

The JCF Elder Affirmation of Faith¹

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1. Scripture, the Word of God Written

1.1 We believe that the Bible, consisting of the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments, is the infallible Word of God, verbally inspired by God, and without error in the original manuscripts (2Timothy 3:16, 2Peter 1:21, Proverbs 30:5, Numbers 23:19, John 17:17).

1.2 We believe that God's intentions, revealed in the Bible, are the supreme and final authority in testing all claims about what is true and what is right. In matters not addressed by the Bible, what is true and right is assessed by criteria consistent with the teachings of Scripture (see verses under 1:1).

1.3 We believe that Scripture contains all the words of God He intended His people to have at each stage of redemptive history, and that it now contains everything we need God to tell us for salvation, for trusting Him perfectly, and for obeying Him perfectly (2Timothy 3:16-17).

1.4 We believe God's intentions are revealed through the intentions of inspired human authors, even when the authors' intention was to express divine meaning of which they were not fully aware, as, for example, in the case of some Old Testament prophecies. Thus the meaning of Biblical texts is a fixed historical reality, rooted in the historical, unchangeable intentions of its divine and human authors. However, while meaning does not change, the application of that

¹ In forming this document, we began with the elder affirmation of faith of Bethlehem Baptist Church, in Minneapolis, MN, and made modifications to that document in accord with our eighteen month study of *Bible Doctrine*, by Wayne Grudem

meaning may change in various situations. Nevertheless it is not legitimate to infer a meaning from a Biblical text that is not demonstrably carried by the words which God inspired (1Peter 1:10-11, 2Peter 3:16, Matthew 4:6-7).

1.5 Therefore, the process of discovering the intention of God in the Bible is a humble and careful effort to find in the language of Scripture what the human authors intended to communicate. Limited abilities, traditional biases, personal sin, and cultural assumptions often obscure Biblical texts. Therefore the work of the Holy Spirit is essential for right understanding of the Bible, and prayer for His assistance belongs to a proper effort to understand and apply God's Word (1Corinthians 2:12-16, Psalm 119:18, Ephesians 1:18).

2. The Trinity, One God as Three Persons

2.1 We believe in one living, sovereign, and all-glorious God, eternally existing in three infinitely excellent and admirable Persons: God the Father, fountain of all being; God the Son, eternally imaging forth the radiance of the Father's glory, not made, without beginning, being of one essence with the Father; and God the Holy Spirit, proceeding eternally from the Father and the Son. Thus each Person in the Godhead is fully and completely God (Deuteronomy 6:4, Daniel 4:34-35, Psalm 138:5, Matthew 28:19, 1 Corinthians 8:13, Hebrews 1:5-6, Acts 5:3-4).

2.2 We believe that God is supremely joyful in the fellowship of the Trinity, each Person beholding and expressing His eternal and unsurpassed delight in the all-satisfying perfections of the triune God (1Timothy 1:11, John 15:11, Matthew 25:23, John 17:24).

3. God's Eternal Purpose and Election

3.1 We believe that God, from all eternity, in order to display the full extent of His glory for the eternal and ever-increasing enjoyment of all who love Him, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His will, freely and unchangeably ordain and foreknow whatever comes to pass (2Timothy 1:9, Ephesians 1:4, Romans 11:36, Ephesians 1:11, Isaiah 46:9-10, Isaiah 41:21-23).

3.2 We believe that God upholds and governs all things – from galaxies to subatomic particles, from the forces of nature to the movements of nations, and from the public plans of politicians to the secret acts of solitary persons – all in accord with His eternal, all-wise purposes to glorify Himself, yet in such a way that He never sins, nor ever condemns a person unjustly; but that His ordaining and governing all things is compatible with the moral accountability of all persons created in His image (Isaiah 40:26, Colossians 1:16-17, Matthew 10:29-30, Lamentations 3:37-38, Deuteronomy 32:4, Romans 1:20, 3:19).

3.3 We believe that God's election is an unconditional act of free grace which was given through His Son Christ Jesus before the world began. By this act God chose, before the foundation of the world, those who would be delivered from bondage to sin and brought to repentance and saving faith in His Son Christ Jesus (Romans 9:11-18, 11:5-8, 2Timothy 1:9, Romans 8:2, Acts 11:18, John 6:44, Philippians 1:29).

