

Scripture texts are given to support the statements in this Confession. The aim in doing this is to give expression to the Confession's own conviction that the Bible alone is our final authority in all matters of faith and practice, and to encourage readers to ground their own convictions directly on the Scripture. This Confession is not based on a superficial approach to theology whereby texts are used in isolation from their contexts to support statements by means of superficial verbal parallels. Rather, it is built on a responsible exegesis of the relevant texts in their literary and historical contexts, with due regard for the theological unity of Scripture.

1. GOD

1.1 There is one living and true God (Deuteronomy 6:4; Jeremiah 10:10; 1 Corinthians 8:4–6; 1 Thessalonians 1:9), who exists in three distinct persons—Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14). Each person is fully God, yet the Godhead is one and indivisible (Exodus 3:14; John 14:11; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Acts 5:3–4; 1 Corinthians 3:16–17).

1.2 God's existence derives from himself (Isaiah 48:12; Acts 17:24–25), and he is set apart from all his creatures (Psalm 113:4–6; 1 Timothy 6:16). He is pure spirit (Deuteronomy 4:15; John 4:24), having no body or unstable emotions (Numbers 23:19; Psalm 33:11; Malachi 3:6; James 1:17). God is infinite in his being and perfections: changeless, eternal, almighty, most holy, all-knowing, most wise and free (Malachi 3:6; James 1:17; Psalm 90:2; Revelation 1:4; Isaiah 6:5; Revelation 1:8; Isaiah 6:3; Revelation 4:8; Psalm 139:1–6; Romans 11:33–34; Daniel 4:35; Romans 11:35–36; Ephesians 1:11b). He is most loving, gracious, merciful, compassionate and forgiving (Exodus 34:6–7; Psalm 103:8–10); he rewards those who seek him (Jeremiah 29:13; Hebrews 11:6), but hates sin and is perfectly just in the punishment thereof (Nehemiah 9:32–33; Psalm 5:4–6; Habakkuk 1:13; Revelation 16:5–6; 19:11).

1.3 God is sovereign and works all things according to his own righteous will, for his own glory (Romans 11:33–36). From all eternity God decreed everything that would ever happen in time (Proverbs 16:4; Isaiah 46:10; Ephesians 1:11b; Romans 11:33–34; Revelation 15:3–4); he did this in perfect wisdom and holiness (Revelation 15:3–4). Furthermore, God sustains and governs all his creatures by his supremely wise and holy providence. In so doing he fulfils the purpose for which they were created, in order that his own attributes and glory may be praised (Psalm 104; Matthew 10:29–32; Acts 17:25–28; Psalm 145:7; Isaiah 63:14; Romans 9:17; Ephesians 3:10).

1.4 In the providential outworking of his decree, God ordinarily works in an orderly, regular way, so that certain causes consistently produce the same effects (Psalm 104; Isaiah 55:10–11; Acts 27:22, 31, 44). (This we call ordinary providence.) However, God is also free to work differently so that the normal relationships of cause and effect are temporarily suspended (Exodus 3:2–3; 2 Kings 6:6; Daniel 3:27; Luke 1:34–35; Romans 4:19–21). (This we call extraordinary providence.) Recognising God's ordinary and extraordinary providence is essential to the proper exercise of human responsibility in humble dependence on God.

1.5 God has revealed himself generally to all people in creation, in providence, and in their inner consciousness and conscience. This revelation does not lead to a saving knowledge of God but does leave people without excuse for their failure to glorify him as God and to give him thanks (Psalm 19:1–6; Romans 1:19–21; 2:14–15). God in grace has revealed himself savingly in Christ and through the Scriptures (Psalm 19:7–14; John 1:14, 18; Romans 1:16–17).

2. SCRIPTURE

2.1 God has revealed himself and his gospel fully and finally in the person of his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ (John 1:14, 18; Hebrews 1:1–3). This revelation is preserved for us in the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments—the Bible (Luke 24:25–27, 46–47; Romans 1:1–2; 2 Peter 1:12–21; 1 John 1:1).

