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**Connected**  
Becoming a part of Redemption Hill Church



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First published 2011 by Redemption Hill Church  
141 Middle Road, #05-08 GSM Building  
Singapore 188976

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# Introduction

Welcome to our Connected Class! We are excited that you are exploring what Redemption Hill Church is about and how you might be a part of our community. While there are many ways to serve and glorify God, we believe that God has called Redemption Hill Church to do some things in a certain way that honours and glorifies Him.

This booklet outlines what we believe, who we are and how we do things. At the end of this class, you can follow the steps in Chapter 5 in the process of joining RHC as a member.

We hope you enjoy this class. Read through the material, make notes and feel free to ask any questions you may have.

For Christ and His Kingdom,

***Simon and the leadership team of RHC***

# 1

## Our Vision, Mission, Identity and Purpose

**“We are a gospel-centered church that exists to spread a passion for God by disciplining nations through the gospel, for His glory and the joy of all people.”**

### Our Identity

A gospel-centered church

### Our Vision

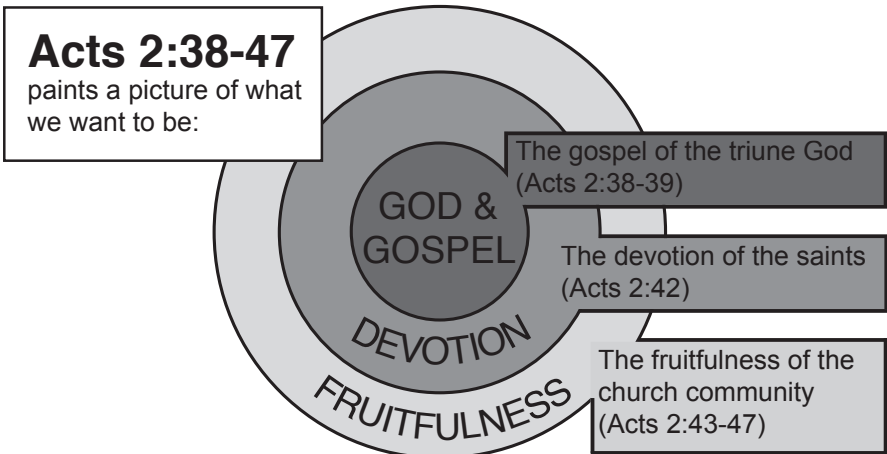
To spread a passion for God

### Our Mission

Disciplining nations through the gospel

### Our Purpose

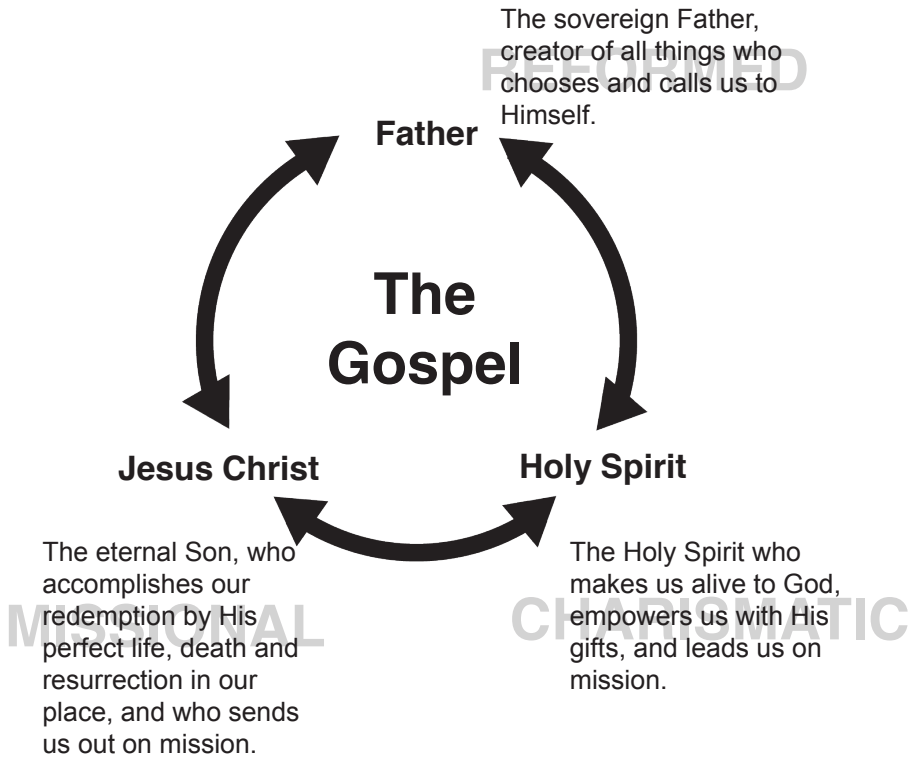
The glory of God and the joy of all people



# THE GOSPEL OF THE TRIUNE GOD

*And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” —Acts 2:38-39*

*We are a people who are transformed by the gospel as it brings us face-to-face with God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.*



# THE DEVOTION OF THE SAINTS

*And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. —Acts 2:42*

These are the central activities we devote ourselves to as an outworking of the gospel.

## Breaking of Bread

Remembering our continual participation in the benefits of Christ's death

## Teaching of the Word

Faithfully preaching and teaching the Holy Scriptures primarily at Sunday services, and also in group and personal study

## Fellowship

Time spent together in community groups, for mutual encouragement, accountability, service and evangelism

## Prayer

Talking with God and hearing His voice. We do this at our prayer meetings, services, and in our personal prayer times

# THE FRUITFULNESS OF THE CHURCH COMMUNITY

*And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. —Acts 2:43-47*

This is the fruit we are desiring to see in the church.



## What we hope RHC will become:

- We want to have a great number of small groups meeting in every corner of Singapore that are on a mission to reach their neighbors, friends and co-workers. You can help by inviting your friends and family to your home to study the bible.
- We want God to have used us to plant many churches within Singapore and throughout Asia. You can help by establishing Community Groups in parts of Singapore that we aren't strong in, and praying for a local church to be established there. You can also consider whether God would call you to go and be a part of a church plant in Singapore or elsewhere in Asia.
- We want to give of our people, resources and finances by sending our members on short, medium and long term mission trips to other nations for the strengthening of the body of Christ, particularly in Asia. Ask God how he could use your gifts and talents on a trip like that. If you are unable to go yourself, pray about supporting someone else to go, financially or otherwise.
- We want to be involved in mercy ministries, tackling the social issues of our day as a response to God's liberating work in us. We want to minister to drug addicts, prostitutes, the broken and despised, and see them redeemed, set free and made whole in Christ. Could you give some of your time to ministering to those in need in Singapore? We want for sustainable ways of getting involved in people's lives, not just something short term.
- We want to be known for radical passionate worship, solid bible preaching, loving community, and a heart for the lost. We want to be fervent in prayer, a joyful, passionate people who love doing what God has called us to. Start praying for your friends and family, invite them to church, and share the love of Christ with them. Your currently unsaved friend or colleague may be a future RHC church planter!

# 2

## Our Statement of Faith

### ***The Scriptures***

*We accept the Bible, including the 39 books of the Old Testament and the 27 books of the New Testament (2 Pet 3:15,16), as the written Word of God (Matt 1:22; 4:4; 19:4,5; Heb 1:1-2). The Bible is the only essential and infallible record of God's self-disclosure to mankind (Jn 17:17; 2 Tim 3:15-17; 1 Pet 1:23; Ps 119:44, 45, 165). It leads us to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ (Lk 16:29-31; Gal 1:8, 9; 2 Tim 3:15). Being given by God, the Scriptures are both fully and verbally inspired by God (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:20,21). Therefore, as originally given, the Bible is free of error in all it teaches (Num 23:19; 2 Sam 7:28; Prov 30:5; Ps 119:96,160; Matt 5:18; Jn 10:35; 17:17; Tit 1:1,2). Each book is to be interpreted according to its context and purpose (Lk 1:1-4) and in reverent obedience to the Lord (Matt 28:20; 2 Thess 3:14; 1 John 2:5) who speaks through it in living power (2 Tim 3:16). All believers are exhorted to study the Scriptures (2 Tim 2:15) and diligently apply them to their lives (1 Tim 4:16, Matt 22:29). The Scriptures are the authoritative and normative rule and guide of all Christian life, practice, and doctrine (2 Tim 3:16). They are totally sufficient and must not be added to, superseded, or changed by later tradition, extra-biblical revelation, or worldly wisdom (Rev 22:18,19). Every doctrinal formulation, whether of creed, confession, or theology must be put to the test of the full counsel of God in Holy Scripture (Acts 17:11, 2 Thess 2:15). We continue to grow in our knowledge of God and his ways (Rom 15:4; Rom 1:2; 4:21; Heb 10:23; 2 Pet 1:4; 3:13) through the Scriptures (Matt 4:4).*

**IMPLICATIONS:** We turn to the Bible to hear God speaking to us in an infallible way. We place a high premium on preaching that expounds the text of the Bible, on studying the Bible together in our Home Groups, and on personal Bible reading, because it is through these encounters with the voice of God, that we find ourselves encountering God, and being changed.

## God Is Triune

*There is one God (Dt 6:4; Mk 12:29): infinite (Ps 90:2; 145:3), eternal (Ps 33:11; 102:25-27; 115:3; Dan 4:34,35; John 5:26; Acts 17:24-25), almighty (Jer 32:17; Eph 1:11; 3:20; 2 Cor 6:18; Rev 1:8), and perfect in holiness (Dt 32:4; Ps 18:30; 50:2; Matt 5:48), truth (Jn 14:6), and love (1 Jn 4:8,16). The Triune God consists of God the Father (Dt 32:6; Mt 6:6; Rom 8:15; 1 Cor 8:6), God the Son (Matt 3:17; Jn 1:14; 3:16; Gal 4:4; Heb 1:5) and God the Holy Spirit (Jn 14:16, 17, 26; 15:26; 16:7-15; Rom 8:9, 26; Gal 4:6) as three distinct Persons (Jn 17:11; Matt 3:16-17; 28:19; 2 Cor 13:14; 1 Pet 1:2) but one divine being, co-existent (Gen 1:1-3), co-equal (John 10:30; Acts 5:3-4), co-eternal (Jn 3:35; 17:24). One God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – is the foundation of Christian faith (Jn 3:16, 17; 6:38; 14:16; 16:7) and life (1 Cor 11:3; 12:12; Rev 7:9).*

**IMPLICATIONS:** The unity and diversity within the Trinity gives us a wonderful basis for the unity and diversity that we experience in life. In marriage, husband and wife have equal value before God, but they also have distinct roles. In the church, we celebrate the diversity of cultures, nationalities, languages and gifts, and personalities while affirming that we are one body in Christ. In leadership, we see it in plurality with roles distinguishing people who are otherwise of equal value in God's sight.

