

## **Covenant Grace Church – 'Doctrinal Statement'**

The following document consists of 3 parts: **A) Introduction** – a brief discussion about the importance of theology and sound interpretation, **B) Statement of Faith** – an overview of some essential Christian doctrines, and **C) What we don't believe**. All of this is written to make sure there are no misunderstandings about our convictions, to provide you with some insights into our philosophy of ministry, and to help you know what we believe about Life, God and Church.

- *"But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work." (2 Tim 3:14-17)*

### **A) Introduction**

#### ***A word about the Bible and Interpretation (Hermeneutics)***

*John Wesley once said, "I have thought I am a creature of a day, passing through life as an arrow through the air. I am a spirit come from God, and returning to God, just hovering over the great gulf, till a few moments hence, I am no more seen; I drop into an unchangeable eternity! I want to know one thing – the way to heaven, how to land safe on that happy shore. God himself has condescended to teach the way; for this his very end He came from heaven. He has written it down in a book. O give me that Book at any price; give me the Book of God"*

This Book has been costly. Martyrs wrote it and others have suffered intensely for their faithfulness to it. The book has been preserved and passed down through painstaking efforts. It has been translated into the language of thousands of peoples, sometimes at the cost of life, not to mention time, energy and money. It is from this book that we learn what the apostles taught concerning the ultimate sacrifice of the Son of God. It is from this book that we learn about the sovereignty and grace of God in all things. It is from this book that we get to see God, hear God, and know God as our Father.

If a rich uncle left his huge inheritance to the person named in his will, and you knew you were that person, you would be very zealous to see that the court interpreted his 'will' in a way consistent with the author's original intended meaning. Or if you were desperately sick with a terminal disease, and you heard of a doctor who knew the cure, and he wrote down a health program for you, you would do everything in your power to understand what the doctor meant and do whatever the program called for. How much more should we, like Wesley, regard the Word of God to be precious and most worthy of study!

Because the Bible alone is the inerrant, infallible authority for what we are to believe about God and how he wants us to live, it is no surprise that we often bring baggage to the text. By nature we don't like the thought of absolute authority residing in anyone/anything outside of ourselves. What if God commands me to do something I don't want to do? Or what if He portrays himself in a way that differs from the way I think he should be? This would lead to a tremendous pressure to import our own meanings ('eisogesis') into the text rather than content ourselves with the authors intended meaning ('exegesis') wherever it may lead.

Most evangelicals believe that God humbled himself not only in the incarnation of the Son, but also in the inspiration of the scriptures. The 'baby manger' and the cross were not sensational - neither are grammar and prepositions. But that is how God chose to reveal himself. A poor Jewish son and a prepositional phrase have this in common - they are both human and both ordinary. That the poor son was God and the prepositional phrase is the Word of God does not change this fact. Therefore, if God humbled himself to take on human flesh and to speak human language, woe to us if we arrogantly ignore the humanity of Christ and the grammar (words) of Scripture!

- *"These things I have **spoken** to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full." (John 15: 11)*

But it is not enough to say that God's revelation in Scripture comes to us in human language. It comes in the language of particular humans in particular times and places. When God spoke through men, he did not always use the same language or the same style or same vocabulary. Rather all the evidence points to the fact that God always availed himself of the language and style of individual Biblical writers. We learn therefore, that God's meaning in scripture is only accessible through a correct understanding of the *historical* and *grammatical* language of the various human authors. Our most immediate goal then, is to understand what the Biblical authors willed to communicate to their immediate hearers, with the resulting interpretation having primarily a single meaning. Only thereafter are we to make a current/contemporary application in the light of ALL scripture.

### ***A word about Covenant Theology and Hermeneutics***

Covenant theology says, "We interpret the Bible literally, but, we believe that the New Testament interprets the Old Testament." We believe that the New Testament is the hermeneutical manual for the Old Testament - *"The New Testament is in the Old Testament concealed, and the Old Testament is in the New Testament revealed"* (Louis Berkhof).