2.2 The Bible in its original autographs is a supernatural, verbal revelation, given by the plenary inspiration of the Holy Spirit. God is its author and it is therefore infallible, inerrant and authoritative (Exodus 20:1; 2 Samuel 23:1–2; 2 Kings 17:13; 2 Chronicles 34:21; 36:21; Nehemiah 9:30; Isaiah 8:20; Jeremiah 1:9; 36:1–2; Ezekiel 1:3; Zechariah 7:12; Malachi 4:4; Matthew 21:42; 22:31–32, 43; 26:54, 56; Mark 12:24, 36; Luke 1:70; 24:44; John 1:23; 5:39; 10:34–35; 14:26; 16:13; 19:36–37; 20:9; Acts 1:16; 3:18; 7:38; 13:34; 28:25; Romans 1:2; 3:2; 4:23; 9:17; 15:4; 1 Corinthians 2:12–13; 6:16; 9:10; 14:37; Galatians 1:11–12; 3:8, 16, 22; 4:30; 1 Thessalonians 1:5; 2:13; 2 Timothy 3:15–17; Hebrews 1:1–2; 3:7; 4:12; 9:8; 10:15; 2 Peter 1:18–21; 3:16; 1 John 4:6; Revelation 14:13; 22:19). By God's singular care and providence, his word to us has been faithfully preserved through the centuries.

2.3 All of God's special revelation to man in the present day is found in the Bible. (This statement is supported by the biblical theology of revelation; the following references should be read in relation to one another: Hebrews 1:1–2; Acts 1:21–22; 1 Corinthians 9:1; 15:7–8; Ephesians 2:20. See also §6.2.) The Bible is sufficient, revealing all we need to know for salvation and godly living (Isaiah 8:20; Luke 16:29–31; Ephesians 2:20; 2 Timothy 3:16–17). Nothing must be taken away from Scripture and nothing added to it. The Bible alone is our final authority in all matters of faith and practice; our consciences are bound by it alone, not by any council, creed, individual or supposed new revelation (Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:32; Isaiah 8:20; Matthew 15:1–9; 22:29, 31–32; Acts 17:11; 28:23–25; Revelation 22:18–19).

2.4 We recognise that our interpretation of Scripture is not infallible; nevertheless, we may gain a true and valid understanding of God's mind revealed in the Scripture (Psalm 19:7–11; Proverbs 2:1–11). To this end, our interpretation must be governed by the author's original intention and the context of the Scripture itself. Therefore, in seeking to understand a text, we depend on the illumination of the Holy Spirit, use the normal grammatico-historical rules of interpretation, and are assisted by the understanding of the true church throughout the ages (1 Corinthians 2:6–14; Ephesians 4:11–13; 2 Peter 3:15–16).

3. CREATION, THE FALL AND SIN

3.1 In the beginning the triune God created the heavens and the earth out of nothing, by the power of his word, in six days according to Scripture (Genesis 1:1–2:3; Hebrews 11:3). God created everything good and perfect for the glory of his own name (Genesis 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31; Psalm 104:31; Romans 11:36). God created mankind, male and female, in his own image (Genesis 1:26–27). The whole human race is descended from Adam and Eve, the first man and woman (Genesis 1:28; Acts 17:26).

3.2 God also created angels as moral, personal and spiritual beings (Colossians 1:16). Some of the angels rebelled against God and were cast out of heaven, thus becoming evil spirits called devils or demons; the chief among them is Satan (Revelation 12:7–9). Within the limits of God's permission, these creatures have a certain capacity to influence the world and oppose the work of God (Job 1:12; 2:6; Revelation 12:10–17).

3.3 Adam and Eve wilfully and freely broke God's commandment (Genesis 3:1–19; Romans 5:14). By so doing they lost their original righteousness and communion with God (Genesis 3:10–11, 22–24).

3.4 Since Adam was appointed to stand in the place of all mankind, each of his descendants inherits the guilt of his sin (Romans 5:12–19), to which is added guilt for sins personally committed (Romans 3:10–20). Furthermore, all people inherit a corrupt nature from their original ancestors, Adam and Eve. Thus, all people are by nature subject to God's wrath, to death, and to temporal and eternal misery unless the Lord Jesus sets them free. The corrupt nature inclines them away from all good and is the cause of all sin actually committed (Psalm 51:5; Romans 3:10–19; Ephesians 2:1–3). Apart from the regenerating work of the Spirit, man is dead in sin and therefore unable to turn himself towards God, or to exercise saving faith in Jesus Christ (Matthew 11:27; 16:17; Romans 8:7; 1 John 5:1).

