



Doctrinal Statement

The Gospel

The Gospel simply means “good news.” So the question is, what is the good news? We must think of the Gospel in the full context of the grand narrative story of Scripture in terms of creation, fall and redemption. God, eternal and triune, spoke into existence everything out of nothing. In so doing, He declared with each stroke of creation, “It is good,” and it was. Creation was beautiful and perfect, reflecting the full glory of its Creator. The climax of this Creation was man, who was created intimately and specially in the image of God. The created world as seen in the Garden was the picture of God’s perfection.

In Genesis 3 the plot of this story thickens and we find the “bad news” this grand story. Man, image bearer of God, believed a lie proclaimed via the mouth of the deceiver Satan. The lie was simple yet powerful... doubt of God’s goodness and rule. Man was faced with the choice to either believe that God is the ultimate, sovereign ruler and One Who cares deeply for them, or that God was somehow trying to suppress their very own self-deity and in so doing, was more like a tyrant God than a loving Father. In that moment man chose creation over creator and sin entered the world, shattering all of creation. Now, all of creation groans in this broken state and cries out for redemption and renewal.

But God is sovereign... man’s rebellion didn’t catch Him by surprise, nor did it somehow cause Him to react. This is HIS story and immediately after this shattering of all creation known as the Fall, God gave His first proclamation of the good news. In Genesis 3:15, God proclaims to the serpent, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” This is known as the protoevangelion, or the first proclamation of the good news that a seed of Eve would come... a Savior, who would be bruised by the effects of sin, but would ultimately deal a fatal blow to the head of sin and death.

This proclamation would continue throughout all of Scripture as every story in the Old Testament would testify and point toward the coming Rescuer. Prophecies would come as well to proclaim that He is coming and that He would restore all things. All of Scripture point to the hero of this story, Jesus, who would bear the full weight of God’s wrath for the transgressions of this broken world and would serve as the substitute for fallen creation. In Him, man is restored to his created position as sons and daughters of the King of the universe in restored and intimate relationship. And not only man... but all of creation. For the Gospel does not end with individuals receiving forgiveness and mercy, but lives in the promise that Jesus is going to someday make all things new and

restore all of creation back to the glory that was reflected before the Fall shattered it. Thus, this Gospel message is so much more than a rescue from damnation, but a wholistic restoration and redeeming of all of creation and is thus “Good news” on a completely different level.

The Scriptures

We believe the Scriptures are God’s special revelation of Himself to man in the form of written words. The Scriptures are not a collection of stories about morality but rather a grand narrative of God’s story of creation, fall redemption and restoration. The Bible is to be read as a narrative and not as some sort of reference book for morality and should always be read through a Christological lens, understanding that all of Scripture points to the cross.

The Scriptures were written by men under the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit and thus can be trusted as the very words of God. If this is true, then we can easily propose that the very words and every aspect of Scripture are completely without error and fully sufficient for every aspect of life because they are breathed out by God Himself.

The theological terminology for this is verbal plenary inspiration. “Verbal” means every word of Scripture is important. This is a crucial view of scripture because it dismisses the idea that the inspiration of the Holy Spirit only inspired the thoughts of Scripture, which opens the flood gates for all sorts of distorted interpretations of God’s word. It is Aletheia College Park’s belief that every word of Scripture is inspired of God. Jesus supports this in Matthew 5:18 when He says that “not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.” In other words, no crossed “t” or dotted “i” is unimportant in the Word of God. “Plenary,” refers to every part of the Bible. Again, this is an important view of Scriptures for it does not allow us to dismiss sections of scripture that do not “fit” with our personal comforts or cultural norms.

Therefore, every section and every word of Scripture are inspired by God Himself and are then both without error and can be trusted for every aspect of our daily lives. The scriptures do not just compose a holy book about life after death, but reveal how the power of its grand story of the Gospel breathes life into our current existence. The bible therefore is fully sufficient for all matters of life including pastoral counseling and cultural engagement. Therefore, as disciples, and certainly as church leaders, we must make the scriptures the foundation and filter for all that we believe and do.

