



**ESCALON  
PRESBYTERIAN  
CHURCH**

**AN INTRODUCTION**

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We would like to thank First Presbyterian Church of Berkeley for the idea of producing such an introductory booklet not only for new members, but for the church as a whole. Pages 4,5,7,9 were produced specifically by FPCB. We thank them for sharing their information with us and allowing us to edit it to our own needs.

## INTRODUCTION

### WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH

#### What is the chief end of man?

*Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.*

### THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM

#### What is your only comfort, in life and in death?

*That I belong—body and soul, in life and in death—not to myself but to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ, who at the cost of his own blood has fully paid for all my sins and has completely freed me from the dominion of the devil; that he protects me so well that without the will of my Father in heaven not a hair can fall from my head; indeed, that everything must fit his purpose for my salvation. Therefore, by his Holy Spirit, he also assures me of eternal life, and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.*

This Booklet has been produced in order to provide a brief four-part introduction to understanding the structure and beliefs of Escalon Presbyterian Church—a member of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. (website: <http://www.pcusa.org>)

First and foremost, we define what “Mere Christianity” (as C. S. Lewis wrote) is—the basics of the faith and what must be believed. Second, is a description of what our church’s Mission is and what is expected of our members. Third is an explanation of Presbyterian government and its various parts (drawn from the Book of Order—the second part of our denominational government). Fourth is a shorter summary of our own Reformed Theological beliefs (with reference to the Book of Confessions—the first part of our denominational government).

We hope this is helpful for you—both in understanding who we are and what we believe. For our main calling is to “make disciples” of Jesus Christ, baptize in the name of the “Father, Son and Holy Spirit,” and teach everything that Jesus commanded. Through Christ and His Church, we hope you can therefore pursue your chief end:

*To Glorify God and Enjoy Him Forever!*

## WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A CHRISTIAN

*At the very heart of our Christian faith is Jesus Christ. While the Church may sometimes resemble a civic or volunteer organization, it is really quite different. We understand Jesus to be the head of the church, the body of Christ and therefore we minister by and in his name. During our weekly worship, we corporately proclaim with joy the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ – that in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, God has done for us what we could not do for ourselves.*

*To be a Christian means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. A Christian acknowledges his or her need for God's redemptive and transforming power through Christ, lives under Christ's lordship, and responds in ever-deepening obedience to what the Holy Spirit calls him or her to do and be in relation to the larger body of Christ, the Church.*

An understanding of human beings in relationship to God and to Christ could be briefly summarized as:

### 1) **Creation**

Every person is lovingly created in the image of God. God loves each person and wants us to live meaningful lives, which must include a dependent, dynamic relationship with our creator.

- Genesis 1:26-31, John 10:10, 1 John 4:19, 1 Tim 2:4

### 2) **Fall**

Sin separates us from God. We ignore God, we rebel against God, we substitute our own do-it-yourself religion, and, in any number of ways, snub God's good intention for us. In both our individual and corporate sin, we turn against God and each other and become the exploiters and despoilers of the world. In this, we are all culpable before God and helpless to turn our lives around without God's forgiveness and transformative power.

- James 2:10, 1 John 1:8, Romans 3:23

### 3) Redemption

Jesus Christ is God's Gift for this tragic human predicament. In Jesus, true humanity was realized once and for all. Jesus, a Palestinian Jew, lived among his own people and shared their needs, temptations, joys, and sorrows. He expressed the love of God in all that he did and all that he was. His life and teaching judged human goodness, religious aspirations, and national hopes. Many rejected him and demanded his death. In giving himself feely for them, even to the point of death on the cross, he took upon himself the judgment under which all humanity stood condemned of their sin. God raised him from the dead, vindicating him as Messiah and Lord.

- Rom 5:8, Eph 2:8-9, John 3:16-17

### 4) Transformation

In Christ, we are forgiven and our new lives begin. Christ invites us to repent or turn away from our sinful life and accept his lordship in our lives. Christ offers not only reconciliation to God for eternity but offers you a life restored and transformed, fully consistent with God's original intentions. Instead of living for yourself, you live for God as the true and authentic human being God created you to be.

- 2 Cor 5:17, John 1:12, Rom 10:9, Rev 3:20

### 5) Discipleship in Community

Our new lives involve a life-long commitment to be Christ's disciple. This new life takes shape in the community of faith, the body of Christ. In this community, we offer our humble worship to God, care physically, emotionally and spiritually for each other, equip each other to grow in faith, and bear witness out in the world to the good work of God in our own lives.

- Eph 5:1-2, 2 Peter 3:18, 1 John 3:2-24, Matt 28:19-20

**For Further Reading:** *Basic Christianity* by John W. Stott  
*Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis

# EPC MISSION STATEMENT

## Our Mission

### WE EXIST TO:

SEEK	<i>To bring others to faith in Jesus Christ</i>
SERVE	<i>In mission locally and around the world</i>
SUPPORT	<i>Personal growth through learning, teaching and sharing God's word</i>
SUSTAIN	<i>A loving, Christ-centered fellowship</i>

## Our Values

- *Christian Ed:* Bring people to accept Christ and deepen their commitment to God through a biblically based Christian education program.
- *Church Life:* Develop Christian relationships through fellowship and communication with all age groups.
- *Deacons:* Demonstrate Christian living as a congregation by caring for each other in times of joy and sorrow.
- *Stewardship:* Develop and use resources of time, talent, treasures and prayer to carry on and expand our mission.
- *Mission:* Reach out to meet the needs of people in the community and the world as a reflection of our Christian love and concern.
- *Outreach:* Invite and encourage all people to join us in a life in Christ by sharing the Good News and living according to Christ's example.
- *Trustees:* Maintain, improve and use church facilities in the best interest of the Lord's Kingdom.
- *Worship:* Glorify God through creative, Christ-centered worship.
- *Ministry:* Develop a Team Ministry involving all members – maintaining opening communication so the congregation as a whole can work toward common goals.