## God the Father

*God the Father (Dt 32:6; Mt 6:6; Rom 8:15; 1 Cor 8:6) is the Creator of heaven and earth (Gen 1:1; Ps 33:6; Jn 1:3; Col 1:15-17; Heb 11:3). By his word (Gen 1; John 1:1-3) and for his glory (Ps 19:1-2; Col 1:16; Rom 11:36), he freely (Isaiah 44:24) and supernaturally created the world from nothing (Gen 1:1; Heb 11:3). Through the same Word he daily sustains all his creatures (Heb 1:3). He rules over all (Eph 4:6) and is the only Sovereign (2 Kgs 19:15, 19; Ps 86:10; Is 37:16). His plans and purposes cannot be thwarted (Gen 50:20; Act 2:23). He is faithful to every promise (Num 23:19; Josh 23:14; Ps 145:13; Rom 4:19-21; 2 Cor 1:20), works all things together for good to those who love him (Rom 8:28), and in his unfathomable grace gave his Son, Jesus Christ, for mankind's redemption (Jn 3:16; Eph 1:7). He made man for fellowship with himself, and intended that all creation should live to the praise of his glory (Gen 1:26-28; Rom 11:36; Col 1:16; Rev 4:11).*

**IMPLICATIONS:** Through Jesus Christ, we relate to God as children of our Father in heaven. His love towards us is the lavish love of a perfect father, his discipline always for our restoration and growth, and his plans for us always

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perfect. And, we worship and call out to Him both in reverent awe, and in joyful expectancy.

### **Jesus Christ**

*Jesus Christ (Matt 1:21; 16:18), the only begotten Son of God (Jn 3:16), was the eternal Word made flesh (Jn 1:1,14), supernaturally conceived by the Holy Spirit (Matt 1:18; Lk 1:34,35), born of the Virgin Mary (Isa 7:14; Matt 1:20; Lk 1:34,35). He was perfect in nature, teaching, and obedience (Rom 5:19; Gal 4:4-5; Matt 3:15; Phil 2:7,8; Heb 4:15). He is fully God (Isa 9:6; Jer 23:6; Jn 1:1; 20:28; Rom 9:5; Col 2:9) and fully man (Matt 4:2; Lk 2:40,52; Jn 11:35; Heb 5:7-8; Jn 1:1-13). He was always with God and is God (Jn 1:1-2). Through him all things came into being and were created (Jn 1:3; Col 1:16). He was before all things and in him all things hold together by the word of his power (Col 1:17). He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation (Col 1:15), and in him dwells the fullness of the godhead bodily (Col 1:19). He is the only Savior for the sins of the world (Jn 4:42; 1 Jn 4:14), having shed his blood and died a vicarious death (Jn 15:13; 1 Jn 3:16; 2 Cor 5:21) on Calvary's cross (Col 1:19-22, Phil 2:8). By his death in our place, he revealed the divine love and upheld divine justice, removing our guilt and reconciling us to God (Rom 3:26). Having redeemed us from sin, the third day he rose bodily from the grave (Matt 28:1-10; Mk 16:1-8; Lk 24:39; Rom 4:25; 1 Cor 15:20,44-45; Col 1:18; Rev 1:5), victorious over death (1 Cor 15:26, 55) and the powers of darkness (Col 2:15), and for a period of 40 days (Acts 1:3) appeared to more than 500 witnesses (1 Cor 15:6), performing many convincing proofs of his resurrection (Matt 28:9-10,16-20; Lk 24:13-53; Jn 20:11-21:25; Acts 1:3). He ascended into heaven (Lk 24:51; Acts 1:6-11; Eph 1:20, 4:8-10; 1 Tim 3:16) where, at God's right hand (Eph 1:20; Col 3:1; Heb 1:3, 8:1, 10:12; 1 Pet 3:22), he intercedes for his people (Rom 8:34; Heb 2:17, 3:1, 4:14, 6:20, 7:25, 8:1, 9:24; 1 Jn 2:1) and rules as Lord over all (Eph 1:21-23). He is the Head of his body, the Church (Matt 21:42, Eph 1:22, 5:23; Col 1:18), and should be adored (Lk 14:26; Phi 3:7-11), loved (Matt 10:37, 28:19; Mk 12:29-30; Jn 8:42, 20:21), served, and obeyed (1 Cor 7:22; 2 Cor 9:13; Eph 6:5-6; 1 Pet 1:2) by all.*

**IMPLICATIONS:** He is both our Saviour and our Lord. When we see Him, we see what God is like. We place our faith in what He did for us on the cross for salvation, and we follow after His example for our sanctification. Through thought, word and deed, we seek to point both ourselves and others to Christ.

## The Holy Spirit

*The Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life (Gen 2:7), convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment (Jn 16:8; 1 Cor 2:14). Through the proclamation of the gospel he persuades men to repent of their sins and confess Jesus as Lord (2 Cor 3:17-18, 4:3-6). By the same Spirit a person is led to trust in divine mercy (Rom 9:14-18, 1 Tim 1:13-14, 16; Tit 3:5; 1 Pet 2:10). The Holy Spirit unites believers to Jesus Christ in faith (Rom 3:24; 5:15-21; 12:5; 1 Cor 1:2, 15:22; 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 1:22, 2:17, 3:28, Eph 1:4, 2:12, 3:6, 4:32; 2 Tim 2:10; 1 Thess 4:16), brings about the new birth (Ezek 36:25-27; Jn 3:3, 5; 1 Cor 12:3; 2 Cor 5:17; Eph 2:5; Col 2:13; 1 Thess 1:4-5; 2 Thess 2:13; Tit 3:5; Jam 1:18; 1 Pet 1:3), and dwells within (Jn 14:17; Rom 8:11; 1 Cor 3:16) the regenerate. The Holy Spirit has come to glorify the Son (Jn 16:14), who in turn came to glorify the Father (Jn 17:1-5). He will lead (Jn 16:13; Acts 15:28; Rom 8:14; Gal 5:18) the Church into a right understanding (2 Tim 2:7) and rich application (Phil 1:9-11) of the truth of God's Word (2 Tim 3:16). He is to be respected and honoured as God and one of the three Persons of the Trinity (Jn 14:16-17, 26; 15:26; 16:7-15; Rom 8:9, 26; Gal 4:6).*

**IMPLICATIONS:** Apart from the work of the Holy Spirit, we cannot know who God is. We worship Him as God, and constantly seek Him to fill us in order that we may love Christ more, become more holy, and be empowered for service. We recognize that no one comes to Christ and the Father unless the Spirit draws, and so we pray earnestly for Him to move especially in the hearts of those who do not know Jesus.

## Man

*God made man – male and female – in his own image, as the crown of creation, that man might have fellowship with him (Gen 1:26-27, 5:1, 9:6; 1 Cor 11:7; Col 3:10; Jam 3:9). Tempted by Satan, man rebelled against God (Gen 3:1-6; Jn 8:44; Rom 5:12-14, 16:20; 2 Cor 11:3; 1 Tim 2:13-14). Being estranged from his Maker (Rom 5:10), yet responsible to him (Rom 1:19-21), he became subject to divine wrath (Rom 1:18; 2:5; 3:9-19; 3:23; Eph 2:3), inwardly depraved (Gen 6:5; Jer 17:9; Isa 6:5; Rom 5:15, 8:5-8; Eph 2:1-2, 4:17-19) and, apart from a special work of grace (2 Cor 4:3-4), utterly incapable of returning to God (Rom 3:11-12). This depravity is radical and pervasive. It extends to his mind, will, and affections (Gen 6:5; Rom 3:9-18). Unregenerate man lives under the dominion of sin (Jn 8:34) and Satan (1 Jn 5:19). He is at enmity with God, hostile toward God, and hateful of God (Jn 8:44). Fallen, sinful people, whatever their character or attainments, are lost and without hope apart from salvation in Christ (Isa 53:6, 64:6; Rom 3:23, 6:23).*

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**IMPLICATIONS:** We have both a hopeful and sober view of man. Hopeful, because man is made in the image of God and thus has the potential to do so much good in this world. Sober, because, by willful rebellion, man has estranged himself from God, and is thus capable of unthinkable evil. Thus, it does not perplex us when we see good people doing bad things, nor bad people doing good things. It makes us thank God for grace, and cry out for mercy.

## The Gospel

*The good news is revealed in Jesus' birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension (Mk 1:1, 1 Cor 15). Christ's crucifixion is the heart of the gospel (1 Cor 15:3), his resurrection is the power of the gospel (1 Cor 15:4,20-28), and his ascension is the glory of the gospel (Mk 16:19; Lk 24:26; Eph 4:8-10). Christ's death is a substitutionary (Mk 10:45; 2 Cor 5:21; Heb 2:16-17; 1 Pet 2:24, 3:18) and propitiatory (Isa 53:6; Jn 3:36; Rom 3:25, 5:9; Heb 2:17; 1 Thess 5:9; 1 John 2:2, 4:10) sacrifice to God for our sins. It satisfies the demands of God's holy justice (Rom 3:26) and appeases his holy wrath (Rom 1:18). It also demonstrates his mysterious love (Rom 5:8, 1 Jn 4:10) and reveals his amazing grace (Rom 5:2; Eph 2:7-8). Jesus Christ is the only mediator between God and man (1 Tim 2:5; Heb 9:15, 12:24). There is no other name by which men must be saved (John 14:6, Acts 4:12). At the heart of all sound doctrine is the cross of Jesus Christ (Gal 1:6-9) and the infinite privilege that redeemed sinners have of glorifying God because of what he has accomplished (1 Peter 2:9-10). Therefore, we want all that takes place in our hearts, churches, and ministries to proceed from and be related to the cross (1 Cor 15:3; Gal 2:14).*

**IMPLICATIONS:** We seek to have the gospel as central in our personal lives, as well as the life of the church. We eschew the thinking that the gospel is the first step into the Christian life as unbiblical, but rather see it as a hub in the wheel that is our lives. Everything that we do in life, and ministry must be tied back to the gospel. The gospel saves us, transforms us and motivates us for service, for the glory of God.

## Salvation

*Salvation, (Jonah 2:9; Lk 1:77, 2:30, 3:6, 19:9; Jn 4:22; Acts 4:12; Rom 1:16; 1 Thess 5:9; 2 Tim 2:10, 3:15, Titus 2:11; Heb 2:3; Rev 7:10, 12:10, 19:1) the free gift of God (Rom 5:15, 6:23; Eph 2:8) is provided by grace alone (Jn 1:16-17; Acts 18:27, 20:24; Rom 3:24, 4:16, 5:2, 15-17, 20-21, 11:6; Gal 1:6, 2:21, Eph 1:3-8, 2:5-8, 2 Tim 1:9; Titus 3:7, Heb 2:9) through faith alone (Matt 9:2, Mk 11:22; Lk 5:20; Acts 6:7, 14:22, 15:9, 16:5, 20:21, 24:24; Rom*

**1:5, 8, 16-17, 3:21-31, 4:5, 9, 11-22, 5:1-2, 9:30, 10:6,17; Gal 3:6-11**) because of Christ alone (**1 Tim 2:5-6; Col 1:13-18**), for the glory of God alone (**Rom 11:36; 1 Cor 10:31; 1 Pet 4:11; 2 Pet 1:3; Eph 3:21; Rev 1:6; Rev 7:12**). This salvation is made possible by Christ's substitutionary death and resurrection (**Isa 53:1-12; Jn 12:27-33; Lk 4:16-22; 2 Cor 5:21; Gal 3:10,13; 1 Pet 2:24, 3:18**), whereby the believer receives the gift of eternal life (**Jn 3:16, 17:3**) and is declared righteous by God as a free gift (**Rom 3:21-26**). The righteousness of Christ is imputed to him (**2 Cor 5:21; 1 Jn 2:2**). He is justified and fully accepted by God (**Rom 5:1, 18-19**). Through Christ's atonement for sin an individual is reconciled to God as Father and becomes his child (**Jn 15:15; Rom 5:10; 2 Cor 5:18-19; Col 1:20-21**). The believer is forgiven the debt of his sin (**Col 1:14**) and, via the miracle of regeneration, liberated from the law of sin and death into the freedom of God's Spirit (**Jn 8:36; Rom 8:21; Gal 3:1-5,14**). Man's response to the gospel is repentance of his sins towards God and putting his saving faith in Christ (**Matt 21:32; Mk 1:15; Acts 11:18, 17:30; 2 Cor 7:10; 2 Tim 2:25**). We believe that all the redeemed, once saved, are kept by God's power and are thus secure in Christ forever (**Jn 10:27-29, 17:2,12; Rom 5:9, 8:29-30, 35, 38-39; Eph 1:3-14; Phil 1:6; 2 Tim 1:12; 1 Pet 1:3-5; 1 Jn 2:19**).

