lord once made with Abraham [cf. Gen 17:1-10] is no less in force today for Christians than it was of old for the Jewish people, and that this word relates no less to Christians than it then related to the Jews. Unless perhaps we think that Christ by his coming lessened or curtailed the grace of the Father—but this is nothing but execrable blasphemy! Accordingly, the children of the Jews also, because they had been made heirs of his covenant and distinguished from the children of the impious, were called a holy seed [Ezra 9:2; Isa.6:13]. For this same reason, the children of Christians are considered holy; and even though born with only one believing parent, by the apostle's testimony they differ from the unclean seed of idolaters [1 Cor. 7:14]. Now seeing that the Lord, immediately after making the covenant with Abraham, commanded it to be sealed in infants by an outward sacrament, what excuse will Christians give for not testifying and sealing it in their children today?...

The covenant is common, and the reason for confirming it is common. Only the manner of confirmation is different—what was circumcision for them was replaced for us by baptism. Otherwise, if the testimony by which the Jews were assured of the salvation of their posterity is taken away from us, Christ's coming would have the effect of making God's grace more obscure and less attested for us than it had previously been for the Jews. Now, this cannot be said without grievously slandering Christ, through whom the Father's infinite goodness was more clearly and liberally poured out upon the earth and declared to men than ever before. And if so, we must admit that at least it should not be concealed with more malign intent, nor revealed with weaker testimony than under the dim shadows of the law.

John Calvin, in  
*Institutes* IV.xvi.6

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## VII. VOW OF INFANT BAPTISM AND OF CONFIRMATION IN THE PCA

### ❖ Parents' Vows Taken at Infant Baptism:

1. Do you acknowledge your child's need of the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ, and the renewing grace of the Holy Spirit?
2. Do you claim God's covenant promises in (his) behalf, and do you look in faith to the Lord Jesus Christ for (his) salvation, as you do for your own?
3. Do you now unreservedly dedicate your child to God, and promise, in humble reliance upon divine grace, that you will endeavor to set before (him) a godly example, that you will pray with and for (him), that you will teach (him) the doctrines of our holy religion, and that you will strive, by all the means of God's appointment, to bring (him) up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord?

### ❖ Personal Vows Made at Confirmation

1. Do you acknowledge yourselves to be sinners in the sight of God, justly deserving His displeasure, and without hope save in His sovereign mercy?
2. Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and Savior of sinners, and do you receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation as He is offered in the Gospel?
3. Do you now resolve and promise, in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, that you will endeavor to live as becomes the followers of Christ?
4. Do you promise to support the Church in its worship and work to the best of your ability?
5. Do you submit yourselves to the government and discipline of the Church, and promise to study its purity and peace?

## WE ARE PRESBYTERIAN

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How does Christ direct and govern His church? After all, He is not bodily present to make decisions and give audible guidance. Moreover, special divine revelation is not provided every time we wish to visit the sick, resolve a dispute, determine questions of doctrine or buy a lightbulb for the church office.

— Greg L. Bahnsen, in  
“Church Government Briefly Considered”

The Lord Jesus, as King and Head of his church, hath therein appointed a government, in the hand of church officers, distinct from the civil magistrate.

—The Westminster Confession of Faith,  
Chapter XXX

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### I. BACKGROUND

Throughout history, churches have failed to follow the model of church government set forth in Scripture. Abuses and disappointments in church affairs have varied from “despotic unity to democratic chaos” (Bahnsen). Although people frequently say that church government is a trivial matter, often the reason that people become upset and leave a congregation is not due to doctrinal differences, but it connected in some way to the manner in which the congregation was governed or disciplined. People become angry, disputes are not peacefully resolved, regular oversight and counseling are not pursued, congregations argue and divide—all because the biblical blueprint for church government was not followed.

