

## **FIRST THINGS: The Gospel of Grace, Core of Our Core Values**

At its core, the Christian religion is a story - a love story. It is a story of the God of the universe sending His son Jesus to redeem for Himself a bride: namely His people - His Church. It is the story of the coming of this One to lay down His life for her, taking her place on the cross—the innocent for the guilty, the righteous for the unrighteous—in order that He might take the stain of her sin and the penalty for her guilt upon Himself, thereby clothing her in the pure white robe of His righteousness. Now He builds a glorious new home for her where He will one day live with her happily ever after. This story is called the gospel (which means “good news”). It is the heart of the Christian faith as revealed in the Scriptures. Everything else flows out from it.

Worship is the celebration of the gospel. Doctrine is the explanation of the gospel. Love is the demonstration of the gospel. Evangelism is the propagation of the gospel. The Church is the family of the gospel. Marriage is the symbol of the gospel. The Christian family is the training ground of the gospel for the next generation. The fruit of the Spirit is the character produced by the gospel. The gifts of the Spirit are the tools of the gospel. Other Biblical truths can be accurately expressed and defined, but if the gospel is left out there is only an empty shell, a lifeless corpse. Even if the gospel becomes just another spoke in the wheel instead of the hub itself, the glory of Christ is undermined at best, and ruined at worst.

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### **I. Worship is the celebration of the gospel**

- A. Worship of the triune God is the Church’s first reasonable response to the saving power of the gospel, and therefore its first corporate calling. ([Rom. 12:1](#))
- B. Biblical worship can only be in and through Christ, and the attention and affection of true worshipers is always anchored to His saving work on the cross.
- C. We believe that worship should be regulated according to Scripture.
- D. We believe that the worship service should strive to address both the minds and the hearts of the worshipers, bringing the life-changing truth of God’s word to bear in our lives. ([Heb. 4:12](#))
- E. We believe in the weekly celebration of the riches of God’s grace in the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. We believe in covenantal baptism.
- F. We believe that a rich treasury of worship music, which is invaluable for use in worship, has been handed down to us from our forefathers in the faith. We believe it is also appropriate and wise for the church to sing sound, Biblical, contemporary songs in worship. ([Eph. 5:19](#); [Psalm 33:3](#))
- G. We believe that in worship “all things should be done decently and in order.” ([1 Cor. 14:40](#)) We also believe that there should be freedom, joy, and expressiveness in worship. ([Psalm 27:6](#); [1 Cor. 14:26](#))
- H. We aspire to have active congregational participation in worship. Worship is not a congregation observing a performance like spectators at a show.

- I. We believe that worship is for all members of God's household - even children - and we not only allow them in the service but work to facilitate the meaningfulness of their worship experience.
- J. We believe that worship is a way of life, not just something we do corporately on Sunday morning. It involves the deference to and enjoyment of God in every moment and activity of life. ([Rom. 12:1-2](#))

## II. Love is the demonstration of the gospel.

- A. Jesus said that after loving God there is no higher law than to love our neighbor. In fact, the Bible says that the one who does not love others also does not love God. We show Jesus to others when we show love because He was the epitome of love and One reflected by all true acts of love.
- B. We believe that part of the calling to love is for believers to act as the salt of the earth and light of the world, working against the corruption of this world for the glory of God and as a witness to their neighbors.
- C. We believe that our example of godly living (by the way we speak to and treat other people with respect, patience, kindness and compassion, by our good deeds and acts of service, and by our example of integrity and dignity) is the first and best tool in this endeavor.
- D. We believe that Christians are called upon to seek justice in this world for those who are denied it.
  - 1. We believe in the humanity of the unborn and therefore that abortion is a violation of God's law.
  - 2. We stand in solidarity with the persecuted Christians around the world: to pray for them, to encourage them, to seek to alleviate their suffering.
  - 3. We repudiate racism and seek to demonstrate our human oneness with all mankind and our spiritual oneness with believers from every race, color, nation and language.
  - 4. We believe Christ's people - reflecting His heart - have a special obligation to the lowly, the needy, the elderly, the weak, and the poor.
  - 5. We abhor the abuse/mistreatment of women and children.
  - 6. We believe God calls us to have a special love for widows and orphans, and gladly support and encourage parents who feel led by the Lord to adopt.
- E. We believe God leads His people to use the political process to promote good in society, though we do not believe it is appropriate for the church to endorse any certain politician, candidate for office, piece of legislation, or political party. We also believe it is important for these efforts to be conducted in a spirit of humility and love, as opposed to a spirit of superiority and self-interest.