## **Worship Regularly**

- Sunday worship. Our services are at 10:30 a.m.
- Special services (Christmas Eve, Good Friday, Prayer services)

## **Study Scripture Daily**

- Personal study of scriptures
- Small Group Bible Studies
- Take classes, i.e. Sunday School, ALPHA, etc.

## **Pray Always**

- Individually and corporately
- Meditation on Scripture
- Intercession for others, including around the world

## **Give Generously**

- Tithe to EPC – remember the Deacon’s Fund
- Contribute to para-church agencies and humanitarian work

## **Serve Joyfully**

- Identify, nurture and develop your spiritual gifts and offer them to God for service in our congregation and throughout the world
- Support others in prayer and financial assistance

## **Participate Actively**

- Attend and vote at Congregational Meetings
- Take seriously the congregational vows at baptism and the reception of new members
- Serve on Ministry Teams and if nominated, serve as Elders or Deacons

## OPPORTUNITIES TO SERVE

*A Member of Escalon Presbyterian Church has many opportunities to serve. It is important to pray in order to discern what gifts the Lord has given you to serve his church. Then you can volunteer for an area of service in our church. Be bold in giving it a try. There is no harm in volunteering for something and later realizing your gifts aren't suited for it. This is a trial and error process. But, we must also remember that we were made to serve! May you find joy in serving the Lord in this church.*

### **Christian Education**

- Sunday School Teacher
- Nursery Volunteer
- Youth Group Leaders
- VBS Teachers / Helpers
- Calvin Crest Camp Counselor

### **Church life**

- Provide Food for Fellowship
- Reach out to New Members
- Contact New Visitors
- Organize and facilitate all church events
- Be a Small Group Leader

### **Finance**

- Help organize and facilitate Fundraising
- Organize Annual Church Operating Budget
- Help others with financial struggles -(budget planning)
- Resource Members for Estate Planning

### **Mission Outreach**

- ALPHA volunteer / Evangelism programs
- Plan and lead Mission projects
- Participate in World-wide Mission & Evangelism promotion
- Volunteer at CARE—Escalon food bank

### **Trustees**

- Help with new Buildings & Grounds projects/construction
- Help with facility maintenance
- Participate in scheduled work parties
- Open & close facilities
- Oversee Personnel issues

### **Worship**

- Sing in the Choir / Praise Team
- Play piano, guitar, strings brass in worship
- Organize & lead music offerings / concerts

### **Deacons**

- Visit the sick / ill / hurting
- Support and visit the elderly
- Prepare food for funerals, shut-ins, those who are ill
- Facilitate prayer chain

# PRESBYTERIAN GOVERNMENT

*Presbyterians organize themselves along the lines of a representative democracy under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Men and women of mature faith are elected and called by the congregation and prayerfully ordained to offices of Pastor, elder, and deacon. Ordination is for life but, in the case of elders and deacons, their years of active service are limited to three year terms.*

## **Local Governing Board:**

**Session:** The governing body of Escalon Presbyterian is called the Session. The Session is made up elders and is moderated by our Pastor. The Session is responsible for the spiritual life and mission of the church and is made up of various Departments that oversee many of ministries here at the church. These include:

- Christian Education (Sunday School, Youth Groups)
- Trustees (Facilities, Personnel, Memorials)
- Mission Outreach (Evangelism, Missions)
- Church Life (Fellowship, Members, Small Groups)
- Finance (Stewardship, Budget)
- Worship (Music, Choir)

**Deacons:** The Board of Deacons is made up of deacons and officers elected from their body. The Board is responsible for ministering to those in need, to the sick, to the friendless, and to any who may be in distress. The Deacons are organized around four ministry commissions:

- Worship: preparing communion, flowers, greeters, lay readers
- Shepherding: providing meals for funerals, shut-ins, sick and ill
- Visitation: prayer chain, elderly visitation, card ministry
- Deacon's Fund: emergency, one-time assistance

## **Regional Governing Board**

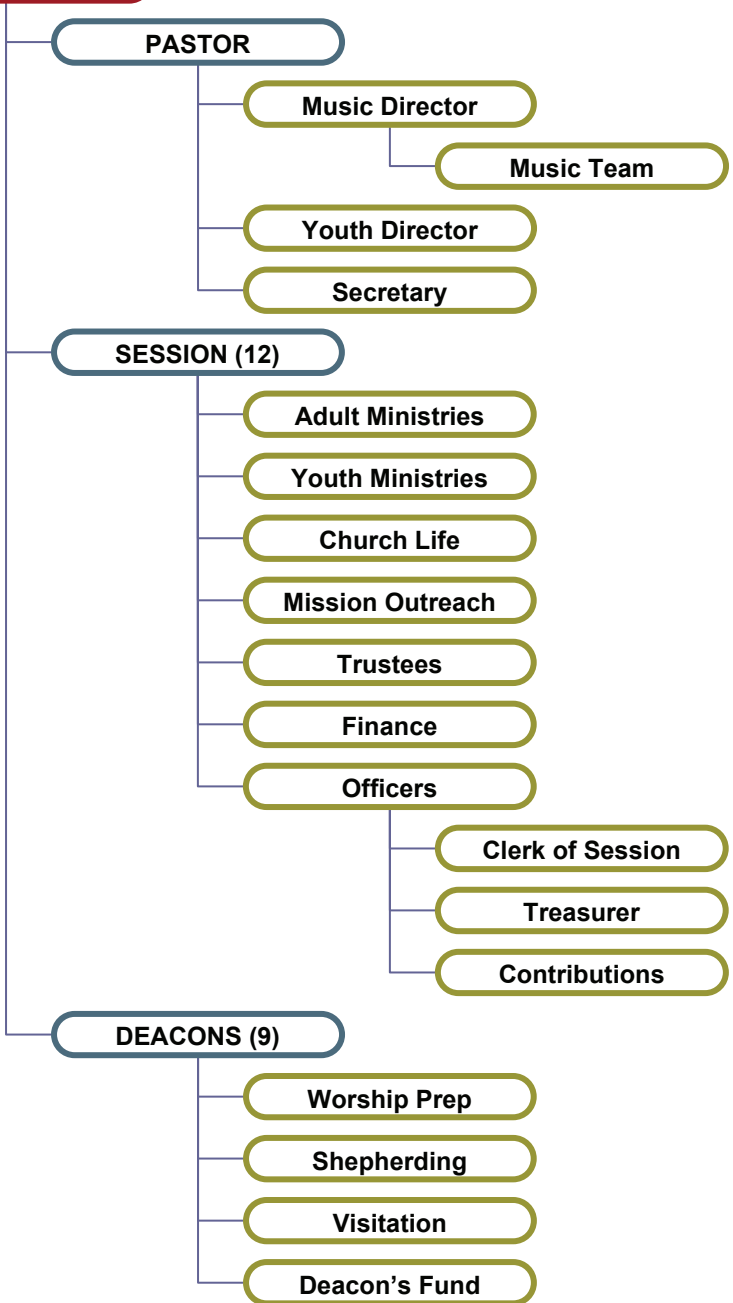
**Presbytery:** We are part of the Stockton Presbytery which is made up of elders and pastors from each of the nearly 25 Presbyterian Churches from Lodi to Merced, and from Tracy to Columbia.