4. God's Creation of the Universe and Man

4.1 We believe that God created the universe, and everything in it, out of nothing, by the Word of His power. Having no deficiency in Himself, nor moved by any incompleteness in His joyful self-sufficiency, God was pleased in creation to display His glory for the everlasting joy of the redeemed, from every tribe and tongue and people and nation (Genesis 1:1, Hebrews 11:3, Psalm 50:9-15, Isaiah 43:7, 35:10, Revelation 5:9).

4.2 We believe that God created a great multitude of spiritual beings with moral judgment and high intelligence, but without physical bodies, called angels. Though often unseen, angels glorify God by carrying out God's purposes and serving God's people. We believe that demons are evil angels who once were like the good angels but who, led by Satan, rebelled against God and lost their privilege of serving God, and now continually work evil in the world. We believe that as evil and corrupt as Satan and his demons are, ultimately they are limited by God's control and have limited power in the world (Hebrews 1:14, Acts 12:23, Jude 1:6, Job 1:6-12).

4.3 We believe that God directly created Adam from the dust of the ground and Eve from his side. We believe that Adam and Eve were the historical parents of the entire human race; that they were created male and female equally in the image of God, without sin; that they were created to glorify their Maker, Ruler, Provider, and Friend by trusting His all-sufficient goodness, admiring His infinite beauty, enjoying His personal fellowship, and obeying His all-wise counsel; and that, in God's love and wisdom, they were appointed differing and complementary roles in marriage as a type of Christ and the church. Because of this, in agreement with the plans of the eternal and all-wise God, we affirm that marriage can only take place between one man and one woman (Genesis 1:27, 2:7, 21-22, 1Corinthians 15:22, Genesis 1:31, Ephesians 5:22-33).

5. Man's Sin and Fall from Fellowship with God

5.1 We believe that, although God created man morally upright, he was led astray from God's Word and wisdom by the subtlety of Satan's deceit, and chose to take what was forbidden, and thus declare his independence from, distrust for, and disobedience toward his all-good and gracious Creator. Thus, our first parents, by this sin, fell from their original innocence and communion with God (Ecclesiastes 7:29, Genesis 3:1-13, Romans 5:12).

5.2 We believe that, as the head of the human race, Adam's fall became the fall of all his posterity, in such a way that corruption, guilt, death, and condemnation belong properly to every person. All persons are thus corrupt by nature, enslaved to sin, and morally unable to delight in God and overcome their own proud preference for self-rule, rather than humble, joyful submission to God's benevolent rule (Romans 5:12-19, Ephesians 2:2-3, Romans 8:7-8).

5.3 We believe God has subjected the creation to futility, and the entire human family is made justly liable to untold miseries of sickness, decay, calamity, and loss. Thus all the adversity and suffering in the world is an echo and a witness of the exceedingly great evil of moral depravity in the heart of mankind; and every new day of life is a God-given, merciful reprieve from imminent judgment, pointing to repentance (Romans 8:20-23, 2Corinthians 4:16, Matthew 5:45, Romans 2:4).

6. Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Son of God

6.1 We believe that in the fullness of time, God sent forth His eternal Son as Jesus the Messiah, conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary. We believe that, when the eternal Son became flesh, He took on a fully human nature, so that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures were inseparably joined together in one Person, without confusion or mixture. Thus the Person, Jesus Christ, was and is truly God and truly man, yet one Christ and the only Mediator between God and man (Galatians 4:4, Luke 1:34-35, John 1:14, Hebrews 2:14-17, Philippians 2:6-8, 1 Timothy 2:5).

6.2 We believe that Jesus Christ lived without sin, though He endured the common infirmities and temptations of human life. He preached and taught with truth and authority unparalleled in human history. He worked miracles, demonstrating His divine right and power over all creation: dispatching demons, healing the sick, raising the dead, stilling the storm, walking on water, multiplying loaves, and foreknowing what would befall Him and His disciples, including the betrayal of Judas and the denial, restoration, and eventual martyrdom of Peter (Hebrews 4:14-16, Mark 1:27, Matthew 11:4-6, 14:19-20, John 13:19, Luke 22:31-34, John 21:18-19).