3.5 Sin is rebellion against God and his law (Romans 1:21; Ephesians 2:1–3; 1 John 3:4). It expresses itself in acts of disobedience by doing what he prohibits and failing to do what he requires (Ephesians 2:1).

4. REDEMPTION, THE PERSON AND WORK OF CHRIST

4.1 Although mankind, through Adam's fall, became dead in sin and unable to save himself, God was pleased to provide a way of salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ alone (John 5:39; 14:6; Acts 4:12). In order to inherit eternal life, it is essential for a person, by the sovereign intervention of God, to be taken out of Adam and united with Christ (Romans 5:12–19). Salvation is in Christ and him alone. God's work of redemption proceeds from God's grace alone, on the basis of Christ's mediatory work alone, through faith alone (Romans 1:2–4, 16–17; Ephesians 2:8–9). In the deepest sense, all the initiative in salvation lies with God, and the glory for salvation belongs to God alone (Romans 11:33–36; Ephesians 3:1–14; Revelation 5:9–10; 7:10).

4.2 God's salvation is revealed in the gospel, which forms the central focus of both Old and New Testaments (Luke 24:26–27, 44; John 20:30–31; Romans 1:1–4). In the Old Testament, the gospel was proclaimed through the promises, types and prophecies, which predicted the "sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow" (Hebrews 10:1–12; 1 Peter 1:10–12); the New Testament proclaims the fulfilment of God's redemptive purposes through the life, ministry, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ (Acts 13:38–39; Galatians 3:16–22). Thus, believers of all ages receive salvation through their union with Jesus Christ, the only mediator between God and man (Romans 4:16, 23–25).

4.3 God calls all men to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and freely promises to all such people that they will be redeemed from sin and inherit eternal life (Isaiah 55:1; John 3:16; Romans 9:33; Revelation 22:17). Furthermore, God has promised to give his Holy Spirit to all of his elect, in order that they may be made willing and able to repent and believe (Psalm 110:3; John 6:37, 44; Acts 13:48; 16:14). The elect constitute a great multitude of men and women whom God appointed to eternal life before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4; Revelation 5:9–10). God's election was not based on anything seen or foreseen in the elect; it proceeded from his free and sovereign grace alone (Deuteronomy 7:7–8; Romans 9:11–16; 2 Timothy 1:9). Furthermore, God the Father entrusted the elect to his Son, who undertook to redeem, call, justify, sanctify and glorify them (Isaiah 53:10–11; Matthew 20:28; Luke 19:10; John 6:37–40; 10:27–28).

4.4 In order to give effect to God's eternal purpose, the eternal Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, took on human flesh: He was conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, and in this way two whole, perfect, distinct natures—divine and human—were inseparably joined together in one person, the Lord Jesus Christ (Luke 1:35; John 1:1,14; Romans 1:3–4; Philippians 2:6–11; Colossians 2:9). Being thus true God and true man, unchangeably sinless (Hebrews 4:15; 1 Peter 2:22), the Lord Jesus Christ was appointed mediator between God and man, prophet, priest and king (Luke 1:32; John 1:45 [quoting Deuteronomy 18:18]; Hebrews 7:21; 1 Timothy 2:5).

4.5 Jesus Christ lived on this earth as a man under God's law, which he perfectly fulfilled (Galatians 4:4–5; Hebrews 5:8–9). On the cross, he acted as substitute for his elect, bearing their sins and suffering God's wrath in their place (Isaiah 53:4–6; Matthew 20:28; 2 Corinthians 5:21). He died and rose bodily on the third day; forty days after that he ascended to the right hand of the Father, from where he poured out his Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 1:3; 2:33; 1 Corinthians 15:3–6); at God's appointed time, he will return personally to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him (1 Thessalonians 4:16; Hebrews 9:28). Jesus Christ is thus the last Adam, through whose sinless life and atoning death believers are reconciled to God (Romans 3:22–25; 5:18–19). Through him, also, God is reconciling all things to himself (Ephesians 1:10; Colossians 1:20).