Man's response to the gospel is rooted and grounded in the free and unconditional election of God for His own pleasure and glory (**Jn 6:44, 15:16; Acts 13:48; Rom 9:15-16, 22-24; Eph 1:4-5, 11; Phil 1:29; 1 Th 1:4-5; 2 Th 2:13; 2 Tim 1:9**). It is also true that the message of the gospel is only effectual to those who genuinely repent of their sins and, by God's grace, put saving faith in Christ (**Acts 2:38, 3:19, 20:21; Eph 2:8-9; Heb 11:6**). This gospel of grace is to be sincerely preached to all men in all nations (**Matt 28:16; Col 4:2-6; Eph 6:19-20; 1 Pet 3:15**).

**IMPLICATIONS:** We humbly acknowledge that salvation is of the Lord, that He chose us to be His children for which we celebrate. At the same time, He has ordained that the means by which this salvation is made known is through the preaching of the Gospel. We thus preach the Gospel to everyone with great confidence, not changing the message, or using dishonest means, calling everyone to repentance and faith, for we know those that God draws will surely respond in saving faith.

## **Sanctification**

The Holy Spirit is the active agent in our sanctification (**Gal 5:17**) and seeks to produce his fruit in us (**Gal 5:22-23**) as our minds are renewed and we are conformed (**Rom 12:1-2**) to the image of Christ (**Rom 8:29-30**). Though indwelling sin remains a reality (**Rom 7:22-24, 8:13; 1 Jn 1:8-9**) as we are

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*led by the Spirit (Rom 8:14; Gal 5:18) we grow in the knowledge of the Lord (Eph 1:17, 4:13; Col 1:10, 2:2; 2 Pet 1:3,6), freely keeping his commandments (Ps 40:8; Jn 14:15, 21; Phil 4:8 1 Jn 5:3) and endeavoring to so live in the world that all people may see our good works and glorify our Father who is in heaven (Matt 5:16). All believers are exhorted to persevere in the faith, knowing they will have to give an account to God for their every thought, word, and deed (Matt 12:36-37; Rom 14:12; Heb 4:13; 1 Pet 4:4-5). The spiritual disciplines, especially Bible study, prayer, worship and confession, are a vital means of grace in this regard (Acts 2:41-42, 13:2; Jam 5:16). Nevertheless, the believer's ultimate confidence to persevere is based in the sure promise of God to preserve his people until the end, which is most certain (1 Pet 1:3-7).*

**IMPLICATIONS:** The Holy Spirit is active in the lives of believers conforming us to be like Jesus. Because the Holy Spirit is at work, we also work. We respond to the work of the Spirit, by exerting ourselves through the spiritual disciplines, that by any means possible we may become more and more like Christ. While there is no perfection this side of the second coming, we make step by step progress, and look forward to the day God himself will transform our lowly bodies and make us like Christ.

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

*In addition to effecting regeneration and sanctification, the Holy Spirit also empowers believers for Christian witness and service (Acts 1:8, 4:8,31, 6:5, 8, 10; Rom 15:19; 1 Cor 2:4; 1 Thess 1:5; 1 Pet 1:12). While all genuine believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit at conversion (1 Cor 12:13), the New Testament indicates the importance of an ongoing, empowering work of the Spirit subsequent to conversion as well (Acts 2:4, 4:8, 31; Eph 5:18). Being indwelt by the Spirit and being filled with the Spirit are theologically distinct experiences (Acts 2:4; 4:8, 31; Eph 1:12-14; 5:18). The Holy Spirit desires to fill each believer continually with increased power for Christian life and witness, and imparts His supernatural gifts for the edification of the Church and for various works of ministry in the world (Rom 8:26-27; 1 Cor 12:7,11, 14:26, Eph 4:7-11). All the gifts of the Holy Spirit (Rom 12:6-8; 1 Cor 7:7; 12:8-10, 28; Eph 4:11) at work in the church of the first-century are available today (1 Cor 13:9,12), are vital for the mission of the church (1 Cor 12:4-6,28 14:12, 24-25; Eph 4:12-14), and are to be earnestly desired (1 Cor 12:1, 31, 14:1, 39-40) and practiced (1 Cor 14:5, 26-33, 39-40; 1 Thess 5:19-21).*

**IMPLICATIONS:** The infilling of the Holy Spirit is an experience to be sought on a regular basis. It is right to pray that the Holy Spirit would fill us afresh, make us holy and empower us for service. It is right to depend on the Lord, listen to

His voice, and expect Him to do signs and wonders in our midst. These signs and wonders can both be the outwardly spectacular e.g. miraculous physical healing, or the less outwardly spectacular e.g. the conversion of a soul, inner healing etc. Both bring glory to God and demonstrate His power.

## The Church

God by His Word (**Deut 4:10**) and Spirit (**Acts 2:47; 1 Cor 12:13**) creates the Church, calling sinful men out of the whole human race into the fellowship of Christ's Body (**Eph 4:4-6; 1 Pet 2:9**). By the same Word and Spirit, He guides and preserves that new redeemed humanity (**Matt 16:18; Acts 11:26; 1 Cor 7:17, 11:16, 14:4-5, 26, 34; Eph 5:27-29**). The Church is not a religious institution or denomination. Rather, the Church universal is made up of those who have become genuine followers of Jesus Christ and have personally appropriated the gospel (**Matt 18:15-20; Acts 2:41,47; 14:23; 20:7; 1 Cor 1:2, 9; 11:20; 12:13; 16:1-2**). The Church exists to worship and glorify God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (**Col 3:16; Eph 1:2; Eph 5:16-19; 1 Pet 2:9**). It also exists to serve Him by faithfully doing His will in the earth (**Matt 28:19; Acts 11:29; 2 Cor 8:4; Gal 2:10; 1 John 3:17**). This involves a commitment to see the gospel preached (**Isa 61:1; Matt 10:7, 11:1,5; 24:14; 26:13; Mark 3:14; 6:12; 13:10; 14:9; 16:15,20; Lk 9:2, 6; 16:16; 24:47; Acts 8:4; 14:7,21; Rom 10:15; 15:20; 1 Cor 1:21,23; 2:4; 9:16; 15:1, 11; 2 Cor 4:5; 1 Tim 4:13; 2 Tim 4:2**) and churches planted in all the world for a testimony (**Acts 8:1, 4, 14; 9:31; 11:19-22; 13:2; 14:21-23; 1 Cor 3:6; Col 1:6; 1 Thess 1:7, 8; Tit 1:5**). The ultimate mission of the Church is the making of disciples through the preaching of the gospel (**Matt 28:18-20**). When God transforms human nature, this then becomes the chief means of society's transformation (**Jer 29:7; Matt 5:13-16; Rom 8:19-21; Gal 2:14**). Upon conversion, newly redeemed men and women are added to a local church, in which they devote themselves to teaching, fellowship, the Lord's Supper, and prayer (**Acts 2:41-42**).

All members of the Church universal are to be a vital and committed part of a local church (**Acts 9:31; 20:28-30; Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 1:2; 16:19; 2 Cor 1:1; 1 Thess 1:1; Philem 1:2**). In this context they are called to walk out the New Covenant as the people of God (**2 Cor 3:6**), and demonstrate the reality of the kingdom of God (**Matt 10:8; 12:18; 16:19; 24:14; Rom 14:17; 1 Cor 6:9-10**). The ascended Christ has given gift ministries to the church (including apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers) for the equipping of Christ's body that it might mature and grow (**1 Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11-14**). Through the gift ministries, all members of the Church are to be nurtured and equipped for the work of ministry (**1 Cor 14:3, 12, 26; Eph 4:12**). Eldership in the church is male (**1 Cor 14:33-34; 1 Tim 2:11-14; 3:2; Tit 1:5-6**). In the context of the

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*local church, God's people receive pastoral care and leadership (Acts 20:28; Heb 13:17; 1 Tim 3:5,13; 2 Tim 2:10,14-15,24-26; 4:2-5; Tit 1:7,9; 2:1) and the opportunity to employ their God-given gifts in His service in relation to one another and to the world (1 Cor 12:4-31; 14:1-33; Eph 5:18-21).*

**IMPLICATIONS:** Because the church is God's means of growing the believer, we do not believe it is possible to be a healthy Christian without being a part of a local church. We seek to be a vital, active member in the local church that God has placed us in. We serve others with our gifts, and receive the help and ministry of others, that together, we may grow in know Christ, holiness, and making Christ known to the world.

## The Ordinances

*Water baptism (Matt 3:6,11,13-16; Mark 1:5-9; Lk 3:16,21; John 1:26,33) is intended only for the individual who has received the saving benefits of Christ's atoning work and become His disciple (Acts 2:41; 8:12; 10:44-48; 16:14-15, 32-33; 1 Cor 1:16; Rom 6:3-4; Col 2:12; Gal 3:27). Therefore, in obedience to Christ's command (Matt 3:15; 28:19; Acts 2:38) and as a testimony to God, the Church, oneself, and the world, a believer should be immersed in water (Matt 3:16; Mark 1:5,10; John 3:23; Acts 8:36-39; Rom 6:3-4; Col 2:12) in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Matt 28:19). Water baptism is a visual demonstration (Rom 6:3) of a person's union with Christ in the likeness of His death and resurrection (Rom 6:4-5). It signifies that his former way of life has been put to death, and vividly depicts a person's release from the mastery of sin (Rom 6:6-11).*

*As with water baptism, the Lord's Supper is to be observed only by those who have become genuine followers of Christ (1 Cor 10:17; 11:29-30). This ordinance symbolises the breaking of Christ's body and the shedding of His blood on our behalf (Matt 26:26-29; 1 Cor 11:23-25), and is to be observed repeatedly throughout the Christian life as a sign of continued participation in the atoning benefits of Christ's death (Matt 26:27-29; 1 Cor 10:16, 21). As we partake of the Lord's Supper with an attitude of faith (Heb 10:22) and self-examination (1 Cor 11:28), we remember (1 Cor 11:25) and proclaim the death of Christ (1 Cor 11:26), receive spiritual nourishment for our souls (John 6:53-57), and signify our unity with other members of Christ's body (1 Cor 10:17).*

**IMPLICATIONS:** In accordance with God's commands, we seek to be baptized as close as possible to the time that we have come to faith in Christ, as a public proclamation, and sign of our union with Christ. We also gladly participate in the

Lord's Supper with our brothers and sisters in Christ, taking it as an opportunity to examine ourselves, repent of sin, make amends with our fellow Christians, and celebrate what Christ has done to redeem us all from sin, and make us one family in Him.

