

Occoquan Bible Church

Statement of Faith

PREFACE

We believe that Jesus Christ is Lord, and that salvation is only by grace through faith in the finished work of his death and resurrection. We believe the church and all things exist for the glory of God, and the church is built on the unchangeable truth of Christ's Word. We have set forth our Statement of Faith to articulate what we teach and to guard against false doctrine.

The teachings summarized in our Statement of Faith are rooted in Scripture and reflect our historic biblical theology as expressed in the *Apostles' Creed*, the *Nicene Creed*, and the *Definition of Chalcedon*. In addition to this, we confess the Five Solas of the Protestant Reformation and stand in general agreement with the *London Baptist Confession* of 1689. We gladly affirm our theological heritage from the ancient creeds and the Protestant Reformation, which are separate from OBC's Statement of Faith. Language from these creeds and Protestant confessions have been incorporated throughout this statement.

In addition to these historical statements, we also uphold the importance of the *Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy* (1978), the *Danvers Statement on Biblical Complementarity* (1987), the *Nashville Statement on Biblical Sexuality* (2017), and the *Dallas Statement on Social Justice and the Gospel* (2018).

I. GOD

A. Theology Proper¹

We believe that the Lord our God is one, the only living and true God (1 Cor 8:4-6; Deut 6:4). He is self-existent and infinite in being and perfection (Jer 10:10; Isa 48:12). His essence cannot be understood by anyone but him (Ex 3:14; 1 Cor 2:11).

God is a perfectly pure and infinite spirit; he is invisible and has no body,² parts,³ or passions⁴ (John 4:24). He alone is immortal by nature, dwelling in light that no one can approach (1 Tim 1:17; Deut 4:15-16; 1 Tim 6:16). He is unchangeable, immense,⁵ eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, holy, perfectly wise, wholly free, completely absolute⁶ (Mal 3:6; 1 Kings 8:27; Jer 23:23; Ps 90:2; Gen 17:1; Isa 6:3; Ps 115:3; Isa 46:10; Ps 135:6).

God sovereignly and effortlessly created the cosmos, for his own joy and glory, by the power of his word (Gen 1; Ps 33:6; Col 1:16). As a sovereign and wise Creator, he has decreed the end from the beginning, and every means to that end (Isa 46:10; Eph 1:11; Rom 9:21-23). In his providence, he works all things according to the counsel of his own unchangeable and completely righteous will for his own glory (Ps 115:3; Prov 16:4; Zeph 3:5; Mal 3:6; Rom 11:36).

God is most loving, gracious, merciful, and patient. He overflows with goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin (Ex 34:6-7). He rewards those who seek him diligently (Heb 11:6). At the same time, he is perfectly just and terrifying in his judgments (Neh 9:32-33; Heb 10:26-31). He hates all sin and will certainly not clear the guilty (Exod 34:7; Ps 5:5-6; Nah 1:2-3).

¹ We have organized the doctrine of God into two sections. Theology Proper speaks of the nature and attributes of God, whereas the following section focuses on distinctives specific to each person of the Trinity.

² God is infinite Spirit is his essence, his essence is not embodied. Though the Son of God adds a human nature (body and soul) in the incarnation, the essence of his deity as spirit remains unchanged, he is both God and man.

³ God is simple in his being, meaning that he is not made up of parts.

⁴ This speaks of the doctrine of the impassibility of God. God's emotions cannot be changed by his creatures.

⁵ Being omnipresent, he transcends all space. As infinite Spirit, he cannot be contained in heaven and earth.

⁶ God is absolutely independent in his being, purposes, and actions.

B. The Trinity

We believe that there is one living and true God, eternally existing in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matt 28:19; 2 Cor 13:14). These three have the same substance, power, and eternity, each having the whole divine essence (Exod 3:14; John 14:11; 1 Cor 8:4-6). The three persons of the Trinity are distinguished as individuals by distinctive personal relations, not by different essential attributes. Together, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit share the same divine attributes and work as one in creation, providence, and redemption, all the while retaining their personal properties (Isa 43:10; John 1:1; Eph 1:3–14; 1 Pet 1:2).

All three are infinite and without beginning and are therefore only one God, who is not divided in nature or being (Deut 6:4; John 10:30).

1. God the Father

We believe that the Father is not derived from anyone, neither begotten nor proceeding. He is the cause, origin, and beginning of all things visible and invisible.