4.6 By his perfect obedience and the once-for-all sacrifice of himself, the Lord Jesus Christ has brought about reconciliation and purchased an everlasting inheritance for all those given to him by his Father (John 17:2–5; 2 Corinthians 5:18–19; 1 Peter 1:3–4). His death and resurrection are thus the guarantee of their eternal salvation (Romans 5:9–10; 8:32; Revelation 5:9–10). By his present work of intercession, effectual calling, sanctification and sovereign rule, he certainly and effectually applies and communicates eternal redemption to all those for whom he obtained it (Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25; John 6:37, 39; 10:4, 16, 27; 17:19; 1 Corinthians 1:30; Hebrews 10:10, 14).

5. THE APPLICATION OF REDEMPTION

5.1 When the time is ripe, the Holy Spirit lays claim to each of the elect through regeneration, enabling them to believe in Christ and thus be united to him (John 1:12–13; 3:3–8; 1 John 5:1).

5.2 Saving faith is ordinarily produced through the ministry of the Word (Romans 10:14–17). It requires a knowledge of what God has revealed—about himself, man and the gospel—includes a conviction that these things are true, and comes to fulfilment as the believer accepts, receives and rests upon Christ alone for justification, sanctification and eternal life (John 20:20–31; Romans 10:9–11). Any reliance which a person places in his own morality, good works or ceremonial faithfulness disqualifies him or her—whether that reliance is in place of or in addition to faith in Christ (Galatians 1:9; 3:10; 5:2–6).

5.3 Evangelical repentance is a gift of God which is inseparable from saving faith. In repentance a person perceives that he or she has offended a holy God (Psalm 51:1–6; Acts 2:37–38), yet grasps that God in Christ is merciful to penitent sinners (Isaiah 55:7; Joel 2:12–13; Mark 1:4–5; Luke 15:17); this leads to a turning from sin towards God, with the full purpose of and endeavour after obedience in all that God has commanded (Luke 3:8–9; 15:18–20; Acts 26:20; 1 Thessalonians 1:9).

5.4 All who are united to Christ through saving faith are justified (declared righteous) by God (Romans 3:22, 24; 4:5). This justification is an objective, legal declaration by which

Christ's active obedience to God's law (i.e. his obedience to all of God's commands) and his passive obedience in death (i.e. his submission to the penalty of death) are imputed to the believer (Isaiah 53:4–6; Romans 4:5–6; 5:18–19; 2 Corinthians 5:21). Justification is thus founded only upon the righteous life and sacrificial death of Christ, having no dependence on the personal righteousness of the believer (Luke 18:9–14; Romans 4:4–6; 1 Corinthians 1:30; Ephesians 2:8–9; 1 John 5:12). Faith is the instrument of justification because it (from the human side) unites the believer to Christ; it is in no way the basis of God's acceptance of the believer (Romans 6:3–10; Galatians 2:20–21). In Christ, believers are also adopted as God's children (Ephesians 1:5).

5.5 Saving faith and justification will, however, always result in a life of good works characterised by supreme love for God and for one's neighbour (Romans 6:4, 14; Ephesians 2:10; 1 John 5:1–5). According to Scripture, good works proceed from true faith, conform to the law of God, and are motivated by a desire for God's glory (Psalm 112:1; Romans 2:7; 14:23; 1 Corinthians 10:31; 1 Timothy 1:5). Whereas unbelievers are unable to perform such works, believers have been and are increasingly sanctified by God's Word and Spirit to their performance (Romans 8:3–11). Though the war with remaining sin continues as long as life in this world, the power of Christ enables believers increasingly to mortify sin and to grow in grace, perfecting holiness in the fear of God (John 15:5; Romans 7:14–15; 3-4; 1 Corinthians 9:24–27). Therefore, while good works are not the root of true faith or the ground of justification, they are the necessary fruit—and evidence of the genuineness—of saving faith and justification (James 2:17, 26). Sanctification is so inseparable from justification that a person who fails to produce good works (as defined above) as a habit of life has no grounds for considering himself a believer (Matthew 7:21–23; 1 John 2:4).