### II. FORMS OF CHURCH GOVERNMENT

- ❖ Episcopal (Hierarchical, or Autocratic)
  - Includes the Roman church, Anglican communion, Methodism
  - With variations, the most widely used form of government in the visible church
  - Authority flows from the top (Monarchical Bishops) to the local pastors and communicants
  - In practice, one man may govern those under him (members or other elders); he need not be chosen by those whom he governs, but can be appointed by higher authority
  - Scriptural authority cited is based on interpreting the words for overseer (bishop) and elder (presbyter) differently in different contexts to distinguish between the man and the office.
- ❖ Congregational (Democratic or Independent)
  - Includes Baptists, Congregationalists, Church of Christ
  - Least commonly found—largely a Puritan invention that found favor in America beginning in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century
  - In its purest form, all authority resides with the members
  - In any give decision, every member has the same authority as every other
  - Ruling boards are simply an administrative convenience
  - In its purest form, every congregation is independent from all others, though unions of congregations often exist
  - No external jurisdiction
  - Associations are purely voluntary
  - No Scriptural authority to be found, although it is considered by some to be the natural conclusion of the doctrine of the priesthood of believers

- ❖ Presbyterian (Representative)
  - Includes Presbyterians and most reformed groups
  - Second most common form
  - Government is by Christ the King through elders who are chosen by the people they govern
  - Elders represent Christ the King to the people rather than the other way around
  - Congregations connected to one another under the jurisdiction of the regional body, called a presbytery (Presbyterian) or classis (Dutch Reformed)
  - Overall government of the church through a system of graded courts
  - Numerous examples in Scripture, both Old and New Testament

### III. GOVERNMENT BY ELDERS IN SCRIPTURE

- ❖ Scripture provides numerous examples of Presbyterian government, beginning as a formal system in the days of Moses
  - Exodus 18:17-22: *Moses' father-in-law said to him, "What you are doing is not good. You and the people with you will certainly wear yourselves out, for the thing is too heavy for you. You are not able to do it alone. Now obey my voice; I will give you advice, and God be with you! You shall represent the people before God and bring their cases to God, and you shall warn them about the statutes and the laws, and make them know the way in which they must walk and what they must do. Moreover, look for able men from all the people, men who fear God, who are trustworthy and hate a bribe, and place such men over the people as chiefs of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens. And let them judge the people at all times. Every great matter they shall bring to you, but any small matter they shall decide themselves. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you."*
  - Numbers 11:16-17: *Then the LORD said to Moses, "Gather for me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them, and bring them to the tent of meeting, and let them take their stand there with you. And I will come down and talk with you there. And I will take some of the Spirit that is on you and put it on them, and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, so that you may not bear it yourself alone."*
  - The term "elder" is used in the context of government over 100 times in the Old Testament and over 60 times in the New.
- ❖ God uses elders throughout Scripture to:
  - Share the human burden of leading His people (Numbers 11)
  - Stabilize and cultivate new churches (Acts 14:24)
  - Practice church discipline (I Corinthians 5)
  - Ordain ministers (I Timothy 4:14, 5:22)
  - Evangelize (II Timothy 4:5)
  - Teach and oversee the doctrinal values of the Church (I Timothy 3:2)
  - Resolve doctrinal disputes for the larger Church (Acts 15)
  - Govern the affairs of the Church (I Timothy 5:17)
  - Care for, protect and govern the flock of Christ (Acts 20, I Peter 5)
- ❖ According to our reading of Scripture, there is no distinction between "elder" (*presbyteros*) and "overseer" or "bishop" (*episkopos*). The man and the office are the same. (Acts 20:17,28; Titus 1:5-7)
- ❖ Elders govern as a court, not as individuals (Acts 14:23, 20:17; Philippians 1:1)

- ❖ Elders have oversight of the Church (Acts 20:28; I Peter 5:2,3), responsible to
  - Govern the congregation (I Timothy 3:5, 5:15; I Thessalonians 5:12; Hebrews 13:7,17,24)
  - Rebuke (I Timothy 5:20)
  - Hold the “Keys to the Kingdom” (Matthew 16:19, 18:18; John 20:23)
  - Preaching
  - Sacraments
  - Discipline
- ❖ Deacons assist the elders in ministry (Acts 6:1-6; Philippians 1:1)
- ❖ Officers are elected by the congregation (Acts 6:5,6) and examined and installed by the current elders (Acts 6:6, 13:1-3, I Timothy 4:14)
- ❖ Judge disputed matters in the Church (Acts 15)

