



CONGREGATIONAL AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

... WHAT WE BELIEVE

INTRODUCTION

Is there something really solid on which we can base beliefs and that will take us beyond our own opinions or current societal trends in thinking? We are counting on it! Belief is not just about *what* you believe but *who* you believe as well. Jesus not only taught the truth but made the astounding claim that He *was* the Truth. For Village, belief begins with belief in Him and His Word!

On occasion, we fully expect that what scripture states will conflict with our own thinking. In that case, guess whose thoughts should prevail? If we were to decide what God is like and who Jesus Christ is . . . our “beliefs” would have no credibility. So, we gladly affirm the Bible as God’s Word and the final say for faith and practice.

“WHAT WE BELIEVE” provides a simple *Congregational Affirmation of Faith* and also includes a *Theological Distinctives* section. The latter seeks to explain the role of Christ’s grace in our salvation. In crafting both of these statements, we have respectfully drawn upon the historic Christian creeds and teachings from the Protestant Reformation.

We also realize that in this life our understanding of God’s Word and the gospel will always be incomplete, and that true Christians may not always fully agree on secondary points. Even so, we think that genuine Christian unity is best served when churches hold firmly to their understanding of truth while also loving and respecting genuine believers who may see things differently.

GET THE GOSPEL RIGHT
APPLY THE GOSPEL FULLY
SHARE THE GOSPEL FAITHFULLY

THE WORD OF GOD: We believe the Bible is the written word of God and inspired by the Holy Spirit in the original manuscripts. The Bible is the revelation of God’s truth; and it is without error and authoritative in all matters of faith and practice.

GOD: We believe that there is One God who exists forever in Three Persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. He is good and perfect in every way. God is creator, sustainer and redeemer. He sovereignly governs and providentially cares for all things visible and invisible.

THE HUMAN RACE: We believe that all people are created by God, male and female, in His image and are therefore accountable to Him. However, because the very first humans chose to rebel against God, all are subsequently born with a sinful nature. Every individual therefore sins and disobeys God’s commandments, preferring self and created things over the Creator. We are unable to save ourselves from this sinful condition or the attending deserved judgment of God.

JESUS CHRIST: We believe that Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God. Through His perfect life and sacrificial death on the cross, Jesus atoned for the sins of all who will trust in Him alone for salvation. Amazingly, Christ was raised from the dead and ascended into heaven. We believe that one day the Lord will return, bodily and visibly, to judge all humanity and especially to bring those He saves to be with Him forever.

THE HOLY SPIRIT: We believe that the Holy Spirit indwells God’s people and enables them with strength and wisdom to trust in Jesus Christ initially, follow Him fully, and faithfully represent Him to others.

SALVATION: We believe that through God’s free grace and not through any human merit, we are brought to repent and believe in Christ as Savior. Because of the death and resurrection of Jesus, those who believe receive forgiveness of sins, a new relationship with God and eternal life. We believe that all aspects of our lives are to be lovingly and respectfully lived to the glory of God under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

CHURCH: We believe that the Church consists of all believers in Jesus Christ. As a local Church we gather together as Christians under the authority of Christ to worship and serve God, proclaim His Word, love each other, receive baptism and communion, and advance His work in the world. Jesus Christ commanded us to go and make disciples of all nations.

THEOLOGICAL DISTINCTIVES

THE BIBLICAL GOSPEL AND DOCTRINES OF GRACE . . . EXPLAIN HOW GOD SAVES THROUGH CHRIST

Ephesians 2:8-9 “By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works so that no one may boast.”

We know that at some point every Christian has made a very conscious decision to turn to Jesus and believe in Him. But what was behind that choice? What does the Bible say about the degree of the Lord’s involvement in bringing us to saving faith? Each of us needs to carefully read scripture so that “my story” about coming to Jesus, lines up with “God’s fuller story” about my coming to Jesus.