5.6 Those whom God has regenerated, enabled to believe, justified, adopted and sanctified will certainly persevere in the state of grace to the end and be eternally saved (Romans 8:28–39; Philippians 1:6). Believers may be severely tested by the world, the flesh and the devil, and may even, for a time, fall into grievous sins whereby they incur God's fatherly displeasure and grieve the Holy Spirit (Psalm 51:3–12; Matthew 26:70, 72, 74). Yet they will certainly be kept by the power of God, who continues to nourish in them faith, repentance, love, joy, hope and all the graces of the Spirit (John 10:28–29; 1 Thessalonians 5:23–24; 1 Peter 1:5). This wonderful assurance is no encouragement to sin, for the Lord clearly warns that those who persist steadfastly in apostasy prove themselves never to have been true believers (Colossians 1:22–23; Hebrews 10:26–27).

5.7 While the Word of God places a strong emphasis on God's initiative in the salvation of a sinner, it has an equally strong emphasis on human responsibility in the outworking of certain elements of the process of salvation: faith, repentance, sanctification and perseverance (Matthew 23:37–38; Philippians 2:12–13). This requires from the believer absolute commitment to the end of life (Matthew 10:22; 24:12–13). It is of the utmost importance to maintain the biblical tension between the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man in the process of salvation.

6. THE HOLY SPIRIT IN REDEMPTION

6.1 The Holy Spirit is from eternity truly God, the third person of the divine Trinity (Acts 5:3–4; 2 Corinthians 13:14).

6.2 The foundation on which the church is established is God's revelation in Jesus Christ (John 1:18; 1 Corinthians 3:11). This foundation was laid as the Holy Spirit made the truth

regarding Jesus Christ known to the apostles, thus enabling them to bear witness to him (John 15:26–27; 16:13–15; Acts 1:21–25; Ephesians 2:20; 3:4–5). In this way, the apostles and their intimate co-workers were inspired by the Spirit to put the New Testament message into writing, and so to complete the Scripture (1 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Peter 1:12–21; 3:15–16). Since the work of the apostles was unique and unrepeatable, the office of apostle ended when the last of the New Testament apostles passed from the scene (1 Corinthians 15:5–8). Ever since the completion of the canon, the Spirit's means of communicating God's truth has been to illuminate the Scriptures which he inspired (2 Timothy 3:16–17).

6.3 Although the Holy Spirit was already active in the Old Testament period, he was, according to the promises of the prophets, poured out in matchless abundance on the church after the ascension of Christ (Nehemiah 9:20; Isaiah 63:11; Acts 2:1–39). This happened on the Day of Pentecost, the Old Testament harvest festival. The Holy Spirit is therefore, in a special way, the Spirit of the New Testament harvest, which consists of the elect from the entire human race. His work is largely concerned with their calling and preservation in this life, and is accomplished by mediating Christ to his people (John 14:16–18; 16:8–11; Ephesians 1:13–14). Thus the work of the Holy Spirit in believers is absolutely essential for their salvation.

6.4 The Holy Spirit is the central gift of the new covenant (Ezekiel 36:27; Acts 2:16–21). Ever since Christ poured out the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, believers have received the gift of his indwelling presence immediately upon the exercise of saving faith (Acts 2:39; Romans 8:9). Thus, all true believers have been baptised in (or by) the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13) and possess the gift of the Spirit—a gift which is not to be patiently tarried for or carnally peddled.

6.5 The initial work of the Spirit in illumination and regeneration leads to repentance and saving faith (John 1:12–13; 1 Corinthians 2:6–16; 1 John 5:1). By the gift of the Spirit, God assures his children of their sonship and eternal life (Romans 8:14–17); gives to them a foretaste of what is yet to come (Romans 8:23; Ephesians 1:14); restores in them the image of God, conforming them to the likeness of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18; Colossians 3:10); instructs them in the words and ways of Christ (John 14:26); liberates them from the bondage of sin and enables them to obey God from the heart (Galatians 5:16–26); assists them in their prayers (Romans 8:26); mediates Christ's presence (John 14:16–18); and unites them to one another (1 Corinthians 12:13).

6.6 The Holy Spirit resides irrevocably in the hearts of all true Christians from the moment of their conversion, being received once and for all (Ephesians 1:13); nevertheless, the same Spirit continues to be supplied to them throughout their lives. Thus, it is the duty of those already indwelt by God's Spirit both to request further supplies and larger measures of the Holy Spirit, and to be filled continually with (i.e. controlled by) the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:13; Ephesians 5:18).

