

Statement of Faith
Grace Church Williamsburg

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I. The Word of God

We believe and teach that the Holy Scriptures, as found in the 66 books of the Bible, are the authoritative Word of God (Deut. 4:2; 12:32; Prov. 30:6; Rev. 22:19). Every word of the original documents, both Old and New Testaments, is inspired by God (2 Tim. 3:15-17). Inspiration is the process by which God communicated His Word through those who wrote the Bible (2 Peter 1:20-21).

Because the Bible is inspired, it is inerrant (without error) in all that it says (Psalm 19:7-9; Psalm 119:160; John 17:17) and infallible (fully trustworthy, reliable, and faithful – Psalm 19:7-9; perfectly achieving God's purposes – Is. 55:11). As God's Word, it is our supreme and sufficient authority for all matters pertaining to life, faith, and practice (Matt. 4:4; 2 Peter 1:3).

To be precise (2 Tim. 2:15), there are four components that control the way we interpret Scripture:

- **Literal.** We explain Scripture according to its normal meaning. This method considers the various figures of speech and literary forms intended by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20-21).
- **Grammatical.** This reveals the meaning of Scripture through the words and their arrangement.
- **Historical.** Since the Bible was written in a cultural context, it is helpful to understand its history and culture.
- **Contextual.** This is the primary way to determine the particular meaning of a word or passage. Each passage of Scripture has only one correct interpretation although it can be applied in a variety of ways. Thus, the Christian must not only seek to understand the Bible, but also to follow what it says (Deut. 32:44-47; Matt. 5:17-19; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; Heb. 4:12-13; James 1:22-25).

II. The Trinity of God

We believe and teach that there is only one God (Deut. 6:4; Isa. 45:5-7; 1 Cor. 8:4, 6; James 2:19), one in essence, yet eternally existing in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Isa. 48:16; Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14). God is glorious because of who He is and what He has done. As the God of glory, He deserves our worship and obedience.

A. God the Father

We believe and teach that God the Father, who is the first person of the Godhead, has revealed Himself generally in creation (Psalm 19:1; Rom. 1:20) and conscience (Rom. 1:19; 2:14-16), but more specifically in the Bible (Psalm 19:7-11) and in His Son Jesus Christ (John 1:18; 14:9-10; Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:1-2).

God has revealed Himself in His Word so that we might understand His character. The following list of attributes are some of the characteristics of His nature. God's nature must not be separated into individual parts, but like the facets of a diamond, they reveal various perspectives of God's character.

The attributes of God can be grouped in two broad categories – those that are unique to God alone, and those that can be reflected to some degree by man. Some of God's unique attributes are: eternal (Psalm 90:2), self-existence (Ex. 3:14), infinite and free (Psalm 115:3; Acts 17:24-25), Creator (Gen. 1-2; Rev. 4:11), invisible (Rom. 1:20; Col. 1:15; 1 Tim. 1:17), all-knowing (Psalm 139:1-6; Rom. 11:33), all-powerful (Job 40-42; Isa. 40; Luke 1:37), everywhere present yet distinct from creation (Psalm 139:7-11; Jer. 23:23-24), unchanging (Mal. 3:6; James 1:17), and incomprehensible (Deut. 29:29; Isa. 55:8-9).

Some of the attributes that can be reflected to some degree are: sovereign as seen in creation, providence, and redemption (Psalm 103:19; 135:5-6; Dan. 4:17, 25, 34-35; Rom. 9:6-24; Eph. 1:11), holy (Isa. 6:3; Rev. 4:8), just (Gen. 18:25; Psalm 89:14; Rom. 9:14), perfect (Deut. 32:4; Matt. 5:48), faithful (Psalm 36:5; Lam. 3:23; 1 Cor. 10:13; 1 John 1:9), loving (Deut. 7:7-8; John 3:16; Rom. 5:6-10; 1 John 4:8, 16), wrathful (Ezek. 5:13-15; John 3:36), truthful (Dan. 4:37; Rom. 3:4), gracious (Deut. 7:9-10; Rom. 3:24; 6:23; Titus 2:11; James 4:6), merciful (Psalm 119:156; Eph. 2:4; 1 Peter 1:3), good (Psalm 100:5; Matt. 7:11; James 1:17), and jealous (Ex. 20:5; 34:14; Josh. 24:19).

