

# Refuge Statement of Faith

From its beginning, the Church has always found it helpful to summarize its core convictions in short and succinct statements. In each of these statements, it is our desire to build fences around the precious doctrines of the faith God has given us while also building bridges so that as many as receive Him may come to know Him. We desire to hold these beliefs with humility and with conviction. God's words, rather than humanity's, are the final authority. The Christian life is not summed up merely by doctrinal affirmations; the purpose of correct doctrine is to feed a genuine spiritual relationship with God.

At Refuge, we embrace the biblical and historic Christian faith as expressed in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, and as summarized in the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds. While we want to be extremely careful not to draw lines where Scripture does not, we also recognize the value of statements of faith such as these for the following reasons: preserving sound doctrine, discipling Jesus' followers, and seeing God glorified as He is known and worshiped. Refuge has three distinct but complementary statements which, taken together, form our Statement of Faith and summarize our beliefs.

## *Closed Handed Issues (Statement of Fundamental Beliefs)*

This statement represents the most simple and foundational beliefs of Christian orthodoxy from a biblical and historical perspective. It captures the basic contours of Christian theology. Anyone pursuing membership and/or baptism at Refuge Church must affirm each part of this statement.

## *Firm Handed Issues (Statement of Theological Convictions)*

This statement captures our convictions on areas that are debated even among gospel-centered churches. Though agreement with every part of this statement is not required for membership, we will preach, teach and counsel on the basis of these deeply held convictions. Furthermore, each member must submit to these teachings without causing division within the body. Some areas of leadership at Refuge will be closed to those who have settled convictions that are not in agreement with this statement.

## *Open Handed Issues (Statement of Biblical Doctrines)*

This statement represents a fuller summary of the various doctrines articulated in the other statements. It also includes doctrines where we recognize the potential for healthy discussion and debate among faithful believers. Together, these statements communicate what we believe as a church.

## Statement of Fundamental Beliefs

This statement represents the biblical and historic Christian faith. These beliefs are the glory and joy of Christ's Church. They form the foundation for the life and hope we have. Any person not in submission to biblical Christianity has departed from the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints and is not yet a part of the family of God.

We believe biblical Christianity includes the following affirmations:

- The Scriptures are inspired by God and are therefore authoritative in all matters pertaining to right living and right belief. They are necessary and sufficient for the believer to know God, understand the gospel, and live a life of obedient faith. (Ps 19:7-11; 2 Tim 3:16; 2 Ptr 1:20-21)
- There is only one true God - Holy and Righteous, Creator of heaven and earth - who eternally exists in three distinct persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Each member of the Godhead is to be equally loved, feared, and worshiped. (Matt 28:19; Deut 6:4; Is 45:5-6; 46:9-10; Jn 17:3; 1 Cor 8:4-6; 1 Tim 2:5; Gen1:26; Ps 45:6-7; 110:1; Matt 3:13-17; Matt 28:17-20; 1 Cor 12:4-6)
- All things exist for the glory of God. (Ps 148; Prov 16:4; Is 61:3; Rom 11:33-36; 1 Cor 10:31; 2 Cor 5:15; Eph 1:3-14)
- With the exception of Christ, all humanity is sinful by both birth and action because of Adam's sin. (Gen 6:5; Ps 51:5; Jer 17:9; Rom 3:23; 5:8, 12-21; 7:18; Eph 2:1-3)
- The deserved penalty for sin is physical and spiritual death. (Gen 2:15-17; 3:19; Rom 5:12; 6:23; Jas 1:14-15)
- Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God, was born of a virgin, and is both fully God and fully human. This makes him the sole Mediator between God and people – the only one able to restore the broken relationship and resulting alienation sin brought. (Matt 1:20; Lk 2:52; Jn 1:1-4, 14; Col 1:15-20; Heb 1:1-3)
- Jesus Christ died as the sacrificial substitute to pay the penalty for sin. (Jn 1:29; 10:1-18; Rom 5:8; 1 Cor 15:14; 2 Cor 5:21; Gal 1:4; 1 Ptr 3:18)
- Jesus Christ physically rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, and will one day physically return. (Matt 28:1-20; Mrk 16:1-8; Lk 24:1-53; Jn 20:1-21:25; 1 Cor 15:12-34; Jn 14:3; Acts 1:11; 1 Thess 4:16; Heb 9:28; 1 Jn 3:2; Rev 1:7)
- There will be a future physical resurrection of the dead. Only those who turn from sin and to Jesus in faith and repentance will be raised to eternal reward. Those who do not turn from sin and to Jesus will be raised to eternal punishment. (Matt 25:31-46; Jn 5:28-29; Acts 24:15)
- Only through faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ and repentance from sin can one be reconciled to God and experience the joy of being in relationship with Him. (Jn 3:18, 14:6; Acts 4:12; Rom 3:21-26; 1 Tim 2:5-6)
- Genuine spiritual life is evidenced by the presence of the fruits of the Spirit, a posture of life-long repentance, and a zeal for godliness. (Lk 3:8-9; Jn 3:6; Gal 5:22-23; Rom 8:9; Acts 26:20)