#### IV. KEY ELEMENTS OF THE PRESBYTERIAN SYSTEM

- ❖ The King and Head of the Church is Christ alone
- ❖ The Church as visible is governed through representatives – *elders* – who are
  - Called by Christ’s Spirit
  - Elected by His People
- ❖ The elders’ governing and often, but not necessarily, pastoral authority is exercised only when organized into an assembly or court
- ❖ Thus, the Church as visible is viewed as a spiritual commonwealth:

Regarded from a divine standpoint, the Church is a kingdom, having Christ for its head; but, as a visible body, in its human administration it is a republic.... Presbyterianism is that system in which the church is regarded as a spiritual commonwealth, whose only Head is Christ; and which He governs through representative elders, called by His Spirit and elected by His people, and all of equal authority, which is exercised by them only when organized into an assembly or court.

— Dr. Robert Kerr in  
*The People’s History of Presbyterianism in All Ages* (1888)

#### V. THE PRESBYTERIAN SYSTEM IN PRACTICE IN THE PCA

- ❖ Officers in the Presbyterian Church in America
  - Restricted to men, as commanded in Scripture
  - Elders
    - Exercise spiritual oversight and authority; represent Christ as Shepherd and Bishop of souls
    - Comprise the governing, decision-making bodies
    - Have authority over all other offices and positions in the local congregation
    - Exist in two classes
    - Teaching elders (ministers)
      - labor in doctrine, prayer, and the Word
      - administer the sacraments
      - exercise government
    - Ruling elders – exercise government
  - Deacons
    - Have delegated authority principally over financial, physical, and mercy matters; represent Christ as the One who came not to be served but to serve
    - Involved in specific areas of service under the governance of the elders
    - May not administer the Sacraments or be members of church courts



- ❖ Church courts in the Presbyterian Church in America
  - The Session (local church court)
    - Comprised of elders elected by the congregation (plus the minister)
    - Charged with the spiritual government of the church:
      - To inquire into the knowledge, principles and Christian conduct of church members
      - To receive and dismiss new members
      - To train, examine, and ordain ruling elders and deacons as elected by the church
      - To hear and decide matters of discipline
      - To determine all literature to be used and taught
      - To determine all causes and uses of the congregation's giving
      - To exercise authority over the time and place of the preaching of the Word and of the administration of the Sacraments
      - Adopts the budget (development and administration delegated)
      - To carry out lawful orders of higher courts in authority
  - The Presbytery (regional church court – Southeast Alabama Presbytery)
    - Comprised of area ministers and those elders elected to represent their congregations
    - Responsible to
      - Ordain, install, and give oversight and membership to ministers
      - Constitute local congregations
      - Devise means to enlarge the church
      - Receive and hear appeals, complaints, etc. from lower courts
  - The General Assembly (Denominational Church Court)
    - Made up of all teaching elders in good standing and ruling elders as elected by their Session
    - Responsible to
      - Carry out the great commission
      - Maintain committees that serve, but do not direct, other church courts
      - Serve as a court of final appeal for the denomination
      - Maintain oversight of denominational institutions

**VI. A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA**

1706	First presbytery formed in America
1715	First synod formed in America
1789	First General Assembly in the United States
December 6, 1861	First General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States (later changed to Presbyterian Church in the United States [PCUS])
1939	First publication of the Southern Presbyterian Journal, later known as the Presbyterian Journal
1958	Presbyterian Evangelistic Fellowship formed
1964	Concerned Presbyterians, a layman's organization, formed
1969	Presbyterian Churchmen United, a minister's organization formed
1971	The Presbyterian Journal Board of Directors, Presbyterian Evangelistic Fellowship, Concerned Presbyterians, and Presbyterian Churchmen United form a "Steering Committee for a Continuing Presbyterian Church"
February, 1973	Steering Committee and the Executive Committees for the above four organizations meet in Atlanta, Georgia, and decide to form a new denomination
May, 1973	A Convocation of Sessions is held at Westminster Presbyterian Church in Atlanta and an Organizing Committee of 40 men is formed
August, 1973	An Advisory Convention is held at the Grove Park Inn in Asheville, North Carolina
December 4, 1973	An Organizing General Assembly is held at Briarwood Presbyterian Church in Birmingham, Alabama, and the National Presbyterian Church (later changed to the Presbyterian Church in America) is formed

Source: Robert C. Cannada and W. Jack Williamson, *The Historic Polity of the PCA*.