6.7 It is crucial to recognise the Holy Spirit's work in the individual believer; nevertheless, since believers are baptised by the Spirit into the body, the corporate nature of the Holy Spirit's work should not be ignored (1 Corinthians 12:12–13). The Holy Spirit works within the individual in the context of the community of believers: both the gifts of the Spirit and the fruit of the Spirit assume the corporate nature of the Holy Spirit's work (1 Corinthians 12:4–11; Ephesians 5:18–21).

6.8 The gift of the Holy Spirit is never completely taken away from true Christians, but he can be so grieved by their rebellions and backslidings, that for a season his presence is

greatly withdrawn and his influences largely withheld (Ephesians 4:30). Therefore, it is the duty of all believers neither to grieve nor to quench the Holy Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19).

6.9 Each true congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ is charismatic by nature—in the sense that every believer receives a gift (or gifts) and is responsible to exercise it (or them) in practising the priesthood of the believer (Romans 12:3–8; 1 Corinthians 12:4–11; 1 Peter 4:10–11). This does not mean, however, that the equipping work of the Holy Spirit is limited to the gifts that are explicitly mentioned in the New Testament. Neither does it mean that all the gifts which are mentioned still appear today. Clearly, the gifts associated with the work of the apostles in the time before the New Testament was completed—especially the revelatory gifts—disappeared with the finalisation of the canon, since they were no longer needed (see §6.2).

7. THE CHURCH

7.1 The universal church consists of all the elect that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one under Christ, its head (Hebrews 12:23). This universal church is the bride and body of Christ, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way, and the agency which forms the focus of God's work of reconciling all things to himself (Ephesians 1:9–10, 23; 3:6–11; 5:25–32). The universal church may be called invisible with respect to the internal work of the Spirit.

7.2 All those who profess faith in Christ and obedience to the gospel, and who do not destroy their profession by unholiness of conduct, are to be regarded as visible saints. A local church ought to be constituted only of visible saints (Matthew 18:15–20; Acts 2:37–42; 1 Corinthians 5:1–9). In addition to this fundamental principle, true churches are recognised by their faithful preaching of the gospel (Galatians 1:6, 9), pure observance of the ordinances in the fear of God (Matthew 28:18–20; 1 Corinthians 11:23–25), practice of church discipline (Matthew 18:15–20; 1 Corinthians 5:1–9) and mutual love (John 13:34–35).

7.3 Christ is the head of every local church, and he has given to each local church all that power and authority which is necessary for the exercise of worship and discipline (Matthew 18:17–20; 1 Corinthians 5:4–5).

7.4 Although officers are not essential to the existence of a local church, they are necessary for its well-being (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). In the present age (i.e. the age after the founding and establishment of Christ's church on earth), Christ has appointed two offices for the government of the local church: elders (also known as pastors, bishops or overseers) and deacons (1 Timothy 3:1–13). It is the particular responsibility of elders to keep watch over the flock as men who must give an account, to provide sound teaching for the edification and strengthening of the saints, and to prepare God's people for works of service (Acts 20:28; Titus 1:9; Hebrews 13:17). Certain elders may be set apart to labour in preaching and teaching (1 Timothy 5:17). Deacons are appointed to attend to ministries of mercy and other practical service, in order to free the elders for prayer and the ministry of the Word (Acts 6:1–7; 1 Timothy 3:8–13).

7.5 All believers are one under the headship of Christ, and it is his desire that they be perfected in unity (John 17:23). Therefore, when God's providence provides the opportunity, local churches ought to promote fellowship and co-operation among themselves (Acts 15:1–4; 2 Corinthians 8:18–24; Galatians 2:10; Philippians 1:4–5).

7.6 In cases of difficulties—whether in matters of doctrine or administration—that concern the churches in general or any one church, it is Christ's will that representatives of the churches meet together to consider the matter and give their advice to all concerned (Acts 15:1–35; Galatians 2:2). It should be understood that the governance of a church is only valid to the extent that it conforms to the will of Christ the head (Revelation 1:12–20), and because Christ's will is not defined by the decisions of a local church or of its leaders, a church may often be helped to follow Christ by obtaining counsel from other churches (Proverbs 12:15; 13:10; 19:20). The representatives do not have power to impose their decision on any church or its officers or members, but their counsel must be taken seriously, in the spirit of genuinely seeking the Lord's will; local churches should be aware of the danger of rejecting wise and godly counsel (Proverbs 1:20–33).