## Statement of Theological Convictions

While the doctrines expressed in the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs are recognized to be universal and primary within the Church, there are a number of secondary beliefs that we are passionate to proclaim. Not all Christians hold these beliefs, but they are nonetheless important and true as we understand the Scriptures. Complete agreement is not required for the sake of membership, but it should be known that we will preach, teach, and counsel in accordance with these convictions. Some areas of leadership at Refuge will be closed to those who have settled convictions that are not in agreement with this statement.

### Divine Sovereignty

God, from eternity, decrees or permits all things that come to pass. He continually upholds, directs, and governs all creatures and all events. This does not mean in any way that He is the author or approver of sin, nor does this destroy the free will and responsibility of each person. Though God's rule extends to all things, it is particularly His sovereignty over the work of salvation that is a theological distinctive. We believe that it is glorious news that salvation is not dependent on the desires and deeds of people, but is grounded instead in God's eternal decree of election - in which he lovingly and powerfully takes the initiative in a person's salvation. While each person is responsible for his or her sin, God is ultimately and entirely responsible for drawing those He would save unto Himself and overcoming their natural resistance to the gospel. (Ps 115:3, 135:6; Eph 1:3-14, Rom 8:26-9:23; Phil 1:29; 1 Thess 2:13; Is 46:9-11; Prov 16:33; Col 1:17; Heb 1:3; Jas 1:13-15)

### The Gifts of the Holy Spirit

The gifts of the Holy Spirit that we see exercised in the Scriptures have not ceased with the death of the last Apostle or the closing of the New Testament canon. They are available today and are to be eagerly desired and practiced in submission to the Spirit speaking through the Scriptures. (Rom 12:3-8; 1 Cor 12-14; Eph 4:1-16).

### The Complementary Role of Men and Women

Just as Jesus and the Spirit are co-equal to the Father, yet willingly submit in their divine roles, so also men and women are absolutely equal in essence, dignity and value but possess unique, divinely designed roles. As part of God's good created order, men and women are to have different yet complementary and mutually enriching roles and responsibilities in the home and church, especially as it comes to teaching and authority. These role distinctions are God's grace to man and woman and are to be protected, preserved and practiced for His glory and our joy. (1 Cor 11:2-16; 14:33-35; Eph 5:22-33; Col 3:18-19; 1 Tim 2:8-15; 1 Ptr 3:1-7)

### Believer's Baptism by Immersion

Baptism in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is obligatory for every believer who has professed faith in Jesus Christ and can give sufficient testimony to the basics of Christian beliefs. We also baptize by immersion because it is the original meaning of the word and best symbolizes the reality to which baptism points: our death and resurrection in Christ. (Matt 28:18-20; Acts 2:38; Rom 6:1-11)

## Gender

We believe that God wonderfully and immutably creates each person as male and female. These two distinct, complementary genders together reflect the image and nature of God. Rejection of one's biological sex is a sinful rejection of the image of God within that person. (Gen. 1:26-27)

## Marriage

We believe that the term “marriage” has only one meaning: the uniting of one man and one woman in a single, exclusive union, as described in Scripture. We believe that God intends sexual intimacy to occur only between a man and a woman who are married to each other. We believe that God has commanded that no intimate sexual activity be engaged in outside of a marriage between a man and a woman. (Gen 2:18-25; 1 Cor 6:18; 7:2-5; Heb 13:4)