In eternity past, the Father elected a people to be his adopted children in the Son (Rom 8:29; Eph 1:4–6). In creation, the Father made the world through the Son and by the Spirit (1 Cor 8:6; Col 1:16). In redemption, the Father sent the Son and together, the Father and the Son sent the Spirit (John 14:26, 15:26). Today, the Father effectually calls these elect by means of the Son and the Spirit. The Father is enthroned in heaven, with the Son seated at his right hand. The Father hears and answers prayer according to his infinite wisdom. The saints pray to the Father in the name of the Son who intercedes for them (John 14:13; Heb 7:25), as the Spirit likewise intercedes for them (Rom 8:26).

2. God the Son

We believe the Son is eternally begotten of the Father (John 1:14, 18) and manifested in time as the Word, wisdom, and image of the Father. Likewise, Jesus Christ is fully God (John 1:1, 18; Col 1:1-20; Heb 1:1-14; Rev 1:4-8), and fully man (Luke 2:52; 1 Tim 2:5; Heb 2:14-18).

In eternity past, the Son received a people from the Father, whom he would redeem by his substitutionary atonement on the cross. In time, the Son was the goal of redemptive history (Gal 4:4; Eph 1:10), the promise of the Old Testament (Luke 24:27; John 5:39), and the mediator of the New Covenant (Heb 8:6; 9:15; 12:24)—the Savior who is Prophet, Priest, and King. Salvation is found in Christ alone, for he is the only way for sinful humanity to be reconciled to God (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 Tim 2:5).

We believe that the Son was conceived by the Holy Spirit (Isa 7:14; Lk 1:35), born of a virgin (Matt 1:23), and suffered under Pontius Pilate. He was crucified for our sins, died, and was buried. He descended into the grave, on the third day he rose bodily from the dead (1 Cor 15:3-4). He ascended into heaven, where he sits at the right hand of God the Father (Eph 1:20), having sent the Holy Spirit to his church (John 15:26), and where today he lives to intercede for his saints (Rom 8:34). From there, he shall come again in glory to judge the living and the dead (Acts 10:42; 2 Tim 4:1).

3. God the Holy Spirit

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life, who eternally proceeds from the Father and the Son (John 15:26; 2 Cor 3:18; Gal 4:6; Rev 22:1). The Holy Spirit is the eternal power and might, proceeding from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified.

We believe that the Holy Spirit spoke by the Scriptures (1 Pet 1:10-12; 2 Pet 1:19-21), and that his power conceived the incarnate Son and empowered him for ministry (Luke 1:35; Acts 10:38).

Pentecost was a unique historical event that marked the Holy Spirit's arrival to New Covenant believers (Acts 1-2), and hence it and the subsequent display of tongues are not a model for ministry today.

The Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8-11). He regenerates, seals, sanctifies, and indwells the church for whom he is an abiding helper, teacher, guide, and intercessor (Titus 3:5; Eph 1:13-14; 1 Cor 6:11; 1 Cor 3:16; 1 Jn 2:27; Rom 8:26).

Baptism in the Holy Spirit is a one-time act whereby Jesus Christ places the believer into the universal church (the Body of Christ). This act of regeneration and sealing takes place at the moment of salvation (1 Cor 12:12-13; Eph 1:13; Titus 3:5). The sealing of the Spirit guarantees that the saints will receive their promised inheritance in glory (Eph 1:14).

II. THE WORD OF GOD

We believe the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, in its sixty-six books from Genesis through Revelation, is the only verbally inspired written Word of God (1 Cor 2:7-14; 2 Pet 1:20-21), and is without error in its original autographs (Matt 5:18, 24:35; Ps 119:89), that it is the full and complete revelation of God's will for the salvation of man, and the Divine and final authority for Christian faith and conduct (John 10:35; 16:12-13; 17:17; 1 Cor 2:13; 2 Tim 3:15-17; Heb 4:12).

It is God's objective propositional revelation and is verbally inspired in every word (1 Thess 2:13; 2 Tim 3:16). We believe the canon is closed and all who add or take away from it shall suffer the wrath of God (Rev 22:18-19; Deut 4:2; Jude 3).

III. MAN

A. Creation

We believe that God created humanity for his own glory, that mankind is uniquely made in the divine image (Gen 1:26-27; 2:7; Matt 19:4; 1 Thess 5:23), and is made up of both body (material) and soul (immaterial). Man was the direct creation of God, and is not in any sense the product of an animal ancestry.