## **National Governing Board**

**The General Assembly:** This national body is made up of representatives from each Presbytery and establishes the mission of the entire Presbyterian Church (U.S.A).

# EPC STRUCTURE

## EPC MEMBERS



## MEMBERS, PASTORS, EDLERS, DEACONS

### WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A MEMBER

#### **Membership Through Faith**

The incarnation of God in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ gives to the church not only its mission but also its understanding of membership. *One becomes an active member of the church through faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and acceptance of his Lordship in all of life.* Baptism and a public profession of faith in Jesus as Lord are the visible signs of entrance into the active membership of the church.

#### **Membership as Ministry**

A faithful member accepts Christ's call to be involved responsibly in the ministry of his Church. Such involvement includes

- a. proclaiming the good news,
- b. taking part in the common life and worship of a particular church,
- c. praying and studying Scripture and the faith of the Christian Church,
- d. supporting the work of the church through the giving of money, time, and talents,
- e. participating in the governing responsibilities of the church,
- f. demonstrating a new quality of life within and through the church,
- g. responding to God's activity in the world through service to others,
- h. living responsibly in the personal, family, vocational, political, cultural, and social relationships of life,
- i. working in the world for peace, justice, freedom, and human fulfillment.

### WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A PASTOR

#### **Ministers and Presbytery**

As the Lord has set aside through calling and training certain members to perform a special ministry of the Word and Sacrament and has committed to them a variety of work to do, the church through the presbytery calls them to the responsibility and office of ministers of the Word and Sacrament. Such ministers shall be members of presbytery which shall designate them to such work as may be helpful to the church in mission, in the performance of which they shall be accountable to the presbytery. They shall be responsible for participation in the larger ministry of the church in addition to the duties to which they are called and designated by the presbytery.

Ministers of the Word and Sacrament have membership in presbytery by action of the presbytery itself, and maintain their membership.

### **Responsibilities**

*The pastor is responsible for studying, teaching, and preaching the Word, for administering Baptism and the Lord's Supper, for praying with and for the congregation.*

*With the elders, the pastor is to encourage the people in the worship and service of God; to equip and enable them for their tasks within the church and their mission in the world; to exercise pastoral care, devoting special attention to the poor, the sick, the troubled, and the dying; to participate in governing responsibilities, including leadership of the congregation in implementing the principles of participation and inclusiveness in the decision making of the church, and its task of reaching out in concern and service to the life of the human community as a whole.*

*With the deacons the pastor is to share in the ministries of sympathy, witness, and service.*

*In addition to these pastoral duties, the pastor is responsible for sharing in the ministry of the church in the governing bodies above the session and in ecumenical relationships.*

## **WHAT IT MEANS TO BE AN ELDER**

### **Scriptural Practice**

As there were in Old Testament times elders for the government of the people, so the New Testament Church provided persons with particular gifts to share in governing and ministry.

### **Governmental Responsibilities**

Elders are chosen by the people. Together with ministers of the Word and Sacrament, they exercise leadership, government, and discipline and have responsibilities for the life of a particular church as well as the church at large, including ecumenical relationships. They shall serve faithfully as members of the session. When elected commissioners to higher governing bodies, elders participate and vote with the same authority as ministers of the Word and Sacrament, and they are eligible for any office.

## **Gifts and Requirements**

Elders should be persons of faith, dedication, and good judgment. Their manner of life should be a demonstration of the Christian gospel, both within the church and in the world.

## **Specific Responsibilities**

*It is the duty of elders, individually and jointly, to strengthen and nurture the faith and life of the congregation committed to their charge.*

*Together with the pastor, they should encourage the people in the worship and service of God, equip and renew them for their tasks within the church and for their mission in the world, visit and comfort and care for the people, with special attention to the poor, the sick, the lonely, and those who are oppressed. They should inform the pastor and session of those persons and structures which may need special attention. They should assist in worship. They should cultivate their ability to teach the Bible and may be authorized to supply places which are without the regular ministry of the Word and Sacrament. In specific circumstances and with proper instruction, specific elders may be authorized by the presbytery to administer the Lord's Supper. Those duties which all Christians are bound to perform by the law of love are especially incumbent upon elders because of their calling to office and are to be fulfilled by them as official responsibilities.*

## **WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A DEACON**

### **The Ministry and Gifts of Deacons**

The office of deacon as set forth in Scripture is one of sympathy, witness, and service after the example of Jesus Christ. Persons of spiritual character, honest repute, of exemplary lives, brotherly and sisterly love, warm sympathies, and sound judgment should be chosen for this office.