## Sexuality

We believe that any form of sexual immorality (including adultery, fornication, homosexual behavior, bisexual conduct, bestiality, incest, and use of pornography) is sinful and offensive to God. While we believe the preceding to be true, we also believe that God offers redemption and restoration to all who confess and forsake their sin, seeking His mercy and forgiveness through Jesus. We believe that every person must be afforded dignity, compassion, love, kindness, and respect. While it is loving to point out sin in the life of a believer and to encourage that person toward faith and repentance, hateful and harassing behavior is not in accord with the Scriptures nor the doctrines of Refuge Church. (Matt 15:18-20; 1 Cor 6:9-10; Acts 3:19-21; Rom 10:9-10; 1 Cor 6:9-11; Mrk 12:28-31; Lk 6:31)

## Sanctity of Human Life

We believe that all human life is sacred because we are created by God and bear His image. Human life is of inestimable worth in all its dimensions, including pre-born babies, the aged, the physically or mentally challenged, and every other stage or condition from conception through natural death. We are therefore called to defend, protect, and value all human life. We believe that this conviction should lead us to care for all people, especially the outcast and the marginalized. (Ps 139:14)

## Authority of the Elders

Any man God has called to be an elder has been called to a noble and fearful task. The elders of Refuge serve to safeguard the church against doctrinal error and shepherd the people of God toward godliness. This statement of faith does not exhaust the extent of our beliefs. The Bible itself, as the inspired Word of God, speaks with final authority to the conscience of each believer concerning truth, morality, and proper conduct. It is the sole and final source of all we believe. However, for the purposes of Refuge Church's faith, doctrine, practice, policy, and discipline, our Elders are Refuge's final interpretive authority on the Bible's meaning and application. (1 Tim 3:1; Heb 13:17; 2 Tim 3:16-17)

## Statement of Biblical Doctrine

This statement represents a fuller summary of the various doctrines articulated in the other statements. It also includes doctrines where we recognize the potential for healthy discussion and debate among faithful believers. While we do not expect all members to fully agree with each of these positions, we believe that these doctrines can be helpful and instructive in the discipleship and encouragement of the members of Refuge Church.

### The Scriptures

We accept the Bible, including the 39 books of the Old Testament and 27 books of the New Testament, as the only written Word of God. The Bible is an essential and infallible record of God revealing Himself to humanity. It leads us to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Given by God, the Scriptures are both fully and verbally inspired by God and were, thus, free of error in their original giving. Each book is to be interpreted according to its context and purpose and in reverent obedience to the Lord who speaks through it in living power. All believers are exhorted to cherish the Scriptures and diligently apply them to their lives. The Scriptures are the authoritative and normative rule and guide of all Christian life, practice and doctrine. They are totally sufficient and must not be added to, superseded or changed by later tradition, extra-biblical revelation or worldly wisdom. Every doctrinal formulation, whether of creed, confession or theology, must be tested by the full counsel of God in Holy Scripture.

### The Triune God

There is one God: infinite, eternal, almighty and perfect in holiness, truth and love. In the unity of the Godhead, there are three Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, co-existent, co-equal and co-eternal. The Father is not the Son. The Son is not the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not the Father. Yet each is truly Deity. One God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—is the foundation of Christian faith and life. This Triune God knows the end from the beginning exhaustively, sustains and rules over all things, and providentially brings about his eternal purposes to redeem a people to the praise of his glorious grace.

### God the Father

God the Father is the Creator of heaven and earth. By His word and for His glory, He freely and supernaturally created the world out of nothing. Through the same word, He daily sustains all creation. He rules over all and, together with the Son and the Spirit, is the only Sovereign. His plans and purposes cannot be thwarted. He is faithful to every promise, works all things together for good to those who love Him and, in His unfathomable grace, gave His Son, Jesus Christ, for humanity's redemption. He made all things for the praise of His glory and intends for humanity, in particular, to live in fellowship with Himself.

### Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, is the eternal Word made Flesh, supernaturally conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary. He is fully God and fully man. Through Him, all things came into being and were created. He was before all things, and in Him, all things hold together by

the word of His power. He is perfect in nature, teaching and obedience and is the only Savior for the sins of the world, having shed His blood and died a vicarious death on the cross. By His death in our place, He revealed divine love and upheld divine justice, removing our guilt and reconciling us to God. Redeeming us from sin, He rose bodily from the grave on the third day, victorious over death and the powers of darkness and performing many convincing proofs of His resurrection. He ascended into heaven where, at God's right hand, He intercedes for His people and rules as Lord over all, awaiting His return. He is the Head of His body, the Church, and should be adored, loved, served and obeyed by all.

### The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life, convicts the world of sin, righteousness and judgment. Through the proclamation of the gospel, He persuades men to repent of their sins and confess Jesus as Lord. By the same Spirit, a person is led to trust in divine mercy. The Holy Spirit unites believers to Jesus Christ in faith, brings about the new birth and dwells within the regenerate. The Holy Spirit has come to glorify the Son who, in turn, came to glorify the Father. He will lead the Church into a right understanding and rich application of the truth of God's Word. He is to be respected, honored and worshiped as God, the Third Person of the Trinity.

### Humanity

God made people—male and female—in His own image, as the crown of creation so that humanity might glorify Him through enjoying fellowship with Him. This means that all humanity is deserving of dignity and respect. Tempted by Satan, Adam rebelled against God. In Adam's sin all men became rebels, inheriting a nature corrupt and fully opposed to God and His law. This means that humanity is also hopelessly flawed. Being estranged from his Maker yet responsible to Him, humanity became subject to divine wrath, inwardly depraved and, apart from a special work of grace, utterly incapable of returning to God. This depravity is radical and pervasive. It extends to his mind, will and affections. Unregenerate humanity lives under the dominion of sin and Satan. He is at enmity with God, hostile toward God and hateful of God. Fallen, sinful people, whatever their character or attainments, are lost and without hope apart from salvation in Christ alone.

### The Gospel

The gospel is the good news of God's grace invading the darkness of this world. It is the grand narrative of creation, fall, redemption and consummation ordained by God and orchestrated through the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. Christ's crucifixion is the heart of the gospel. His resurrection is the power of the gospel. His ascension is the glory of the gospel. Christ's death is a substitutionary and propitiatory sacrifice to God for our sins. It satisfies the demands of God's holy justice and appeases His holy wrath to all who come to Him in faith and repentance. It also demonstrates His mysterious love and reveals His amazing grace. Jesus Christ is the only mediator between God and humanity. There is no other name by which men can be saved. At the heart of all sound doctrine is the cross of Jesus Christ and the infinite privilege that redeemed sinners have in glorifying God because of what He has accomplished. Therefore, we want all that takes place in our hearts, churches and ministries to proceed from and be related to the gospel.

## Humanity's Response to the Gospel

The proper response to the gospel is faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ, a faith that is naturally accompanied by repentance from sin. Biblical repentance is characterized by a godly sorrow and hatred of sin, and saving faith is evidenced by dependence on God for a life of holiness. Faith and repentance are gifts from God that flow out of a new, supernaturally given heart. While neither repentance nor works save, unless a person is willing to deny himself, pick up his cross and follow Christ, he cannot become His disciple. This response to the gospel is rooted and grounded in the free and unconditional election of God for His own pleasure and glory. This gospel of grace is to be sincerely preached to all men in all nations.

## Humanity's Inheritance Through the Gospel

Salvation, the free gift of God, is provided by grace alone, through faith alone, because of Christ alone, for the glory of God alone. Anyone repenting of sin by the miracle of regeneration and looking to Christ and His substitutionary death receives the gift of eternal life and is declared righteous by God as a free gift. The righteousness of Christ is imputed to him. He is justified and fully accepted by God. Through Christ's atonement for sin, an individual is reconciled to God as Father and becomes His child. The believer is forgiven the debt of his sin and liberated from the law of sin and death into the freedom of God's Spirit.