## **The Consummation**

*The Consummation of all things includes the visible, personal and glorious return of Jesus Christ (Matt 24:44; John 14:3; Acts 1:11; 1 Thess 4:16; Heb 9:28; 2 Pet 3:10; 1 John 3:2; Rev 1:7; 22:20), the resurrection of the dead and the translation of those alive in Christ (Isa 26:19; Dan 12:2; 1 Cor 15; 1 Thes 4:13-18; Rev 20:13), the judgment of the just and the unjust (Ecc 12:14; Matt 12:36; Matt 26:31-32; Acts 17:31; Rom 14:10; 2 Cor 5:10; 2 Tim 4:1), and the fulfillment of Christ's kingdom in the new heavens and the new earth (Isa 65:17; 66:22; Rom 8:19-21; Heb 12:26-27; 2 Pet 3:13; Rev 21:1; 22:3). In the Consummation, Satan with his hosts (Rev 20:10) and all those outside Christ are finally separated from the benevolent presence of God, enduring eternal punishment (Matt 25:46; Lk 16:26; 2 Thess 1:9; Rev 14:11; 20:14-15; 21:6, 8; 22:14-15), but the righteous, in glorious bodies, shall live and reign with him forever (Matt 25:34, 46; John 14:2; 2 Tim 2:12; Rev 21:1-3). Married to Christ as his Bride, the Church will be in the presence of God forever, serving him and giving him unending praise and glory (Eph 1:6,12; 5:25-32; Rev 19:6-10; 21:3; 22:17). Then shall the eager expectation of creation be fulfilled (Rom 8:19-21; 1 Cor 15:20-28) and the whole earth shall proclaim the glory of God (Rev 22:3-5) who makes all things new (Rev 21:5).*

**IMPLICATIONS:** We long for Christ to return and encourage one another as we see the day approaching. We seek to live our lives radically in response to the reality that the lifestyles we currently live are temporal, and that Christ is coming soon to judge and restore creation to what it was meant to be. We hold our possessions and life itself lightly, and seek to spend ourselves for the cause of Christ.

# 3

## Our Distinctives

### Gospel-Centered

What does it mean to be “gospel-centered”? Being gospel-centered means that we turn to the gospel, by its content and implications, to shape the whole of our church life, activities and priorities. We seek to be a church that preaches the gospel unashamedly and which finds our motivation for service and ministry in the gospel itself. We believe that the gospel is the basis for our salvation, the means by which we are sanctified, and the motivation for every action of the Christian. We do not believe that the gospel is simply the first step into the Kingdom, after which it is quickly left behind. As a church we break bread every week, ensure that the gospel is proclaimed in some way at every gathering we have, and long for people to be reconciled to God Himself, which is the ultimate outworking of the gospel in our lives.

What then is the content of this gospel? What is at its heart?

**1. Creation:** God as Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) existed in perfect goodness, joy, community and happiness. Though He has no lack or need, He created everything as an expression of His character – His goodness, happiness, joy, community, etc. The purpose of creation was that we may share in His joy and glory in Him.

**2. Fall:** In the garden, man rebelled against God. The result of that rebellion was separation and death, with man becoming totally depraved and both completely unwilling and unable to respond to God, let alone reconcile himself to God. This is how sin and death entered the world, leading to decay, sorrow, sadness and death.

**3. Redemption and Mission:** Throughout the Old Testament God promises that He will save His people. The Son of God becomes a man – Jesus – and lives the perfect life, dying to pay for man’s rebellion. Those who repent and place their faith in Him are saved from eternal punishment and are adopted into God’s family. Christians who have received Christ are sent into the world to proclaim this good news and live out its implications.

**4. Consummation:** The Scriptures tell us that we live in the time between the first and second coming of Christ. At the second coming, Jesus comes to judge all men. Those who are His will be rewarded and be with Him forever, those who are not will be cast out of His presence into the Hell of eternal suffering.

To put this story in far more succinct way, we would summarise it by saying that “*God saves sinners*”. God – triune, omnipotent, all wise, powerful and loving works to save His chosen people. The Father elects, the Son does the will of the Father and completes the work of salvation, the Spirit renews those who are saved by the will of the Father and the work of the Son. This work of salvation is entirely God’s doing, beginning, middle and end. God wills it, plans it, tells it, executes it, offers it, sustains it and brings every Christian from creation to calling to justification to sanctification to glorification. This salvation is given to sinners: men who, by God’s standard, are guilty, evil and completely unable to please God on their own, let alone relate to Him.

The gospel is central to everything we do as Christians. It is our conviction that all of life should flow out of our understanding of the gospel. The gospel is not simply the first step in our walk with God! It is not something we leave behind at the door as we progress on. Let us look at the implications of the gospel in three areas: God, ourselves and others:

## 1. God

### **The gospel makes us see God rightly – His person and His supremacy**

Jesus Christ reveals the Father. Through the Gospel we see His person – His holiness, love, mercy, grace, truth and justice all at the same time. The gospel shows how none of God’s attributes are ever suspended, rather that they are help together perfectly at all times. At the cross we see His holiness and wrath towards sin, yet simultaneously His incredibly love towards us as He bears the brunt of that wrath Himself.

God is supreme in all things and is our supreme goal, prize and desire. We acknowledge His hand in all of history, His will in everything. We acknowledge His rule over every realm. We recognise Him as the highest gift of the gospel, with nothing more desirable. We become God centered and recognise that the whole bible is about Him!

### **The gospel leads us to know God**

1 Peter 3:18 says that ‘Christ suffered once for our sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God’.

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When we understand the gospel correctly it leads us to love God with all our hearts, and gives us the confidence to approach Him and know Him. We glory in knowing Him, and find our delight and pleasure in His person. The aim of the gospel is not just to bring us forgiveness, but for us to be forgiven in order to be reconciled to God, to know Him and love Him with all our hearts, thereby fulfilling the great commandment, to love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind and strength.

The Westminster Confession says that the purpose of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. John Piper has said that God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him! If this is the case, then the gospel is a means to an end, the end being reconciled to God so that by being satisfied (complete, whole, healed, forgiven, secure, fulfilled) in Him, He is ultimately glorified. The gospel then is a gift of God that brings us to Himself, to have Christ in us and for us to abide to Him. This is completely impossible without the 'good news' of the gospel.

Through the gospel we understand that the veil that separated us from God's presence has been torn, and we are ushered into His presence to know Him in the most intimate and personal way.

### **The gospel makes us love God because He first loved us.**

In the gospel we see the great love of God for us. While Jesus was being nailed to the cross by his enemies, while he was dying for them, he cried out 'Father forgive them, for they know not what they do'.

When we come to see the truth of the gospel, we understand that we indeed might have been those Roman soldiers nailing Christ to the cross. By our individualistic, rebellious lives we have all tried to throw off God's authority. We have wished Him dead a thousand times over in our thoughts, actions and deeds. Yet, as was true of those Roman soldiers, while we were killing God, he was dying for us.

Isaiah's words are true for every human: "I was ready to be sought by those who did not ask for me, I was ready to be found by those who did not seek me. I said 'Here I am, here I am' to a nation that was not called by my name. I spread out my hands all the day to a rebellious people." (Isaiah 65:1-2). Our sin had us so trapped that we were utterly unable to respond to God apart from Him initiating this relationship with us, and sending His Spirit into our hearts. When we realise our total depravity and therefore inability to help or save ourselves, we can say "we love Him because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

The result is true worship. When the gospel message of God's perfect holiness and perfect love take their full effect in our hearts, our reality changes and we worship God rightly. No matter what our preferred method or tradition of worship is, when we are renewed, we worship God with our whole being – heart, mind, will and strength – a worship that transcends the dichotomous trappings of intellectual-emotional, formal-informal, believer-seeker or other extremes that keep us away from true worship.

## 2. Our Lives

### **The gospel makes us see ourselves rightly – humble yet confident**

The gospel tells us that our purpose is the glory of God, for His and our eternal joy. It correctly identifies us as His children and servants, His princes/princesses and laborers. As believers we are a fallen creation restored, a perspective that makes us humble yet confident, proud yet submissive, powerful yet reliant.

### **The gospel gives us our identity and our purpose.**

“Who am I and what am I living for?” is the nagging question that has crossed everyone's mind. Without an identity, we are empty; without a purpose we are lost. The gospel answers both these questions and brings us back into sharp focus as we unveil our true nature and the glorious calling that we have.

The true gospel correctly identifies each one of us – God's good, unique, beloved creation made fallen and worthless through our own willful sin. The gospel tells us that in spite of this we are precious – beloved enough to be redeemed at the highest price of God's own life. In the light of the gospel we are neither too worthless, that God dismisses us, or too precious, that we would think we are worth anything on our own.

### **The gospel brings deep change to our lives.**

The gospel moves us to the point of repentance because since Christ's died for our sin, making us acceptable. This stands in contrast to the law, which tells us that if we do not obey, we will not be accepted.

Legalistic repentance dwells on broken rules and our failure to meet God's standards. Gospel repentance grieves for dishonoring God, breaking his heart and destroying our relationship with Him. Legalistic repentance is convicted by punishment, and grieves over the result of sin and how dangerous sinful behavior is. Burnt, but still tempted, we dance around the edge of the fire, desiring to touch it. It turns away the hands from sinning, but cannot kill sin at its source – our hearts. Gospel repentance grieves over sin and how it damages our relationship with God, making it in its essence so putrid and disgusting that we go out of our way to get away from it. It turns our hearts away from sin.

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The fact that Jesus **died** for you results in incredible conviction over your sin, but that fact that He died **for you** brings the most amazing comfort! So we are simultaneously challenged and comforted! This is why true gospel preaching moves us from sin and leads us to delight in and love God with all our hearts.

### **The gospel makes us radical**

The gospel does not give itself to mundane responses. It will not evoke a blasé response that hums in the background of the believer. The gospel is radical – God died! What a radical price! – and so we, the people of the gospel, are radical in our response to Him.

We love radically, we live radically, we see the world in a radically different light.

## 3. Other People

### **The gospel makes us see other people rightly – of great worth and completely in need of God.**

Not only does the gospel reform our view of God and of ourselves, it also conforms our view of other people to God's view. We realise that He loves them deeply, even while they are His enemies, and the price He paid for us He pays for others also. We see that all of us need God desperately, whether we know it or not, and then seek to live our lives so that others may recognise this fact as well.

### **The gospel makes us love other people**

When we see how much God has loved us although we were his enemies, it affects our hearts and we realise that no matter how badly other people have treated us, it pales in comparison to the way in which we have treated God. And despite the way in which we treated Him, He has loved us with an everlasting love, taken the initiative to see us reconciled to Him, and paid the price (taken the punishment) that we should have taken. When we realise that we are the recipients of such great love, we cannot hold unforgiveness towards others, no matter what they have done to us. More than this, we don't just forgive them, but we love them, knowing that Christ, on whom our life is built and in whose image we are being transformed into day by day, loves them too.

### **The gospel defines the Church**

The gospel is also the basis for the Church – the family and community of God. Not merely the structure and composition of the Church but the spirit and nature of it, modeled after Jesus Christ.

True gospel living brings down the barriers that keep relationships shallow. We realise that we are not trying to uphold a competent, righteous and good image

for others to see, and live real lives, revealing our weaknesses to others without fear of shame. We no longer pretend or avoid the truth, or tell little and big lies to disguise the way things are.

The gospel also fills us with humility that works out as sympathy and patience for the sufferings and weaknesses of others. We are no longer so insecure that we have to be judgmental of others, or feel a need to elevate ourselves through one-upmanship.