### **Responsibilities**

*It is the duty of deacons, first of all, to minister to those who are in need, to the sick, to the friendless, and to any who may be in distress both within and beyond the community of faith.*

They shall assume such other duties as may be delegated to them from time to time by the session, such as leading the people in worship through prayers of intercession, reading the Scriptures, presenting the gifts of the people, and assisting with the Lord's Supper.

## WHAT WE BELIEVE

We at Escalon Presbyterian Church believe in the Triune God – God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, the three-in-one. Our faith is defined by three basic “I believe” statements:

### **I believe in God, the Father Almighty,**

We believe that God the Father created the heavens and the earth and that he so loved the world that he sent his only Son, Jesus Christ, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

### **I believe in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord;**

We believe that Jesus Christ, fully human and fully God, came to earth and died upon the cross for our sins and rose again from the grave, defeating evil and death. We believe that he will return one day to judge the living and the dead.

### **I believe in the Holy Spirit,**

We believe that the Holy Spirit brings about faith in us, transforms us from within, strengthens us in our weaknesses, guides us in prayer, empowers us to serve our neighbors, and guides us into truth as our words and lives bear witness to the love of God in Jesus Christ.

We believe that the Bible is the Word of God written, infallible in truth, and that our profession of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit is faithful to the witness of the Bible, the revelation of Almighty God. Our denomination holds to the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds, the ancient expositions of the Christian faith, as well as to the Confessions and Catechisms that comprise our own *Book of Confessions* (being the first part of the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A.). These creeds and confessions (referenced as well in the following pages) can be viewed online at:

<http://pcusa.org/oga/constitution.htm>.

## ESSENTIALS AND DISTINCTIVES

### We profess these essential **Christian Beliefs**

- Scripture (p. 16)
- The Triune God (p. 17)
- The Incarnation of Christ (p. 19)
- The Nature of Humanity (p. 20)
- The Atonement (p. 22)
- Salvation by Grace through Faith (p. 23)

### We profess these distinctive **Reformed Beliefs**

- Election in Christ (p. 25)
- Covenant Life (p. 26)
- Baptism / Lord's Supper (p. 28)
- Sanctification (p. 29)
- Priesthood of all Believers (p. 30)
- Mission of the Church (p. 30)
- Stewardship (p. 32)

The following pages are brief explanations of each essential Christian Belief and distinctive Reformed Beliefs.\* The word “Presbyterian” comes from the Greek word ‘presbuteros’ which means elder. So Presbyterian Churches are churches that are governed by elders. Presbyterian theology, over the years, has labeled as “Reformed theology.” This word emerged out of the Reformation of the church in the sixteenth century, the beginning of the Protestant church. Thus the word “reformed.” In particular, Reformed Theology is associated with our Swiss pastor/theologian John Calvin, though reformed theology is not limited to him. Confessions referenced are taken from our own *Book of Confessions*.

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*\*These brief summaries of Essential Christian and Reformed theological beliefs are taken with permission from the Presbytery of San Diego. They are used to evaluate candidates for ordination—as candidates promise to abide by Reformed Theology as they preach and teach the Word of God.*

## SECTION 1: CHRISTIAN BELIEFS

### AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

The Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are God’s uniquely revealed and written Word, inspired by the Holy Spirit, and are the church’s first and final authority in all areas of faith and life including, but not limited to, theological doctrine, mission, church order, character, and ethical behavior. The Bible speaks to us with the authority of God himself. We seek to understand, love, follow, obey, surrender, and submit to God’s Word—both Jesus Christ, the living Word of God, and the Scriptures, the written Word of God, which bear true and faithful witness to Jesus Christ.

#### What is Not Affirmed

Any doctrine—

- that seeks to invalidate or subvert scriptural teaching concerning what is to be believed or how we are to live;
- that attempts to subordinate biblical authority to any human authority, cultural norm, or ideology— whether religious, ecclesiastical, governmental, political, economic, psychological, sociological, scientific, historical, philosophical, or other—as though the church should listen primarily to another voice than the voice of the Lord Jesus Christ as expressed in scripture;
- that seeks or asserts a revelation from the Spirit of God which contradicts the Bible as Word of God, or that attempts to separate the Spirit from the Spirit inspired words of Scripture, or that elevates the authority or modernity of the Spirit’s revelation above the revelation of Scripture;
- that rejects as historical fact the witness of Scripture to the incarnation, birth, ministry, miracles, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ (as, for example, summarized in 1Corinthians 15:3-7 and Acts 10:38);
- that seeks to follow a “Jesus Christ” apart from the Person, Work, and Will of Jesus Christ revealed in scripture.
- that regards Scripture as subjectively, but not objectively, God’s written Word, or that maintains the Scriptures *contain* the Word of God, but are not in themselves the Word of God.

Orthodox reformed faith does not include any notion of a Church “reformed and reforming” that moves outside the boundaries of the authority of Christ and confession of his Lordship which are clearly re-

vealed in Scripture. Or any ecclesiology or morality that attempts to subvert the headship of Jesus Christ and the authority of Scripture in the interests of an “inclusive” and overbroad institutional concern for “unity, peace, and purity.” Jesus Christ is Lord of the church, and he rules the church through the written word of scripture, illuminated by the Holy Spirit.

## **Scripture**

Matthew 4:4; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Timothy 3:16-17

## **Confessions**

Second Helvetic Confession 5.001, 5.003, 5.010; Westminster Confession of Faith 6.006, 6.009; Larger Catechism 7.113-114

# GOD

We worship the one only living and true God who is revealed in the Bible and who is the source of all life, glory, goodness, and blessedness.

*Trinity* - With the holy catholic church in all ages, we confess the mystery of the holy Trinity—that there is one God alone, infinite and eternal, Creator of all things, the greatest good, who is one in essence or nature, yet who exists in a plurality of three distinct persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

*Creation* - God in the beginning created the universe and everything in it for the manifestation of God’s glory, eternal power, wisdom, and goodness. He is the sovereign ruler of creation, working all things according to the counsel of his omnipotent and righteous will.