6.3 We believe that His life was governed by His Father's providence with a view to fulfilling all Old Testament prophecies concerning the One who was to come, such as the Seed of the woman, the Prophet like Moses, the Priest after the order of Melchizedek, the King in the line of David, and the Suffering Servant (Luke 24:25-27, Genesis 3:15, Psalm 110, Deuteronomy 18:18, Isaiah 53, Isaiah 9:6-7).

6.4 We believe that Jesus Christ suffered voluntarily in fulfillment of God's redemptive plan, that He was crucified under Pontius Pilate, that He died, was buried and on the third day rose from the dead to vindicate the saving work of His life and death and to take His place as the invincible, everlasting Lord of glory. During forty days after His resurrection, He gave many compelling evidences of His bodily resurrection and then ascended bodily into heaven, where He is seated at the right hand of the Father, interceding for His people on the basis of His all-sufficient sacrifice for sin, and reigning until He puts all His enemies under His feet (John 10:18, Acts 2:23, 4:27-28, 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, Romans 4:25, Philippians 2:9-11, Acts 1:9-11, Romans 8:34, 1 Corinthians 15:25, Hebrews 1:13).

7. The Saving Work of Christ

7.1 We believe that by His perfect obedience to God and by His suffering and death as the spotless Lamb of God, Jesus Christ obtained forgiveness of sins and the gift of perfect righteousness for all who trusted in God prior to the cross and all who would trust in Christ thereafter. Through living a perfect life and dying in our place, the just for the unjust, Christ absorbed our punishment, appeased the wrath of God against us, vindicated the righteousness of God in our justification, and removed the condemnation of the law against us (Romans 5:18-19, 3:24-25, John 1:29, 2 Corinthians 5:21, Galatians 2:21, 3:13, Colossians 2:13-14).

7.2 We believe that the atonement of Christ for sin warrants and impels a universal offering of the gospel to all persons, so that to every person it may be truly said, —God gave His only begotten Son so that whoever believes in Him might not perish but have eternal life. Whosoever will may come for cleansing at this fountain, and whoever does come, Jesus will not cast out (John 3:16, Acts 1:8, Matthew 28:19, Colossians 1:23, John 6:37).

7.3 We believe, moreover, that the death of Christ did obtain more than the bona fide offer of the gospel for all; it also obtained the omnipotent New Covenant mercy of repentance and faith for God's elect. Christ died for all, but not for all in the same way. In His death, Christ expressed a special covenant love to His friends, His sheep, His bride. For them He obtained the infallible and effectual working of the Spirit to triumph over their resistance and bring them to saving faith (Luke 22:20, Hebrews 13:20-21, Acts 11:18, Philippians 1:29, Ephesians 2:8-9, John 17:6, 9, 19).

8. The Saving Work of the Holy Spirit

8.1 We believe that the Holy Spirit has always been at work in the world, sharing in the work of creation, awakening faith in the remnant of God's people, performing signs and wonders, giving triumphs in battle, empowering the preaching of prophets and inspiring the writing of Scripture. Yet, when Christ had made atonement for sin, and ascended to the right hand of the Father, He inaugurated a new era of the Spirit by pouring out the promise of the Father on His Church (Genesis 1:2, Judges 14:6, 3:10, 1 Samuel 10:6, 2 Peter 1:21, Luke 24:49).

8.2 We believe that the newness of this era is marked by the unprecedented mission of the Spirit to glorify the crucified and risen Christ. This He does by giving the disciples of Jesus greater power to proclaim the gospel of the glory of Christ, by opening the hearts of hearers that they might see Christ and believe, by revealing the beauty of Christ in His Word and transforming His people from glory to glory, by manifesting Himself in spiritual gifts (being sovereignly free to dispense, as He wills, all the gifts of 1 Corinthians 12:8-10) for the upbuilding of the body of Christ and the confirmation of His Word, by calling all the nations into the sway of the gospel of Christ, and, in all this, thus fulfilling the New Covenant promise to create and preserve a purified people for the everlasting habitation of God (John 16:13-14, Acts 1:8, Acts 16:14, John 3:8, 2 Corinthians 3:17-18, 1 Corinthians 12:7-10, Hebrews 2:3-4, Jeremiah 31:33-34).