This allows relationships in the church to be sincere and deep. Heart-bound brothers and sisters who by the truth of the gospel lovingly rebuke, encourage, build up and admonish one another “as iron sharpens iron”. Change in our community does not come through programs or laws or policy but interactively, in community by the Spirit. We learn by emulating those who emulate Christ, discussing the truth and implications of the gospel and holding ourselves accountable to others.

We become a counter-cultural community that is attractive to others, set apart and visible like a city on a hill.

### **The gospel makes us a people on a mission**

Because we have experienced firsthand the great love of God and have seen it transform our lives, we are eager to tell others of this great news of salvation and love of God. The gospel truly makes us a people on a mission. We want to dedicate our lives to God’s service, surrendering to His will, serving Him all our days. We want others to experience what we have experienced in Christ, and our lives revolve around Him and His purposes. When we see that He is actively involved in preaching the Gospel to all nations, we want to make His priority our priority, and gladly do so.

The gospel makes every believer an evangelist. Everyone preaches the gospel and tells it to the people they know, adding daily to the numbers in the Church. Many receive the gospel for the first time and the church grows more through new believers than through Christians moving between churches.

Gospel-centered evangelism is not programmed or built but is a natural outpouring of the joy and love of God, in the truth of God. We preach the gospel and affirm its truth as humble servants and messengers, not seeking to put anyone down or ignite prideful debate. We are not trying to prove ourselves or project an image for Christianity. The gospel is gentle and bold.

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### **The gospel results in social justice and social action**

The gospel re-orientates us with regard to poverty and injustice. We cannot turn a blind eye to need, or super-spiritualise God's ultimate provision. Our redemption from spiritual bankruptcy makes our pursuit of material wealth irrelevant. We do not grasp tightly to material wealth or derive security or confidence from it. We do not value ourselves or any other person based on the material scale. James 1 and 2 implore us to give generously, not pay lip service, remember our redemption, take real action and give with humility.

We shine a light that is effective and enlightens the world to our Saviour. We serve our neighbours and strangers sacrificially and without complaint or expectation of reward. We serve our community, we give to our nation, we extend the provision of God to the world. When we truly see Jesus, we can never hold any indifference to the needy in our hearts.

### **Cultural renewal**

The gospel reveals itself to us as the all in all of Christianity. It is relevant and primary in every step of our walk. It is not an entryway or a minimum of beliefs to be counted among God's people. It must consume us. It consumes every part of our lives, including the way we relate to the culture we live in.

Paul addressed race and nationality, sex and gender roles, civil law and social status and a whole slew of life issues by referring to the gospel for direction on everything. The fundamental truths of the gospel are applicable to every sphere of life, leading us away from works-based religion and into a life-changing worldview. Therefore we approach our careers differently, we develop our relationships differently, we choose our activities differently and we judge and act differently to those who have not been transformed. Our public life is different. Our private life is different.

Gospel-centered believers, because they stand out, make an impact on the arts, business, science, government, media, academia, and leisure of their society. This impact on the culture comes not primarily through programmatic reform, but essentially by being true Christians, who cannot help but shine like lights as they live and breathe in their community.

### **The gospel is the kingdom of God in us, living in the world.**

Naturally then, the gospel produces the Kingdom of God in us, and therefore God's Kingdom extends through the world as we reflect it. Jesus' death wasn't only to secure an eternal place in heaven, but to bring heaven to earth. As the gospel works its way through our lives, so it ushers in God's Kingdom.

# Reformed

When we say that we are reformed, we are referring to two primary things: Firstly, an adherence to the 5 ‘solas’ of the reformation and secondly to the sovereignty of God.

## The “5 solas” of the reformation

The “5 solas” of the reformation refer to five stands that the reformers took regarding the faith. The word ‘sola’ is Latin for ‘only’ and so the “5 solas” mean that these five things are absolute and the highest authority in their areas. The five solas are: Sola Scriptura (Scripture alone), Sola Christus (Christ alone), Sola Gratia (by grace alone), Sola Fide (through faith alone), Soli Deo Gloria (for God’s glory alone). Let us have a look at them now:

**1. Scripture alone (Sola scriptura):** This is the teaching that the only infallible and sufficient rule for deciding issues of faith and practices that involves doctrines is the scriptures. Scripture does not speak of everything, but does contain what is necessary for understanding salvation, and conduct in the Christian life and church. As a direct implication of this, human tradition, experiences, history or cultural practices are not the authority for the Christian. Tradition may be valuable, but must be tested under the higher authority of the scriptures. This means that we are a people of the bible, eager to study learn and apply scripture to our lives.

**2. Christ alone (Solus Christus):** This states that Christ alone is the only way to the Father. He indeed is the “narrow gate” (Matthew 7) and in His own words “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except by me” (John 14.6). Because there is no other way, Christ Himself is our confidence, our hope and our message. The implications for church life are significant. We must clearly distinguish between Christianity (solus Christus) and religion, that attempts to add extra requirements to salvation, and hence glories in mans own achievement rather than in Christ.

**3. Grace alone (Sola gratia):** This teaching emphasises that our justification before God (and therefore our salvation) are both solely by the sovereign grace of God and not as a result of man’s action or work. There is nothing that we can do to earn our salvation, there is nothing we can do to commend ourselves to God. Salvation is entirely an act of the grace of God. Augustine said “God bids us do what we cannot, that we may know what we ought to seek from Him.”

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**4. Faith alone (Sola fide):** Faith alone shows us that the only response that we are to have in the process of salvation is to believe (John 6). To further clarify, faith itself in Christ is not a 'work' we do, but rather a channel through which we receive the work of Christ, His substitutionary death on the cross and imputed righteousness to us. This is the cornerstone of "justification by faith" and shows us that there is no work that man can do to endear himself to God, except to simply believe the gospel. There is no basis for our acceptance before God except in Christ's saving work, not in our church devotion or moral decency. The gospel declares what God has done for us in Christ. It is not about what we can do to reach Him. John Blanchard says "Grace is not a reward for faith; faith is the result of grace." Or consider B.B. Warfield's words: "It is not faith that saves, but faith in Jesus Christ... It is not, strictly speaking, even faith in Christ that saves, but Christ that saves through faith. The saving power resides exclusively, not in the act of faith or the attitude of faith or in the nature of faith, but in the object of faith."

**5. God's glory alone (Soli Deo Gloria):** Because salvation is of God and has been accomplished by God, it stands that it is accomplished for God's glory. This is what we must affirm always. Since God did all the work, He alone gets all the glory.

**In summary:** Scripture is our highest authority and reveals a salvation that is found in Christ alone, by grace alone, through faith alone, for the glory of God alone. This is the article by which the church stands or falls.

## The Sovereignty of God

The Sovereignty of God over all things is a key and glorious truth that brings security to believers and glory to God. It has many implications for how we view life and ministry.

A summary of the Sovereignty of God can be found in Psalm 115:3 "Our God is in the Heavens, He does all that He pleases". The Sovereignty of God means that God does as He pleases, nothing can stand in His path, and that He is over all things including our salvation.

**The Sovereignty of God in life:** This brings immeasurable comfort to the Christian. Nothing happens on earth that takes God by surprise, or that He has not allowed to happen in one sense. This means that "there is no temptation that has seized you that is not common to man, and he will provide a way

out". It means that in the midst of the darkest hours of our lives we can look heavenward knowing that God is over all. It means that we give glory to God in all circumstances, when things are going well and when things are not going well. It brings comfort to us knowing that God's plans cannot be thwarted; what He has decreed will come to pass.

**The Sovereignty of God in salvation:** This truth in scripture shows us that God is the initiator, full author and means of salvation. Unless God first acts, no man would respond to him. Our lostness is complete, truly there is no one who seeks for good; all have turned away and become worthless. Our rebellion against God means that unless He acts to open our eyes to the glory of His gospel, we have no ability to respond of our own accord. This is called regeneration, and is the process by which God sends His Holy Spirit to open our eyes to the truth of the gospel and the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor 3). Without this work of the spirit, we are blinded to God by the god of this age and unable to respond to Him.

This means that God has to initiate for us to respond to Him. Romans 9 says that this results in full dependence on Him and praise to the glories of His grace (Eph 1).

Not only is God the initiator of our salvation, but He is the means of our salvation. God Himself became a man (Phil 2), emptying Himself and taking on human flesh that He might live a perfect unblemished life before God and die on the cross in our place. At the cross the great exchange took place, where our sin is imputed to Him, and His righteousness is imputed to those who believe.

This means that both the means of salvation (the cross of Christ) and the ability to be saved are God's work. As the scripture says, who then can be saved? God answers "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy". We are not to talk back to God to question His actions on who His mercy is extended to. Without His mercy none at all would be saved. By His mercy many are, to the praise of His glorious grace.

Predestination then is the act of God before creation in which he chooses some people to be saved, not on account of any foreseen merit in them, but only because of His sovereign good pleasure.

Our understanding of doctrine must come from the scriptures, and not from any tradition. This is a vital distinction to make. When we come with a certain tradition in mind, it can make us want to superimpose our views over all of the

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bible. This invariably leads to distorting or ignoring certain scriptures so that they 'fit in with our doctrine'! This is not good. We must come first and foremost to the bible, see what it says to us, and then live out our lives in the light of those scriptures.

This guards against any strange application of doctrine. For example, the truths about God's Sovereignty and election do not take away any responsibility from us. We have to preach the gospel to people in order for them to hear and be saved. We cannot be fatalistic because scripture itself doesn't allow it. In addition to this, we see that in Romans, Paul expounds the doctrine of predestination with great clarity in chapter 9 but then in the next passage urges that preachers must be sent out, saying that "whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved".

### What are the implications of being Reformed?

1. **We are humble people:** No man can take even the slightest iota of credit for his salvation! It rests entirely in the hands of God. We are humbled before Him yet affirmed by His love for us. We believe that God saved us, we are humbled and wonder what our lives would be like were it not for grace. We honor and respect others.
2. **We have incredible gratitude to God:** It results in praise of His glorious grace, and hence deep love for God. The doctrine of the sovereignty of God will make us see the glorious truth of the scripture "we love Him because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). Ephesians says that "in love He predestined us to adoption... to the praise of His glorious grace".
3. **We have confidence to witness and share the gospel:** This comes from knowing that it is not pressure, techniques, abilities or giftings that "convert" people, but that God is the one who opens eyes to the gospel.
4. **We are radically word based:** This is the result of knowing that scriptures are sufficient to teach us all things. Scripture must determine our behaviour. We submit ourselves to the authority of the Word.
5. **We embrace Christ and surrender our all to Him:** We surrender all to Christ because God has ordained Him supreme over all. We recognise that Christ in us is the hope of Glory.
6. **We love God with all of our hearts:** Because we have seen the unmerited love of God displayed to us, we respond with love for Him. We love him because He first loved us. This is what empowers us to obey the great commandment.

7. **We become a people of faith:** We trust God, believe His promises, and stake our lives on His claims. We walk by faith and not by sight.
8. **We keep the main thing the main thing, which is the gospel.**

## Charismatic

We believe that the living and active work of the Holy Spirit, including all the gifts of the Holy Spirit, as Biblically described and prescribed in the New Testament, particularly in the book of Acts and the first letter to the Corinthians, are a vital component of the life and ministry of the church for today. We believe that the Holy Spirit empowers the people of God for ministry, guides each believer according to God's will and leads us to the truth. His presence and gifts are to be hungered after and eagerly desired in accordance with His Word. We also believe that Scripture is God's authority in revelation, and cannot be superseded by any other revelation.