B. Race and Ethnicity

We believe that there is one human race which has descended from Adam (Acts 17:26). Though humanity was divided by God at Babel (Gen 11:1-9), Christ has ransomed people from every tribe, language, people, and nation. This one new man in Christ (Eph 2:13-16) will praise the Lord forever (Rev 5:9; 7:9). The basic divide in humanity stands between those in Adam and those in Christ (Rom 5:12–19). And the only true and lasting unity between people is spiritual (Eph 4:1–7), granted by God the Father, when he transfers the children of Adam into the kingdom of the beloved Son (Col 1:13), by means of the Spirit’s new birth (John 3:5–8).

C. The Sanctity of Life

We believe that all human life is sacred and created by God in His image (Gen 1:27). 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. We are therefore called to defend, protect, and value all human life (Ps 139).

D. Gender, Marriage, and Sexuality

We believe that God wonderfully and immutably creates each person as male or female. These two, distinct, complementary genders together reflect the image and nature of God (Gen 1:26-27). Gender is determined by God, and it is one and the same with one’s biological sex (male or female), being irrevocably tied to human biology. As Creator, God alone determines the gender of each person and gives definition to all of his creatures. Rejection of one’s God-given gender is to rebel against God’s good design and is a futile attempt to usurp the authority of God.

The term “marriage” has only one meaning: the uniting of one man and one woman into a single, exclusive union, as delineated in Scripture (Gen 2:18-25). God created the institution of marriage in Eden (Gen 2:21-24), and he is the one who joins husband and wife together (Matt 19:6). Marriage is created to point us to Christ and the church (Eph 5:31-32; Rev 19:6-9).

God has designed sexual intimacy to occur only between a man and a woman who are married to each other (1 Cor 7:2-5; Heb 13:4). We believe that God has commanded that no intimate sexual activity be engaged in outside of a marriage between a man and a woman (1 Cor 6:18). For example, any form of sexual immorality (including but not limited to adultery, fornication, homosexual behavior, bisexual conduct, bestiality, incest, and use of pornography) is sinful and offensive to God (Matt 15:18-20; 1 Cor 6:9-10).

E. Family

We believe that the family is the basic institution that God has created for humanity, and that new families are created through marriage (Gen 2:24). We also recognize that Scripture defines the family as a father and mother, and the children God has given to them, whether members related by birth, legal adoption, or guardianship.

Every child is a gift from the Lord (Ps 127-128), and fathers and mothers bear the primary responsibility for the care, discipleship, and instruction of their children (Deut 6:4-9; Eph 6:1-4; Col 3:20-21). In addition to this, the people of God have a shared responsibility to raise up each successive generation to set their hope in God (Ps 78:1-8; Matt 28:18–20). While family members bear primary responsibility for the care of the widowed and aged (1 Tim 5:4-8), the saints should also care for the widowed and orphaned (James 1:27).

We believe that the family, not the individual, is the basic institution for humanity. While God treats every image-bearer personally and specifically (Ps 139:13–16; Jer 31:30), and while sin and death often destroy

households, every person is created to be in a family, even if that family is only to be found within the church (Mark 10:29-30). Therefore, the family is the divinely ordained institution for all humanity, and in redemption God is creating a new household, where the children of God are a family united by the Spirit, not the flesh.

F. Sexual Integrity

We believe that in order to preserve the function and integrity of Occoquan Bible Church as the local Body of Christ, and to provide a biblical role model to the Occoquan Bible Church members and the community, it is imperative that all persons employed by Occoquan Bible Church in any capacity or who serve as volunteers believe, agree to, and abide by our Statement on Gender, Marriage, Family, and Sexuality (Matt 5:16; Phil 2:14-16; 1 Thess 5:22).

We believe that God offers redemption and restoration to all who confess and forsake their sin, seeking His mercy and forgiveness through Jesus Christ (Acts 3:19-21; Rom 10:9-10; 1 Cor 6:9-11).

We believe that every person must be afforded compassion, love, kindness, respect, and dignity (Mark 12:28-31; Luke 6:31). Hateful and harassing behavior or attitudes directed toward any individual are to be repudiated and are not in accord with Scripture nor the doctrines of Occoquan Bible Church.