## III. Evangelism is the propagation of the gospel

- A. One of the greatest ways to love our neighbor is by communicating to him the good news of the gospel.
- B. This Christian calling begins with a duty to love the world in the sense of [John 3:16](#) (though believers in Christ must never love the world in the sense of [James 4:4](#) and [1 John 2:15](#)), which means longing for those who are lost to not perish but receive eternal life through faith in Christ.

- C. Jesus was the friend of sinners. When filled with His Spirit, His Church will have the same love He had— and this same reputation. We believe in praying for and striving to have this heart of Christ for sinners.
- D. If a Christian or a Christian church is not active in evangelism, or is not burdened for the salvation of the lost, or is not praying for the salvation of nonbelievers, then that Christian or Christian church is not acting in accord with the gospel. The gospel leads us and compels us to evangelize. Propagation of the gospel is not just a Christian duty; it is the natural product of the acceptance of the gospel. Christ makes His people into fishers of men.
- E. The world without Christ is in desperate need of the gospel. Believers also have a need to share the gospel, outreach being an essential ingredient in a healthy Christian life and in the life of a healthy church. Without outreach, the gospel and its power to save and to transform lives are too easily forgotten.
- F. There is a great temptation for us as Christians to think of ourselves as better than others. This attitude of superiority is deadly to outreach and to spiritual life itself.
- G. We believe in the duty of the church to go into all the world and make disciples in every nation, tribe, and language ([Matt. 28:18-10](#)). We believe that one major way for this to be done is through sending out and supporting missionaries to every people around the world for short and long-term ministry. ([Rom. 10:14-15](#))
- H. We believe it is the responsibility of Christians and Christian churches to welcome those who come to their land from other countries and to receive them as believers in Christ or seek to love them to Christ.
- I. We believe that outreach is an aspect of the normal, everyday, individual Christian life, and not primarily a church program. We believe that it is the privilege of every believer to be a part of Christ's gospel enterprise by living a life that reflects Him, by practicing acts of love which commend the Savior to the unbeliever, by being ready to give a reason for a life which does so, and by proclaiming the love of Christ in word when opportunity affords, and by praying for the conversion of those outside of Christ. ([Acts 8:4](#); [2 Tim 4:5](#); [Col. 4:5](#); [1 Pet. 3:15](#))
- J. The church must preach the gospel from the pulpit and through other means, seeking to bring nonbelievers to faith and working to engraft visitors and new believers into the church, including baptism and church membership.
- K. We believe that the Holy Spirit is the One who truly converts sinners to Christ. All our efforts are in vain unless He changes the heart.

#### **IV. The Christian family is the training ground of the gospel for the next generation.**

- A. We believe that God instituted the family, and that He did so for many important purposes, none of which is more important than to communicate to the next generation through word and example the truth of the gospel of grace in Christ.
- B. We believe that the Bible is our primary source of guidance for family life, including marriage and childrearing (e.g. [Eph. 5:22-6:4](#)).
- C. We believe that marriage is a precious gift of and a high calling by God and should therefore be nourished, protected and supported by the family, the church, and the society. The church has a special role in marriages and families through instruction, prayer, counseling, encouragement, and accountability.
- D. We believe that the family is the first place we are called to exemplify Christ in love, in nurture, in patience, in honor & respect, in mutual encouragement, in kindness, in humility, in faithfulness, in generosity, in service, and in striving for unity and harmony.