8.3 We believe that, apart from the effectual work of the Spirit, no one would come to faith, because all are dead in trespasses and sins; that they are hostile to God, and morally unable to submit to God or please Him, because the pleasures of sin appear greater than the pleasures of God. Thus, for God's elect, the Spirit triumphs over all resistance, wakens the dead, removes blindness, and manifests Christ in such a compellingly beautiful way through the Gospel that He becomes irresistibly attractive to the regenerate heart (Ephesians 2:4-6, 4:17-19, 22, Romans 8:7-8, 6:17, 2 Corinthians 4:4-6).

8.4 We believe the Holy Spirit does this saving work in connection with the presentation of the Gospel of the glory of Christ. Thus neither the work of the Father in election, nor the work of the Son in atonement, nor the work of the Spirit in regeneration is a hindrance or discouragement to the proclamation of the gospel to all peoples and persons everywhere. On the contrary, this

divine saving work of the Trinity is the warrant and the ground of our hope that our evangelization is not in vain in the Lord. The Spirit binds His saving work to the gospel of Christ, because His aim is to glorify the Christ of the Gospel. Therefore we do not believe that there is salvation through any other means than through receiving the gospel by the power of the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 4:4-6, Acts 16:14, 1 Corinthians 1:18-25, Acts 4:12, Romans 10:13-15).²

9. The Justifying Act of God

9.1 We believe that in a free act of righteous grace God justifies the ungodly by faith alone apart from works, pardoning their sins, and reckoning them as righteous and acceptable in His presence. Faith is thus the sole instrument by which we, as sinners, are united to Christ, whose perfect righteousness and satisfaction for sins is alone the ground of our acceptance with God. This acceptance happens fully and permanently at the first instant of justification. Thus the righteousness by which we come into right standing with God is not anything worked in us by God, neither imparted to us at baptism nor over time, but rather is accomplished for us, outside ourselves, and is imputed to us (Titus 3:5-7, Romans 3:28, 4:6-8, 2 Corinthians 5:21, Colossians 1:21-23, Romans 5:1, Philippians 3:9).

9.2 We believe, nevertheless, that the faith, which alone receives the gift of justification, does not remain alone in the person so justified, but produces, by the Holy Spirit, the fruit of love and leads necessarily to sanctification. This necessary relation between justifying faith and the fruit of good works gives rise to some Biblical expressions which seem to make works the ground or means of justification, but in fact simply express the crucial truth that faith that does not yield the fruit of good works is dead, being no true faith (Galatians 5:6, 22-25, 1 John 3:14, Colossians 1:4-6, James 2:17, 26, Hebrews 12:14, Romans 8:13-14).

10. God's Work in Faith and Sanctification

10.1 We believe that justification and sanctification are both brought about by God through faith, but not in the same way. Justification is an act of God's imputing and reckoning; sanctification is an act of God's imparting and transforming. Thus the function of faith in regard to each is different. In regard to justification, faith is not the channel through which power or transformation flows to the soul of the believer, but rather faith is the occasion of God's forgiving, acquitting, and reckoning as righteous. But in regard to sanctification, faith is indeed the channel through which divine power and transformation flow to the soul; and the sanctifying work of God through faith does indeed touch the soul and change it into the likeness of Christ. The faith which alone justifies, cannot remain alone, but works through love (James 2:17, 26, Galatians 5:6, Romans 4:3, Romans 6:19, 22).

10.2 We believe that the reason justifying faith necessarily sanctifies in this way is threefold:

² The only possible exception would be in the case of infants and those with severe mental disability, whose minds are physically incapable of comprehending the gospel. While Scripture does not address this matter directly, we can be confident that He will act towards such individuals in perfect accord with His goodness, kindness, justice and mercy.