Finally, God is transcendent, completely beyond His creation (Psalm 113:4-5; Isa. 57:15). Yet He is also immanent, intimately involved with His creation (Psalm 113:6-9; Isa. 57:15).

B. God the Son

We believe and teach that Jesus Christ, who is the second member of the Godhead, is the eternal Son of God, who has the same essence and attributes as the Father (Micah 5:2; John 1:1-3; 8:58; 10:30; 14:9).

1. The Person of Jesus Christ

Aside from His appearances in the Old Testament (Gen. 16:7; 18:1-2, 22; etc.), Jesus' first coming was through the virgin birth (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:23, 25; Luke 1:26-35). He came as the unique God-Man with His divine and human natures united into one person.

Jesus is fully God (Matt. 1:23; 16:16; John 1:1, 14, 18; 5:18; 8:58; 10:30-33; 19:7; 20:28-31; Rom. 10:9; 1 Cor. 2:8; Col. 1:19; 2:9; Heb. 1:8). Many of the attributes applied to God the Father in the Old Testament are also applied to Jesus in the New Testament (Acts 3:14 {Isa. 48:17}; Rev. 1:17-18 {Isa. 44:6};

Rev. 22:13 {Rev. 1:8}). His miracles also proclaim that He is God (Mark 2:5-12; Matt. 8:23-27).

Without surrendering His divine essence or attributes, Jesus gave up only the independent control of His divine privileges at His incarnation (Phil. 2:5-8).

Jesus is also fully Man (John 1:14; Gal. 4:4; Phil. 2:7-8; 1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 2:17-18). He was sinless despite being tempted in all things as we are (2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15). When He fulfilled the purposes of His first coming, God glorified Him (Eph. 1:19-22; Phil. 2:9-11; Heb. 1:3).

2. The Work of Jesus Christ

Scripture reveals that God created the universe and all within it through His Son Jesus Christ (John 1:3; Col. 1:15-17; Heb. 1:2).

The pinnacle of His ministry during the first coming was His death and resurrection. In His death, Jesus was the atoning sacrifice (Isa. 52:13-53:12; Heb. 10:12-14) on behalf of sinners (Rom. 4:25; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13). Three days later, as He had prophesied (Matt. 17:22-23; 20:19; Mark 14:28), He rose from the dead (Matt. 27:62-28:10; Luke 24:1-8, 26-27, 44-48; John 20:1-10) making several appearances to His followers (John 20:11-21:23; 1 Cor. 15:4-8). Forty days after He rose, He ascended to the right hand of God (Acts 1:9-11; 7:55; Eph. 1:19-20; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3). He is now building His Church (Matt. 16:18) and interceding as the Mediator and Advocate for His people (1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 2:18; 7:25; 1 John 2:2).

Scripture reveals that Jesus will come again (Acts 1:11; 1 Thes. 4:13-18). At the end of time, He will reward believers and punish unbelievers (John 5:27; Acts 17:30-31; 1 Cor. 3:10-15; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 20:11-15).

C. God the Spirit

We believe and teach that the Holy Spirit, who is the third person of the Godhead, is equal in essence with the other members of the Trinity (Isa. 48:16; Matt. 28:19; Acts 5:3-4; 2 Cor. 13:14). He possesses all the divine attributes belonging to God the Father and God the Son (Psalm 139:7-10; Isa. 40:13-14; John 16:13; Rom. 15:13; 1 Cor. 2:10-13; 12:11; Eph. 4:30; Heb. 9:14). Although He is fully God, He functions in a subordinate role within the Trinity (John 16:13-14).

The work of the Holy Spirit is revealed in creation (Gen. 1:2), the inspiration of the Bible (2 Peter 1:20-21), and the incarnation of Christ (Matt. 1:18). In salvation, He is the sovereign agent of regeneration (John 3:3-7; Titus 3:5), conviction (John 16:8-11), adoption (Rom. 8:12-17), sanctification (2 Cor. 3:18; Gal. 5:22-23; Eph. 4:30; 1

Thes. 5:19), assurance (Rom. 8:16), and the sealing of believers (2 Cor. 5:5; Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30).