## THE ORDINARY MEANS OF GRACE: WORSHIP

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*You have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. For they could not endure the order that was given, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned." Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I tremble with fear." But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven. At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." This phrase, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been made—in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.*

—Hebrews 12:18-29

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### I. BACKGROUND

We like to believe that we are primarily thinking creatures – what some have called brains on sticks – and that what we do is primarily guided by what we think. This is not altogether false, but it does not dig down deep enough. Before we are thinkers, we are lovers. The Triune God who is and does love has created humankind in his image and has commanded us to love:

*A lawyer, asked Jesus a question to test him. "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 22:35-40)*

Indeed, it is possible to speak of sin a disordered love – sin loves bad things, and it loves good things in a bad way, and this disordered love results in all sorts of iniquity and transgression and sin.

And more, the Bible is clear that we worship what we love (the worship of anything that is not God is a sort of adultery), and we become what we worship:

*The idols of the nations are silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have mouths, but do not speak; they have eyes, but do not see; they have ears, but do not hear, nor is there any breath in their mouths. Those who make them become like them, so do all who trust in them. (Psalm 135:15-18; cf. Psalm 115:4-8)*

So strong is this that one author has said, "our identity is shaped by what we ultimately love or what we love *as* ultimate—what, at the end of the day, gives us a sense of meaning, purpose, understanding, and orientation to our being-in-the-world. What we desire or love ultimately is a (largely implicit) vision of what we hope for, what we think the good life looks like (James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 26-27). This is not just modern insight; read Psalm 73.

Because these things are so, the people of God must be careful to guard their hearts from the love of the world and of the things in the world, for such love – *the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and the pride in possessions* – will push out, will eat up love for the best and greatest true God (1 John 2:15).

Public worship, where the people of God meet together with God (the Father, in the Son, through the Holy Ghost) and make use together of the outward and ordinary means of grace, is the venue where we are trained to love God and others as we ought to. Worship is the antidote for the love of the world and the things in the world.

## II. THE NATURE OF PUBLIC WORSHIP

- ❖ An assembly of public worship is not merely a gathering of God's children with each other, but is, before all else, a meeting of the triune God with his covenant people. In the covenant, God promises his chosen ones that he will dwell among them as their God and they will be his people.
  - The triune God is present in public worship, not only by virtue of the divine omnipresence, but, much more intimately, as the faithful covenant Savior. Through Christ, God's people have access by one Spirit to the Father.
  - In an assembly of public worship, the triune God is not only the One to whom worship is directed, but also the One who is active in the worship of the church. Through his public ordinances, the covenant God actively works to engage his people in communion with himself. In public worship, God communes with his people, and they with him, in a manner which expresses the close relationships of the Father and his redeemed children, of the Son and his beloved bride, and of the Holy Spirit and the living temple in which he dwells.
  - Pastors and ruling elders are to endeavor to inculcate in themselves and in the congregation expectations for, attitudes concerning, and behavior during public worship which are appropriate to the glorious fact that public worship is covenantal communion between God and his people in his public ordinances. (*Directory for Public Worship*, OPC)
- ❖ Because Christ is the Mediator of the covenant, no one draws near to God except through him alone.
  - God's people enter the Most Holy Place, the heavenly sanctuary, by the redeeming blood of Jesus, by the new and living way opened for them through the curtain, that is, his flesh. They draw near through him as their Great High Priest, who has not entered a man-made sanctuary but heaven itself, now to appear for them in God's presence.
  - Public worship is to be conducted in a manner that plainly expresses conscious reliance upon the mediation and merits of Jesus Christ. To this end, it is well that there be a prayer of confession of sin early in the worship service. It is fitting that the minister, as God's ambassador, then declare an assurance of God's grace in Christ, reminding each worshiper that he can have boldness to approach the holy God only through the mediation and merits of Jesus Christ.
- ❖ By the Spirit of the exalted Christ, God draws near to his people and they draw near to their God. They come by grace to Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, joining innumerable angels and all the people of God in joyous and reverent communion with him.
  - God's people not only are to come into his presence with a deep sense of awe at the thought of his perfect holiness and their own exceeding sinfulness, but also are to enter into his gates with thanksgiving and into his courts with praise for the great salvation that he has so graciously wrought for them through his only begotten Son and which he applies to them by his Holy Spirit. All are therefore to worship with sincere devotion, reverence, and expectation.
  - Public worship is to be conducted in reliance on the gracious working of the Spirit of the exalted Christ, which alone can make anyone capable of such sincerity, reverence, devotion, awe, expectation, and joy. Hence, from its beginning to its end, public worship should be conducted in that simplicity which manifests dependence on the Spirit of Christ to bless his own ordinances.
  - Accordingly, the whole congregation should assemble promptly, that all may be present and may join together for the entire worship service. Unless necessary, none should depart until after the benediction. All should refrain from any behavior that would distract other worshipers or detract from their communion with God.

