

# Our Statement of Faith

## I. The Importance of What We Believe At River Church

As a congregation one of the most important things that defines and identifies us is our statement of faith. This is the biblical doctrine we believe and teach as a church, and our unity as a congregation requires that we hold to a common body of biblical truth. These corporate biblical teachings could be simply termed “what we believe”, and they encompass the foundational teachings of the Christian faith as we understand them.

Each of us as individuals, of course, has our own personal convictions and understanding regarding what we believe the Scriptures teach. One could describe our personal beliefs as “what I believe” and “what you believe.” We have illustrated this with the diagram below, with two circles, one circle representing all that I believe, and another circle representing all that you believe. The area of overlap between my circle of belief and your circle of belief is “what we believe” together. This middle section is the doctrinal belief we hold in common.



When we speak of our church’s Statement of Faith we are referring to this area of “what we believe” together and hold in common as a church. This large and essential body of shared belief is central to our identity as a church, and to unity as a church family. It is therefore important that everyone who considers The River Church to be their church home, or who is considering making The River their church home, know and understand what this circle of common doctrinal beliefs encompasses. It is also important that each of us be in substantial, if not full agreement with these doctrinal beliefs, and that we are committed and careful to not be divisive regarding any areas where there are differences between our personal beliefs and those of the church.

## II. The Core of What We Believe

The core of our faith as a church, the “what we believe” circle described above, encompasses our basic convictions of what we understand the Scripture to teach. Our core beliefs can be summarized in four words: **reformational, evangelical, charismatic, and apostolic**. These describe four distinctive positions we hold regarding biblical doctrine. We will briefly review these individually before presenting our Statement of Faith.

### A. Reformational

The essential biblical truths that we teach as a church are consistent with the fundamental teaching of the Protestant Reformation, which is why we identify ourselves as “reformational”. This is not to say that we wish to perpetuate the division and animosity aroused by the disputes of the Reformation. It is to say, however, that we are committed to the emphasis of the Reformation on salvation by grace and not by works. Moreover, we hold to the absolute and governing authority of the Bible. This means that the Scripture of the Old and New Testaments are to have the final say on the truth or falsity of any doctrinal claim.

There are five historic statements that come from the Reformation which are known as the “Great Sola’s” of the Protestant churches (“sola” is the Latin word for “only”, so you may call them the “Great Only’s”). These five foundational statements are widely considered to express the biblical truths recovered and restored in the Reformation, and as such they are central to our own core beliefs. In this sense we as a church are fundamentally Protestant and Reformational, and we unabashedly champion these biblical truths. The Great Sola’s are as follows:

**"Sola Scriptura"**, Latin for “Scripture Alone”—We believe in the infallibility, inerrancy, sufficiency, and full inspiration of both the Old and New Testaments. All doctrine, practices, and traditions of the church are subject to the rule and authority of the Scripture.

**"Sola Christo"**, Latin for “Christ Alone”—We believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the second person of the

Trinity, fully God and fully man, and that the person and work of Christ are the only means of salvation for mankind. All aspects of our salvation come from our union with Christ by faith, and not from our membership in any church or through the mediation of any man. Every aspect of our salvation is fully provided in Jesus Christ and in Him alone we receive abundant life.

**"Sola Gratia"**, Latin for "Grace Alone"—We believe in Christ's atoning and substitutionary work on the cross as the basis of our reconciliation with God. Therefore, our salvation is by God's grace alone, and not on the basis of any good works or righteousness on our part, nor because of our participation in sacraments or religious liturgy. God's grace is His free gift of everything that is necessary for salvation today and for eternity, to the praise of His glory.

**"Sola Fide"**, Latin for "Faith Alone"—We believe that salvation is received by means of an active and genuine faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, and in His finished work on the cross. Saving faith is a gift from God and a personal response to the Gospel, and this faith will result in good works. However, such good works are not the basis of this salvation, rather they are evidence that true faith exists in the heart.

**"Soli Deo Gloria"**, Latin for "Glory to God Alone"—We believe that everything exists for the glory of God and that He will be glorified in and through all things. Therefore, we are to do everything for the honor and glory of our loving Redeemer. Also, because our salvation is wholly the work of God and not ourselves, all credit and all glory belongs to Him alone and none to us, to the praise of His glorious grace.

## **B. Evangelical**

By "evangelical" we mean that we ascribe as a church to the doctrinal conviction that the means that God has chosen to save people is the proclamation of the Gospel (in contrast to participation in sacraments such as baptism, or membership in a church). This term evangelical also communicates our conviction that Scripture commands and instructs us regarding our individually and corporately evangelizing others through the proclamation of the Gospel, both in our words and in our deeds or way of living.