*Providence* - In gracious providence God continually upholds, directs, oversees, and governs creation—all creatures, actions, and things.

*Sovereignty* - In sovereignty God has seen fit to accommodate free will among moral creatures, resulting in great cultural and cosmic good and terrible evil, disorder, and disobedience. Nevertheless, God is in no way the author of evil or sin, but continues to govern creation in such a way as to cause all things to work together for good for those who love God.

*Grace* - God is a God of love. In grace God chooses to show love and mercy. When we were dead in trespasses and sin, God made us alive with Christ, saving us by grace through faith, as a sheer gift of sovereign love.

*Worship* - God—and God alone—is worthy of worship. We respond to God by consciously and intentionally seeking to declare, explore, celebrate, and submit to God’s righteous and gracious kingship over all of creation and over every aspect of our individual and corporate life, and thereby “to glorify him and enjoy him forever.” (Westminster, 7.01) This is true worship.

### **What Is Not Affirmed**

Any doctrine—

- that denies this doctrine of God’s triune nature, or refuses to confess the Trinity as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit;
- that minimizes this doctrine as an unessential or secondary Christian tenet;
- that asserts that all religions are essentially true, that all religious beliefs are essentially in accord; or that the views of God held by the world’s major religions are equally valid;
- that confesses or celebrates belief in multiple gods or goddesses, or that identifies God as a goddess, or that worships God’s uncreated glory through idols or images representing creatures or creation.

The biblical doctrine of God’s sovereignty excludes:

- the notion that, if God is sovereign, our human efforts are in vain;
- the deistic notion that God created the cosmos like a watchmaker but is no longer personally involved in its operation or unfolding;
- any theology that denies or downplays the reality of evil or the enmity between evil and a holy God or the moral responsibility of humankind for sin.

### **Scripture**

Genesis 1:1; Exodus 20:4-5; Deuteronomy 6:4; Psalm 47:2; Isaiah 45:5  
Matthew 28:19; Luke 1:35; John 14:26; Romans 1:23; 8:28; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Ephesians 1:7-11; Jude 1:25; Revelation 4:11

### **Confessions**

Nicene Creed 1.1, 1.3; Scots Confession 3.01; Heidelberg Catechism 4.027; Westminster Confession of Faith 6.011-6.014; Larger Catechism 7.01; Brief Statement of Faith 10.1

## HUMANITY - ORIGINAL RIGHTEOUSNESS / FALL INTO SIN

Human beings were created by God in God's own image—in true righteousness and holiness—to know, love, and obey God and be righteous stewards of the creation. Our earliest forebears, instead of acknowledging, worshiping, and obeying God, became disobedient sinners and brought sin and death upon themselves and all creation.

There is now a radical brokenness and corruption in human nature that is the result of and results in sin. Sin is rebellion against God. No human effort can fully resolve or redeem this defect. Sin is destructive, contagious, parasitical, polluting, disabling. Human beings are sinners by nature, by influence, by choice, by action.

While there is an inalienable glory and nobility to human beings because they are God's image bearers, this image is now broken and distorted, and even our best and noblest actions are contaminated by sin. Every part of our human being—our personality, intellect, emotions, will, motives, virtues, and actions—is corrupted by sin. The human will, originally free and righteous, is now crippled and defective. As a result, human beings are in bondage to sin and subject to God's holy judgment. Without God's intervening grace and salvation, they are lost and condemned.

### **What Is Not Affirmed**

- The notion that human nature is basically good and self-redeemable through good effort, discipline, improved environment, etc.
- The notion that man's defective nature is the result of heredity or environment to such a degree that human beings are not morally responsible for their nature or behavior.
- The notion that God is the author of sin or that sin is part of his original plan to educate and improve humankind.

### **Scripture**

Genesis 1:26-27; Psalms 51:5, 143:2; Jeremiah 17:9; Matthew 15:19-20; Romans 3:10-23; 5:18-19; 7:18-23; 8:7; Ephesians 2:1-3

### **Confessions**

Scots Confession 3.03; Heidelberg Catechism 4.005, 4.006, 4.010  
Larger Catechism 7.135, 7.137; Confession of 1967 9.12-13  
Brief Statement of Faith 10.3

## JESUS CHRIST – INCARNATION OF THE ETERNAL WORD

Jesus Christ is fully God and fully human. In the person of Jesus of Nazareth, the eternal Son of God uniquely entered human history and became a real human being. He is truly the Word of God (John 1:1-3)—that is, the perfect and culminating expression of God’s mind and heart, of God’s will and character—present in the intimate fellowship of the Holy Trinity from eternity and fully engaged with the Father in the work of creation and redemption.

Becoming human, Jesus was “all of God in a human body” (Colossians 1:19) and “God with us” (Matthew 1:23)—a living tabernacle of God’s holy presence, “full of grace and truth” (John 1:14-18). His divine-human identity is corroborated by the true witness of scripture—in his divine conception and virgin birth, in God’s own testimony concerning Jesus, in Jesus’ supernatural works of healing and deliverance, in his obedience to the point of sacrificial death, and in his bodily resurrection from the dead, ascension, and exaltation. He is now Lord over everything in creation.

The early church in the creeds of Nicea and Chalcedon accurately interpreted and expressed the apostolic testimony concerning Jesus—fully God and fully human. The significance of this is: in Christ we are dealing with God himself; in Christ we have a human being who truly represents us.

Jesus Christ is God’s only Mediator between God and humankind and God’s unique agent for the salvation of the world. He is also the perfect expression of what humanity was designed to be. In his complete obedience, he became the representative Human Being, a second Adam, modeling for us human life and offering to God on our behalf human life that is rightly in God’s image—reflecting God’s glory in a wholly submitted life of steadfast love and righteousness.