First, we believe that justifying faith trusts in Christ not only for the gift of imputed righteousness and the forgiveness of sins, but also for the fulfillment of all His promises to us based on that reconciliation. Justifying faith magnifies the finished work of Christ's atonement, by resting securely in all the promises of God obtained and guaranteed by that all-sufficient work (1 John 2:19, Philippians 1:6, 1 Thessalonians 5:23).

Second, we believe that justifying faith embraces Christ in all His roles: Creator, Sustainer, Savior, Teacher, Guide, Comforter, Helper, Friend, Advocate, Protector, Lord, and Hope. Justifying faith does not divide Christ, accepting part of Him and rejecting the rest. All of Christ is embraced by justifying faith, even before we are fully aware of, or fully understand, all that He will be for us. As more of Christ is truly revealed to us in His Word, genuine faith recognizes Christ and embraces Him more fully (John 1:1-3, Colossians 1:17, Luke 2:11, John 13:13, 14:27, 1 John 2:1, 2 Thessalonians 3:3, Romans 10:9).

Third, we believe that this embracing of all of Christ is not a mere intellectual assent, or a mere decision of the will, but is also a heartfelt, joyful, Spirit-given (though imperfect) embracing of all that God is for us in Jesus. Therefore, the change of mind and heart that turns from the moral ugliness and danger of sin, and is sometimes called "repentance," is included in the very nature of saving faith (John 6:35, 1 John 5:1-4, Hebrews 11:24-26, Matthew 3:8).

10.3 We believe that this simple, powerful reality of justifying faith is God's gift which He gives unconditionally in accord with God's electing love, so that no one can boast in himself, but only give all glory to God for every part of salvation. We believe that the Holy Spirit is the decisive agent in this life-transformation, but that He is supplied to us and works holiness in us through our daily faith in the Son of God whose trustworthiness He loves to glorify (Romans 8:29-30, Ephesians 2:8-9, 1 Corinthians 1:26-29, Romans 11:36, Galatians 2:20, 3:5).

10.4 We believe that the sanctification, which comes by the Spirit through faith, is imperfect and incomplete in this life. Although slavery to sin is broken, and sinful desires are progressively weakened by the power of a superior delight in the glory of Christ, yet there remain remnants of corruption in every heart that give rise to irreconcilable war, and call for vigilance in the lifelong fight of faith (Philippians 3:12, 1 John 2:1, Matthew 6:11-12, Galatians 5:16-18, Romans 6:11-14, Hebrews 3:12-13, 1 Timothy 6:12).

10.5 We believe that all who are justified will win this fight. They will persevere in faith and never surrender to the enemy of their souls. This perseverance is the promise of the New Covenant, obtained by the blood of Christ, and worked in us by God Himself, yet not so as to diminish, but only to empower and encourage, our vigilance; so that we may say in the end, I have fought the good fight, but it was not I, but the grace of God which was with me (Philippians 1:6, Romans 8:30, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, John 10:27-30, Hebrews 13:20-21, Philippians 2:12-13, 2 Timothy 4:7-8, 1 Corinthians 15:10).

11. Living God's Word by Meditation and Prayer

11.1 We believe that faith is awakened and sustained by God's Spirit through His Word and prayer. The good fight of faith is fought mainly by meditating on the Scriptures and praying that God would apply them to our souls (Romans 10:17, Ephesians 1:18-19, 2 Thessalonians 3:1, Ephesians 6:17-18, Hebrews 4:12, 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Psalm 119:18, 36).

11.2 We believe that the promises of God recorded in the Scriptures are suited to save us from the deception of sin by displaying for us, and holding out to us, superior pleasures in the protection, provision, and presence of God. Therefore, reading, understanding, pondering, memorizing, and savoring the promises of all that God will be for us in Jesus are primary means of the Holy Spirit to break the power of sin's deceitful promises in our lives. Therefore it is needful that we give ourselves to such meditation day and night (2 Peter 1:3-4, Hebrews 10:34, Hebrews 11:24-26, 2 Timothy 2:7, Psalm 119:11, Psalm 34:8, Psalm 1).