## Sanctification

The Holy Spirit is the active agent in our sanctification, seeking to produce His fruit in us. Good works do not make us acceptable before God, but are the natural outcome of authentic faith in Jesus. As grace works in us, our minds are renewed, and we are conformed to the image of Christ. Though indwelling sin remains a reality, the Spirit leads us to grow in the knowledge of the Lord, freely keeping His commandments and endeavoring to so live in the world that all people may see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven. All believers are exhorted to persevere in the faith, knowing they will have to give an account to God for their every thought, word and deed. The spiritual disciplines, especially Bible study, prayer, worship and confession, are a vital means of grace in this regard. Nevertheless, the believer's ultimate confidence to persevere is based in the sure promise of God to preserve His people until the certain end.

## Empowered by the Spirit

The Holy Spirit empowers believers for Christian witness and service. The promise of the Father is freely available to all who believe in Jesus Christ, enabling them to exercise the gifts He sovereignly bestows for ministry and mission. The Holy Spirit desires to continually fill each believer with power to bear witness to the gospel and imparts His gifts for the edification of the body and the work of ministry in the world. All the gifts of the Holy Spirit at work in the first-century church are available today and are to be earnestly desired and practiced in an orderly manner. This includes those gifts that are considered miraculous, as well as those which might be seen as more mundane, as both are works of the Spirit. The healthy exercising of diverse gifts within a unified body is essential to the mission of the Church in the world today.

## The Church

God, by His Word and Spirit, creates the Church, calling sinful men out of the whole human race into the fellowship of Christ's body. By the same Word and Spirit, He guides and preserves that newly redeemed humanity. The Church is not a religious institution or denomination. Rather, the Church is made up of those who have become genuine followers of Jesus Christ and have personally appropriated the gospel. The Church exists to worship and glorify God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It also exists to serve Him by faithfully doing His will on earth. This service involves a commitment to see the gospel preached and churches planted in the entire world. The ultimate mission of the Church is to bring glory to God by making disciples. Upon conversion, newly redeemed men and women are added to a local church in which they devote themselves to teaching, fellowship, the Lord's Supper and prayer. All members of the Church are to be a vital and committed part of a local church. In this context, they are called to live out the implications of the gospel as the people of God and demonstrate the reality of the kingdom of God. The ascended Christ has given gift ministries to the Church, including prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, for the equipping of Christ's body so that it might mature and grow. In the context of the local church, God's people receive pastoral care and oversight and the opportunity to steward their gifts for His glory and the good of the others.

## Sacraments of the Church

Water baptism is only intended for the individual who has received the saving benefits of Christ's atoning work and become His disciple. In obedience to Christ's command and as a testimony to God, the Church, oneself and the world, a believer should be immersed in water in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We recognize that faithful Christians throughout history have practiced other methods of baptism. We reject the idea that baptism is required for salvation or is itself saving in any way. We do not believe that a different conviction on the mode or timing of baptism should bar anyone from membership at Refuge, however a settled conviction about the saving nature of baptism would. We believe water baptism to be the correct method of baptism since it is a visual and symbolic demonstration of a person's union with Christ in the likeness of His death and resurrection. It signifies that a former way of life has been put to death and vividly depicts a person's release from the mastery of sin.

As with water baptism, Communion is to be observed only by those who have become genuine followers of Christ. This sacrament symbolizes the breaking of Christ's body and the shedding of His blood on our behalf and is to be observed repeatedly throughout the Christian life as a sign of continued participation in the atoning benefits of Christ's death. As we come to the table with an attitude of faith and self-examination, we remember and proclaim the death of Christ, receive spiritual nourishment for our souls, and signify our unity with other members of Christ's body.

## The Consummation

The consummation of all things includes the future, physical, visible, personal and glorious return of Jesus Christ, the resurrection of the dead and the translation of those alive in Christ, the judgment of the just and the unjust, and the fulfillment of Christ's kingdom in the new heavens and the new earth. In the consummation, Satan, with his hosts and all those outside Christ, is finally separated



from the benevolent presence of God, enduring eternal punishment in Hell, but the righteous, in glorious bodies, will live and reign with Him forever, serving Him and giving Him unending praise and glory. Then the eager expectation of creation will be fulfilled, and the whole earth shall proclaim the glory of God, who makes all things new.