Many modern day Christians (E.g. Dispensationalists) tend to be suspicious of this. When you say that the New Testament must interpret the Old Testament, they get a little bit edgy, because they feel you are about to spiritualize something that the Old Testament has said for them very clearly. We however, believe that the New Testament has the final word as the meaning of that passage, whereas some Christians tend to want to interpret the Old Testament and then go to the New Testament and attempt to harmonize the particular teaching of the New Testament with their previous interpretation of that Old Testament passage.

**Ligon Duncan gives this classic example** - *"the most important passage in the Bible, from a Dispensational perspective is Amos chapter 9. Well, of course, Amos 9 is interpreted in Acts chapter 15, but the interpretation of Amos 9 that is given in Acts 15 is diametrically opposed to the central principle of Dispensationalism. So how does the Dispensationalist deal with that? Well, he gives you his "literal interpretation" of Amos 9 and then simply attempts to harmonize the teaching of Acts 15 with his previous literal interpretation of Amos 9, whereas the Covenant Theologian says no, "James tells you what Amos 9 means in Acts 15, and therefore, James' interpretation must exercise all hermeneutical control even when you are doing your own original exegesis of Amos 9." Because if James says that is what Amos 9 means, and James is speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit recorded in Acts chapter 15, then that is what Amos 9 means."*

Lastly, Covenant Theology accepts the Protestant idea of the '*analogy of faith*', that Scripture interprets Scripture (1 Co 2:13). Again some believers are dubious about that principle, because they think that it is a way to spiritualize away literal prophecies in the Old Testament. But for the Covenant theologian, the New Testament always has the final word as to the meaning of the Old Testament passage (E.g. Gal 3:7-18; 4:21-31; 1 Co 9:9-11). It doesn't mean that you don't start with the original context, and that you don't bother yourself about original intent, it just means that you recognize from a biblical standpoint that later revelation, by definition, controls the final theological understanding of earlier revelation. The ultimate aim of Covenant theology is to uphold the unity of the Scriptures by maintaining a *Christ-centred* emphasis for every text and context in the Word of God. (See the following - John 5:39, 46-47; Luke 24:27, 44; Acts 1:15-20; 2:30-31; 26:22-23; 28:23; Rom 15:4)

**I conclude then with this:** A fruit of the Spirit is love. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not puffed up. On the contrary, "*love rejoices in the truth*" (1 Co 13:6). This is the mark of a good Bible teacher (Pastor), he seeks not his own, he seeks the truth. If the truth he finds conflicts with his own idea, he rejoices to have found the truth and humbly acknowledges that he was mistaken. We must make every effort to deal with the Bible ***historically, grammatically, and in a Christ-centred manner!***

## **B) Statement of Faith**

### ***The Scriptures (Bibliology)***

We believe in the Holy Bible consisting of the Old and New Testament Scriptures (66 Books) to be the verbally inspired Word of God, inerrant and infallible in the original writings (2 Pet. 1:20-21; John 16:12-13). We believe that the Bible is the only essential and authoritative record of God's self-revelation to mankind, and therefore it is sufficient for all righteousness and obedience (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

We believe in the covenantal unity of the Scriptures and affirm that ALL Scripture points to redemption through faith in Christ Jesus (Luke 24:27, 44; Acts 4:11-12; 28:23; John 5:46). We believe that each book of the Bible is to be interpreted according to its historical and grammatical context and that all believers are exhorted to study the Scriptures and diligently apply them to their lives. The Scriptures are the final authoritative and normative rule for all Christian life, practice, and doctrine. They are totally sufficient and must not be added to, superseded, or changed by later tradition, extra-biblical revelation, or worldly wisdom. Every doctrinal formulation, whether of 'historical creed', 'confession of faith', or 'systematic theology' must be put to the test of the full counsel of God in Holy Scripture. [In addition, we agree with the Chicago statement on Biblical inerrancy, 1978.]

*Why this is important:*

The Bible teaches in Rom. 10:17, "*So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*" Thus, we see the distinct yet inseparable work of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God (i.e. The Bible). Both are essential for salvation and are our primary means to know and understand who God is, to grow in faith and maturity and to learn the promises that God has given us. Finally, the *Word* and the *Spirit who inspired the Word* should never be set against one another or be perceived as two separate tracks, but rather as two inextricably united means for all that pertains to life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3).