IV. SIN

We believe in the fall of man, that by personal disobedience to the revealed will of God, man became a sinful creature and the progenitor of a fallen race (Gen 3:1-24; 5:3). All of mankind is universally sinful in both nature and practice (Eph 2:3; Rom 3:23; 5:12), and is therefore under condemnation, being alienated from the life and family of God (Eph 4:18, John 8:42-44), and under the righteous judgment and wrath of God (Rom 1:18; 3:19). Mankind has within himself no possible means of recovery or salvation (Matt 19:25-26; Mark 7:21-23; Rom 7:18).

V. SALVATION

We believe salvation is a work of God from beginning to end. Every saint is foreknown, predestined, called, justified, and glorified (Rom 8:28-30). We believe that we are granted salvation from enslavement to sin and its penalty as a free gift by grace alone through faith alone (Rom 6:23), unaided by human effort or merit (John 3:16; Eph 2:8-9; Titus 3:5-7).

A. Predestination/Election

We believe that predestination is the gracious purpose of God, by which the Father in eternity chooses a particular and vast number of individuals to give to the Son (John 6:37; 10:29; 17:6, 9, 24; Rom 8:28–30; Rev 13:8; 17:8), whom in time, the Son will redeem by his blood and the Spirit will regenerate by his power (Eph 1:3–14). Election is consistent with the free agency of man and encompasses all the means in connection with the end (Prov. 16:1; 9; Rom. 9:7–23). It is for the glorious display of God's sovereign goodness and is infinitely wise, holy, and unchangeable (Rom. 11:33–36). It excludes boasting and promotes humility (Eph 2:8-9).

B. Effectual Calling

We believe that the effectual call is the work of God the Father's power and grace, whereby he summons his sheep unto Jesus Christ by his Word and Spirit (John 6:44; 1 Cor 1:9; Gal 1:15; Eph 4:4; 2 Tim 1:9). In this calling,

he regenerates their hearts, enlightens their minds in the knowledge of Christ, and grants them spiritual life to turn from sin and all other idols and to embrace Jesus Christ, as freely offered in the true gospel (2 Cor 4:6; Eph 1:18; Titus 3:4-7).

C. Regeneration and Conversion

We believe regeneration is the removal of a dead heart and the granting of Christ's resurrection life (Ezek 36:25-27; John 5:25; Eph 2:5). In accordance with God's purposes of grace, all who are regenerated by the Holy Spirit will freely repent of their sins and trust in Jesus Christ as Savior, receiving the forgiveness of their sins (Ps. 110:2-3; Titus 3:5; Rom 10:9-13).

We believe conversion includes faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ and repentance from sin (Mark 1:15; Acts 20:21). Saving faith is demonstrated by obedience to the command to trust in Christ (Rom 1:5). Conversely, no amount of good deeds, apart from faith, will save (Eph 2:8-9; Rom 14:23). Yet, good works necessarily follow and proceed from faith (James 2:14-26).

D. Justification

We believe that the death of Christ provides full payment for our sin and satisfies the just requirement of God's law (1 Cor 15:3; Heb 9:12; 1 Pet 1:18-21). In justification God imputes the righteousness of Christ to the ungodly by grace through faith (Rom 3:24-26; 5:18-19).

E. Adoption

We are no longer slaves to sin, but have been adopted as children by God (John 1:12; Rom 6; 8:14-17). The saints possess every spiritual blessing in Christ (Eph 1:3).

F. Sanctification

Sanctification is the experience, beginning in regeneration, by which the believer is set apart to God's purposes, and is enabled to progress toward moral and spiritual maturity through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in him (Heb. 9:13-14; 10:10). Growth in grace will continue throughout the regenerate person's life, and will be characterized by living for the glory of God and loving one's neighbor, and increasing transformation to be more conformed to Christ (1 Cor 10:31; 2 Cor 3:18; Gal 5:14; Eph 4:11-16; Phil 1:6; 2:1-15; Heb. 10:14).

G. Eternal Security and Assurance

Every justified person is absolutely secure in the permanency of his salvation and will neither totally nor finally fall or be removed from his converted state (John 3:16, 36; 5:34; 6:39-40; 10:25-30; Rom 8:1, 29-39; 2 Cor 5:17; Eph 1:12-14; 4:30; Phil 1:6; 2 Tim 2:12-13; Heb 7:25; 1 Pet 1:3-5; 1 John 2:19, 25; 5:13).

It is the privilege of all saints to be assured of their salvation from the very day of their true conversion based exclusively on the testimony of God's Word (2 Cor 5:1, 6-8; 2 Tim 1:12; 3:15; Heb 6:1; 10:22; 2 Pet 1:10; 1 John 5:13).