The unique work of the Holy Spirit for this age began at Pentecost when the church was born (Acts 2:1-36) just as Jesus had prophesied (John 14:16-17; 15:26). Jesus baptizes believers in the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13). The Holy Spirit indwells believers (Ezek. 36:26; John 14:16-17; Rom. 8:9-11; 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19), teaches them the Truth (1 Cor. 2:10-13; 1 John 2:27), fills them (Eph. 5:18), and gives gifts to the Body of Christ (Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12-14; Eph. 4:7-12; 1 Peter 4:10-11). The “sign gifts” (e.g., speaking in tongues, prophecy, healing, performing miracles) were given to the prophets, apostles, and those in the apostolic circle, to authenticate their message before Scripture was canonized (1 Kings 17:24; 2 Kings 5:8; John 3:2; Acts 2:22; 1 Cor. 12-14; 2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:2-4). Having accomplished their purposes, these “sign gifts” ceased historically, apparently, not being intended for the church to practice after the Scriptures were completed.

III. Creation, Preservation, and Providence

We believe and teach that God created all things, out of nothing, in six twenty-four-hour days, without the use of evolution (Gen. 1:1-31; Ex. 20:11; Col. 1:16; Heb. 11:3). The culmination was the creation of mankind in His own image (Gen. 1:26-27). After this, He declared all His creation to be “very good” (Gen. 1:31).

God not only created the universe and everything within it, but He also sustains His creation for His own glory (Rom. 11:36; Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3). God intervenes in history through supernatural events (Gen. 6-9; Ex. 7:1-14:31; John 9:1-7; Rom. 9:17), but ordinarily governs and directs every element of His creation through His sovereign providence (Psalm 103:19; Dan. 4:34-35; Rom. 8:28). The providence of God, however, does not negate the responsibility of mankind or angels to serve Him (Phil. 2:12-13; James 1:13).

IV. Angels

We believe and teach that angels were created perfect with untested innocence and were included in God’s description of “very good” (Gen. 1:31). God created angels with greater power than man (2 Peter 2:11) and in a temporary position over man (Heb. 2:7). Yet men who have been saved by God will judge angels (1 Cor. 6:3). Scripture seems to indicate differing ranks within the angelic realm such as archangels (Jude 9), seraphim, and cherubim (Isa. 6:2-7; Ezek. 10:1-19), and other rankings (Eph. 3:10; Col. 1:16; 1 Peter 3:22).

A. Holy Angels

Holy angels were created and chosen by God (Mark 8:38; Col. 1:16; 1 Tim. 5:21) to worship and glorify God (Heb. 1:6), as well as to minister to God’s children (Heb. 1:14). They serve as His representatives to proclaim messages to select individuals

(Gen. 18-19; Luke 1:11-20, 26-38; 2:8-15). Both Old and New Testaments reveal that God uses angels to deliver judgment (2 Sam. 24:15-17; Rev. 6-18) and to oppose the forces of Satan and his demons (Dan. 10:13; Rev. 12:7-9).

B. Fallen Angels

Although fallen angels were created “very good”, they rebelled against God in pride (1 Tim. 3:6; 2 Peter 2:4). The leader of these fallen angels is Satan (Rev. 12:7-9). Some of the fallen angels are bound (Jude 6; 2 Peter 2:4) while others serve Satan as demons (Matt. 25:41). Satan, as the serpent (Rev. 12:9), tempted mankind to rebel against God (Gen. 3). God crushed Satan through the completed work of Jesus Christ (Gen. 3:15; Rom. 16:20). Satan has been sentenced and will be cast into Hell for eternity (Rev. 20:10).

Since Satan’s fall, God allows Satan to rule the spiritual kingdom of darkness (John 12:31; Eph. 2:2; 1 John 5:19). He is also permitted to afflict God’s people (Job 1-2; 1 Peter 5:8). He continues to deceive unbelievers, even appearing as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14). The believer is called by God to stand firm and resist Satan and his schemes (2 Cor. 2:11; Eph. 6:10-18; James 4:7; 1 John 4:4).