- E. We believe the church must reflect Jesus' attitude toward children, welcoming, embracing, and blessing them. ([Matt. 19:13-15](#)) We believe that this requires churches to be diligent to protect children from all kinds of abuse.
- F. We believe education of children is the responsibility of parents, and choices must be made before Christ, and according to a conscience which is informed by the word of God and the realities of the present culture. We urge believers to avoid being judgmental of one another regarding these choices, for each must stand before His own Master ([Romans 14:4](#)). The church is committed to supporting the parents as they make educational decisions and strive to raise their children in the instruction and nurture of the Lord.
- G. We believe it is important for the church to help its young people to realize that it is their church, and that their gifts and energies are needed just like everyone else's, and to help young people discover their spiritual gifts and find ways to use them in the body, and to train the next generation to become leaders in the church.
- H. We believe it is healthy and important for the young people of the church to establish a network of Christian friendships which will point them to and support them in the way of the Lord as they grow into adults and leave home.

#### **V. Doctrine is the explanation of the gospel**

- A. We believe all Biblical truth ultimately points to and glorifies Christ and His coming to die for the salvation and glorification of man, and we believe in teaching the whole Bible with this in view.
- B. Without neglecting the law of God or denying its place in the deposit of truth given us by Christ, we proclaim the good news of God's grace in Christ.
- C. Believing the Bible to be the infallible word of God, we accept it and proclaim it as our final authority in all matters of faith and life.
- D. We believe that the word of God is God's living and powerful instrument for imparting new life to sinners and remaking them into the image of Christ.
- E. We teach Christian doctrine in the tradition of the Protestant Reformation, because we believe that movement articulated the gospel of Christ in a way which was most faithful to Scripture.
- F. Recognizing the fallibility of human creeds, we nevertheless believe that creeds of the church can be very helpful as expressions of the Bible's truths. We are especially grateful for the Westminster Standards, and find them very useful as a faithful expression of the teaching of the word of God.
- G. We believe that Biblical doctrine, Biblical practice, and a right heart toward God are all essential. We believe that the Bible should be taught in a way which seeks the transformation of the heart and the life, as well as informing the mind of the listener.
- H. Since we know that only the Holy Spirit can make God's word effective in our lives, we believe it is essential to approach the task of teaching and preaching with prayer.
- I. We teach the truths of God in the recognition that our enemy is crafty and often tempts us to overreact to one sin or error, thereby falling into an opposite sin or error.

#### **VI. The church is the family of the gospel**

- A. The church
  - 1. We believe that Christ is not only redeeming and sanctifying individuals, but churches as well.

2. We believe that the church is not peripheral but central to what the Lord is doing on the earth. Using the living stones of individual believers, He is building His Church, making something greater than the sum of its parts.
3. We believe it is the duty of every believer to be a member of a local church if it is within his/her power. We believe church membership is taught in the Bible. Just as each body part is a member of the body, so each Christian should be a member of a local body of believers. (See our Bible study on church membership.)

#### B. Church leaders

1. We believe that the Bible gives us guidance about the proper form of church government and that a structure of elders (both teaching and ruling) and deacons, and connectedness to other churches is the Biblical church model.
2. We believe that God has called local congregations to elect Biblically-qualified leaders to serve in the church. (E.g. Acts 6; [1 Tim.3:1-13](#); [Titus 1:6-9](#))
3. We believe that elders are called by Scripture to teach God's people, to model godly living, to watch over the flock like a shepherd, to act as judges when necessary, and to pray for the people. ([Acts 6:3](#); [1 Tim. 5:17, 18](#); [1 Pet. 5:1-5](#); [Titus 1:5-9](#))
4. We believe that church leaders, like all of those in authority, must struggle against the temptation to abuse their authority, and must constantly strive to be servant leaders, relying on their good example as the primary instrument of ministry ([1 Pet. 5:3](#)), making use of authority only as necessary and only for the good of God's people ([1 Thes. 2:6](#) ff), reflecting the heart of Christ for His sheep, and treating them with tenderness and sincerity in His love.
5. We believe that church leaders, like everyone else, must be accountable and subject: to each other, to the presbytery (the local network of churches), and to the denominational body.
6. Though Christ invests authority in the leaders of the church, we believe it is crucial for those leaders to remember that the adults of the congregation are not children and must not be treated as such, and that the members have much wisdom and important insights which must be heard and considered in the decisions and actions of the leadership.