H. Glorification

Glorification is the culmination of salvation and is the final blessed and abiding state of the redeemed in glory (Rom 8:30; 1 Cor 15:42-55; 1 Thess 4:17; 1 John 3:2; Rev 21-22).

VI. THE CHURCH

A. The Universal Church

We believe the Universal Church is an elect company of believers, birthed at Pentecost, spread throughout the earth, present in all generations, made visible when local churches assemble, and who will be finally and fully gathered to Christ at the end of the age. God's Church is created by the Word of Christ (Rom 10:17) and baptized into the Holy Spirit, in one body whose head is Christ (1 Cor 12:12–13). Christ alone is Lord over the Church, and he alone holds authority over the Church's worship (Col 1:18; Acts 5:29). The Church is the Bride of Christ, and that which belongs to God must not be given to Caesar (Ps 2:10-12; Mark 12:13-17).

We believe in the spiritual unity of the Universal Church (1 Cor 12:12–13), the autonomy of the local churches (Matt 18:15–17), and the cooperation of local churches for the sake of advancing the gospel (Acts 11:29; Rom 15:24; 3 John 8).

B. The Local Church

We believe the local church glorifies God by making disciples (John 15:7–8). As a local embassy of the universal church, these disciples are to gather for worship (Heb 10:24–25) on the Lord's Day (John 20:1; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 16:2; Rev 1:10) in order to proclaim the Word, share in fellowship and prayer, and keep the ordinances (Matt 28:19-20; Acts 2:42-47).

C. Ordinances: Baptism and the Lord's Table

Water baptism and the Lord's Table are the only two ordinances given to the church. They are to be observed by the church when the church gathers for worship (1 Cor 11:33-34). While neither add to nor in any way aid an individual in meriting salvation, both should be seen as an obedient expression of the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit in someone's life.

Christian baptism is the immersion of a believer in water symbolizing the believer's death to sin, union with Christ, burial of the old life, and resurrection to walk in new life (Matt 28:18-20; Acts 10:47-48; 16:32-33; 18:7-8; Rom 6:1-4). In baptism, the repentant believer bears witness to faith in Christ, just as the church bears witness to the visible faith of the baptized.

The Lord's Table is a symbolic act testifying of Christ's saving work for the redeemed and expectant anticipation of Christ's Second Coming (Acts 2:42-47; 1 Cor 11:17-32). When we take the Lord's Supper, we proclaim the death of Christ and bear witness to one another of our mutual participation in Christ (1 Cor 11:17, 18, 20; 1 John 1:7).

We believe that baptism precedes admission to the Lord's Table, with baptism being the initiatory rite of the New Covenant and the Lord's Supper being an ongoing rite for those who belong to the New Covenant. As a local church with many visiting saints from other churches, we practice "close" communion, where we invite believers from other gospel-believing congregations to share in the Lord's Table with our members.

D. Church Membership in the Local Church

Church members partner together in the local church for the sake of advancing the gospel (Acts 13:1–3; Phil 4:16–18).

While believer's baptism is necessary for church membership, we gladly recognize baptism from other churches who share our faith and practice. Participation in baptism (the initiating rite of the New Covenant) and the

Lord's Supper (the ongoing rite of the New Covenant) is determined by the nature of regenerate church membership.

As local church members walk together, they are to love, serve, and build up one another to bring every believer to maturity in Christ (John 13:34-35; Eph 4:12-16; 1 Pet 4:10-11).

Sharing in membership together includes mutual accountability to each other, the discipline of sinning members in accord with Biblical standards (Matt 18:15-20; 1 Cor 5:1-13; Gal 6:1-2), and submission to the leaders God has given them (Heb 13:7, 17). Together, the gathered assembly possesses the keys of the kingdom and exercises the authority of Christ on earth (Matt 16:19; 18:18-20; 1 Cor 5:4-5).

E. The Mission of the Church

We believe the mission of the church is to glorify God by making disciples of all the nations (Matt 28:19), so that we can present everyone mature in Christ (Col. 1:28). Discipleship begins with evangelism (Mark 13:10; Rom. 10:13-17), is carried along by formative and corrective discipline (Matt. 18:15-17; 1 Tim. 4:11-13), and includes doing good to all, especially the household of God (Gal. 6:10).