V. Man and Sin

We believe and teach that man was created for the purpose of glorifying God (Isa. 43:7; Rom. 11:36; Col. 1:16). Like the angels, man was created perfect with untested innocence and was included in God’s description of “very good” (Gen. 1:31). Man was also created in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:26-27). After man fell into sin, he still retained the image of God (Gen. 9:6; James 3:9) although this image and likeness has become marred by the effects of sin.

Adam, as mankind’s representative, sinned by disobeying God in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:6). Because he was man’s representative (Rom. 5:12-21), everyone, aside from Jesus, is born a sinner (Psalm 51:5), dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1-3), and alienated from God (Rom. 5:10; Col. 1:21).

Because of the fall, man is totally depraved (Gen. 6:5; Eccl 9:3; Jer. 17:9; Mark 7:14-23; Rom. 3:9-23; Eph. 4:17-19). This does not mean that man is as sinful as he can be but that every aspect of his being is distorted by sin. Sin reveals itself in man’s actions, words, thoughts, attitudes, emotions and will. Sin is disobeying God either by what you do or fail to do (1 John 3:4; James 4:17). It makes man spiritually helpless and incapable of choosing God (Jer. 13:23; John 6:44, 65; Rom. 3:11; 5:6-10; 1 Cor. 2:14; Eph. 2:1-3).

VI. Salvation

We believe and teach that salvation is completely a work of God based upon the atoning work of Jesus Christ and applied by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:4-7). God's grace in saving people has nothing to do with any works in those He saves (Gal. 2:16; Eph. 1:7; 2:8-10). Man is responsible, however, to respond to God's gift as He commands.

A. Election

Election is the sovereign work of God in which He chose to save certain people from sin (Acts 13:48; Eph. 1:5, 11) according to His great mercy (1 Peter 1:3), before the creation of the world (Eph. 1:4; 2 Thes. 2:13). Election is closely related to foreknowledge. When salvation is in view, foreknowledge does not mean that God looked to see who would choose Him so that He would know whom to elect for salvation (foresight). Foreknowledge means that God intimately knew those whom He chose in a personal way before the beginning of time (Jer. 1:5; Acts 2:23; Rom. 8:29; 11:2; 1 Peter 1:1-2).

B. Effectual Call

God calls everyone to salvation through the proclamation of the Word (Isa. 55:1; Matt. 22:14; Acts 17:30). Those whom God has elected, however, He effectually calls so that they will respond to His work of grace (Rom. 8:29-30; 2 Tim. 1:9; 1 Peter 2:9).

C. Regeneration

This is solely the act of God by which the Holy Spirit takes one who is dead in sin and makes him alive in Christ (Eph. 2:1-5), causing him to be born again (John 3:3-7; Titus 3:5).

D. Faith and Repentance

Man is to respond to the free offer of the gospel with faith and repentance (Gen. 15:6; Acts 3:19; 16:31). Although we are responsible to repent and believe the gospel, both faith and repentance are gifts from God (Acts 11:18; 16:14; Eph. 2:8-9; 2 Tim. 2:24-26).

Faith is not mere intellectual agreement to the facts of the gospel (John 2:23-25; James 2:19). Saving faith is the belief in Christ that trusts Him alone. This faith will reveal itself in the life of a believer as faithfulness (Hab. 2:4; John 3:36; James 2:14-26).

Initially, repentance is the act of changing one's mindset about sin and one's view of God (Acts 3:19; 17:30; 2 Peter 3:9). Once a person is saved from sin, then

repentance bears the fruit of changing his former manner of sinful living to serving God (Luke 3:8; 1 Thes. 1:9)

E. Justification

Justification is the work of God (Rom. 8:33) by which He declares sinners to be righteous based on Christ's death and resurrection (Rom. 3:24-4:25). Even though Jesus Christ was without sin, He bore the sin of believers so that His righteousness could be imputed to sinners (2 Cor. 5:21). This righteousness is not earned in any way by man but is an act of God's grace (Rom. 3:20; 4:6). Justification comes by means of faith alone (Rom. 4:16, 22-25).