This same Lord Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, as attested in scripture, is to be the center of the Christian Church’s proclamation, worship, discipleship, and mission. As we eagerly and prayerfully anticipate that “he will come again to judge the living and the dead” and to establish God’s righteous kingdom in fullness and perfection, we say, “Come Lord Jesus!” (Revelation 22:20)

## **What Is Not Affirmed**

Any doctrine—

- that affirms the deity but not the full humanity of Christ, or the humanity but not Christ's full deity;
- that asserts that Jesus was an inspired or extraordinary or holy man, but was merely human in nature and not the incarnation in history of the eternal Son of God;
- that attempts to supplement the authoritative revelation of the Old and New Testament scriptures concerning Jesus Christ and proposes a corrected or revised revelation of Jesus;
- that discounts or discredits as untrue or as myth all or portions of the New Testament record concerning Jesus;
- that does not affirm as biblical and true the death of Christ as the central saving act of our Christian faith, or
- that asserts that Jesus is merely one example, however noteworthy, of a divinely approved or divinely enlightened life;
- that asserts that Jesus is one Mediator between God and humankind among other religious options or among other spiritual or enlightened teachers or mediators;
- that contends that the Jesus Christ attested by scripture is essentially and significantly different from the historic Jesus of Nazareth;
- that misrepresents Jesus' mission in terms compatible with pantheism or as a message of human self-fulfillment and divine self-realization, that God is one being with the world or that human beings are essentially divine, and that all religious truth is harmonious and convergent.
- that detracts from Jesus' supreme authority over every human authority, over the church, and over our individual moral lives.

## **Scripture**

Matthew 1:23; Luke 1:31-35; John 1:1-3, 14-18; Romans 5:18-19;  
2 Corinthians 5:19; Colossians 1:15-20; 1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 1:1-3;  
1 John 4:2-4

## **Confessions**

Nicene Creed 1.1-1.2

Westminster Confession of Faith 6.044

Confession of 1967 9.07-9.08

Brief Statement of Faith 10.2

## JESUS CHRIST – HIS ATONING WORK

Jesus' death on the Cross was the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world. In this act of obedience to God's will and love for humankind, Jesus acted as the divine agent for the salvation of the world. In his death he perfectly fulfilled the office of High Priest and was also the perfect sacrifice for sins—"the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." (Jn 1:29) The Cross became an altar on which his life was sacrificed as a substitute for ours, and satisfaction and expiation for sins were completely accomplished. On the sole basis of the finished work of Christ on the Cross, sinners may now be reconciled to a holy God and set free from their bondage to sin and death to live for God in holiness and joy.

Exalted to the place of honor beside God the Father, Jesus Christ the eternal Son, now Lord of heaven and earth, continues his saving work, advocating and interceding on behalf of the church and functioning as our eternal prophet (God's living and revealed Word), priest (ever making intercession and mediation for us), and king (ruling his church by Word and Spirit and with sovereign love and power).

### **What Is Not Affirmed**

Any theology—

- that does not affirm as biblical and true the death of Christ as the central saving act of our Christian faith, or
- that rejects these teachings—atonement, substitutionary sacrifice, expiation for sins on the basis of Christ's death—as obsolete, unworthy, unessential, or irrelevant, or
- that seeks to substitute some other basis or to promote some "more culturally relevant paradigm" for our salvation, justification, and reconciliation with God than Christ's death on the Cross for us
- that asserts that Christ's atoning work is universally applied to all or most of the human race, so that all or most are saved, regardless of their religion or non-religion and apart from hearing the gospel and believing in Christ.

### **Scripture**

Matthew 1:21; Romans 3:25; 1 Corinthians 1:23-25; 2:2; 15:3; 2 Corinthians 5:19, 21; Galatians 3:13; 6:14; Ephesians 1:19-23; Hebrews 9:11-12; 1 Peter 3:18; 1 John 2:2

### **Confessions**

Scots Confession 3.09; Heidelberg Catechism 4.031, 4.037

## SALVATION BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH

Salvation is God's gracious work through Jesus Christ to reclaim humankind and all creation from sin and its consequences. Salvation is a gift of God's grace received by faith. Christ's righteousness and atonement are the sole basis for human salvation. Faith in Christ is the only instrument by which this righteousness is received by individual believers, resulting in their justification.

Justification is the righteousness of Christ imputed to a sinful woman or man *through faith alone* in Christ. Their faith appropriates Christ's atonement, resulting in their sins atoned for and forgiven and God reckoning them to be righteous.

Scripture also describes salvation as a ransom or redemption from slavery (Mark 10:45); a sacrificial substitution (Christ's death for our death); reconciliation of sinners with a holy God; our sins being sacrificially expiated, satisfied, covered over, forgiven, and removed. All of these ways describe how God has given us "the forgiveness of sins, everlasting righteousness and salvation out of sheer grace solely for the sake of Christ's saving work." (Heidelberg, 4.021)

Faith is (1) accepting the message of salvation as true and (2) trusting God to apply this salvation to us. Faith is "certain knowledge" and "wholehearted trust," that is created in us by the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. In faith we accept, receive, and rest "upon Christ alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life, by virtue of the covenant of grace." (Westminster, 6.080)

### **What is Not Affirmed**

Any doctrine—

- that asserts that salvation can be obtained through other religions or that other religions have equally valid solutions to the human problem, or that there is salvation in some other name besides Jesus Christ
- that denies the radical sinfulness of human beings, their condemnation before a holy God, that denies that human beings are lost apart from Christ, or denies their need for a Savior
- that teaches that God saves or will save everybody (or nearly everybody) regardless of their faith in Jesus Christ or whether they hear the gospel or not or whether they put their faith explicitly in Jesus Christ or not.