#### C. Relationships with other churches and believers

1. We grieve over the fractured state of the modern church and believe it is a Christian duty to work and pray for unity and purity. To this end, we work to cooperate with sister churches as much as we can. We do not view other Christ-loving, Bible-believing churches as our enemies or our competitors, but try to view them as sister churches, co-laboring with us in the kingdom of Christ.
2. We are a part of a denomination, not by accident but by conviction. We grieve over the shattered state of the church because we believe our Lord created the church to be one. And yet in light of the present, unfortunate, fragmented state of the church, we believe it is better for a church to align with a body of other churches for encouragement and accountability rather than remain alone. By so doing, we do not intend to cut ourselves off from other evangelical churches which are not a part of our denomination. We are eager to fellowship and work with them as much as possible. And we believe that all churches should be praying and working toward unity in the body of Christ. We believe the "us/them" attitude is unhealthy and unbiblical.
3. Though we warmly and enthusiastically embrace the truths of reformed theology, we also recognize that there are other true Christians - equally sincere and committed to the truth of Christ - who disagree with some of our convictions. We

want to warmly accept them as our brothers and sisters in Christ and welcome them as members into our church. We want them to use their spiritual gifts and even exercise whatever forms of leadership in the church are appropriate and possible without undermining the doctrinal beliefs of the PCA or the unity of the congregation.

D. Body life and the gifts of the Spirit

1. We believe in the need for regular Christian gathering - in large groups and small - for mutual encouragement, prayer support, instruction, inspiration, accountability and exhortation, stirring one another up to love and good works. ([Acts 2:42-47](#))
2. We believe in the importance of Biblical accountability and, when necessary, church discipline. ([Matt. 18:15-17](#); [1 Cor. 5:1-2](#); [1 Tim. 5:19](#)). However, accountability and church discipline must always be done without judgmentalism, self-righteousness or superiority.
3. We believe in the importance of Christian hospitality, where believers open their homes and hearts to one another for fellowship in love.
4. We believe that men and women are co-heirs of the glorious riches of Christ. We believe that women have needed gifts in the body of Christ, along with much wisdom and insight important to the church and its leaders.
5. The gifts of the Spirit are the gifts given by the Spirit to the believer by which he is enabled to minister the gospel of grace to the brethren. We believe that every member of the body of Christ is gifted by the Holy Spirit to serve the body by means of at least one spiritual gift. We believe that it is sinful and scandalous for the church to say to any Christian, "we have no need of you." All the parts of the body are needed.
6. We believe that the whole counsel of God is expressly set down in Scripture and that nothing may be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit or traditions of men. Therefore, we believe the apostolic office and the gift of prophecy have ceased.
7. We believe that diversity is healthy in a church. God has made His people different from one another for a reason, just as the parts of the body are different from one another. We believe that the human impulse to focus on befriending those who are like us, therefore, is often an unhealthy impulse and leads to the reinforcing of our blindnesses and prejudices. We believe that Christian relationships across age, ethnic, or personality barriers can be among the most enriching relationships we can have.
8. We believe that we owe special love to those who are weak, sick, elderly, grieving, handicapped, or otherwise have special needs. We want to welcome and not spurn those whom Christ brings to us in need, and teach our children to do so as well.
9. We believe that one of the most important callings of pastor/teachers in the church is the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry ([Eph. 4:12-13](#)). The church has a vital role in helping the members discover, develop and employ their gifts in the church and in the world.
10. We recognize that it is not easy to work together and get along in Christ's church, and believe that Christians must bear with one another's weakness, being slow to anger, quick to forgive and longsuffering with others as God is with us. We must strive to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
11. We believe strongly in Biblical peacemaking and conflict resolution. We believe it dishonors Christ when believers tolerate alienation from one another.