F. Sanctification

When God justifies a sinner, he is given the holiness of Christ and stands perfect before God positionally, based on the work of Christ. Sanctification is the process by which God makes the justified sinner, in the actual practice of his life, more like Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18; 1 Thes. 5:23). Biblical sanctification involves dependence upon God and a disciplined effort towards godliness (Phil. 2:12-13; 1 Tim. 4:7-8). Some of the means which the Holy Spirit uses to mature believers are: the Word of God (John 17:17), the people of God (Heb. 10:24-25), prayer (Col. 1:9-12), and trials (James 1:2-4).

God makes a believer a new creation in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17), yet the remaining tendency to sin still wages war in the 'flesh' (Rom. 7:7-25; 1 Peter 2:11). God makes all the resources available for the believer not to sin (1 Cor. 10:13; 1 John 2:1). Yet a believer sins because he does not rely upon the sufficient resources God has provided (1 John 1:8-10). A true believer, however, will not practice sin as the pattern of life (1 John 3:6-10).

G. Eternal Security and Perseverance of the Saints

Eternal security and perseverance of the saints are two sides of the same coin. They emphasize the fact that all true believers will not lose their salvation but have eternal life. Eternal security means that for those whom God has saved, He will keep in Christ forever (John 6:37, 39, 44; 10:27-30; Rom. 8:35-39; 1 Cor. 1:7-8; Phil. 1:6; 1 Peter 1:3-5; 5:10). Perseverance of the saints is the process by which believers endure to the very end of their life so as to remain in Christ (2 Peter 1:10; 1 John 2:19; Rev. 13:10; 14:12). The practice of sin leaves no room to presume upon God's grace in eternal security (Rom. 6:15-22; 13:13-14; Gal. 5:13).

H. Glorification

Those whom God saves from sin will ultimately be glorified (Rom. 8:28-30). This is the completion of the work of salvation when a believer will be holy both in position

and in practice before God. Glorification occurs at death or when Christ returns. When believers are glorified, they will be given a new body that is imperishable, powerful, free from the effects of sin, and like the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:35-57). The confident hope that believers will be like Jesus brings about holiness (1 John 3:1-3).

VII. The Church

We believe and teach that all who believe in Jesus Christ are immediately placed into the body of Christ, the church. The 'church' is manifested in two ways. First, the universal church is made up of all true believers since its birth at Pentecost (Acts 2). Second, the local church is a local assembly of believers. Every believer is automatically part of the universal church and is responsible to unite with a local church (Heb. 10:24-25).

A. The Government of the Church

Christ is the Head of the church (Eph. 1:22; 4:15; 5:23; Col. 1:18). Under His leadership, there are two offices in the church – elders and deacons. The elders of a local assembly are men who are accountable for overseeing, shepherding, and equipping the believers (Acts 20:28; Eph. 4:11-16; 1 Tim. 5:17-25; Heb. 13:17; 1 Peter 5:1-5). The Scriptural qualifications for elders are found in 1 Tim. 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. We believe in the equality and plurality of elders. The congregation is called to submit to their leadership (Heb. 13:7, 17) as they submit to Christ (Heb. 13:17; 1 Peter 5:4). The second office of the church is the deacons. The purpose of the deacons is to assist the elders in performing the ministries of the local church (as illustrated in Acts 6:1-7). 1 Tim. 3:8-13 provides the qualifications for the office of deacon.

Each local church is autonomous (i.e., self-governing). Our desire, however, is to cooperate with true churches in the work of God whenever possible and beneficial.

B. The Ordinances of the Church

There are two ordinances that Jesus Christ provided for the church – baptism and the Lord's Supper. Baptism is a command for believers to obey (Matt. 28:19; Acts 2:38). The New Testament pattern was for believers to be baptized immediately after their conversion (Acts 2:41; 10:44-48). Therefore, we believe that water baptism is not necessary for salvation. The biblical mode of baptism is immersion. Baptism testifies of faith in Christ and symbolizes union with Him in death to sin and in resurrection to new life (Rom. 6:1-14).