The Triune Godhead

We believe that God is one God that exists in three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Each member of the Triune Godhead is distinct in personhood and are not simply different expressions of God manifest at different times and places.

The Triune Godhead exists eternally in perfect, self-sufficient unity, but fulfill complementing roles.

The Person and work of Jesus Christ

We believe Jesus Christ is the second person of the triune Godhead who existed eternally with God the Father and the God the Spirit. In the fullness of time, Jesus entered this earth, born of a virgin, and existed simultaneously as fully man and fully God in hypostatic union. He lived a perfect life without sin leading to His substitutionary work on the cross.

When Jesus died on the cross, He accomplished many things for the elect. As those born into sin, we stand guilty before a holy and just God. In order to be true to His nature as God, He must carry out punishment and administer wrath for sin. How can God both be just, administering this wrath, and also simultaneously be gracious and merciful to sinners? This apparent paradox is reconciled by the work of Jesus on the cross. Being perfect, Jesus was able to rightly be the object of God's wrath (a propitiation) and thus be the substitute for our penalty, to restore a relationship between God and man. This is theologically known as penal substitutionary atonement. All who respond in faith and repentance to Jesus' work on the cross are thus justified. We are by His work, declared righteous as stated in 2 Corinthians 5:21, "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. His sacrifice has reconciled us to God and restored fellowship with God (2 Corinthians 5:18-19). His death has redeemed us out of the bondage that we were held in by sin. This deliverance is from the guilt of sin and the reigning power of sin in our lives, and it was only possible through the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus!

Creation

We believe God created all things as recorded in the book of Genesis. He spoke all things into existence out of nothing (ex nihilo). Creation came through the spoken word of God as evidenced in the statement "And God said," prior to each creative act, and this creation was formed in Trinitarian unity. God created the world and it was "good," (Genesis 1:31) and holy before the sinful rebellion of man broke it in what we call the Fall. Creation was for the sole purpose of bringing glory and praise to God. It is important to note that God did not *need* creation as if creation somehow completes His Trinitarian glory. Rather God chose to create in order to declare His own glory and to take delight in how His creation reflects His excellence. Creation is thus distinct from God but always dependent upon God. Creation is not god, nor does creation exist without the constant, direct involvement of God. Rather, all things exist from God and are under His sovereign rule.

The nature of man

We believe mankind is the climax of God's creation because we were intimately and personally formed, and unlike the rest of creation, we were made in God's image. As

image bearers we are not God, but we do have the unique ability and responsibility to reflect the glory of God in our lives, which now can only be fully accomplished when we are redeemed by the person and work of Jesus Christ.

When man sinned it broke all of creation and significantly marred our nature and ability to choose in regard to good and evil. Even in this broken state we are still image bearers and as image bearers we have some moral sense about us. However, though we may not be as evil as we could possibly be, Adam's sin has placed us in a state of total depravity. Every aspect of our being from our thoughts and motives to our actual words and deeds are stained by sin. Jeremiah 17:9 says, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?" Jeremiah's words remind us that there is no aspect of our being that is not affected by sin and as such we have nothing good in us that would merit God's favor. This depraved nature does not relieve us of our moral responsibility as we see the very next verse say, "I the Lord search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds." Knowing this magnifies the grace of God in the hearts and minds of the elect even more.

The implications of man being created in God's image are many. One is the idea of community. Since God is Triune and we are created in His image, we too have a built in desire for community. This is biblically expressed through both the family and through the body of Christ, the church. It also has implications in how we view all of man. Even those that are not elect, having not been redeemed by Christ, carry with them great worth simply because they are image bearers. Therefore, it is crucial that we show love, respect and mercy for all of mankind, regardless of their race, ethnicity, social status, and even their faith, while simultaneously loving our fellow image bearers in the most important way... by pointing them to the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Salvation

We believe that man is rescued from this state of sin and separation from God only through the good news of Jesus Christ and His substitutionary death and victorious resurrection. Upon faith and repentance, which was birthed in our dead hearts as a gift of grace from God, we are justified and declared righteous in Christ as seen in 2 Corinthians 5:21, "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." We are thus adopted into the family of God and are being sanctified by this same Gospel that declared us righteous. We look forward to day when God completes His renewal of all of Creation and operate as agents of reconciliation and renewal in our daily lives.