12. We believe that God's people have a duty to care for each other even in material things, as the church in Acts did. ([1 John 3:17,18](#)) We believe that God has ordained the office of deacons in order to oversee this process in the church.
13. We believe that older women have a special role in teaching and mentoring the younger women in the church ([Titus 2:3-5](#)). This is also true for older men and younger men.

## **VII. The fruit of the Spirit and the Christian life**

- A. We believe that true doctrine must coexist with the fruit of the Spirit. Gratitude, love, humility, joy and a spirit of self-denial are essential to godliness.
- B. The fruit of the Spirit is the Spirit-induced result of the gospel in the life of the believer, whereby the believer is transformed into the image of Christ in His love, joy, peace, etc.
- C. We believe that there is equal danger in legalism and in lawlessness, and that Christians and churches must be alert to temptations in both directions.
- D. We believe that believers are called to have wholehearted passion for the Lord and His cause. However, we also recognize that it is possible to have great zeal for the Lord and yet be self-righteous. ([Rom. 10:2-3](#))
- E. Though God invites us to pray for deliverance from specific troubles we face, we believe in the expectation of suffering in this life and the ultimate acceptance of it as from the Lord for His good purposes in our lives. We believe that hardship and pain are powerful tools in the hands of the Lord to work toward our maturity, godliness and growth in faith.
- F. We believe in a real and personal devil, who desires to thwart the Lord's purposes in our lives, in the church and in the world. He is the Christian's true enemy. Our enemy therefore is not flesh and blood ([Eph. 6:12](#)), and our weapons are not earthly ([2 Cor. 10:3ff](#)).
- G. Christian freedom
  1. We are committed to upholding, proclaiming and obeying the laws of God. We are also committed to not making laws where God has left men free, and we repudiate human efforts to improve divine law.
  2. We believe that in matters of Christian law, the believer is obligated to obey God no matter the consequences. However, in matters of Christian freedom, the believer is obligated to prayerfully consider and do what he or she believes is wisest and best and most honoring to God, keeping all the relevant Biblical principles in mind. In addition, the believer must be careful not to judge other believers in matters of Christian freedom or impose his or her convictions on others.

## **VIII. Marriage is the symbol of the gospel.**

- A. We believe that marriage was created by the almighty, living, and only true God for the sake of mankind: for companionship, for procreation, for accountability.
- B. We believe that God also created marriage for an even higher purpose: to teach man about Jesus Christ. Though He had all honor and glory as God the Son, He came to the earth as a man, lived a life of humiliation and servanthood, and eventually laid down His life upon the cross – in order to win Himself a bride, a people (His church).
- C. This explains many of the Bible's instructions concerning marriage, instructions many have difficulty understanding and accepting. In loving their wives, husbands are called to imitate Christ in His love for His church. And wives are called to imitate the duties of the

church toward Christ in the way they love their husbands. In this way, couples are called to display the love between Christ and His church in the way they love one another.

- D. We believe that marriage is a valuable gift God gives to many, and should be cherished and cultivated with humility, tenderness, and compassion. We despise brutality, domination, manipulation, coercion, humiliation, and violence in marriage.
- E. We believe it is the duty of every human being, as a creature of God, to submit to God in all things, including His instructions regarding sexuality and marriage.
- F. We believe that human sexuality is a precious and beautiful gift God has given mankind, for their joy and for the bringing forth of children.
- G. We believe that sex belongs only in the context of the covenant of marriage. We believe that all sexual acts outside of the context of marriage are forbidden in the Bible as sexual immorality.
- H. We believe that true marriage, as God designed it from the beginning, is between a male and a female.
- I. We believe that a person's gender/sex is assigned at conception/birth by God's providence, and that every person is called to live within the context of God's assignment.
- J. We also understand that in this broken and bewildering world, some people experience feelings and impulses contrary to this. We have deep compassion for them and despise all the ways they have been mistreated and hated (especially when it has been done in the name of Christ). They need to be shown Christian love like everybody else. However, we also believe that these feelings are contrary to God's design for gender and/or sexuality, and that pursuing these feelings is therefore contrary to human well-being. We all have feelings and impulses contrary to the way of God, but God in His grace can forgive each sin through Christ and help us to walk in His way.