

THE HOLY SPIRIT, CHILDREN, BAPTISM, AND THE CONTINUATION OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS

We believe in the sovereign and gracious work of the Holy Spirit in the application of redemption. The Holy Spirit regenerates those whom God has chosen in Christ, grants spiritual life to those who are dead in sin, effectually calls them to faith and repentance, indwells every believer, sanctifies the people of God, and empowers the Church for witness and service. Salvation is wholly of God's grace, accomplished through the finished work of Jesus Christ and applied by the Holy Spirit. We therefore distinguish between the **external signs and means of Christian faith** and the **internal work of regeneration**, which belongs sovereignly to the Holy Spirit.

We believe that the children of believers are to be received as members of the visible covenant community and placed under the spiritual care, instruction, prayers, and nurture of the Church and their parents. In recognition of this responsibility, we practice the **anointing of children with oil as an act of consecration and dedication to God.** This anointing is a symbolic act of prayer, setting the child apart unto God and expressing our confidence in His covenant mercy and our commitment to raise the child under the Word of God and in dependence upon the Holy Spirit. The oil itself possesses no saving or sacramental power, does not regenerate the child, and does not guarantee the child's future salvation. Rather, it visibly signifies the Church's prayer that the Holy Spirit would graciously preserve, awaken, draw, and bring the child to saving faith in God's appointed time.

We believe that salvation is evidenced by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. Consequently, we distinguish the consecration of children from the ordinance of baptism. Baptism is administered upon a credible profession of faith and serves as the believer's public identification with the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. In this sense, baptism is not the instrument by

which regeneration is accomplished but is the God-ordained sign and public testimony of the grace already wrought by the Holy Spirit in the believer. We therefore understand believer's baptism as a **confirmation and public confession of the finished work of regeneration and conversion**, rather than as the means by which salvation is conferred.

The Continuing Work of the Holy Spirit

We believe that the Holy Spirit continues to actively and sovereignly distribute spiritual gifts to the Church according to His will. We therefore reject the doctrine that the miraculous or revelatory gifts of the Spirit necessarily ceased with the death of the apostles or the completion of the New Testament canon. We affirm the continuing validity of the gifts described in Scripture, including prophecy, tongues, interpretation of tongues, healing, miracles, discernment, words of wisdom and knowledge, and other gifts given for the edification of Christ's body.

At the same time, **we affirm the sufficiency, final authority, and unique inspiration of Holy Scripture.** No contemporary prophecy, revelation, impression, vision, dream, or spiritual manifestation possesses authority equal to or independent of Scripture. All such claims must be tested by Scripture and judged within the fellowship and accountable leadership of the Church. The Holy Spirit never contradicts the Word He inspired.

We therefore seek to be **Spirit-filled without being Scripture-light, and biblically ordered without being spiritually restrictive.** We welcome the present ministry of the Holy Spirit while insisting that every spiritual gift and manifestation operate under the lordship of Christ, the authority of Scripture, and the biblical principles of order, discernment, love, and edification.

Corporate Singing and the Laying On of Hands

We believe that congregational singing is an essential expression of corporate worship. The gathered Church should sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with thanksgiving to God, allowing the Word of Christ to dwell richly among His people. We therefore affirm the practice of corporate psalm singing while also receiving the broader biblical expression of hymns and spiritual songs. Our worship seeks to unite biblical truth, reverence, congregational participation, and Spirit-enabled expression under the order established by Scripture.

We also affirm the biblical practice of the laying on of hands. We recognize laying on of hands as an appropriate expression of prayer, blessing, identification, commissioning, recognition, and the setting apart of believers for particular ministry and service. We practice it in accordance with Scripture and under the oversight of the Church, recognizing that the physical act itself possesses no independent or automatic spiritual power. God alone gives the blessing, calling, empowerment, healing, or spiritual grace for which the Church prays.

Our Confessional Foundation

The Gate Church of the High Desert receives the Westminster Confession of Faith as the primary theological framework for its doctrine, insofar as it faithfully summarizes the teaching of Holy Scripture. We affirm its doctrines concerning the authority of Scripture, the Triune God, creation and providence, human sin, God's sovereign grace in salvation, justification by faith, sanctification, perseverance, the Church, the ordinances, Christian ethics, and the consummation of God's purposes in Christ.

In matters concerning the sacraments/ordinances, children, and the continuing ministry of the Holy Spirit, our church expresses these convictions according to the biblical understanding articulated above. We also affirm the historic Reformed Baptist emphasis represented in the Philadelphia Baptist Confession concerning **corporate singing and the laying on of hands**, while retaining our broader Westminster theological framework.

Our governing principle is therefore Scripture alone as the infallible and final authority for faith and practice. Historic confessions serve the Church as subordinate standards that summarize and guard biblical doctrine; they do not stand above the Word of God. We seek to be a church that is **Reformed in theology, covenantal in biblical understanding, Christ-centered in salvation, Spirit-filled in ministry, continuationist in spiritual gifts, and biblically ordered in worship and church life.**