- ❖ In public worship, God's people draw near to their God unitedly as his covenant people, the body of Christ.
  - For this reason, the covenant children should be present so far as possible, as well as adults. Because God makes his covenant with believers and their children, families should be taught and encouraged to sit together as families.
  - For the same reason, no favoritism may be shown to any who attend. Nor may any member of the church presume to exalt himself above others as though he were more spiritual, but each shall esteem others better than himself.
  - The unity and catholicity of the covenant people are to be manifest in public worship. Accordingly, the service is to be conducted in a manner that enables and expects all the members of the covenant community—male and female, old and young, rich and poor, educated and uneducated, healthy and infirm, people from every race and nation—to worship together.
  - Because God's people worship, not as an aggregation of individuals, but as a congregation of those who are members of one another in Christ, public worship is to be conducted as a corporate activity in which all the members participate as the body of Christ.
- ❖ The triune God assembles his covenant people for public worship in order to manifest and renew their covenant bond with him and one another. The Holy Spirit engages them and draws them into the Father's presence as a living sacrifice in Christ. God himself has fellowship with them, strengthening and guiding them for life in his presence and service in his kingdom.
  - Public worship should be conducted in a manner that reflects God's initiative in the covenant itself, making clear that God establishes and renews his covenant with his people, assuring God's people of those things which they so easily forget unless Christ crucified is portrayed before their eyes week after week, cultivating the expectation that God himself meets his people in Christ as the Holy Spirit works through the public ordinances, always keeping central the persons and works of the triune God.
  - Consequently, it is well that public worship be so conducted that it is apparent that God summons his church to assemble in his presence, that he assures his people of his receiving and cleansing them through Christ the Mediator, that he consecrates them to himself and his service by his Word, that he communes with them and gives them grace to help in time of need through his means of grace, and that he sends them out to serve with his blessing.
- ❖ The triune God reveals the way of knowing and worshiping him in his Word, the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, which is the only infallible rule of faith and practice.
  - The principles of public worship must be derived from the Bible—either as they are expressly set down in Scripture or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture—and from no other source.
  - God may not be worshiped according to human imaginations or inventions or in any way not prescribed by his Word, nor may the church require her members to participate in elements of worship that God's Word does not require. Only when the elements of worship are those appointed in God's Word, and the circumstances and forms of worship are consonant with God's Word, is there true freedom to know God as he is and to worship him as he desires to be worshiped.
- ❖ The end of public worship is the glory of the triune God. To that end, Christ builds his church by perfecting the saints and adding to its membership such as are being saved—all to the glory of God.
  - Through public worship on the Lord's Day, God calls his people to serve him all the days of the week in their every activity, and enables them, whether they eat or drink or whatever they do, to do all to the glory of God.