Spiritual Gifts

We believe spiritual gifts are gifts given by the Holy Spirit to believers upon faith in Christ. There are various gifts listed in Scripture in many different places (1 Cor. 12:8-10, 28-30; Romans 12:6-8; Ephesians 4:11). It seems that these are not meant to be exhaustive lists of the gifts and we should assume that our gifts are anything

that God empowers for the building up of His church and the advancement of His kingdom. Gifts are to always be viewed as tools for service and never seen in light of some sort of spiritual pecking order. This seems to be the real thrust of Paul's exhortation in 1 Corinthians 12-14, implying some were desiring the "greater" gifts, when in fact the body has many gifts and all are important to its work.

The Church

We believe the church is the community of believers in Jesus Christ for all time. The church is both invisible and visible. It is invisible as God sees it and is not simply an organizational structure. But it is also visible as those who profess faith in Christ live out the evidence of such faith in their everyday lives. The church is both universal and local. It is universal as it includes all believers around the world for all times. But the church is also local as the very word church in the New Testament is "ekklesia" which means "gathering, meeting, or assembly," and so we see the church embodied in these local gathering of believers known as the local church.

The local church is made up of regenerate believers who have a relationship with Jesus Christ through faith and repentance. The local church functions in unity under the biblical authority of qualified elders (Acts 14:23, 1 Tim. 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-9), gathers regularly for worship and the preaching of God's word (Acts 2:42-47), and partakes in the biblical sacraments of baptism and communion.

The church's role is to make disciples through Spirit led fellowship/community and teaching, and through Spirit empowered evangelism driven by the intense desire to see God worshipped. The church is not simply an organization where people are born into and are categorized in some sort of organizational pecking order. Rather the picture of the church is that of a body, where the head is simply Jesus Christ and where the rest of the body, though different in function, are all essential, both in worth and role, to the health of the entire body. The church exist for the worship of God and serves as the agent of reconciliation in this world.

The Sacraments

We believe there are two sacraments of the church, baptism and communion. Baptism is a sacrament because it is an outward and visible expression of an inward and invisible reality. In short, baptism is a proclamation of the gospel through the life of one who has professed faith in Jesus Christ. Baptism does not bring salvation or complete salvation in the life of the believer, but is an important act of obedience. In baptism the believer proclaims the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ and His work thus applied to their lives. This is best and most biblically expressed through immersion as a symbol of dying to our old self (being immersed in water) and raising to new life in Christ (coming out of the water) (Colossians 2:12, Romans

6:4). The believer proclaims these realities in their life through baptism and identifies themselves a part of both the universal church and the local church.

Communion or the Lord's Supper is the second of the two sacraments of the church. Communion has many meanings for the life of the believer and the local body. It serves as yet another proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Every time the church partakes in the Lord's supper it presents a clear opportunity to share the good news of Jesus' sacrificial, substitutionary, atoning death on the cross. As believers partake, they are proclaiming their continued covenant relationship with God the Father through the broken body and shed blood of the Son. It also serves as a reminder to the believer of the great sacrifice that was made on our behalf. Jesus said, "Do this in remembrance of Me," (Luke 22:19) clearly exhorting the church to often reflect on the His sacrificial death. So communion is a time of great reflection and thankfulness. Finally, the Lord's supper serves as a time of examination. The Apostle Paul exhorts us in 1 Corinthians 11:12 to examine ourselves before we partake of the Lord's supper. Therefore, another purpose is a time to repent of sins both to God and to each other. Communion is a glorious gift to the church that should be enjoyed frequently.