11.3 We believe that God has ordained to bless and use His people for His glory through the means of prayer, offered in Jesus' name by faith. All prayer should seek ultimately that God's name be hallowed, and that His kingdom come, and that His will be done on earth as it is done in heaven. God's sovereignty over all things is not a hindrance to prayer, but a reason for hope that our prayers will succeed (Philippians 4:6-7, Matthew 7:7-11, , Ephesians 6:19, James 1:5-8, Matthew 6:9-10).

12. Christ's Church and Her Ordinances

12.1 We believe in the one universal Church, composed of all those, in every time and place, who are chosen in Christ and united to Him through faith by the Spirit in one Body, with Christ Himself as the all-supplying, all-sustaining, all-supreme, and all-authoritative Head. We believe that the ultimate purpose of the Church is to glorify God in the everlasting and ever-increasing gladness of worship (Colossians 1:18, Ephesians 4:15-16, 3:10, Matthew 5:14-16, Revelation 5:9-12).

12.2 We believe it is God's will that the universal Church find expression in local churches in which believers agree together to hear the Word of God proclaimed, to engage in corporate worship, to practice the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper, to build each other's faith through the manifold ministries of love, to hold each other accountable in the obedience of faith through Biblical discipline, and to engage in local and world evangelization. The Church is a body in which each member should find a suitable way to steward their God-given spiritual gifts; it is the household of God in which the Spirit dwells; it is the pillar and bulwark of God's truth in a truth-denying world; and it is a city set on a hill so that men may see the light of its good deeds—especially to the poor—and give glory to the Father in heaven (Acts 8:1, 1 Corinthians 16:19, Ephesians 4:11-12, 2 Timothy 4:1-2, Colossians 3:15-16, Matthew 28:19, 1 Corinthians 11:23-26, Romans 12:6-8, Matthew 18:15-18, 1 Corinthians 12:13-18, Ephesians 2:20-22, 1 Timothy 3:15, Galatians 2:10, Matthew 5:14-16).

12.3 We believe that baptism is an ordinance of the Lord by which those who have repented and come to faith express their union with Christ in His death and resurrection, by being immersed in water in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is a sign of belonging to the new people of God, the true Israel, and an emblem of burial and cleansing, signifying death to

the old life of unbelief, and purification from the pollution of sin (Colossians 2:12, Galatians 3:26-27, 1 Corinthians 12:13, Romans 6:3-4, Acts 8:36-39, Matthew 28:19, Romans 2:28-29).

12.4 We believe that the Lord's Supper is an ordinance of the Lord in which gathered believers eat bread, signifying Christ's body given for His people, and drink the cup of the Lord, signifying the New Covenant in Christ's blood. We do this in remembrance of the Lord, and thus proclaim His death until He comes. Those who eat and drink in a worthy manner partake of Christ's body and blood, not physically, but spiritually, in that, by faith, they are nourished with the benefits He obtained through His death, and thus grow in grace (1 Corinthians 11:23-26, 17-20, 22, Luke 22:20, 1 Corinthians 10:16-17).

12.5 We believe that each local church should recognize and affirm the divine calling of spiritually qualified men to give leadership to the church through the role of pastor-elder in the ministry of the Word and prayer. Women are not to fill the role of pastor-elder in the local church, but are encouraged to use their gifts in appropriate roles that edify the body of Christ and spread the gospel (Ephesians 4:11-12, 1 Timothy 5:17, Acts 14:23, Titus 1:5, 1 Timothy 2:12-13).

12.6 We believe that in addition to pastor-elders, the other recognized office in the local church is the office of deacon. Deacons are to be believing and wise men of good reputation in the body. They are to serve the pastor-elders and the local church by meeting practical and spiritual needs as they arise among the body. While not limited to these, the deacons' focus is to be on those who might otherwise be overlooked or forgotten in daily ministry (Acts 6:1-6, Philippians 1:1, 1 Timothy 3:8-13).