- God's people are to be led to engage in all the elements of worship with a single-minded focus on God's glory and with a humble and dependent expectation that the exalted Lord Jesus Christ himself will edify them and build his church through his appointed means of grace—all to the glory of God (from *Directory for the Public Worship of God*, OPC).
- ❖ **Worship:**
  - **Is According to the Scriptures** – The acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by Himself, and so limited by His own revealed will, that He may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scripture (WCF 21.1b). See “The Beauty of Reformed Worship,” by Mark Robinson
  - **Is Corporate** – It is something that the whole family of God in a local congregation does together.
  - **Is Dialogical** – Throughout the service, there is the interplay of conversation between God and his people. We speak to him, he speaks to us.
  - **Is Embodied** – We make use of the bodies God created to worship God: we stand, we sit, we might raise our hands or bow our heads, we listen, we sing and speak. In the Lord's Supper, we eat and drink. There's a story I've heard, that when Helen Keller went to the communion service at her Presbyterian Church in Tuscumbia, Alabama, at the point when the minister uncovered the elements, she could be heard inhaling sharply. Helen Keller couldn't see the bread and wine, but she could smell them. A necessary corollary of this is that worship cannot simply be watched or listened to. Television, radio, the internet may be useful, but they cannot involve us in worship.
  - **Tells a Story** – The story of Scripture: Creation, Fall, Redemption, Restoration. Various parts of the story will be emphasized from week to week, but no part can be left out.
  - **Is Antithetical** – We are in the world, but we are not of the world.

## THE ORDINARY MEANS OF GRACE: THE SACRAMENTS

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### **What does God require from us to escape his wrath and curse, which we deserve for our sin?**

To escape God's wrath and curse, which we deserve for our sin, God requires from us repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, and the diligent use of the outward means whereby Christ brings to us the benefits of his mediation.

### **What are the outward means whereby Christ brings to us the benefits of his mediation?**

The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ brings to his church the benefits of his mediation, are all his ordinances; especially the Word, sacraments, and prayer; all of which are made effective for the salvation of the elect.

—Westminster Larger Catechism, 153, 154

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## **I. BACKGROUND – SACRAMENTS IN GENERAL**

### ❖ Definition

- Augustine — A visible sign of a sacred thing, or a visible form of an invisible grace.
- Calvin — An external sign, by which the Lord seals on our consciences His promises of good-will towards us in order to sustain the weakness of our faith, and we in our turn testify our piety towards Him, both before Himself and before angels as well as men.
- Westminster Confession of Faith — Sacraments are holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace, immediately instituted by God, to represent Christ and his benefits, and to confirm our interest in him; as also to put a visible difference between those that belong unto the church and the rest of the world; and solemnly to engage them to the service of God in Christ, according to his Word (WCF 27.1)
  - Sign — Sacraments do not make a declaration concerning itself, but rather declare the saving grace of Christ
  - Seal — Sacraments authenticate and confirm the saving grace of Christ to us; they are of benefit to the recipient, not the giver.
- There is a sacramental union (or spiritual relation) between the sign and the thing signified. There is the outward and sensible sign and the inward and spiritual grace signified.
- Spiritual truth is represented, then, through sensible (i.e., by means of the five sense) signs.
- The Sacraments, unlike other means of grace, are always and only to be administered to the people of God in gathered worship

### ❖ Number – There are only two Sacraments: Holy Baptism and Holy Communion.

- All Protestants hold only to the two Sacraments
- The Roman Church holds to seven Sacraments.

### ❖ Necessity

- Both Baptism and the Lord's Supper are commanded by Christ Himself in His role as King and head of the Church.
- Sacraments, biblically administered, are among the biblical marks of a true church. They may be thought of as representing to us Christ as our High Priest. The other marks are faithful preaching of the Word (Christ as Prophet) and proper administration of discipline (Christ as King).

### ❖ Effect – we are sacramental realists, that is, we believe that the sacraments (both of them) actually do something to/for the one who receives them in faith: they become effective means of salvation, each in its own appointed way. However, as WCF 27.3 teaches, the grace that is

administered (conveyed, applied) in the right use of them, “is not conferred by any power in them. Neither does the efficacy of a sacrament depend on the piety or intention of him who administers it, but rather on