Part of the belief of being charismatic assumes that God does speak to His people personally and regularly, and that we are in this kind of relationship with Him. He is our Father, who draws near to us, and leads and guides us by His Holy Spirit. This personal revelation happens primarily through gifts of the Holy Spirit, as well as God's inward audible voice. These are detailed in 1 Corinthians 12-14, where it says that we should "eagerly desire" the spiritual gifts (1 Cor 14:1). This means that we aren't to be 'theoretical charismatics' but we are to long for and practice these gifts. Corinthians makes it clear that these gifts are for the building up of the body of Christ, and should be therefore be desired as they help us to "build up the church" (1 Cor 12:14).

Being charismatic means that God is not just the Lord over your life in the bigger picture sense but that He wants to be over you in the smallest details of your life! He's leading and speaking now, talking, rebuking, challenging, convicting, etc. This we must realize and deal with. When we are charismatic, we live in the Spirit, are guided by the Spirit and are empowered by the Spirit.

This is what keeps us from getting over-planned or over-organised about church and our services. We do want and expect God to lead us, and our expectation of this makes us hold all of our plans lightly. When we meet for services or any Christian gathering, we are not only worshiping Him but actively participating with and responding to Him. This involves worship, hearing from Him, cooperating, being changed and transformed, seeing His Kingdom come in our midst, seeing the lost won, praying to Him, experiencing His presence, repenting of sins and re-orientating our lives to His priorities.

### What are the implications of being Charismatic?

1. **We are a people of prayer:** We wait and press on in prayer, knowing that God hears us, delights in our prayers, and responds to us. We seek to spend time in God's presence: asking, seeking and knocking.
2. **We are led by the Holy Spirit:** We strive to live lives that are 'abiding in the vine' and living in intimate relationship with God himself. Because He is living and active, and because we can know Him, we expect Him to speak to us, lead and guide us.
3. **We walk in the power of the Holy Spirit:** the Holy Spirit empowers us to witness and live the Christian life. Jesus said that when the disciples were baptised with the Holy Spirit they would receive power to witness. The Holy Spirit empowers us for service, and gives gifts to us that help to build up the body and declare God's glory. We long for and expect the power of the Holy Spirit in our daily lives.
4. **We expect God to lead us:** God leads us day by day, directing our paths, affirming His love for us, and growing us in godliness.
5. **We expect God to speak to us through His gifts:** These charismatic gifts are used in our services, small groups, prayer meeting, and throughout our lives.
6. **We believe and expect that God will work through us in miraculous ways for His glory:** We keep in step with the Holy Spirit so that He may lead us and we may know His will in these areas.

## Missional

We see that mission is at the heart of our great God who sent His Son Jesus into the world to save the world. He took on human flesh, did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, becoming nothing. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, learning a language, living in a culture, and preaching the good news. Jesus says that as the Father had sent him, so He was sending us into the world. As Christians, our deep desire is that others may come to know this great God that we serve. We therefore see ourselves as "missionaries" to our world, sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The unchanging, eternal Gospel of God must be communicated to the culture in which we live. As children of our Father, we pray to Him for all men, knowing that He desires all people to come to a saving knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:4). We believe the words of Jesus, that as the Father sent Him into the world so He sends us into the world. We are therefore sent to witness to individuals, thereby discipling nations.

Being missional means that we do this for the sake of the lost. We say like Paul *“woe is me if I don’t preach the gospel”*. This is the reason - we want all to know! We love for His sake, live for His sake and do all things for His sake, as we were made to.

We therefore believe in incarnational Christianity, rather than a ‘build it and they will come’ mentality. Jesus came and was incarnated (took on human form) and likewise we want to take ministry to people, leaving the walls of our church building and sharing the good news of the gospel with them.

This will also require sacrifice on our part for the mission. In many parts of Christendom there exists a sense of entitlement. Those who have such an attitude, though they might not articulate it, assume that the church exists merely to meet one’s own felt needs. Therefore, the church that caters to such an ideology is forced to create thousands of different programs to meet those ever-changing desires.

The Bible does not teach that the church exists to meet our needs, but rather that we exist to meet the needs of others. A heart of humility does not say “meet my needs,” but instead “do not pander to me. I am here to serve.” In the end, the greatest need, felt or not, is for the gospel. If we spend our time meeting peripheral issues, all we have done is dealt with symptoms without addressing the disease. Certainly we recognise the legitimacy of needs and are here to serve those in need, but an attitude of entitlement and true service are at odds.

This means that every person in the church must see themselves as a missionary to their culture. We are called to impact our community by loving neighbors, listening to their questions, objections and concerns, spending time with them in their ‘worlds’ and giving generously and sacrificially to meet their needs.

### Some implications of what it means to be Missional:

1. **We share the gospel to unbelievers:** Recognizing that we are called to be witnesses of Jesus Christ, we share the gospel with those who do not know Him, praying that they will come to believe in Him.
2. **We serve others:** Just as Christ came to serve, so we live to serve others, both in our community and out of it. We don’t want to only preach with words to our neighbours, we want to them to see a real commitment to them and their wellbeing by the way that we live our lives. This means we are engaged in community service and projects, uplifting those in need.
3. **We are ready to pay the price:** Jesus said that he had no place to put his head, and as His followers we don’t expect to be treated better than He

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was. We are more than willing to forsake homes, countries, wealth, family, job and status for the sake of the gospel.

4. **We believe in church planting:** The Great Commission is best fulfilled by planting New Testament churches. We want to fulfill the great commission by planting new testament churches across the world. We pray for these, support existing church plants with finances, prayer and other resources.
5. **We are engaged in our community:** We are in the world but not of it. We don't let church activity effectively remove us from our network into the culture. We are involved, and shine as light in the midst of a crooked and depraved world.

# 4

## Why Join a Local Church?

### The Local Church

Each one of us has had a different experience of church, coloured by our culture, relationships, education, joys, hurts and other significant episodes in our lives. Some of us want to avoid church, some want to check it off their weekly to-do list, others look forward to it as a refreshing and inspiring part of their week.

### What is a “church”?

The bible tells us that it is important to be part of a church. The Greek word “*ekklesia*” is translated 112 times in the bible as “church” and 3 times as “assembly”. It is used to refer to both the universal church (the assembly of all who are saved) and the local church (the assembly of saints in a geographical area that meet together to worship and do God’s work).

Let us look at some of the distinguishing marks of the universal and local church.

<b>Universal church</b>	<b>Local church</b>
Composed of all Christians (Heb 12:22-24)	Composed of Christians in one physical place (1 Cor 1:2; 1 Thess 1:1, etc)
There is only one universal church (Eph 1:22-23; 4:4)	There are many local churches (Rom 16:16; Gal 1:2)
Members are added and approved by God (Acts 2:41; 2 Tim 2:19)	Members added and approved by human authority and judgement (Acts 9:26-28; 3 John 5-10)
Membership is only for saved (Eph 5:23)	People can feign salvation to gain membership (Rev 3:1-4; Acts 20:28-30)

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Membership is eternal (1 Thess 5:10)	Membership is temporal and can be terminated (Matt 18:15-17)
Not divided (Luke 11:17)	Can be divided (1 Cor 1:10-13) although this doesn't mean the universal church gets divided (see verse 13)

There are some who consider the local church to be flawed, and therefore not worth participating in. Others still consider membership in the universal church to be sufficient for all the Christian's needs. If we read the bible, it becomes clear to us that God intends for true believers everywhere to be part of a local "*ekklesia*" in addition to our God-given membership in the universal church. Their local church is where we put into practice and action the mission of the universal church. The local church is where our knowledge of God gets put into practice.

The local church is not designed by God to be a sideshow in the Christian's life. Scripture constantly places the emphasis of the order of the Christian life around the church. The bible talks more about living and growing in terms of the church than it does in terms of our family, nation, profession, role or other pursuits. The bible is the word of God and God's priority is the church – we need to make God's priority our own.

The local church is where our Christianity gets worked out. It is one thing to believe and to say we believe, but when we put faith into action, our faith becomes alive – meaningful, relevant and vital.

It is through relationships in the local church that we become the community of God on mission. The local church provides the opportunity to be cohesive as a community (like the three persons of the Godhead are). It reminds us that we are inseparable from God and find our identity in Him. It also gives us a mission that cannot be accomplished by any of us working alone – the work of the glory of the gospel of God.

## The doctrine of the local church

Each one of us is called to be part of a local church. Hebrews 10:25 tells Christians not to forgo meeting together. This meeting of believers for worship, prayer, teaching, fellowship, communion and giving, under the authority of church leaders (Acts 2:42-47), is the outline of the activity of the local church.

This means that as a local church, we are a group of Christians who meet together to commit and pursue the ordered purposes of a local church. In other words, a church congregation not only looks like a church on the outside (an assembly), but also acts like a church based on what the bible describes. This means that they are united in their biblical mission, purpose, form, structure and relationships.

### Commitment to the local church

Not only must every Christian be part of a local church, they must also be committed to the local church they are currently in and identify themselves as part of that congregation. This means that not only does the Christian fulfil the purposes of the universal church, he or she also works to fulfil the purposes of the local church that he or she is committed to and submitted to (Hebrews 13:17).

From a leadership perspective, it is also important that individual Christians clearly commit to membership in a local church. Without such commitment, it will be difficult (if not impossible) to determine whose spiritual growth and discipline an elder is responsible for (Hebrews 13:17; Acts 20:28-30). Elders also need to know whom to withdraw from the fellowship of the church for discipline (Matthew 18:15-17) and who to treat as an internal or external source of false teaching or misconduct (1 Corinthians 5, 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15). Elders only have pastoral oversight of the flock that God has appointed them over (1 Peter 5:2-3; Acts 20:28).

For example Paul, when he moved to Jerusalem from Damascus (Acts 9:26-28), sought to be “joined” with the church in Jerusalem. Likewise, when Apollos went to minister in Achaia from Ephesus, the Ephesian church wrote to the church in Achaia to ask that they welcome him there and support him (2 Corinthians 11:8).

### The mission of the local church

Joshua Harris’ book “Stop Dating the Church” (Multnomah, 2004) explains the mission of a local church as follows:

- A local church is a tangible, visible, real-world expression of the body of Christ.
- A local congregation shows non-Christian neighbours that the new life through Jesus’ death on the cross is also the foundation for a new society.

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- By living the gospel as a distinct community, the church accomplishes the mission of displaying the transforming effects of the gospel for the world to see.
- A local church is also measured by its ordinances of baptism (Matthew 28:19; Romans 6:4), The Lord's Supper (Matthew 26:26-29; 1 Corinthians 11:23-25) and church discipline (Matthew 18).

Being a part of the local church ought to fill us with joy. We are in the company of fellow saints and sufferers; we are in the presence of a family that is more fundamental and eternal than our biological families. We not only have a shared identity, but a shared mission given by Jesus Christ.

# Leadership

Church leadership is a weighty thing. Before getting into specifics about elders, deacons and church members, we wish to put forward several biblical concepts that will help us better understand the basis on which church leadership is built.

**Equality before God:** Every man's equality before God is clearly taught in scripture (1Cor 12:13, Gal 3:28, Col 3:11). It is from this fundamental starting point that we see our common relationship with God, value in His eyes, basic responsibilities and new life in Christ.

The mechanics and structure of the body of Christ do not conform to the ways of the world. Worldly power, and with it worldly ambition, goes out the window in the light of Christ. This will require us to completely re-think what we know about how leadership works.