### ***The Godhead (The Trinity)***

We believe in One God eternally existing in three persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—and that these persons are co-equal in nature, power, and glory, having the same attributes and perfections (Deut. 6:4; 2 Cor. 13:14), being equal in essence, but uniquely distinct in function. [In addition we agree with the Apostles Creed, the Nicene Creed (AD 325), the Chalcedonian Creed (AD 451), and the Athanasian Creed.]

*Why this is important:*

The God who was and is and will be, declares Himself to be alone in the heavens. This means that He alone is God and there is none besides Him. In believing this we understand that many individuals, including Muslims, Mormons, and Jehovah's Witnesses, place their hope in gods who are not there. This doctrine clearly distinguishes the Christian faith from almost all other religious movements. The ramifications of this, motivates us to declare to the world with our lips and lives who this true and living God is.

### ***God the Father (Theology Proper)***

God the Father is the Creator of heaven and earth. By his word and for his glory, he freely and supernaturally created the world from nothing ('ex-nihilo'). Through the same Word he daily sustains all his creatures (providence). He rules over all, is the only sovereign and His plans and purposes cannot be thwarted. He is faithful to every promise, works all things together for good to those who love him, and in his unfathomable grace gave his Son, Jesus Christ, to satisfy His righteous wrath and secure mankind's redemption. Although completely independent ('aseity'), He made man for fellowship with himself, and intended that all creation should live to the praise of his glory. (Rev 4:11; 1 Tim 6:15-16; 1 Cor 10:31)

### ***Jesus Christ (Christology)***

Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, was the eternal Word made flesh, supernaturally conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary (John 1:1-2, 14; Luke 1:35). He was perfect in nature, teaching, and obedience. The incarnate Christ was fully God and fully man ('hypostatic union'). He was eternally with God and is God. Through him all things came into being and were created. He was before all things and in him all things hold together by the word of his power. He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation, and in him dwells the fullness of the Godhead bodily (Col. 1: 15-20; 2:9). He is the only Saviour for the sins of the world, having shed his blood and died a vicarious death on the cross. By his death in our place, he revealed divine love and upheld divine justice, removing our guilt and reconciling us to God. Having redeemed us from sin, the third day he rose bodily from the grave, victorious over death and the powers of darkness, and for a period of 40 days appeared to more than 500 witnesses, performing many convincing proofs of his resurrection (Rom. 3:24-25, 5: 6-10; 1 Pet. 2:24; Eph. 1:7; 1 Pet. 1:3-5). He physically ascended into heaven and is now exalted at the right hand of God where, as our High Priest, He fulfils the ministry of Representative, Intercessor, and Advocate (Acts 1:9-10; Heb. 7:25; 9:24; Rom. 8:34; 1 John 2:1-2). He is the Head of his body, the Church, and should be adored, loved, served, and obeyed by all.

*Why this is important:*

Jesus the 'God-Man' is the unique revelation of God, the Saviour of God's children, declaring Himself to be the only way to the Father (John 14:6; 1 Tim 2:5). Because of Jesus' sinless life and perfect obedience - His life, death and

resurrection perfectly satisfied God's just wrath and atoned for the sins of all who place their faith and trust in Him.

This reality calls us to a life of mission to minister to those whom He sought (Is. 61:1-3). We see ourselves as deserving nothing yet receiving everything necessary to have a right relationship with the Father through the work of the Son. As Jesus initiates a relationship with us, so He calls us to initiate relationships with the lost. He demonstrated His love towards us while we were yet sinners, and this compels us to follow the same pattern and walk as He walked in the pursuit of the lost. Our motivation to love and serve the world and our desire to live a life worthy of the calling to which we were called comes from understanding the beauty of Jesus.

### ***The Holy Spirit (Pneumatology)***

The Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life, convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgement. Through the proclamation of the Gospel, He irresistibly persuades men to repent of their sins and confess Jesus as Lord. The Holy Spirit effectually brings about the new birth (regeneration), uniting believers to Jesus Christ in faith, and baptises all believers into the body of Christ, indwelling and sealing them unto the day of redemption (John 16:8-11; 2 Cor. 3:6; 1 Cor. 12:12-14; Rom. 8:9). We believe the Holy Spirit inspired the written Word of God and that He will lead the Church into a right understanding and rich application of the truth of God's Word (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20-21). He is to be respected, honoured, and worshipped as God the Third Person of the Trinity.