## **C. Charismatic**

By "charismatic" we mean that we are committed to the present day demonstration of the gifts and manifestations of the Holy Spirit, as outlined in the first epistle to the Corinthians and in the Book of Acts. Our posture is not just one of tolerating these giftings, but of actively encouraging the exercise of such in our public gatherings as the Holy Spirit inspires and directs their use.

## **D. Apostolic**

By "apostolic" we understand that we feel called to not only win the lost, but to also equip local churches to reproduce themselves in other locations, in accordance with the New Testament. The objective of the apostles in the New Testament was to see churches planted. The term "apostolic" also carries with it an understanding that God has given that ministry gift to the body, and that it is functional today.

# **III. Our Statement of Faith**

We have expanded on the above with the following Statement of Faith. This statement covers all the major areas of biblical doctrine that we understand as foundational and primary.

## **A. The Bible**

We believe the Bible to be the fully inspired and inerrant Word of God and the only infallible rule of faith and practice. We believe the Scriptures are the final authority for our lives and the standard by which all subsequent revelation is to be evaluated, as well as all church teaching, practice, experience, and tradition.

## **B. God**

We believe in the one Triune God revealed in the Bible, eternally existing in three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who are all powerful (omnipotent), all knowing (omniscient), and everywhere present (omnipresent). God is the creator and sustainer of all things, sovereign ruler over all creation, infinite and perfect in love, goodness, wisdom, justice, holiness, and righteousness. All of God's purposes in history and redemption will come to pass for His glory. We exist to glorify God, and God is most glorified through us when we, His redeemed sons and daughters, find our highest joy and our life in Him.

## C. Man and Sin

We believe that man was created in the image of God. His intent was that man would willingly choose to live in a dependant and obedient relationship with Him for their joy and blessedness, and for His glory and joy. However, through the rebellion and disobedience of Adam and Eve, all men have inherited a sinful nature, and because of this all men are sinful before God, separated from Him and under condemnation. We believe sin is not just acts committed which do not conform to God's moral law revealed in Scripture, but that it encompasses all attitudes which reflect the violation of love for God and others, all rebellion and independence from God, and all worship of or trust in anything other than God. Further, we believe that Satan, who is a created being of limited power, and who is in opposition to God and His people, is an adversary to be resisted and one who will be fully defeated by God at the end of the ages.

## D. Salvation through Jesus Christ

We believe man's salvation and reconciliation are experienced through renouncing his own proud self-determination, taking responsibility for his sinful disobedience, turning from his sin, and seeking forgiveness from God. Further, we believe such a penitent person must put a personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, trusting in His saving work on the cross, where He died for our sin.

We believe Jesus Christ to be the incarnate Son of God, fully God and fully man, the second person of the triune Godhead, the Messiah prophesied by Scripture, born of a virgin, anointed with the Holy Spirit and power. According to God's sovereign plan, Jesus was crucified and died substitutionally for man's transgressions, bearing the wrath of God for man's sin. Christ was then raised from the dead on the third day, and He ascended back to the Father in heaven, where He is now seated and ready to return. We also believe that Jesus Christ is thereby man's only savior, redeemer, healer, deliverer, and Lord of all. As such, Christ is also the appointed Judge of all men, the living and the dead. Finally, we believe that this salvation of man is wholly a work of God's free unmerited grace and is not the result of human goodness, works, or religious ceremony. God imputes His righteousness to those who put their faith in Christ alone for their salvation, their sin having been laid on Christ as their substitute in His death on the cross, and thereby justifying them in His sight. This is called in Scripture our "justification" in Christ through His life and His work on the cross. For this reason, the Gospel is to be preached to all men, so that whosoever would respond in faith may receive the gift of eternal life. Also, everyone who receives by faith this gift of righteousness, God also makes them His child, and they become a member of His family, and a co-heir with Christ. This is called in Scripture our "adoption" in Christ, and is the gift of a new identity and status as a son or daughter of God.

## E. The Holy Spirit

We believe that the Holy Spirit is fully God, one with the Father and the Son, yet distinct in person as the third person of the triune Godhead. Scripture describes the activities of the Holy Spirit as the one who empowers us, intercedes for us, teaches us, comforts us, leads us, and distributes gifts to us.