We believe the priority of the local church is to gather in person (1 Thess. 2:17; Heb. 10:24-25), on the Lord's Day, to worship God (Heb 12:22-24), equip the saints for the work of ministry (Eph 4:11-16), and teach disciples to obey all that Christ has commanded (Matt 28:19). Individual church members are to go out (2 John 1-4), proclaiming the risen Christ to the world (Acts 1:8; Col 4:6), all the while loving our neighbors by means of using the various abilities, gifts, and talents God has given to them (Mark 12:28-29; Matt 5:13-16).

F. Offices: Elders and Deacons

We believe there are two distinct offices within the local church (Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:1-13), and these are: (1) elders, otherwise called pastors or overseers, and (2) deacons.

Elders are appointed by the church, and a plurality of qualified elders shepherds, leads, teaches, equips, protects, and prays for the congregation (Acts 14:23; 20:28; Eph 4:11-12; 1 Tim 3:1-7; 5:17-22; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Pet 5:1-5).

Deacons are recognized by the church as faithful servants, whose model of good works gains confidence in the gospel and cares for the physical needs of the church body (Acts 6:1-7; 1 Tim 3:8-13; 5:9-16).

Complementing one another in the household of God, elders, who must be male (2 Tim 2:12-13; 1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:6), lead the church from God's Word, and deacons, who may be male or female (1 Tim 3:11-12; Rom 16:1-2), serve the church and help in a variety of ministries.

G. Cessation of Sign Gifts

We believe that the gifts of tongues and their interpretation, the gift of healing, and the working of sign miracles have ceased to be necessary in the ministry of the church (1 Cor 12-14). Tongues (*glossolalia*) served its redemptive historical purpose when the Spirit was poured out on the Church beginning with the Jews (Acts 2), then the Gentiles (Acts 8), and finally the disciples of John (Acts 19). Since the founding of the church, tongues have not been a normative or required practice in the church.

These miraculous gifts were intended to confirm the message and ministry of the apostles (2 Cor. 12:12; Heb 2:3-4) and that when the office of apostle and prophet came to an end (Acts 1:21-22; Eph 2:20), so did the need for these miraculous gifts.

Though miraculous healings tapered off in the New Testament, the Lord's grace is promised to be sufficient for today (Phil 2:25-27; 2 Tim 4:20; 2 Cor 12:8-9). Healing is not guaranteed in this life, but it is promised in the New Creation when all things will be made new (Rev 21:1-4). Although no one possesses the gift of healing today, we believe God does heal and delights to answer the prayer of faith, according to his own perfect will for the sick and afflicted (2 Cor 12:6-10; Jas 5:13-16; 1 John 5:14-15).

VII. CHRISTIAN LIBERTY AND LIBERTY OF CONSCIENCE

We believe that the liberty Christ has purchased for believers under the gospel is found in their freedom from the guilt of sin (Rom 8:1), the condemning wrath of God (1 Thess 1:10), and curse of the law (Gal 3:13). It also includes their deliverance from this present evil age (Gal 1:4), bondage to Satan (Acts 26:18), the dominion of sin (Rom 8:3), the evil of afflictions (Rom 8:28), the fear and sting of death and victory of the grave (1 Cor 15:54-57), and everlasting damnation (2 Thess 1:9-10). In addition, it includes their free access to God and their obedience to him, not from slavish fear (Rom 8:15) but from a childlike love and willing mind (Luke 1:73-75; 1 John 4:18).

All these liberties were also enjoyed in their essence by believers under the Old Covenant (Gal 3:9, 14). But in the New Covenant, the liberty of Christians is further expanded. They are free from the yoke of the ceremonial law to which the Jewish congregation was subjected, they have greater confidence of access to the throne of grace, and they have a fuller supply of God's free Spirit than believers under the law usually experienced (John 7:38-39; Heb 10:19-21).

God alone is Lord of the conscience (James 4:12; Rom 14:4), and he has left it free from human doctrines and commandments of men that are in any way contrary to his word or not contained in it (Acts 4:19, 29; 1 Cor 7:23; Matt 15:9). So, believing such doctrines, or obeying such commands, is a betrayal of true liberty of conscience (Col 2:20-23). Requiring implicit faith or absolute and blind obedience destroys liberty of conscience and reason as well (1 Cor 3:5; 2 Cor 1:24).