**Scripture**

Mark 10:45; John 3:16; Acts 4:12; Romans 3:22-26; 5:1; Galatians 2:16; Ephesians 2:8-9

**Confessions**

Second Helvetic Confession 5.107-109, 5.112-113

Heidelberg Catechism 4.021, 4.060

Westminster Confession of Faith 6.080

Brief Statement of Faith 10.4

## SECTION 2: REFORMED DISTINCTIVES

### ELECTION FOR SALVATION AND SERVICE

Our salvation and sanctification are based entirely on God’s initiative and God’s grace. It is not primarily about *our* choice but *God’s* choice. The Reformed understanding of election is that God has chosen us *in Christ* for salvation and service—

- To be redeemed,
- To be God’s own “treasured possession,” a holy nation and a kingdom of priests,
- To live holy and exemplary lives, zealous for good works, resulting in praise for the glory of God’s grace.

Our salvation is not an accident we stumble into or a destiny we create. It is God’s gracious purpose for our life and it is for God’s glory.

God has elected us out of grace. God has elected us from eternity. We are elected *in Christ*, that is— Christ is God’s elected Son, chosen to redeem God’s creation and to be Mediator and Savior for humankind. Our election is not direct, but indirect—we are elected on account of Christ, with the result that those who are now grafted into Christ by faith are also be elected.

As those chosen by God, we are predestined to be conformed to the image of Jesus. Our purpose, then, is to glorify God by our redeemed and sanctified life. Our faith in Christ and our good works are evidence and confirmation that we are chosen by God to be His.

Election is a doctrine intended to reassure Christians of the security of their salvation and of the steadfast love of God for them, and to instill in them a sense of divine purpose and a zeal for good works. A person may know with complete assurance, on the basis of the promises of scripture and God’s faithfulness, that if they are trusting in Christ for their salvation, they indeed are in Christ and are elected.

## **What Is Not Affirmed**

Any doctrine—

- That denies God’s initiative in calling persons to Himself.
- That asserts that all people will ultimately be reconciled to God.
- That asserts a profession of faith without bearing any fruit.

## **Scripture**

Psalm 139:16; John 15:5, 8, 16; Ephesians 1:4-7, 11-13; Ephesians 2:10; 2 Timothy 1:9

## **Confessions**

Scots Confession 3.08

Second Helvetic Confession 5.052, 5.053, 5.059-60

## **COVENANT AND COVENANT LIFE**

Covenant, in the cultural context of the Bible, described the strongest relationship of love and loyalty between persons. It was a solemn relationship and bond, often with explicit oaths and obligations, often sealed solemnly with the blood of sacrifice. Reconciliation after hostility and conflict was often marked by a covenant ceremony. A covenant was entered into by faith as a relationship of trust and solemn promises; it was held together by faithfulness. Covenant faithfulness led to blessing and life; breaking covenant invoked a curse. Covenants described the relationship between rulers and subjects, wife and husband, business partners, neighboring nations. God adapted this covenant model to describe his special relationship and bond with the people he redeemed.

God’s covenants had different forms and details at different times in salvation history (for example, with Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David), but they reflected a single sovereign and gracious purpose to redeem, sanctify, and preserve a people who belonged to God. The divine covenant was always initiated by God; it was sustained by God’s faithfulness in spite of humankind’s history of unfaithfulness; it was an expression of God’s steadfast love (Hebrew, *hesed*); and it reached a culmination and fullness in the “new covenant” (Luke 22:20) established and perfected by Jesus Christ.

In Jesus, the promised Messiah, we encounter personally and directly the Mediator of God’s perfect and everlasting covenant (Hebrews 9:15).

Jesus has perfectly fulfilled the obligations of the covenant for us; he has demonstrated complete faithfulness to God as a covenant partner. In his substitutionary death he took on himself the curse for our covenant breaking, ended the hostility our sins had caused, reconciled us and made us right with God. Those who put their faith in Christ are spiritually united with him, enter the new covenant where there is salvation and redemption, become members of the covenant community called *the church*, and enjoy the covenant promises of eternal life and blessing.

Every believer is called to be a faithful and participating member of a local church, where “the community of the new covenant” has local expression and where they can be disciplined into holiness and maturity. The community of the new covenant is to be a demonstration of the supernatural reality and power of the kingdom of God—what the world looks like and might become where God is acknowledged as King; a community of love and wholeness; a ministry extending the healing, deliverance, and grace that marked the life of Jesus and his disciples.

### **What Is Not Affirmed**

Any doctrine—

- that promotes a covenant life which is to be lived out in a solitary manner, devoid of community;
- that suggests that covenant life need not be different than the life of the unbeliever in any profound way;
- that would seek to lay the foundation of our covenant life on anything other than or contrary to God’s Word.

### **Scripture**

Genesis 6:18; 9:8-17; 17:1-8; Exodus 19:3-6;  
2 Samuel 7:12-16; Isaiah 9:6-7;  
Jeremiah 23:5-6; 31:31-34;  
Luke 22:20; Galatians 3:28;  
Ephesians 2:12-13; Hebrews 9:15;  
1 Peter 2:9-10

### **Confessions**

Scots Confession 3.16;  
Second Helvetic Confession 5.125-5.126  
Confession of 1967 9.31

## SACRAMENTS

The church receives from the Lord Jesus Christ two sacred and symbolic actions, called sacraments, which enact and perform (symbolize and seal) the promises of the gospel. These sacraments are Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Baptism is the sign and seal of incorporation into Christ and of the washing away of sin through his sacrifice. Baptism publicly acknowledges that the one baptized is part of the covenant community of faith. Baptizing infants reminds us that God reaches out to us even before we are able to respond in faith.

The Lord's Supper, using bread and wine, is the sign and seal of our ongoing communion with the living Christ and of his life continuing to nourish us. Celebrating the Lord's Supper, we give thanks as we remember that Christ lived for us, Christ died for us and Christ will come again.

Both sacraments point to and remind us of the holy sacrifice of Christ for us. The Holy Spirit uses these sacraments—the common signs of water and of bread and wine, combined with the promises in the gospel of eternal life and forgiveness through Christ—to convey grace, salvation, and the real presence of the Lord Jesus Christ, which are received in faith by the believing community in their worship together.