The experience of conversion, in which a person repents and believes upon Christ, is the result of a radical change of one's heart through the agency of the Holy Spirit, who indwells the heart and causes one to be "born again." This is called our "regeneration" in the Scripture. The Holy Spirit continues to indwell the believer for the duration of their life and effects change in their character to become more like Christ – the process which is called in Scripture our "sanctification". This life-long process of growth as a Christian, causing us to become progressively more loving, pure, and righteous, is the result of our growing to know God more, seeing our sin and our need for Him more, and responding in faith and obedience to Him and His word. As such, our sanctification is a cooperative work of the believer and the Holy Spirit, in which He brings about change within us as we seek to follow and please Him. Jesus Christ Himself is the example and standard of the character that we seek to emulate, thereby fulfilling the commandments of Scripture, summarized in the Bible's call to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love one another as He has loved us. In this way there is expressed in our lives the good works that are the evidence and fruit of genuine faith, as we live a life worthy of the calling we have received and glorify God through works of righteousness. However, all such good works are the result of humble dependence upon God and the operation of His grace and power in us, so we can take no credit for them but glorify God for and through them. Also, we will never complete this process of recognizing and addressing sin in our hearts while in this life, but must continue to the end in humility and repentance as we respond to His Spirit's convicting and empowering work.

We believe there are many experiences in the believer's life which are valid encounters with God, the Holy Spirit, and which are separate and distinct from the initial indwelling work of the Spirit at our conversion. "Baptism with the Holy Spirit", "filled with the Holy Spirit", and "anointed with the Holy Spirit", are among those scriptural terms used to describe such ongoing encounters with the Holy Spirit. We believe that as Christians we are to be continually "being filled with the Holy Spirit", and that such experiences will produce greater commitment to God's will, greater conformity to His character, greater realization of His power in and through our lives, and greater edification of His Church.

We further believe the Holy Spirit imparts gifts or abilities greater than our own to accomplish God's will. These spiritual gifts include miraculous healings, revelations, and utterances, among many others, and are to be appreciated and welcomed by believers. These gifts ought to be operative in the Church for the common good, supervised and judged by mature leaders, and ministered in love by Christians whose lives reflect faith and godly character. Finally, we believe that God continues in our day to bring supernatural healing, deliverance, and restoration by the power of His Spirit to individuals and relationships that are broken, hurting, sick, and oppressed.

## **F. The Priesthood of Believers and Covenant Life**

We believe in the great reformation doctrine of the priesthood of the believer. By the shedding of His life on the cross, Jesus has become the believer's High Priest and has made it possible for each Christian to have free access to the presence of the Father. In His presence, each one can know God and can receive from Him. Each Christian, likewise, is responsible to come to the Father in confidence and faith as a priest unto Him under the New Covenant. There we are to present in prayer our needs and petitions, and intercede for other's needs, as we minister both the worship of his lips and the worship of his life sacrificially and freely to God.

We believe God is a covenant-making and covenant-keeping God. He has made promises to those who are, by faith in Jesus Christ, under the New Covenant covered by His blood shed on the cross. When one accepts Jesus as Lord, he pledges his life also to the will of God. Jesus has sent the Holy Spirit to abide in us and to seal this covenant, writing it on our hearts. We also believe that in this covenant which God has sealed, we can have security about our future and about our eternity. We are confident that God will keep us to the end of our lives, as we remain faithful to Him.

Therefore it is our privilege as believers to not live in fear of losing our salvation, yet not in presumption with unrepentant sin or rebellion, but diligently continuing in our faith to the end of our lives.

God's promise of forgiveness and eternal life begins the moment one is regenerated and submits to His loving Lordship. He is the source of life and all necessary provision to the one believing, meeting all of our spiritual and natural needs. His sovereignty and care in our lives provides us the security that He will cause all things to work together for our good and our growth in His grace. For this reason we can trust God and His faithfulness, and persevere in the trials and tribulations that we will experience in our lives, knowing that He remains good and will work it all for our good and His glory.

We further believe that all who so confess Jesus Christ as Lord and King are part of His Kingdom and are to live in covenant love and loyalty with one another. On a daily basis, this means learning to love one another in practical ways, forgiving one another, serving one another, and exhorting one another in a brotherly fashion when necessary. The fundamental expression of this in human society is seen in the marriage covenant, which is sacred and a representation of Christ's relationship with the church, and is the foundation for the family. We believe that the Scripture presents to us clearly God's intent that marriage, family, and the spiritual family of the church express His love, faithfulness, and truth, bearing witness to the living God.

## **G. The Church**

We believe the very nature and purpose of God is revealed in and through His Church. Jesus Christ has established the Church as His Body in the earth. We believe that the "Church Universal" consists of all who confess and live under Jesus' Lordship, both those on earth and those in heaven. The "Church Local" is a body of believing people in a locality joined together as a church family. Since the Church is one, as God is one, the local Church must seek to walk in harmony with the Universal Church, especially in the city in which they are located.