7.7 Baptism is one of the two New Testament ordinances (sometimes called sacraments). It is the formal expression of a believer's entry into a saving relationship with God through Christ (Acts 2:38–41; 1 Peter 3:21), and as such is a visible word: from the side of the person baptised, baptism is a visible and decisive expression of his or her repentance and faith in Christ (Acts 2:38–41; Romans 6:3–4); from God's side, baptism is a sign of the baptised person's union with Christ and remission of sins (Romans 6:3–4; Hebrews 10:22). It follows, therefore, that the only proper subjects of baptism are those who profess repentance and faith in Christ (Matthew 28:19–20; Acts 2:37–41; 8:12–13, 36–38; 9:18; 10:47–48; 11:16; 15:9; 16:14–15, 31–34; 18:8; 19:3–5; 22:16; Romans 6:3–4; Galatians 3:27; Colossians 2:12; 1 Peter 3:21). The due administration of this ordinance involves immersion in water.

7.8 The second New Testament ordinance is the Lord's Supper, which the Lord Jesus himself instituted on the night that he was betrayed. The Lord's Supper is observed by eating the bread and drinking the cup which symbolise the body and blood of the Lord, which bread and cup are a visible proclamation of the death of Christ and its benefits for all who are united to Christ (1 Corinthians 11:23–29). The Lord's Supper is to be observed regularly by all believers in good standing with their local church who, receiving the elements in faith, spiritually receive and feed upon Christ crucified and all the benefits of his death (John 6:29, 35, 47–58).

8. THE CHRISTIAN LIFESTYLE

8.1 It is the fundamental responsibility of all human beings to worship and serve their Creator (Romans 1:19–21). Although unbelievers fail in this responsibility (Romans 1:18–23, 25, 28), Christians, whose lives are being transformed and renewed by the gospel, are called to live lives of worship by offering themselves as living sacrifices to God (Romans 12:1–2).

8.2 In addition to this worship, which embraces all of life, God's people are called to specific acts of public (Acts 2:42–47; 20:7) and private (Psalm 119:148; Matthew 6:6) worship. These specific acts of worship—including such elements as the preaching of the Word, prayer (1 Timothy 4:13; 2:8), observance of the ordinances (Matthew 28:19–20; 1 Corinthians 11:18, 23–25), and the singing of psalms, hymns and spiritual songs (Colossians 3:16)—are to be offered through Christ (1 Peter 2:5), in spirit and in truth (John 4:23), and according to the teachings of Scripture rather than in ways devised by man (Leviticus 10:1–3; Deuteronomy 12:30–31; Matthew 15:3).

8.3 Christian ethics is controlled by God's law, which is expressed in the two great commandments (to love God and our neighbour), summarised in the Ten

Commandments, and applied to the New Testament believer by Christ and the apostles (Matthew 5:17–20; Mark 12:29–31; Romans 13:8–10).

8.4 Christians are members of one another by virtue of their union with Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12–27); therefore, participation in the fellowship of the body of Christ through the local church is one of the believer's greatest privileges and responsibilities (Psalm 84; Hebrews 10:25). This fellowship is one of the most important means of proclaiming Christ to the world (John 17:21), as well as one of the believer's primary sources of preservation, comfort and edification (Hebrews 3:13; 1 John 4:12).

8.5 Christ has commanded his disciples to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matthew 5:13–16). Believers, therefore, have a responsibility to the world around them—without distinctions of race, language or class—to communicate the gospel of Jesus Christ by their actions, lifestyle and words (Matthew 28:18–20; Romans 1:14; Titus 2:11–14). In this way they are to make disciples of all nations.

9. CIVIL INSTITUTIONS: THE STATE AND MARRIAGE

9.1 As partakers of God's saving grace, believers are the firstfruits of God's new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 3:10–11; James 1:18). In the church, they begin to experience the fellowship that will characterise the new humanity (Hebrews 12:22–23). Yet believers continue to live in the present world and in human society, which is maintained and upheld by God's common grace (Psalm 145:9; Romans 2:15; 1 Peter 1:1). In this human society, God has appointed civil rulers to maintain order and justice, if necessary, by the use of the sword (Romans 13:1–4; 1 Peter 2:14).