- the work of the Spirit and
- the word of institution, which contains
  - a precept authorizing its use and
  - a promise of benefit to worthy receivers.”
- ❖ Agreement and Differences of the two Sacraments:
  - Agreement
    - Both are authored by God Himself.
    - The spiritual part of both is Christ and His covenantal benefits.
    - Both are seals of the same covenant.
    - Both are to be dispensed only by ministers of the Gospel, lawfully ordained.
    - Both are to be continued in the visible Church until Christ’s return.
  - Differences
    - Baptism is to be administered only once.
    - Baptism with water is the sign and seal of our regeneration and engrafting into Christ.
    - Holy Communion is to be administered frequently in the elements of bread and wine, and represents and exhibits Christ as spiritual nourishment to the soul.
    - Baptism is to be administered even to infants; Holy Communion is to be administered only to those who are of years and ability to examine themselves and thus discern the Lord’s Body.
- ❖ In summary, concerning the Sacraments in general:
  - We deny that they confer grace by any power or virtue in themselves;
  - We deny that they convey grace to the unworthy recipient;
  - We deny that the grace conveyed comes from the mere moral or emotional power of the truth they symbolize;
  - We affirm that they really do confer grace to the worthy recipient;
  - We affirm that they confer grace instrumentally, that is the grace conferred is by the work of the Holy Spirit, who as a free divine-person uses the sacraments sovereignly as his means (that is, instruments) to do his will of conveying the grace of Christ;
  - We affirm that as seals of the covenant of grace, the sacraments convey and confirm grace to those to whom it belongs, that is, to those who are within that covenant, and in the case of adults, only through a living faith;
  - We affirm that the Spirit who confers grace in the sacraments may, and does, confer that same grace to true believers before and without their use

## II. BAPTISM

- ❖ Meaning –
  - Baptism is the washing with water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost as a sign and seal of
    - our engrafting into Christ
    - the remission of our sins by his blood
    - the regeneration by the Holy Spirit
    - our adoption as children of God
    - our resurrection unto eternal life



- Baptized persons are *solemnly* (publicly and formally) admitted into the visible Church and enter into an open and professed engagement to be wholly and only the Lord's. Again, for infants, the engagement is made for them by their believing parents, with the duty incumbent upon those baptized in due time to make the engagement their own profession of faith.
- Baptism imparts no grace apart from faith ("If we do not wish to annihilate Holy Baptism, we must prove its efficacy by newness of life." — John Calvin). However, even where no faith is present at the time of Baptism, the sign of Baptism can retain its latent efficacy until it becomes profitable.
- ❖ Mode – Effusion (that is, pouring), of which sprinkling is an acceptable variation
  - The offering of the Blood of Christ for our salvation is pictured in the Old Testament sacrificial system always by pouring or sprinkling. (e.g., Exodus 24:6,8 and Hebrews 9:19)
  - Hebrews speaks of Christ, our Great High Priest, offering His Blood for the cleansing of our sins. (See Hebrews 9:13,14)
  - Ezekiel 36:25: Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. See also I Peter 3:21: And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you — not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience — through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- ❖ How do we improve our baptism?
  - We have a **necessary** but frequently neglected **obligation** to improve our baptism: our whole lives,
    - especially in times of temptation and
    - when we are present at the baptism of others.
  - We should seriously and thankfully **reflect on**
    - what is involved in baptism,
    - why Christ established it,
    - the privileges and benefits conferred and sealed by it, and
    - the significance of our own solemn vows when we were baptized.
  - This reflection **humbles us** when
    - we recognize how defiled we are by sin and
    - how far short we fall of living up to, and indeed
    - walk so contrary to the standards set by the grace of baptism and by our other spiritual commitments.
  - We are also
    - **assured** of pardon from sin and of all the other blessings sealed in that sacrament,
    - **draw strength** from the death and resurrection of Christ, into whom we were baptized, in order to
      - keep killing our sins and
      - becoming alive by His grace.
    - **spurred on**
      - to try to live by faith,
      - to have our human relationships defined by holiness and righteousness, as is proper for those who have given up their names to Christ, and
      - to walk with each other in brotherly love, as is proper for those baptized by the same Spirit into one body.

### III. THE LORD'S SUPPER/HOLY COMMUNION/THE EUCHARIST

We now enter the innermost Most Holy Place of the Christian temple. We approach the sacred altar on which lies quivering before our eyes the bleeding heart of Christ...Christ is present. If he is not present really and truly, then the sacrament can have no interest or real value to us.