13. Christ's Commission to Make Disciples of All Nations

We believe that the commission given by the Lord Jesus to make disciples of all nations is binding on His Church to the end of the age. This task is to proclaim the Gospel to every tribe and tongue and people and nation, baptizing them, teaching them to obey all that the Lord Jesus has commanded, and gathering them into churches able to fulfill their Christian calling among their own people. The ultimate aim of world missions is that God would create, by His Word and Spirit, worshippers who glorify His name through the obedience of faith. When the time of ingathering is over, and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever (Matthew 28:18-20, Revelation 5:9, Acts 14:23, Romans 1:5, 15:8-11).

14. Death, Resurrection, and the Coming of the Lord

14.1 We believe that when Christians die they are made perfect in holiness, are received into paradise, and are taken consciously into the presence of Christ, which is more glorious and more satisfying than any experience on earth (Hebrews 12:22-23, Luke 23:43, Philippians 1:23, 2 Corinthians 5:1-9).

14.2 We believe in the blessed hope, that at the end of the age Jesus Christ will return to this earth personally, visibly, physically, and suddenly in power and great glory; and that He will

gather His elect, raise the dead, free the natural creation from its bondage to corruption, judge the nations, banish Satan eternally, unite heaven and earth, and establish His eternal kingdom. We believe that the righteous will enter into the everlasting joy of their Master, and those who suppressed the truth in unrighteousness will be consigned to everlasting conscious misery (Titus 2:13, Acts 1:9-11, Mark 14:61-62, Luke 24:39-43, 1 Thessalonians 5:2-3, Luke 21:27, Matthew 24:31, 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17, Romans 8:19-25, Revelation 20:11-15, Revelation 21:1-5, 1 Corinthians 15:22-28, Matthew 25:46, 41, Daniel 12:2, 2 Thessalonians 1:9, Revelation 14:11).

14.3 We believe that the end of all things in this age will be the beginning of a never-ending, ever-increasing happiness in the hearts of the redeemed in the new heavens and new earth, the home of righteousness. All sin will be purged, and its wretched effects forever banished. God will be all in all, as He displays more and more of His infinite and inexhaustible greatness and glory for the eternal enthrallment of His people (2 Peter 3:13, Revelation 21-22, 1 Corinthians 15:28, Ephesians 2:6-7, 1 Corinthians 13:12, Psalm 16:11).

15. The Spirit of This Affirmation and the Unity of the Church

15.1 We do not believe that all things in this affirmation of faith are of equal weight, some being more essential, some less. We do not believe that every part of this affirmation must be believed in order for one to be saved.

15.2 Our aim is not to discover how little can be believed, but rather to embrace and teach the whole counsel of God. Our aim is to encourage a hearty adherence to the Bible, the fullness of its truth, and the glory of its Author. We believe Biblical doctrine stabilizes saints in the winds of confusion and strengthens the church in her mission to make disciples of all nations. We believe that the supreme virtue of love is nourished by the strong meat of God-centered doctrine. And we believe that a passion for the glory of God and the good of all peoples is awakened and sustained in an atmosphere of deep and joyful knowledge of God and His wonderful works (Acts 20:27, 1 Timothy 6:3-5, Ephesians 4:13-14, 1 Timothy 1:5, 2 Peter 1:2, Philippians 1:9-11).

15.3 We believe that the cause of unity in the church is best served, not by finding the lowest common denominator of doctrine, around which all can gather, but by elevating the value of truth, stating the doctrinal parameters of the church, seeking the unity that comes from the truth, and then demonstrating to the world how Christians can love each other across boundaries rather than by removing boundaries. In this way, the importance of truth is served by the existence of doctrinal borders, and unity is served by the way we love others across those borders (Ephesians 4:4-6, John 13:34-35, 17:20-23).

15.4 We do not claim infallibility for this affirmation and are open to refinement and correction from Scripture. Yet we do hold firmly to these truths as we see them and call on others to search the Scriptures to see if these things are so. As conversation and debate take place, it may be that we will learn from each other, and the boundaries will be adjusted, even possibly folding formerly disagreeing groups into closer fellowship (1 Corinthians 13:12, 2 Peter 3:18, Acts 17:11).

May God be glorified in this local congregation, of which Jesus Christ is the Head, and in all the earth!

"For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen."

Romans 11:36