### ***Empowered by the Spirit***

In addition to inspiring the Scriptures and effecting regeneration, the Holy Spirit also empowers believers for Christian witness and service (Acts 1:8). We believe that God sovereignly ("*as He wills*") bestows spiritual gifts upon His people for the "*common good of the church*" (1 Co. 12:7, 11).

The baptism of (or 'in') the Holy Spirit, although distinct from conversion, occurs at conversion (upon faith in Christ) and is the uniting of the believer to the body of Christ (1 Co 12:13; Acts 2:38-39; Rom 8:9; John 7:39). While all genuine believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit at conversion, the New Testament also indicates the importance of an ongoing, empowering work of the Spirit subsequent to conversion (Eph 5:18). Being *indwelt* by the Spirit and being *filled* with the Spirit are theologically distinct experiences. The Holy Spirit desires to fill each believer continually with increased power for Christian life and witness, and sovereignly imparts his spiritual gifts for the edification of the Body and for various works of ministry in the world.

We also believe that particular spiritual gifts are neither essential for salvation (proving the presence of the Holy Spirit) nor an indication of a deeper spiritual walk or experience (1 Cor. 12:7, 27-31; 13:1-3). It is the privilege and responsibility of every believer to serve the church according to the gifts and grace of God given to them (Rom. 12:1-8; 1 Pet. 4:10-11).

We believe in a miracle working God and that He graciously answers prayers of faith for the sick and afflicted in accordance with His own sovereign will (1 John 5:14-15, Jms 5:14). While all the gifts of the Spirit are vital for the mission and health of the church, they are always subject to love and are to be practised and judged in accordance with biblical standards and guidelines (1 Co 13; 14:20-40). The fullness of the Spirit's work in a believer's life will testify of Jesus and result in a greater evidence of the fruits of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, self-control, etc. Thus, it is biblical to expect that when people are *filled with the Spirit*, these attributes don't diminish or disappear, but increase (Gal 5:22).

Specifically, we believe that the New Testament 'gift of prophecy' does *not* carry intrinsic (divine) authority, and is not equal to, but subject to the Scriptures. Therefore, all contemporary prophecy does not challenge the 'doctrine of canonicity' or the sufficiency of the Scriptures and is best understood as occurring when "a spontaneous revelation from God is reported in the prophet's own (merely human) words". In this way these subjective insights (prophecies) serve as a sign for believers and are a clear demonstration (in addition to providence) that God is at work in our midst (1 Co. 14:22). Also, because all contemporary prophecy is fallible (in part), and has elements of the speakers own understanding and interpretation in it, it should always be reported or delivered as 'man's word' (i.e. "I think God might be saying...or I have something to share..."). These prophecies ('man's words') are then able (theologically and practically) to be sifted and tested against 'Gods Word' (1 Co 14:29-40; 1 Thes. 5:19-21). [For more information on this understanding of NT prophecy refer to: Wayne Grudem, DA Carson, Craig Simonian and John Piper]

*Why this is important:*

The primary role of the Holy Spirit is to Glorify Jesus Christ; nothing that the Spirit does will detract or divert attention from the person, work, character, and teachings of Jesus. Thus, the ministry of the Spirit and the Word (Jesus – Jn 1:1) are inextricably linked and never contradict each other (John 15:26; 16:13-15; 1 Co 12:3). The Holy Spirit resides permanently in his children and gives them the power to love and serve the Father through the Son. The Holy Spirit is the anointing of God and He works alongside all believers as our comforter, helper and sanctifier. We are fully dependent on the Holy Spirit to remain faithful to God, and to lead us into truth by illuminating the Scriptures (1 John 2:27).