It does not do to say that this presence is only spiritual, because that phrase is ambiguous. If it means that the presence of Christ is not something objective to us, but simply a mental apprehension or idea of him subjectively present to our consciousness, then the phrase is false. Christ as an objective fact is a really present and active in the sacrament as are the bread and wine, or the minister or our fellow-communicants by our side.... It does not do to say that the divinity of Christ is present while his humanity is absent, because it is the entire indivisible divine-human Person of Christ which is present. When Christ promises to his disciples, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world-age," and "Where two or three are met together in my name, there am I in the midst of them;" he means, of course, that he, the God-man Mediator they loved, trusted, and obeyed, would be with them. His humanity is just as essential as his divinity, otherwise his incarnation would not have been a necessity... "Presence," therefore, is not a question of space; it is a relation...So we need not speculate how it is that Christ, the whole God-man, body, soul and divinity, is present in the sacrament, but we are absolutely certain of the fact. He has promised it. ~ A. A. Hodge

- ❖ Meaning
  - The Lord's Supper is "a visible sermon, wherein Christ crucified is set before us."— Thomas Watson
  - The Lord's Supper represents and exhibits salvation through the one perfect sacrifice of Christ.
  - The Lord's Supper is a sign and seal of the benefits of Christ's sacrifice for us.
  - The Lord's Supper does not effect a union with Christ, but it is a means of strength and assurance to those who have union with Christ.
- ❖ Names (taken from *Mystery of the Lord's Supper*, by Robert Bruce)
  - The Body and Blood of Christ – it is a heavenly and Spiritual nutriment; it contains a food for the soul that is able to build up the soul for a spiritual life for the life everlasting;
  - The Supper of the Lord – a holy supper appointed for the increase of holiness, for the food of the soul in holiness, to feed the soul for the life everlasting;
  - The Table of the Lord – not the altar of the Lord; a table to sit at, to take and receive, not an altar to stand at, to offer and present;
  - The Communion (Participation) of the Body and Blood of Christ
  - The Eucharist, or Thanksgiving
  - The Banquet of Love
- ❖ Participants
 

Those who have:

  - made public profession of their personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior;
  - been examined and received by the Session of a local Church;
  - are repentant for sins; and
  - who intend to live as becomes followers of Christ.
- ❖ Parts
  - Bread and wine, which are set apart by prayer and the reading of the words of institution.
  - All believers are to participate on an "equal footing" with all being served by an elder.

- ❖ The regular eating and drinking symbolizes the believer's thankful remembrance of Calvary, their feeding spiritually on Christ Himself and their renewed engagement to be Christ's alone.
- ❖ Ends, or Purposes
  - First, to represent and convey Christ as the full and perfect food for believers, body and soul;
  - Second, to bear witness to the world, which is against our profession, that we worship and belong to Christ, and that we might bear witness to our love for our brothers and sisters in Christ;
  - Third, to serve as our comfort and consolation in troubles, our strength when we are about to fall, or are tempted by the world, our flesh, or the devil;
  - Fourth, to render sincere thanks to God for all his covenant benefits to his people and to pledge ourselves again to covenant faithfulness; in this sense, it is a covenant renewal ceremony.
- ❖ The Gift Communicated
  - That we really feed in the Holy Supper on the flesh and blood of Christ, no otherwise than as bread and wine are the aliments of our bodies, I freely confess. — John Calvin
  - When, therefore, we speak of the communion which believers have with Christ, we mean that they communicate with His flesh and blood not less than with His Spirit, so as to possess thus the whole Christ. — John Calvin
  - I do not call them [the elements] signs for the reason that men commonly call them signs, because they only signify something, as the bread signifies the Body of Christ, and the wine signifies the Blood of Christ; I do not call them something because they only represent something. *I call them signs because they have the Body and Blood of Christ conjoined with them.* Indeed, so truly is the Body of Christ conjoined with the bread, and the Blood of Christ conjoined with the wine, that as soon as you receive the bread in your mouth (if you are a faithful man or woman) you receive the Body of Christ in your soul, and that by faith. And as soon as you receive the wine in your mouth, you receive the Blood of Christ in your soul, and that by faith. It is chiefly because of this function that they are instruments to deliver and exhibit the things that they signify, and not only because of their representation are they called signs. — Robert Bruce, *Mystery of the Lord's Supper*

It is a mystery of Christ's secret union with the devout which is by nature incomprehensible. If anybody should ask me how this communion takes place, I am not ashamed to confess that that is a secret too lofty for either my mind to comprehend or my words to declare. And to speak more plainly, I rather experience than understand it. — John Calvin