**Hierarchy:** While it is true that individuals rise to lead God's people at different times, places and circumstances, this is due to the mechanics of roles and gifting, as well as God's appointment rather than instituted hierarchy of power. We can see this in scripture when the church is compared to a family (Heb 2:11) and a body (1Cor 12:27).

The organisation of a body or of a family is not one that emphasises hierarchy, but one that emphasises roles and gifts, with every member or part as important as the next (1Cor 12:21), with different functions, one function of which is leadership.

**Biblical authority:** The authority given to church leaders is not the same as the authority given to leaders in secular organisations. All authority is given to

and flows from Christ (Luke 4:6, Col 2:10, Matt 28:18). This must be recognised first because it is ultimately Christ who enables us and gives us knowledge, authority and His Spirit to accomplish the work He has called us to.

Church leaders exercise biblical authority to accomplish their duties. The whole church is to be obedient to the eldership of a church (Heb 13:17, 1Thess 5:12-13). The respect and obedience given to elders allows them to effectively perform their responsibility to God and to the members they lead.

**Gifting:** In terms of the qualifications of elders, deacons and other leaders in the church body, the Bible makes it clear that character is the primary concern. We see in both 1Tim 3:1-13 and Titus 1:5-9 that God considers it foremost that people who lead the church be of Godly character. Once character has been established, there is also a consideration of gifting.

**Servant leadership:** One of the great dangers of leadership is a natural inclination to abuse a position of authority by treating the position as something detached from the people that the authority is over. This is particularly the case when people wrongly view the church as primarily a structured organisation and then serve the form of the organisation rather than its people.

Leadership in a church cannot be defined outside of relationship with the family of God. Three of the great characters of this relationship are servanthood, love and humility.

First, we look at servanthood. Jesus' teaching on the clear connection between leading and serving is in Mark 9:33-35. John 13:14-15 is also given as the rule in Christian life to all those who are His, whether they are in positions of leadership or not.

Second, we consider love. The commandment comes from Jesus in John 15:12 and is repeated by the apostles throughout the New Testament in places like 1John 4:7-12 and Romans 12:10. This profound commandment must transform the concept and practice of leadership in the church.

Thirdly, we need to remember humility. Humility flows from a life of servanthood. Our servanthood is to the people around us but more importantly to God. When we have a humble spirit, we obey God and are exalted by Him (Matt 23:8-12), avoid strife and receive God's grace (James 4).

**Plurality:** The church was never meant to be led by one man at the top of an organisational chart. The Bible consistently places a strong emphasis on plural

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leadership in the church, with individuals taking the lead only as *primus inter pares*, or 'first among equals'. We will look first at plurality and then at *primus inter pares*.

The concept of plurality is closely tied to the concept of the priesthood of all believers (1Peter 2:4-9). It is this equal and complete access to God that all believers share that prevents any single individual from claiming that they alone should lead the body of Christ. Plurality is also tied to the concept of trinity.

Whenever elders are mentioned in the New Testament, they are almost always referred to in the plural. This appears in Titus 1:5, Acts 15, 1Peter 1:1, Acts 20:17, Philippians 1:1, and many other places. It has not been recorded in scripture that any church body was led by just a single elder.

The concept of *primus inter pares*, or 'first among equals' jumps out in 1Tim 5:17, which says that "elders who rule well should be considered worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in preaching and teaching." This means that certain elders, while not holding any special rank, but because of their calling and gifting and excellence in glorifying and reflecting Christ, should command greater honour than the other elders.

**Family structure:** Leadership in a church should have the dynamics of leadership in the family. This is why one of the qualifications of an elder is a track record of good family management and leadership (1Tim 3:4-5). The leadership of the family is much like the leadership of the body of Christ.

## What is an elder?

A leader of the church is referred to in the bible as both an elder (presbuteros, Titus 1:5) and overseer (episkopous, Titus 1:7). They are qualified individuals who have many duties.

One of the duties of an elder is pastoring. In spite of the understanding of "pastor" in modern English as a separate office from an elder, pastoring is actually a duty of an elder rather than a separate office. While by definition, someone who performs the duty of pastoring (shepherding the flock) would be called a pastor. The biblical intention is, that pastors and elders are one and the same.

The term "elder" also refers to a stage of life and the deference and respect accorded to it. In the past, this was given to mature, experienced and older members of the community (Job 32:6-7, Exodus 3:16). In the church elder, age has much less bearing on eldership than maturity in Christ does (Job 32:8-9,

1Tim 3:6). In the church, elders are those who have walked long and faithfully with God, know Him well, are submitted to Him and live lives that show it.

### The call of an elder

A man who becomes an elder must recognise that the duties of eldership become their primary responsibility, around which other responsibilities revolve. Obedience to God must re-order family, work, leisure and every thought (2 Cor 10:5). This however, does not equate to saying that an elder abandons his other responsibilities, but fulfils them in the light of his eldership, so that he may be qualified for eldership, effective in eldership, equipped for eldership, freed up for eldership and supplied for eldership.

An elder is fully committed to the local congregation that he has oversight of. He must put the needs of the flock before his own, like our Good Shepherd (John 10:11), and like a loving father (Matt 7:9-11). He must not desire to be away from the flock (Acts 20:36-38) and should wish to spend much time with them.

### Duties of an elder

The duties of an elder as described in scripture are:

- Pray (Acts 6:4)
- Minister (studying, preaching, teaching, counsel) the word (Acts 6:4, Heb 13:7, 1Tim 5:17)
- Rule the church and its affairs (1Tim 5:17, 1Thess 5:12)
- Care for (manage) the church (1Tim 3:5)
- Shepherd (feed, protect, lead) people in the church (1Pet 5:2)
- Give account to God for the spiritual state of church (Heb 13:17)
- Be examples of life and faith for others to follow (Heb 13:7, 1Pet 5:3)
- Use their authority wisely (1Pet 5:3)
- Teach the bible correctly (Eph 4:11, 1Tim 3:2, Titus 1:9)
- Pray for the sick (James 5:13-15)
- Rebuke false teachings (Titus 1:9)
- Protect the church from false teachings (Acts 20:17-31)
- Work hard (1Thess 5:12, Acts 20:35)
- Admonish the flock (Acts 20:31, 1Thess 5:12)
- Discipline unrepentant Christians (Matt 18:15-17)
- Lead the church in submitting to secular authority (Rom 13:1-7)
- Build up, train, disciple and develop Godly men to extend God's ministry (Eph 4:11-16, 2Tim 2:1-2)

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Many of these duties are also applicable to the rest of the flock, and naturally, because elders and non-elders alike are subject to the authority and leadership of God. As leaders, elders must pay particular attention to how they lead the rest of the flock in these matters.

Elders are shepherds who are also sheep. They lead only where Jesus leads, feed the flock only what Jesus has fed them, and protect the flock with the word of God. In other words, the best sheep make the best shepherds and the best servants make the best leaders, shedding light on the profound teaching of Jesus Christ in Matt 23:8-12, Mark 9:33-35, Mark 10:35-45 and Luke 18:9-14.

### What is a deacon?

Deacons are first mentioned in the bible in Acts 6:1-7. In this case, seven men were appointed to handle the task of serving tables, distributing relief fairly to all the widows of the church so that the apostles could pray and minister the word.

More about deacons can be found in Philippians 1:1 and 1Tim 3:8-13. At RHC, we believe that both men and women can hold the office of a deacon.

### Duties of a deacon

The word that “deacon” is taken from is the Greek “*diakonos*”. This word means servant or helper. This best defines the duties of a deacon.

Acts 6:1-7 records that the seven were appointed to serve (*diakonein*) the tables of widows. This can be extended to include mercy and benevolent ministries such as visitations and distribution of relief to the sick, orphans, the poor, the imprisoned, the fatherless, the destitute, martyrs and their families and the oppressed.

From Acts 6:1-7 we can also conclude that the purpose of the office of a deacon is to free up those whose primary duty is prayer and the ministry of the word. In other words, deacons assist elders in time-consuming practical matters so that elders can spend more time in prayer and the ministry of the word.

It can also be said that deacons, by their appointment, must help to unite the church. They help to pull together the fraying ends of a community that is larger than the elders can practically manage. They do this in a godly manner.

Deacons also enhance the evangelistic mission of the church by their work. Acts 6:7 indicates that the appointment of the seven enabled the ministry of the gospel to continue with great effect.

### Small groups

At RHC, we have a number of different types of small groups that meet during the week. We would encourage you to get involved in any one type of a small group, as a means to growing in your faith and community with others.

### Foundations for small groups

There are many different types of groups in a church, organised formally and informally along common grounds such as interests, objectives, experiences, physical proximity, background and more. No matter how different each of these groups is (compare an elder group meeting to a church football team), they should all have a few things in common. These common denominators are rooted in what the community of Christ is.

1 Corinthians 10:31 Reminds us that our lives and interactions (much more our interactions with fellow Christians) must be focused on glorifying God. We are to “do all to the glory of God”. Likewise Colossians 3:17 also says that every word and deed is for the sake of Christ Jesus.

### Every group should enable and enhance the preaching of the gospel

As gospel-centered people, every group should remember constantly how it can preach the gospel as a group. Even when we play football as a group, we need to consider how the way we play enhances the preaching of the gospel!

### Every group should deepen gospel-based community

We meet up to build up. Not only does this mean godly, harmonious relationships, but a committed focus on community. The importance of relationships should never be sidelined in favour of the task at hand.

Let groups be a place for reconciliation, encouragement, familiarity and vulnerability. Many of us engage in our relationships in church without engaging in the spiritual reality of the church community. Relationships between Christians

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thrive on prayer, praise, and a spiritual perspective on activity. This brings the reality of God into our relationships.

### Every group should provide a real-life opportunity to see the outworking of the gospel

The gospel is a way of life. Theology must result in doxology (giving glory to God) at the ground level. Every plan, interaction, thought and deed as a group needs to be rooted in putting gospel-living into practice.

## Service

The local church is where the rubber hits the road in terms of the gospel. Every Christian needs to be an active and serving part of the church. A body will not work well if even a small part of it is not pulling its weight.

There are no exceptions to serving according to our ability and gifts. Nobody is too young or too old, too uneducated or too posh. Everyone should serve to the level of their God-given ability and gifting.

After all, God is the one who has given us our time, energy, abilities and gifts. He gives these resources to accomplish His mission through us, His church.

### Serve for the sake of the gospel

Serving the body of Christ, in the body of Christ, is doing the work of the body of Christ – the gospel. Every act of service builds together to proclaim the gospel in many ways: by direct proclamation, by supporting the work of others (Matt 10:40-42), and by being, by example, the perfect bride of Christ – His church.

Our service should then be focused on the gospel, for the gospel. We do not serve for the benefit of our church body, or to assuage our guilt, or to pass time, gain experience, earn credit or satisfy someone's expectations. While all these other effects may happen in the course of service, they are not to be our primary motivation – God must come first.

### Serve according to your gifts

Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12:4-6 and 1 Peter 4:10 tell us that we serve one another with the gifts that God gives us. Paul also speaks about the married

serving as the married, and the celibate serving as the celibate – God puts us in our life situations and gives us our abilities and gifts for a reason. The gifts we have are just what God needs for His church.

This means that we should not manufacture human desire to serve in areas outside our gifting. We need to be responsible and serve with the gifts God has given us. Responsibility with what has been given is the foundation for greater service (Luke 16:10, 19:17).

### God will gift the body according to its need

The work of our church is God's work, not our own. It is directed by God and supplied by God. Not every Christian is called to do everything there is to do, and neither is every church called to do everything there is to do. While we desire to do more for God, be responsible with our gifts, and train up others using our gifts, we recognise that everything ultimately comes from God.