Those who use Christian liberty as an excuse to practice sin or nurture sinful desire pervert the main objective of the grace of the gospel to their own destruction (Rom 6:1-2) and completely destroy the purpose of Christian liberty. This purpose is that we, having been delivered from the hands of all our enemies, may serve the Lord without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our lives (Gal 5:13; 2 Pet 2:18-21).

VIII. ANGELS

A. Holy Angels

We believe that angels are created beings and therefore are not to be worshipped. Although they are a higher order of creation than man, they are created to worship God (Luke 2:9-14; Heb 1:6-7; 2:6-7; Rev 5:11-14; 19:10; 22:9) and to serve those who will inherit salvation (Heb 1:14).

B. Fallen Angels

We believe that Satan, who is also called the devil and that ancient serpent (Matt. 4:1, 5, 8; Rev. 12:9), is a created angel, the father of lies, and a murderer from the beginning (John 8:44). He incurred the judgment of God by rebelling against his Creator, involving numerous angels in his fall (Job 1:6-7), and introducing sin into the human race by his temptation of Eve (Gen 3:1-14). We believe that Satan is the open and declared enemy of God and man (Matt 4:1-11; 25:41), the god of this age who is now at work in the sons of disobedience (2 Cor

4:4; Eph 2:3). Through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Satan was defeated (Rom 16:20), just as it was promised (Gen 3:15). At the end of the age, he shall be eternally punished in the lake of fire (Rev 20:10).

IX. THE LAST THINGS

We believe that God has declared the end from the beginning (Isa. 46:10) and predestined everything in time to occur according to his perfect and unchanging will (Eph 1:11). The earth is the Lord's (Ps. 24:1), and so is history. In his book of life are written all the names of his elect (Rev 13:8; 17:8), and in his decree are written every event in human history (1 Cor 2:7). Biblical eschatology (last things), therefore, begins with protology (first things): Before the beginning, God planned for his Son, as the Lamb of God (1 Pet. 1:20), to receive eternal praise from a kingdom of redeemed sinners (Matt 25:34) taken from every tongue, people, and nation (Rev 5:9–10; 7:9–10).

In time God has revealed by promise and fulfillment (Acts 13:32–33), shadow and substance (Col 2:17; Heb 10:1), a plan of salvation whereby God will bring all things under the feet of his Son Jesus Christ (Ps 2:7; 110:1; Eph 1:10, 22–23). Accordingly, all of the Old Testament was written to reveal Christ (Luke 24:27, 44–49; Jn 5:39). And in the fullness of time (Gal 4:4), the Son of God took on flesh (Jn 1:14), so that every promise could be fulfilled in him (2 Cor 1:10).

After fulfilling all of his earthly works (Jn 19:30), Jesus Christ rose bodily from the dead (1 Cor 15), walked the earth for forty days teaching about the kingdom (Acts 1:8–11), and rose bodily to heaven (Acts 1:9–11), where he now reigns as king (Ps 2:7; Matt 28:18), lives to intercede for us as priest (Ps 110:4; Heb 7:25), and sends forth his Spirit and his word as the true Prophet (John 15:26; Acts 3:22–26).

Because of Christ's exaltation and the promises of God, we believe in the personal, bodily, visible, and glorious return of the Lord Jesus Christ. Already, God has given all authority to his Son to put all things under his feet (Eph 1:22–23) and to send forth his disciples with the gospel of the kingdom (Acts 8:12). Yet, we eagerly await his second coming, when he will establish his kingdom on earth and finally and fully reign over all creation (Col 1:20; Rev 19:1–22:21).

We believe in the future eternal life, bodily resurrection, and final judgment: that upon death, the souls of the saved go immediately to be with Christ in Heaven (Phil 1:21–23; 2 Cor 5:8), where they abide in joyful fellowship with him until his Second Coming, when their bodies shall be raised from the grave and changed into the likeness of his own glorious body (1 Cor 15:35–58; Phil 3:20–21; 1 John 3:2). We also believe that the souls of the unsaved at death descend immediately into Hades where they are kept under punishment until the final day of judgment (Luke 16:19–31; 2 Pet 2:9), at which time their bodies will be raised from the grave, and they shall be judged according to their works and cast into the place of final and everlasting punishment (Mk 9:43–48; Jude 1:13; Rev 20:11–15; 21:8).

After the final judgment, there will be a new heaven and new earth where the final state of the redeemed will be in a new creation (Rev 21–22). In that glorious day, life will be as it should be, and mankind glorified by the finished work of God will enjoy eternal blessedness with their Creator.