This doctrine also emphasizes the communal nature of our faith. The Christian life is one of community, not autonomy. We live dependently on God and one another as the body of Christ. Thus each member, when employing his or her gifts to the glory of God, contributes to the beauty, vitality, and unity of the church. This motivates us to use our spiritual gifts, for they were *not* given to us for our personal edification, but for the edification (building up) of the church (1 Co.12:7; 14:12, 26, 31; Rom 12:3-8; 1 Pet 4:10).

### ***Humanity (Anthropology)***

God made man—male and female—in his own image, as the crown of creation, that man might have fellowship with him (Gen. 1:26-27). Tempted by Satan, man rebelled against God. Being estranged from his maker, yet responsible to him, he became subject to divine wrath, inwardly depraved and, apart from a special work of grace, utterly incapable of returning to God (Eph 2:1-3). This depravity is radical and pervasive. It extends to his mind, will, and affections. Unregenerate man lives under the dominion of sin and Satan (Rom 5:12), he is at enmity with God, and hostile toward God. Fallen, sinful people, whatever their character or attainments, are lost and without hope apart from salvation in Christ (Rom. 3:10-18, 23).

*Why this is important:*

Our understanding of the nature of humanity is crucial to our understanding of ministry. Because of humanity's innate sinful nature (Ps 51:5) we not only see man's desperate need of salvation, but we acknowledge that this doctrine serves to magnify the amazing beauty of God's grace and love (Rom 5:6-8). Man is blind in the darkness of sin, dead in trespasses, and thus totally incapable of finding his way, working his way, or buying his way to the Father, and yet God is gracious enough to save a vast multitude of people (Titus 3:4-7). God sent His Son to redeem sinners, and the Father and the Son send the Spirit to call sinners unto the promise of that redemption ('Saving Grace' - John 6:44, 63-65).

In addition, God sends us to proclaim to all people the redemption that God offers in the Gospel (Rom 10:13-17). Through Christ we seek to emulate God's love for the world ('Common Grace') by showing compassion toward sinful humanity and pursuing social justice in the hope that He will *through the Gospel* transform sinners into saints. Finally, we believe that the healing of the broken-hearted and the satisfaction of the deepest longings in men and women are not ultimately met through the alleviation of poverty or suffering, nor through the improvement of society and culture (*although these are good and necessary Christian works*), but primarily through the proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ, resulting in the reconciliation of man to God (2 Co.5:17-20).

### ***The Gospel***

Jesus Christ is the gospel. The good news is revealed in his birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension. Christ's crucifixion reveals the heart of the gospel, his resurrection is the power of the gospel, and his ascension is the glory of the gospel. Christ's death was a substitutionary and propitiatory sacrifice to God for our sins. It satisfies the demands of God's holy justice and appeases his holy wrath (Rom. 3:23-26; 2 Co. 5:21). It also demonstrates his mysterious love and reveals his amazing grace.

Jesus Christ is the only mediator between God and man. There is no other name (nor means) by which men must be saved (Acts 4:12). At the heart of all sound doctrine is the finished work of Jesus Christ – we are saved by the Gospel, into the Gospel and for the Gospel. Therefore, we are not ashamed of the Gospel and want all that takes place in our hearts, lives, and ministry to proceed from and be related to the Gospel/Cross, for it is the very power of God. (Rom 1:16; 1 Co 2:2).

### ***Man's Response to the Gospel (Soteriology)***

Man's response to the gospel is completely based in the free and unconditional election of God for his own pleasure and glory (See - Eph 1:3-14; Rom. 9:11-24; 1 Pet 1:3-5; Rom 8:29-30; Acts 13:48; John 10:26; Rev 5:9; 17:8). Salvation then, is the free gift of God, granted by grace alone, through faith alone, because of Christ alone, for the glory of God alone (Eph. 2:8-10). Anyone turning from sin and trusting in Christ and his substitutionary death receives the gift of eternal life and is declared righteous by God. Because of this faith, the righteousness of Christ is imputed to him, and he is justified and fully accepted by God (Rom 4:22-24; 6:23). Through Christ's atonement for sin an individual is reconciled to God and becomes his child (John 1:12; Rom 8:16). The believer is forgiven the debt of his sin and, via the miracle of regeneration, liberated from the law of sin and death into the freedom of God's Spirit (Rom. 8:2).