### God doesn't need you to serve; He wants you to

Our service doesn't do God any favours. He is more than enough to accomplish everything on His own. He has, however, chosen to work through us and has commanded that we serve and worship Him.

If our service doesn't do God any favours it, likewise, is not a favour (in the broader sense) to the church or to any group or individual. Our impetus for service is an attitude of servanthood. This is what the bible describes as a "bondservant" or "slave". We serve because it is what we are made and called to do, and because of that, serving God is our great joy.

### Service is service

Since all gifts are given by God, and all purposes are ordained by God, and God is not needy of our service, it is clear that no area of service is more "honourable" than another. In fact 1 Corinthians 12:21-26 reminds us that every part of the body is indispensable. Moreover, those parts that are considered "less honourable" are to be treated with more honour, and the parts that are weak are to be considered indispensable.

In conclusion, it would be good to take stock of the gifts and resources God has given to us and make full use of them to serve the church and to serve God. By

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doing so we shall fulfil our purpose and calling, please our Lord and maker, and find our utmost joy in Him.

The areas in Redemption Hill Church where you may like to serve include:

- Setup/Teardown teams
- Children's ministry
- Sound/AV teams
- Welcome desk
- Ushers
- Library
- Worship teams

As we mentioned at the start of this section, we expect every person who is a part of RHC to be serving in some capacity.

## Financial Giving

Some General Principles with regard to finances:

**God is the source and owner of everything:** In Psalm 24:1 we see that the earth is the Lord's and everything in it. Similarly, 1 Chronicles 29:10-13 shows that honor and wealth come from God. We are never owners of anything, but rather stewards of resources that God has entrusted to us.

**Money is not evil:** The bible says that the love of money is the root of evil, but money itself is not evil. Because of the fall, money gets corrupted and can be served as a god, but it can also be redeemed through the gospel and used to advance the Kingdom.

**Christians are generous givers:** Christians give out of response to the gospel. We are saved because God gave. Because we have freely received, we freely give. It truly is more blessed to give than to receive.

There are many forms of giving in scripture:

**General giving:** In the old testament God instituted the tithe, which was the giving of 10%. In the New Testament, we are no longer under the 'law' of the tithe, but there are some helpful things we can see from this. In a technical sense, our New Testament giving is not tithing, and the phrase is sometimes

unhelpful. We shouldn't bring the Old Testament concept of the tithe into the New Testament in the same way that we don't call our pastors 'Priests' or churches 'Temples'. Yet that does not disqualify the biblical ground of giving.

The law is typological. It is a shadow. Most of the time we find this easy to understand (like doing away with animal sacrifices, or putting blood on your lintels). But even the moral law is a shadow of the greater principles of giving.

In the Old Testament, tithing was giving 10% of your whole possessions, not your monthly income, out of gratitude to God. It was taking 10% of your newborn animals and your crops, once a year to Jerusalem, to a big annual festival. It was to support the Levites, to have a party, and to support the poor every 3 years. We are no longer under the law – we do not go up to a certain city with our tithe. We give under grace.

But now surely, under grace we go forwards not backwards. We no longer give because the law is forcing our hand. Under grace, we give because we want to get in line with the fact that God owns everything and we owe Him everything. We should be giving a "super-tithe". It is not law, but it is our personal law of love. We grace-tithe, we super-tithe.

**Offerings:** For special projects such as church plants, building funds, etc.

**Almsgiving:** The bible speaks much about giving to the poor, indeed this is the way we lay up treasures in heaven (Luke 12, Luke 18, 1 Tim 6).

**Apostolic giving / Missions:** In scripture, money was also collected for apostolic ministry, supporting church planting and the forward work of the gospel. As a church we give at least 15% of our general funds for this purpose, but there may be times that we ask to take up special offerings for this purpose.

There are many reasons to give:

**We give because all of our resources belong to God and we are only stewards:** Because we are only stewards of our resources, we want to be faithful with the talents that God has entrusted to us, earning a return (Matt 25). We see that the resources God has entrusted to us can be used for the furthering of the Kingdom.

## Chapter 4

**We give joyfully out of gratitude to God:** We are grateful to God for saving us. As 2 Corinthians 8 says “He became poor so that through His poverty we might become rich”.

**We give because this is how the church covers the costs of shepherds:** Biblically, shepherds are supported by the funds of the church (2 Tim 5).

**We give because our funds help to forward the mission:** As 2 Cor 8 has shared, we become spiritually rich because of the poverty of Christ, and so in response we are willing to forgo earthly riches in order that others might come into the riches of knowing Christ.

**We give because we believe in sowing and reaping:** Scripture says that he who sows sparingly will reap sparingly. We want to be generous sowers of the seed that God has given us.

**We give because this is how God wants the church to get resources for its ministry:** The church needs resources for its ministry: it pays the wages of shepherds (1 Tim 5:17-18) and labourers for the gospel (1 Cor 9:3-14), it pays for the support of widows (1 Tim 5:16), poor believers (Rom 15:26, Acts 2:45) and provides for fellowship and communion (Acts 2:46). These resources are directed through the church, and their distribution is governed by the leaders of the church (Acts 4:34-35).

**We give because we treasure God more than money:** the bible says that “where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matt 6:21) and that “you cannot serve God and money” (Matt 6:24).

Everyone who is a part of RHC is expected to give faithfully and biblically. This is a clear indication of how we prioritise God and His command to give.

# Managing relationships and resolving conflict

Relationships are key in church life. Here are some biblical imperatives for conducting Christian relationships in the church:

**1. The second commandment: Love your neighbour as yourself (Matt 22):** This is the second command, that we are to love others and care for them. This means acting like the good Samaritan, caring for the needs of our brothers.

**2. The golden rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you (Matt 7):** This means taking the initiative, and thinking what would serve and be best for our brothers.

**3. Put to death all gossip, slander and malice (Rom 1:29-31, Eph 4:31-32):** Gossip is seen as murder, as you are slandering someone made in the image of God (James 3.9). For the same reason that anger is considered the same as murder, so character assassination is murder too, and the bible speaks against gossip and slander in many different places.

**4. If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault privately (Matt 18):** If someone offends you, don't tell others or get advice on it from friends, but go privately to them and show them their fault. If they don't listen, bring a witness (one) to arbitrate. By dealing with conflict this way, much gossip and strife in communities will be dealt with. The initiation of reconciliation is always our responsibility.

**5. If you remember your brother has something against you, leave your gift at the altar and go and make it right with him (Matt 6):** This shows us that even if we aren't the offended party, we are to initiate reconciliation. If you think that someone is upset with you, don't carry on with your day and life, go and put it right immediately.

**6. In humility consider others more significant than yourself (Phil 2):** What a way to live! Genuinely looking at the best in others, wanting to serve them, and honoring them.

**7. Forgive everyone (Matt 6):** We have no right to withhold any forgiveness from anyone at all, as we have received more forgiveness from Christ than we ever deserved. If we withhold forgiveness from others it demonstrates that we have failed to understand the forgiveness that we have received from God.

We expect every person who is at RHC to handle their relationships biblically. They are to pursue peaceful relationships with all their heart and in so doing uphold biblical principles. We must always speak to the other party first, be ready to forgive, ask for forgiveness, and act in full humility. The body of Christ must not be divided, and, as far as it depends on us, we must live in peace with all (Rom 12:18).

# 5

## Becoming a Member of RHC

Being part of the local church is not just about regular attendance. It is an issue of commitment. We do not just meet, but commit to one another's welfare, growth and holiness as well as to the work of the gospel through the church corporate. As Ephesians 4:12 says, it is the saints – every believer – who does to work of the ministry.

### Church Commitment

What do we expect of members:

A commitment is a promise by which we obligate ourselves to one another in such a way that the obligation of one party is not dependent on the faithfulness of the other. The commitment is something that we make before God.

My obligation to the church as a member:

1. I commit to submit to the authority of Scripture as the final authority on all issues, and I have read and understood the church's statement of faith and agree to honour its teaching.

2. I understand as a Christian that I am to be submitted to God. I will remain close to the Lord Jesus through regular Bible reading, prayer, fellowship, and practice of spiritual disciplines. My relationship will be evident through my participation in weekly worship services, communion, service, and a life that glorifies Jesus.

3. I will be diligent to preserve unity and peace including agreeing to deal biblically with all relationships, and to submit to church discipline should the need arise.

4. I will steward the resources God has given me, including my time, talents, and treasure. This includes regular financial giving according to the bible's teaching on giving, service in the church, and participation in community that is sacrificial, cheerful, and voluntary in a way that contributes to the church's vision of seeing the nations disciplined.

## Chapter 5

5. I will get involved in the community of the church, through some kind of smaller group with the desire to build deep relationships, and will not function in leadership or as a member in another church family.

6. I will, by God's grace, walk in holiness as an act of worship to Jesus Christ, who has saved me from my sin that I may live a new life. As taught in scripture, I will open my life to Christian brothers and sisters as we build up one another through encouragement, prayer and the confession of sins.

### The obligation of the church to its members:

1. We commit that your elders and deacons will meet the criteria assigned to them in the Scriptures (1 Tim. 3:1-13; 5:17-22; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:1-4).

2. We commit to seek God's will for our church community to the best of our ability as we study the Scriptures and follow the Spirit (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-5).

3. We commit to care for you and seek your growth as a disciple of Christ, in part by equipping you for service (Eph. 4:11-13) and praying for you regularly, particularly when you are sick (James 5:14).

4. We commit to provide teaching and counsel from the whole of Scripture, being on guard against false teachers. (Acts 20:27-28; Gal. 6:6; 1 Tim. 5:17-18).

5. We commit to providing biblical pastoral care and oversight, watching over you (Heb 13:17).

### Steps to Membership

1. Attend RHC services for at least 2 months and get involved in the church community through a smaller group.

2. Make a request to be a member to the pastoral leadership of the church (if you have been a member at another church, speak with the leadership of the previous church about moving).

3. Attend our Connected Class, or sign up for the next one by speaking to one of our leaders.

4. Read and agree to uphold the Statement of Faith and Church Commitment.

5. Be baptised, or seek to be baptised before seeking to be a member.
6. Meet with a church leader to discuss your faith, your desire to become a member and, if necessary, your intention to be baptised.
7. Sign the Church Commitment, acknowledging that you are becoming a member on these terms.
8. Be publicly recognised as a new member during a members meeting and church service.

# Afterword

Without knowing who we are and what we have been called to do, everything in life starts to lose its meaning. When we have a clear picture of what defines us and what we are called to do, we live our lives with confidence and hope. God is who we were made for and Christ is who we have been saved to become like; all things revolve around Him and what He is doing. We, the church, are His bride.

Everything we have covered here must ultimately be worked out in our daily lives. Devotion to God, love for our brothers and sisters, and a passion for the lost must leap off the printed page and become the “Word we have put in our hearts”. The community of God must be intensely practical.

Being a part of RHC or of any other church is an integral part of a meaningful and purposeful Christian life. As a body, every member is vital and we dearly wish to train, strengthen, support and love one another. If you have any questions, struggles or needs, do feel free to let us know about them and we will minister to you.

It is our hope that the foundational topics we have covered in this booklet will be the framework on which we build a Christ-centered, vibrant, compassionate church that is equipped and excited to do God’s work in the world. God has united us on this mission together, as a church that passionately glorifies Him, lives out the Kingdom on earth and reaches out to the lost.



Printed June 2011