We believe that the local church is to exercise as their primary practices 1) the worship of God, 2) the preaching and teaching of the Word of God, 3) the celebration of the two sacraments of Water Baptism and Holy Communion, and 4) the living out of a community life of faith, in loving and serving relationships with one another for their mutual edification. We believe that the sacrament of water baptism is for believers who have been converted, and therefore is inappropriate for infants. We believe that the sacraments are not just symbols, but vital means of grace by which God imparts His life to His people.

We believe the Lord sets each of His people in a local church for their growth in character, ministry, and fruitfulness, as well as for the good of other believers with whom they are joined. We believe that Jesus Christ, who is Lord and Head of the Church, has given ministry gifts in the Church on earth. Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers are placed in the Church by the Lord to equip and inspire His people to do His work in the earth.

We believe that the local church family is to be under the pastoral care and elders are mandated by Scripture to shepherd God's flock and to govern the local church. They are further called on to develop, implement, and oversee the vision of the local church which they serve. It is in the scope of the elders' responsibility to exercise church discipline toward an unrepentant member who is in clear violation of biblical teaching. We also believe that women can serve in any leadership capacity except that of an elder.

While God has ordained both civil and spiritual government that all are called to honor, we believe each person is directly accountable to Him. Therefore, while pastoral leaders can give counsel, and churches can call one to service, all service and submission is to be rendered voluntarily, out of faith in Christ, and joyfully. We believe that Jesus taught that leadership is a servant role and that all leaders must have true biblical character.

We believe the local Church should be supported by the tithes and offerings of those committed to it as their church home, and that all believers are called to worship God willingly and joyfully through the giving of their tithes and offerings.

## **H. Evangelism, Missions, and the Extension of the Kingdom**

We believe the gospel of Jesus Christ is to be preached to all men through both word and action, for it is through hearing and responding to the gospel that men are saved. Every believer is called to be a witness for Christ, and the local Church is to actively and creatively engage and evangelize its community and culture, thereby extending the reign of Christ as men and women surrender to His loving rule over their lives. Also, both believers individually and the Church corporately are to extend the Kingdom of God by acts of mercy and love to the poor, oppressed, broken, and sick, and to the widow and the orphan, becoming Christ's instrument of grace to a needy world. In addition, the Church is to be a prophetic people in our lifestyles and a prophetic voice for justice, righteousness, and truth, living and

speaking as “salt and light” in a world and a culture held in to sin and the god of this age.

We believe in the biblical call upon the church for world evangelization. We accept the commission of Jesus Christ to proclaim the Gospel and to make disciples for Him in all nations, to baptize them and teach them to observe His commandments. We desire to partner with others to accomplish this urgent task of world missions, fulfilling the biblical vision of a “sending church”, and carrying God’s heart for the unreached peoples of the world.

## **I. Christ’s Return, the Final Judgement, and the Resurrection**

We believe Jesus Christ will return to the earth in a visible way. His purpose will be to manifest His government and peace in the earth. Christians are exhorted to be watchful and obedient until His appearing. While there are many viewpoints concerning the details of His second coming, we believe Christians should not give their primary attention to these theological debates but lovingly look for His appearing, giving full attention to spiritual sensitivity and obedience while He tarries. We believe His appearing will occasion the resurrection of the righteous who have died and are now with Him.

We believe that when a Christian dies he goes immediately into heaven and the presence of God. Then, at the end of the age, after Christ’s return, there will be a final judgment. All men, the righteous and wicked, shall stand before Him and be judged. Those who have been regenerated, made righteous by Christ’s atonement for their sin, will be rewarded the privilege of ruling with Him and enjoying His eternal presence and blessings, having been fully freed from indwelling sin and given an immortal resurrected body. This is what the Scriptures call our “glorification” in Christ, and is the consummation of our redemption in a new heavens and a new earth which He will create. Those who were rebellious and wicked will be eternally separated from God and punished for their sin.

## **IV. In Conclusion**

In conclusion, these biblical truths are the foundation of our faith and for our continued growth in the knowledge of God and His grace. We believe that our statement of faith does not relieve us of the responsibility to live relationally with God in joyful trust and intimacy, but rather it calls and convicts us to pursue an ever deepening trust in God and knowledge of Him. We gratefully acknowledge those who have served Him in ages past and bless them in their eternal state for their faithfulness. We acknowledge those who serve Jesus Christ now, whose doctrinal expressions and lifestyles are different from our own, but who uphold the authority of the Word of God and the Triune God it reveals, and the centrality and sufficiency of the person of Jesus Christ and His saving work on the cross. We desire to walk in peace with them as brothers and sisters. We say “Amen” to Christ’s own prayer that His church be one as He and the Father are one.