It is equally true that the message of the gospel is only effectual to those who genuinely repent of their sins and, by God's grace, put saving faith in Christ (Acts 2:38). This gospel message is also the *means* which God has ordained to bring the elect unto faith (Rom. 1:18; 10:17) and therefore it is to be sincerely preached to all men in all nations (Matt 28:19; John 10:16). Biblical repentance is characterized by a changed life, and saving faith is evidenced by good works (2 Pet. 1:3-11). While neither philanthropy nor good works save, unless a person is willing to deny himself, pick up his cross, and follow Christ, he cannot become his disciple (Luke 9:23).

#### *Why this is important?*

It is by the sheer grace and mercy of God that we are saved. In this unmerited grace we humbly recognize that God has acted on our behalf and that He continues "to work in us to will and to do" according to his good pleasure (Phil 2:13). The 'doctrines of grace' and the 'sovereignty of God' are the heart and soul of the Gospel, and when we embrace these truths, it radically transforms our

lives and ministries from being pragmatic and man-centred to being Christ exalting and God-glorifying!

### **Sanctification**

The Holy Spirit is the active agent in our sanctification and seeks to produce his fruit in us as our minds are renewed and we are conformed to the image of Christ (1Thes 5:23-24). Though indwelling sin remains a reality, as we are led by the Spirit we grow in the knowledge of the Lord, freely keeping his commandments and endeavouring to so live in the world that all people may see our good works and glorify our Father who is in heaven.

All believers are exhorted to persevere in the faith, knowing they will have to give an account to God for their every thought, word, and deed. The spiritual disciplines, especially Bible study, prayer, worship, confession and the ordinances, are a vital 'means of grace' in this regard.

Nevertheless, the believer's ultimate confidence to persevere is based in the sure promise of God to preserve his people until the end, which is most certain (Phil 1:6; Heb 12:2). We believe that all the redeemed, once truly saved, are kept by God's power and are thus secure in Christ forever (John 6:37-40; 10:27-30; Rom. 8:1, 38-39; 1 Cor. 1:4-8; 1 Pet. 1:5). We believe it is the privilege of believers to rejoice in the assurance of their salvation through the testimony of God's word which clearly forbids the use of Christian liberty as an occasion to sin (Rom. 13:13-14; Gal. 5:13; Titus 2:11-15).

*Why this is important:*

The joyful proclamation of the Gospel to the world comes from secure believers who have experienced salvation and are being transformed by the hope that is in Jesus. We persevere in faith and in service together for the inheritance that awaits us. God preserves His children forever, and this motivates us toward joy, away from works of self-righteousness, and into the fruit-bearing ministry to which God calls us.

### **The Church (Ecclesiology)**

We believe that the church, which is the body and bride of Christ, is a spiritual organism made up of all born-again persons of all ages (Eph. 1:22-23; 5:25-27; 1 Cor. 12:12-14; 2 Cor. 11:2). God through his Son and by his Word and Spirit creates the Church, by calling sinful men and women from every nation, tribe and tongue into the fellowship of Christ's Body (Matt 16:18). The Church is not a religious institution, club or denomination. Rather, the Church universal is made up of those who have become genuine followers of Jesus Christ and have personally appropriated the gospel. The Church exists to worship and glorify God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit ("*The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.*" – Westminster Catechism). It also exists to serve him by faithfully doing his will in the earth. This involves a commitment to see the gospel preached and churches planted in the entire world for a testimony. We believe that the establishment and continuance of local churches with the appointed offices of elders (pastors) and deacons is clearly taught and defined in the New Testament Scriptures (Acts 14:27; 18:22; 20:17; 1 Tim. 3:1-3; Titus 1:5-11). We believe in the autonomy of the local church—that each local church is eldership led, and although the elders are encouraged to seek the wisdom that comes from the congregation and others, they are free of any external authority and control (Acts 13:1-4; 15:19-31; 20:28; 1 Cor. 3:9; 5:4-7, 13; 1 Pet. 5:1-4).