### What Is Not Affirmed

- That the physical body and blood of Jesus are actually present in the Lord's Supper.
- That there are other sacraments besides the two instituted by the Lord Jesus.
- That other sacraments can be instituted as the church deems suitable such as milk and honey, etc.
- That these sacraments are mere symbols or do not involve a supernatural presence of Christ or do not supernaturally perform what they signify, that is, *wash from sins* and *nourish us with Christ's very life*.
- That the sacraments confer grace whether or not they are received in faith.

## **Scripture**

Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 2: 38-39,42; 16:31-33; Romans 6:3-4;  
1 Corinthians 10:16; 11:23-26; 12:13

## **Confessions**

Heidelberg Catechism 4.066, 4.069-4.071, 4.074, 4.075-4.079  
Second Helvetic Confession 5.169, 5.175, 5.205  
Shorter Catechism 7.094, 7.096  
Confession of 1967 9.51, 9.52  
Brief Statement of Faith 10.4

## **SANCTIFICATION AND THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**

The indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in the individual and collective life of believers effects real transformation—a life of increasing holiness, righteousness, power, and love, as we are changed more and more into the image of Christ. Though Christians are marred by sin and imperfect until Christ returns, there is a substantial manifestation of the righteousness and power of the kingdom of God in the believer, the church, and the world through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit connects us to the life of Christ and releases in us the supernatural and saving power of Christ’s life, death, resurrection, and glory.

## **What Is Not Affirmed**

Any doctrine—

- That proclaims that total perfection occurs in this lifetime. (1 Corinthians 13:10-12)
- That proclaims “As though there were areas of our life in which we would not belong to Jesus Christ, but to other lords—areas in which we do not need justification and sanctification through Him.” (Barmen Declaration, 8.15)

## **Scripture**

Romans 8:29; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 6:11; Galatians 5:22-25; Philippians 2:12-13; 2 Thessalonians 2:13

## **Confessions**

Scots Confession 3.12; Westminster Confession of Faith 6.075-6.077  
Shorter Catechism 7.035; Larger Catechism 7.188

## PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS

Every believer, as a disciple of Jesus Christ, is called to participate in his priestly ministry. A priest functions to reconcile people to God. Jesus Christ is the eternal high priest of God's new covenant, who offered himself as an atoning sin offering on our behalf and who is our eternal advocate before the throne of God. "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself." All believers are called as disciples to do this ministry of Jesus—to participate in his priestly work of reconciling the world to God by proclaiming the gospel, doing the works of Jesus, and manifesting the reality and power of the kingdom of God in the world. This ministry is not reserved exclusively for ordained clergy and officers, but is the vocational privilege and responsibility of every Christian.

### Scripture

Exodus 19:6

Matthew 10:1, 6-7; 28:18-19;

1 Corinthians 12:7, 14, 27;

2 Corinthians 5:18-20, 1 Peter 2:9;

Revelation 1:5-6

### Confessions

Second Helvetic Confession 5.153

Confession of 1967 9.31, 9.38

## MISSION OF THE CHURCH

God's redeeming and reconciling work in the world was accomplished through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and continues through the church, the body of Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit.

The great ends of the church are the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind; the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God; the maintenance of divine worship; the preservation of the truth; the promotion of social righteousness; and the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven in the world.

Jesus Christ, as the Lord of the church, calls the church into being, declares its mission, and supernaturally equips it for its work. Its mission is:

- To be the provisional demonstration of the new reality God intends for humanity;
- To proclaim the good news of salvation by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ, leading persons to repentance, acceptance of Christ as Savior and Lord, and new life as his disciples;
- To make disciples of all nations;
- To demonstrate new life in Christ tangibly through its love for one another and the quality of its common life together, sharing in worship, fellowship, and nurture, practicing a deepened life of prayer and service under the guidance of the Holy Spirit;
- To participate in God's activity in the world through its life for others.

The church is to commit itself fully to this mission, waiting for and hastening the Lord's coming again.

### **What Is Not Affirmed**

Any witness of the Church—

- that distorts the gospel message or holds it captive to culture;
- that seeks justice apart from the truth of Christ;
- that elevates sociology, psychology, education or any other discipline above the clear witness of Scripture;
- that self-righteously appeals to others to live faithful and obedient lives rather than acknowledging the Church's reliance on the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit in its own life and witness;
- that is motivated by anything other than the love of Christ.

### **Scripture**

Matthew 9:36-38, 28:18-20; Acts 1:8; Romans 10:13-15;  
2 Peter 3:10-13

### **Confessions**

Westminster Confession of Faith 6.058  
Confession of 1967 9.06, 9.43, 9.44-9.46.

## STEWARDSHIP

God has given us all that we have and all that we are. He charges us with the responsibility of using all our abilities and gifts in his faithful service and to his glory—and especially to further the work and mission of the church, to relieve suffering and help the poor, to resist the devil and overcome evil. In particular God has ordered us to manage and care for creation as grateful stewards and obedient servants.

Jesus Christ is Lord of every area of our life—our spiritual life and our physical life; our social life including marriage, politics, justice, and culture; our intellectual life; our work life and our recreational life; the use of our bodies, our possessions, our resources, and our money. We are to be stewards of all of these things to manifest and extend the kingdom of God in the world, to extend the gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth, and to bring glory to the name of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.

### **Scripture**

Psalm 24:1

Romans 12:1; 1 Corinthians 4:7;

Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 4:8-11

### **Confessions**

Larger Catechism 7.251

Confession of 1967 9.46

Brief Statement of Faith 10.33, 10.38



ESCALON PRESBYTERIAN  
CHURCH

**WE EXIST TO:**

SEEK

*To bring others to faith in Jesus Christ*

SERVE

*In mission locally and around the world*

SUPPORT

*Personal growth through learning, teaching and sharing God's word*

SUSTAIN

*A loving, Christ-centered fellowship among our members, friends and community*