The Lord's Supper (or, The Lord's Table) commemorates the death of Jesus Christ. The two elements, the bread and the cup, symbolize the body and blood of the Lord (1 Cor. 11:24-25). Celebrating the work of Christ is a time of self-examination and confession (1 Cor. 11:27-32). The Lord's Supper is also called communion, which

pictures the fellowship believers have with the Lord and with each other. This ordinance proclaims His death until Christ comes again (1 Cor. 11:26).

C. The Purpose of the Church

The purpose of every ministry of the church is to glorify God (Eph. 3:21; 1 Cor. 10:31). The church glorifies God by: exalting God (John 4:23-24), edifying the saints (Matt. 28:19-20; Eph. 4:11-16; 2 Tim. 2:2), and evangelizing the lost (Matt. 28:19-20; Col. 4:2-6).

When sin in the life of a professing believer becomes known, prayer, gentleness and humility must accompany a confrontation of that sin (Matt. 18:15-20; 1 Cor. 5:1-13; Gal. 6:1-2; 2 Thes. 3:6-15; 1 Tim. 1:19-20; Titus 1:10-16; 3:10; 1 John 5:16). The goal of this discipline is the glory of God, the purity of God's church, and the restoration of the one who is sinning. Church discipline is not a vindictive act but a ministry of love.

VIII. Last Things (Eschatology)

We believe and teach that our Lord Jesus Christ will return, visibly and bodily, to the earth in power and glory (Matt. 25:31; Acts 1:10-11).

God has revealed truths concerning the end of time to encourage believers in godly living (1 Thes. 4:13-5:11; 2 Peter 3:8-18; 1 John 2:28-3:3). Holiness is developed as believers eagerly await the return of the Lord with high expectation and enthusiasm. Any study of the end times that fails to promote holiness undermines God's present focus for these prophetic promises.

For an unbeliever, death brings about temporal punishment (Luke 16:19-31) until he is resurrected to eternal condemnation. Those who have rejected Christ from all the ages will spend eternity in hell suffering beyond imagination for their sin (Dan. 12:2; John 5:29; Rev. 20:13-15).

When a believer dies, his spirit instantly enters into the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ (Luke 16:19-31; 23:43; 2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:23). In this temporary state, a believer awaits his physical resurrection, judgment, and reward in heaven for eternity (John 6:39; Rom. 8:10-11, 19-23; 1 Cor. 15:35-44, 50-54; 2 Cor. 4:14; Rev. 20:4-6).

As a believer enters the eternal state, he will experience incomprehensible bliss from being in the presence of God (Rev. 21:3-5). The glorification of the believer will bring about pure worship that God deserves. The eternal state will also include the recreation of the fallen created order (Rom. 8:19-22).

IX. Marriage and the Family

We believe and teach that God wonderfully and immutably creates people either as male or female. These two distinct, complementary genders together reflect the image and nature of God (Gen. 1:26-27). Rejection of one's biological gender is a sinful rejection of God's perfect work (Psalm 139:13-18).

We believe and teach that God began the institution of marriage in Genesis 2:24. Despite a growing tendency within our culture to try and say otherwise, God's Word defines marriage to be an exclusive, faithful relationship between one man and one woman only, lasting as long as they both live (Gen. 2:18-25; Matt. 19:3-6), and uniquely reflecting Christ's relationship with His Church (Eph. 5:22-33). Intimate sexual activity is to occur exclusively within the marriage union as God alone defines it (Ex. 20:14; Prov. 5:15-23; Mark 7:21-23; 10:7-12; 1 Cor. 6:18; 7:2-5; 1 Thes. 4:1-8; Heb. 13:4). Anything apart from this is sinful and contradictory to God's design for marriage (Lev. 18:1-30; 20:10-21; Rom. 1:18-32; 1 Cor. 6:9; 1 Tim. 1:9-10; Heb. 13:4; Jude 7; Rev. 21:8; 22:15). Thankfully, God forgives even these sins when there is true repentance (1 Cor. 6:9-11). It is important to realize, though, that there are often ongoing, life-long, consequences to these sins, even when forgiven (Prov. 6:32-35; 1 Cor. 6:18-20).