The ultimate mission of the Church is the making of disciples through the proclamation and demonstration of the Gospel (Matt 28:19). When God transforms human nature, *this* then becomes the chief means of society's

transformation. Upon conversion, newly redeemed men and women are added to the church and in this way the Kingdom of God grows. The Kingdom of God is best defined and summarized by the following statements, '*The Rule and Reign of Christ*' and '*Already and not Yet*' (Luke 17:20-21; Rom 8:18-25). Therefore, wherever the rule and reign of Christ is, there the Kingdom of God is too. Thus, we believe that although the Kingdom of God and the Church are distinct from one another, the one does not grow, influence or increase apart from the other (Matt 16:18-19; Acts 28:28-31). An understanding of the '*Already, and not Yet*' kingdom principle, is crucial to avoiding the errors of an "*under or over-realized eschatology*", especially in relation to the timing of miracles and healings.

All members of the Church universal are to be a vital and committed part of a local church in which they devote themselves to teaching, fellowship, the Lord's Supper, and prayer. In this context they are called to walk out the New Covenant as the people of God, and demonstrate the reality of the kingdom of God (Acts 2:42-47).

We believe the ascended Christ has given gift ministries to the church (including apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers) for the equipping of Christ's body that it might mature and grow (Eph 4:11). In saying this, we also recognise the important uniqueness and authority of the 'Apostles of Christ' (The 12, plus Paul) and affirm that certain of their ministry requirements and functions, have necessarily ceased (Eph 2:20; 3:4-5; 1 Co 9:1; 2 Co 12:12).

No one today would disagree that contemporary 'teachers' *do not* teach with the same revelation and authority as the Apostle Paul did, and yet the 'gift of teaching' continues to be necessary and of value in the church. Therefore, the continuation of these gift ministries beyond the close of the canon of Scripture (1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.) is best understood as "*analogous*" to that of Christ's authoritative representatives (Apostolic band). In other words, it is the same grace gift, but because the Word of God has been "*once for all delivered to the saints*" (Jude 3), these gifts are not necessarily withdrawn, but continue to function *without* the Holy Spirits superseding infallibility and authority as they did before (2 Pet 1:21). [For more on this subject see – "*Analogous Spiritual Gifts*" by Vern S. Poythress; Sovereign Grace Ministries "policy and polity manual", and "*Exploring the Gap between the Big and Little 'A'*" – A Fresh Look at Apostolic Ministry by Dave Harvey]

Through these gift ministries, all members of the Church are to be nurtured and equipped for the work of ministry. Women play a vital role in the life of the church and are encouraged use their gifts and participate in ministry, but in keeping with God's Word and complementary design, eldership in the church is reserved for men (1 Tim 3:2; 1 Tim 2:12-13; Tit 1:5-9). [For more info refer to '*Recovering Biblical manhood and womanhood*' by Wayne Grudem and John Piper and also the Danvers Statement – [www.cbmw.org](http://www.cbmw.org)]

### **Ordinances of the Church**

Water baptism is intended only for the individual who has entered the New Covenant, having received the saving benefits of Christ's atoning work and become his disciple (Heb 8:8-13). Therefore, in obedience to Christ's command and as a testimony to God, the Church, oneself, and the world, a believer should be immersed in water in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Water baptism is a visual demonstration of a person's union with Christ in the likeness of his death and resurrection. It signifies that his former way of life has been put to death, and vividly depicts a person's release from the slavery of sin.

As with water baptism, the Lord's Supper is to be observed only by those who have become genuine followers of Christ. This ordinance symbolizes the breaking

of Christ's body and the shedding of his blood on our behalf, and is to be observed repeatedly throughout the Christian life as a sign of continued participation in the atoning benefits of Christ's death. As we partake of the Lord's Supper with an attitude of faith and self-examination, we remember and proclaim the death of Christ, receive spiritual nourishment for our souls, and signify our unity with other members of Christ's body. (Matt 28:19-20; Acts 2:41-42; 18:8; 1 Cor. 11:23-26).

### ***The Consummation (Eschatology)***

The Consummation of all things includes the once-off visible, personal and glorious return of Jesus Christ, the resurrection of the dead and the translation of those alive in Christ, the judgement of the just and the unjust, and the fulfilment of Christ's kingdom in the new heavens and the new earth.

