

LET'S GET ACQUAINTED SERIES
GOSPELGRACE101

week #5

UNDERSTANDING OUR MESSAGE

What Is Our Statement of Faith?

The single most important thing about a church is what it believes. The only reason this church exists, the only reason we are gathered together today is because this statement is true—because what we believe matters. What we believe, in fact, is a matter of life and death.

Some Christians are opposed to statements of faith. Christian revelation, Jesus, they say, is too great to be reduced to mere mechanical formulas. In one sense, this is true. No statement of faith can perfectly plumb the depths of God's knowledge and purposes. And yet the good news of Jesus Christ is nonetheless about news, truths, propositional truths about God, ourselves, and Christ, and these truths must be understood, believed, and lived out if we are to have any hope in this life and the life to come. And so what we want to accomplish in the next two weeks is to consider what it is that

we as a church believe. Before we begin, let us share a few words about “Statements of Faith.”

✪ **First, they are biblical.** We see them in Scripture.

“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures., that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day...” (1 Cor. 15:3-4)

Paul goes on to list more factual statements about the gospel that the church in Corinth knew from Paul, Jesus, and the apostles and that they must maintain in order to be faithful. They are also biblical in a second sense, in that they are summaries of the Bible’s (as opposed to man’s) teachings.

✪ **Second, statements of faith are historical.** That is to say, they’ve been used widely by the Church since the first century to clarify the Bible’s teaching and thereby build unity and guard against heresy, or false teaching.

✪ **Thirdly, statements of faith are exactly that; they are mere statements.** They are not meant to be exhaustive statements of doctrine but rather summaries of some essential elements of the Christian faith laid out in Scripture.

Before we walk through each section, you will notice that we have grouped the 11 sections of our Statement of Faith into three categories.

First there are those sections that are Historically Christian.

These sections would be affirmed by any historic Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, or Protestant church. And you will notice that they make up the majority of our statement. The reason we say Historically Christian is because there have been two great divides in Christianity over the past 1,000 years. The first was the Reformation in the 1500s, which would lead to the recovery of the gospel and a split between Protestant churches and the Roman Catholic Church. The second was a liberal/conservative divide during the Enlightenment of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; not in a political sense, but in regards to Scripture and authority. During this period there was a move away from traditional conservative beliefs that the Bible is God's inerrant Word—fully trustworthy and sufficient in all of its teachings. And in its place, people began to believe and teach that our final authority is not Scripture but human reason. Human reason, not divine revelation, would be our guiding principle. This affected almost every Christian church. For the purpose of explaining our statement of faith, we are concerned with what is historically Christian, leaving aside the confusing mess that liberalism has brought in the last two centuries.⁷

Secondly there are a number of sections classified as Evangelical.

These are sections that classify us as Evangelical. These mark us out as a Protestant church, over and against the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox Church.

⁷ Mark Dever, adapted from *Membership Matters: What Is Our Statement of Faith?* Capitol Hill Baptist Church, Washington, D.C., May 1998

Lastly, we have three sections
of our statement of faith
that define us as Baptists.

These sections distinguish us from other Protestants, such as Presbyterians, Anglicans, Methodists, etc.

Most simply, our statement says that Gospel Grace Church is a Christian, Evangelical, Baptist church. Our statement of faith is divided into 11 sections, which speak to the fact that we can be called by each of these names.

The ***Historically Christian*** sections simply show what Christians have always believed; in other words, issues that there have traditionally been rarely disputed over in Christendom.

The ***Evangelical*** category highlights the critical issues related to the Gospel that were recovered during the Reformation.

The ***Baptist*** categories highlight what are distinctive features of Gospel Grace Church, which are also true of historic Baptist churches.

Statement of Faith

Historically
Christian

Evangelical

Baptist

1. The Bible <i>(Scriptures)</i>		✓	
2. God	✓		
3. Jesus Christ	✓		
4. Holy Spirit	✓		
5. Mankind	✓		
6. Salvation <i>(The Way of Salvation)</i>	✓		
<i>(Justification)</i>		✓	
<i>(Repentance and Faith)</i>		✓	
<i>(God's Purpose of Grace)</i>		✓	
7. Christian Living <i>(Sanctification)</i>		✓	
8. Things to Come	✓		
9. The Church <i>(Defined)</i>	✓		
<i>(Leadership / Polity)</i>			✓
10. The Ordinances <i>(Baptism and Lord's Supper)</i>	✓		
<i>(Meaning of Baptist & The Lord's Supper)</i>		✓	
<i>(Mode of Baptism)</i>			✓
11. Historic Baptist Distinctives			✓

⁸ Mark Dever, adapted from *(Statement of Faith Overview Chart) Membership Matters: What Is our Statement of Faith?*, Capitol Hill Baptist Church, Washington, D.C., May 1998