Because God created, ordained, and defined marriage as the covenant relationship between a man, a woman, and Himself, Grace Church Williamsburg will only recognize marriages between a biological man and a biological woman. Further, the elders and staff shall only participate in weddings and solemnize marriages between one biological man and one biological woman. The facilities and property of Grace Church Williamsburg shall only host weddings between one man and one woman.

We believe and teach that every person must be afforded compassion, love, kindness, respect, and dignity (Matt. 5:44; Mark 12:28-31; Luke 6:31). Hateful and harassing behavior or attitudes directed towards any individual are to be confronted biblically since they are not in accord with Scripture and therefore the faith and practice of Grace Church Williamsburg.

A family can be as simple as a husband and wife but usually includes children as well. The wife is a blessing from God for her husband (Prov. 12:4; 18:22; 19:14; Eccl 9:9) and each child is a blessing from God for their parents (Psalm 127:3-4). Some are gifted by God to serve Him as single Christians without being distracted by the cares of the world (1 Cor. 7:32-35).

Scripture teaches that the husband is the head of the family as Christ is the Head of the church (1 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 5:23; Psalm 128:1-4). The wife is to submit to her husband (Eph. 5:24; Col. 3:18; 1 Peter 3:1) and the husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church by giving Himself up for her (Eph. 5:25; Col. 3:19). While these God-given roles include functional submission, both male and female are equal before God (Gal. 3:28).

Both the husband and the wife are to rear their children in the ways of God (Prov. 1:8; 6:20). This involves the responsibility to: exemplify godly attitudes and behavior (Prov. 23:26), discipline without exasperating the child (Prov. 13:24; 29:15, 17; Eph. 6:4; Col. 3:21), teach (Prov. 1:8; 6:20; Eph. 6:4), and love (1 Cor. 13:4-7; Titus 2:4).

God requires children to honor and obey their parents. This is right, pleasing to God, and brings blessings (Ex. 20:12; Eph. 6:1-3; Col. 3:20). The only time God allows children to disobey their parents is if a parent asks the child to disobey God (Acts 5:29).

X. The Sanctity of Life

We believe that all human life is sacred and created by God in His image (Gen. 1:26-27; 9:5-6). Human life is of inestimable worth in all its dimensions, including pre-born babies, the aged, the physically or mentally challenged, and every other stage or condition from conception through natural death (Ex. 4:11; 20:13; 21:22-25; 23:7; Deut. 22:8; Job 12:10; 31:15; Psalm 100:3; 119:73; 127:3-5; 139:13-18; Prov. 6:16-17; Isa. 44:2, 24; 49:1-8; Jer. 1:4-10; Matt. 5:21-22; 6:25-26; 19:18; 25:31-46; Luke 12:6-7; Acts 17:25; Rom. 9:9-11; 13:9; Gal. 1:15; Heb. 9:27). We are therefore called to defend, protect, and value all human life.

XI. How to Become a Christian

We believe and teach that being a Christian means that one responds appropriately to what the Bible says about the character of God, the sin of man, and the gift of Christ.

A. The Character of God

Since God is the Creator of all that is (Gen. 1:1-2:9; Acts 17:24-28), He has absolute authority over all His creation, including man. As Creator, He has the right and power to do all things according to His desire (Rom. 9:18-24; Eph. 1:3-14).

God is holy, which means that He is morally perfect and separate from all evil (Isa. 6:3; Rev. 4:8). In His holiness, He requires of man absolute perfection in all of life. God says, "You shall be holy, for I am holy" (Lev. 11:44; 19:2; 1 Peter 1:16). Jesus said, "You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Matt. 5:48).

B. The Sinfulness of Man

The Bible teaches that everyone is born dead in sins (Psalm 51:5; Eph. 2:1). This means that people are born unable and unwilling to respond rightly to the truths of the Bible (Rom. 3:11). Man is helpless, sinful, and an enemy of God due to his rebellion against God (Rom. 5:6-10).