In the end, Satan with his hosts and all those outside Christ are condemned to eternal punishment, but the righteous, in glorious bodies, shall live and reign with him forever. Married to Christ as his Bride, the Church will be in the presence of God forever, serving him and giving him unending praise and glory. Then shall the eager expectation of creation be fulfilled and the whole earth shall proclaim the glory of God who makes all things new. (1 Thes 4:3-18; Rev. 3:10, 19:11-16, 20:1-6; 1 Thes. 1:10, 5:9; Rev.3:10).

*Why is this important?*

We do not know when Jesus will return (Matt 24:36), but we do know He is visibly coming again. We hope and long for that day, and we seek to be about the Father's business until that time.

### **C) What the elders of Covenant Grace Church do not believe**

To help clarify our beliefs it may also be helpful to declare what we do not believe. In stating what we are not, we do not seek to attack those who disagree with us, but rather distinguish ourselves so that you can be clear about our convictions and doctrinal emphasis.

- We are not *Liberals (emergent)*...who embrace culture without discernment and compromise the authority of the Scripture, but rather evangelicals who believe that ALL of the Bible's teachings are inerrant, authoritative, and eternal...therefore relevant for every time, place, and people.
- We are not *Fundamentalists*...who retreat from cultural involvement and transformation, but rather missionary's faithful both to the content of Scripture and context of ministry.
- We are not *Isolationists*...and seek to fellowship and partner with like-minded Christians from various churches, denominations and organizations.
- We are not *Arminians*...who believe that God elects (saves) on condition of foreseen faith in the individual, but rather believe that God unconditionally and sovereignly saves his elect by graciously granting faith and repentance as a free gift.
- We are not *Hyper-Calvinists*...who minimize God's appointed means, but rather pray, evangelize, and do good works because we believe that the sovereign plan of God is accomplished through us, His people.
- We are not *Theonomists*...whose goal is to bring in the Kingdom of God through Christian reconstruction in society, but rather believe that the covenantal mandate to advance the Kingdom is *primarily* soteriological, not cultural.

- We are not *Dispensationalists*...who believe that the church is a 'parenthesis' in God's plan of redemption and that God has a completely separate plan for Israel and the church. Rather we believe in the unity of the covenants and affirm that Christ will visibly return for *One Bride*, the Church consisting of many people from every nation, tribe and tongue.
- We are not *Supercessionists (replacement theology)*...who say that the New Testament church is a replacement of *ethnic* Israel, but rather we believe that the New Testament church is a continuation of the True Spiritual Israel.
- We are not *Egalitarians*...and do believe that men should head their homes and male elders should lead their churches (complementarian).
- We are not *Open Theists*...and believe in the complete sovereignty and foreknowledge of God in all things for all eternity.
- We are not *Moralists*...seeking only to help people live good lives, but instead evangelists laboring that people would become new creations in Christ.
- We are not *Relativists*...and do gladly embrace Scripture as our highest authority above such things as culture, experience, philosophy, contemporary prophecy and other forms of revelation.
- We are not *Cessationists*...and although we affirm the unique authority and function of the sign gifts during the founding of the NT church (Apostolic era), we believe that the all gifts of the Holy Spirit continue to serve an edifying and equipping purpose, and therefore are sovereignly given by God to the church in all ages.
- We are not *Universalists*...and do believe that many people will spend eternity in the torments of hell as the Bible teaches.
- We are not *Evangelical feminists*...and do believe that God reveals Himself as a Father and is to be honored by the names He reveals to us without apology.
- We are not *ashamed*...and do proclaim a loving gospel of grace which sounds like foolishness and offensiveness to the unrepentant while also saving multitudes with ears to hear good news.
- We are not *Polemicists*...who believe that it is our task to combat every false teaching but are passionate about preserving the integrity of the Scriptures and the purity of the church. Our *primary* objective is not to defend the Gospel, but to advance the Gospel.

*"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places."*

***Ephesians 1:3***

(Covenant Grace Church, gladly acknowledges that the above information has been influenced in style and content by the following sources: 'The ESV Study Bible', 'The Acts 29 Network' and 'Sovereign Grace Ministries')