9.2 Civil government is an institution separate from the church; it has no mandate to prescribe the doctrines and practices of any church, or to coerce its citizens into following one religion or another, or to prevent its citizens from practising religion (Matthew 5:43–47; 18:15–17; Acts 4:19; 1 Corinthians 5:9–13; Romans 13:3–4). Although the church has no institutional connection with the civil government, believers have a prophetic responsibility to remind the government of its accountability to God and of those principles of justice which accord with the will of God revealed in Scripture and in the human conscience (Psalms 2; 146:7–9; Proverbs 31:8–9; Revelation 18).

9.3 God has commanded Christians, within the limits of obedience to God, to submit to their rulers, to participate in the life of their society, and to promote the well-being of their fellow-citizens (Jeremiah 29:4–7; Matthew 5:38–47; Acts 4:19; 1 Thessalonians 4:11–12; 1 Peter 2:13–25).

9.4 Marriage is a lifelong covenantal union between one natural man and one natural woman; it must be entered into publicly and formally. It was ordained by God at creation for the mutual help of husband and wife, and for the propagation of the human race (Genesis 1:27–28; 2:20–24; Deuteronomy 24:1; Matthew 19:4–6). Marriage is thus the basis of the family, which is the essential building-block of any stable society (Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 6:7; Malachi 2:15; Ephesians 6:1–3).

9.5 Since marriage is a creation ordinance, its privileges and commitments apply to both believers and unbelievers. However, it is the duty of Christians to marry only in the Lord (1 Corinthians 7:39).

10. DEATH, RESURRECTION, JUDGEMENT AND THE FINAL STATE

10.1 After death, the human body returns to dust; the spirit, however, is immortal and neither dies nor sleeps (Genesis 3:19; Matthew 10:28; Luke 16:23; 23:43; 2 Corinthians 5:6–8; Hebrews 9:27). The spirits of the righteous are received into the presence of the Lord in anticipation of their final resurrection and full eternal inheritance (Luke 16:23; 2 Corinthians 5:6–8; Philippians 1:21–23; Revelation 6:9). The spirits of the wicked are cast into hell, where they await their final judgement (Luke 16:23–28; Acts 1:25; 2 Peter 2:9).

10.2 A time is coming when all the dead shall be raised and their souls united to their imperishable, resurrected bodies forever (John 5:28–29).

10.3 After the general resurrection there will be a day on which God will judge the world in righteousness by Jesus Christ (John 5:26–30; Acts 17:31). All people who have ever lived upon earth will be judged in perfect righteousness, according to what they have done (Romans 2:5–10; Revelation 20:12–13). The righteous will receive the reward of eternal joy, everlasting life and imperishable glory in the presence of the Lord; the wicked, who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, will be cast aside into everlasting torments, punished with everlasting destruction, and shut out from the gracious presence of the Lord and the majesty of his power (Matthew 25:31–46; Romans 2:6–10; 2 Thessalonians 1:9–10).

10.4 Although the final judgement is according to works, it is not as though the righteous earn or deserve the eternal life which they will receive (Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:9–10). Their good works are merely the evidence of God's gifts of regeneration, faith, justification and union with Christ, for whose sake alone they are given their eternal inheritance (Romans 5:1–2, 9–10; 6:23). On the other hand, those who will be condemned will be fully deserving of their punishment, since their works arise from a heart at enmity with God and find expression in the rejection of God's kindness, righteous claims and holy law (Romans 1:18–21; 2:1–5; 3:9–20). Thus, the day of judgement will glorify God: by the display of his mercy and grace in the salvation of believers, and by the manifestation of his justice in the condemnation of unbelievers (Romans 9:22–23; 2 Thessalonians 1:10; Revelation 15:3–4).

10.5 God has clearly revealed that the day and hour of Christ's coming are unknown to men (Matthew 24:36–41; 1 Thessalonians 5:1–3). His purpose is that they should shake off carnal security, reject the distraction of date-setting, and keep watch at all times, since they do not know the day or hour (Matthew 24:42–25:30; 1 Thessalonians 5:4–11). Thus prepared for the glorious appearing of their Lord and Saviour, they will always be ready to say, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly. Amen" (Revelation 22:20).