C. The Gift of Christ

While Scripture describes the bad news about man, it also describes the good news of the amazing love of God. He provides Jesus Christ as the sacrifice for the sin of man. It is through the death and resurrection of Jesus that God forgives the sin of His children. This gift of salvation from sin is completely a work of God's grace (Eph. 2:4-9).

D. The Responsibility of Man

Salvation is the work of God, but man is responsible to receive this gift through saving faith. Merely believing the facts about Jesus Christ does not save (James 2:19). True faith is the belief that depends upon Christ alone. It will show itself in the life of a Christian by good works (Eph. 2:10; James 2:14-26). Repentance always accompanies saving faith and involves the recognition of one's sin with the desire to turn from all sin to God.

The only hope for the sin of mankind is Jesus Christ (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). He alone can deliver a person from a life of sin to a right relationship with God. God does this for the praise of the glory of His grace (Eph. 1:3-14).

XII. Statement on Gender

We believe and teach that God created human beings. His design expresses His wisdom, power, providence, and love in that He made us:

1. In His image
 2. For His glory
 3. Male and female
 4. For relationship with each other and with God
 5. For marriage, family, friendship, and procreation
- (cf. Gen. 1:26-27; Gen. 2:7, 20-25; 5:1-2; Isa. 43:7; Eph. 5:22-6:9; Col. 3:12-21)

Based on these truths of our faith from the clear teaching of Scripture, we believe and teach that sexual identity and gender are given as gifts of God, are unalterable, and form the basis of how we are to understand ourselves in relationship to each other and to God.

Conversely, we believe and teach that transgender ideology is immoral, is believed and acted on in rebellion against God, and constitutes a pervasively degrading influence on society. In truth, our anatomy helps us know who we are, because our sex tells us who God made us to be.

Sexual identity is not assigned by people, professionals, or by us as individuals. Our gender identity is not the product of social, cultural, or individual invention (or even medical

intervention), nor is it a matter of sexual preference. Personal preferences do not alter or dismiss God's design for expressing our sexuality as male or female (e.g., Deut. 22:5; 1 Cor. 11:1-16).

Gender (i.e., our biological, distinct, God-given sex) and our sexual identities (i.e., who we are and how we live as distinctly male and female persons) are precious realities of our uniqueness in creation and God's design for our companionship. These gifts from God are vital aspects of our ability to enjoy life under God's authority and care for us as men and women (Eccles. 3:11-14).

Therefore, we affirm the distinctiveness of the sexes, and we see these distinctions as blessings for our compatibility – that while different, men and women were created for each other, and they are suited for one another according to God's good design. Hence, these biological and emotional differences are not wrong in themselves, and we are not to deny, malign, or manipulate them, but we are to celebrate these differences within the context of God's design for marriage, family, and church life (Eccles. 2:24-25; 3:11-14; 5:18-20; 9:1-9; SS. 1-8).

Transgenderism, homosexuality, lesbianism, and other unbiblical expressions of sexuality reflect earth-bound concepts of self, which God assesses as expressions of self-exaltation (Rom. 1:18ff; Gal. 5:13-21; 6:8; Eph. 4:17-24). It sobers us to reflect on the Bible's teaching that self-love, in any form, is a mark of a degenerating society in the last days (Rom. 12:3; 2 Tim. 3:1-5).

A person's self-concept (i.e., how one views oneself) must be grounded in the truth of Scripture and fixed in faith on Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord (John 3:36; Rom. 10:9-10). A biblical view of self is based in a saving relationship with Jesus Christ, so that how we think about ourselves in relationship to Jesus (including our sexual identity) is of ultimate importance in how we understand ourselves, how we live, and in how we relate to others (Mark. 8:34; Gal. 2:20).

Final Note: This Statement of Faith does not exhaust the extent of our beliefs. The Bible itself, as the inspired and infallible Word of God that speaks with final authority concerning truth, morality, and the proper conduct of mankind, is the sole and final source of all that we believe. The elders are authorized to know God's Word, teach it (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:9), refute false doctrine (Titus 1:9), and apply it to those at Grace Church Williamsburg.

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