At Village, we recognize these Doctrines of Grace are provided by the Lord to answer those important questions. It is obvious, Jesus did not come to bring us what we were owed or what we earned and deserved. Quite the opposite! Christ died to provide sinners with forgiveness and salvation as a free-gift for whoever believes. Yet even our believing must be given to us and enabled by the Lord. In choosing and saving us, the Lord leaves absolutely no room for human self-crediting but every reason for us to be deeply grateful and praise Him as undeserving recipients of His amazing grace.

Regarding the proclamation and defense of essential gospel truths, Martin Luther stated: “If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition of every portion of the truth of God, *except* precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christ. Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved. And to be steady on all the battlefield besides, is mere flight and disgrace if he flinches at that point.”

SOME OF THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE



ALL THOSE GOD SAVES ARE FALLEN ONES

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ALL THOSE GOD SAVES ARE FALLEN ONES THE OBJECTS OF GRACE

- We believe that everyone is created by God and accountable to Him. He has made us and thus mandates our responsibility. In the summary sense, we are made to love God as supreme and embrace Him as our highest priority in everything. We are additionally commanded to love others in ways the Lord prescribes.

Despite what we might think about ourselves, scripture clearly affirms that no one adequately obeys what God requires. Rather, everyone has personally chosen to disregard and disobey His lawful commands. The Lord terms this, sin, and all humanity have been engaged in abject rebellion. Simply put, we love and prefer ourselves and created things above God the Creator.

- In justice, God holds everyone accountable. He assesses all humans as guilty and under sentence of death. *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God . . . Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins . . . The wages of sin is death.* Romans 3:23; Ecclesiastes 7:20; Romans 6:23 Our sin is not described as an occasional stumbling but as a repeated and defining pattern of behavior – even to include our inward motivations. We transgress not as an exception to who we are but as an expression of who we are – sinful and depraved in our very nature. That is what is meant by the term, “fallen ones”.
- So how can someone who God rightly assesses as guilty and justly deserving of wrath become the object of His saving grace? That’s what the gospel of Christ proclaims and what the doctrines of grace explain to us. If people *could* save themselves from their sins or sinful condition, Jesus would never have come, much less been crucified to satisfy the penalty for transgressions. So, the good news about what the Son of God accomplished starts off with some very bad news about us – we are guilty, condemned and in desperate need of saving. No one can or will believe in Christ without acknowledging their personal need for a Savior.

- We also hold that in this fallen condition no one is capable or willing of responding properly to Christ or to believe the gospel. It is only through God’s work in us bringing about a new birth that the Lord enables us to repent and believe in Jesus. Gospel grace not only brings Christ to us but also brings us to Christ. God’s intervention provides Jesus as Savior *and* additionally enables belief in Christ. This means we are not the one to be credited with our salvation.

"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets." Matthew 22:36-40

And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." Mark 2:17

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience -- among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. Ephesians 2:1-3

When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?" But Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." Matthew 19:25-26

For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one" . . . For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person-- though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die -- but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 3:9-12; 5:6-8

GOD IS THE ELECTING ONE THE AUTHOR OF GRACE

- The oft-used biblical term, “*election*”, is less well known – and much less understood – than many other salvation truths. Despite this pattern of human neglect, the great doctrine of election remains a core part of the gospel of grace and frequently appears in the New Testament.
- Through the gospel, Jesus is freely offered to all and all are invited to come to Him by faith. Those who repent and believe in Christ are saved. Yet in reality only some respond. Is there more involved in our saving response than a mere human decision? Yes, for before we could make Jesus Christ the object of saving faith, the Lord made us the object of His redeeming grace. The believers’ choice of God is finally explained through God’s choice of them.
- What does the biblical teaching on election affirm? It concerns the loving and entirely gracious decision of God made before the foundation of the world to save specific undeserving sinners through Jesus Christ. We believe that scripture presents both this sovereign choosing of God *and* responsible human decision-making as *entirely* compatible. Here is another truth similar to New Testament teaching on the Trinity (God is One Being and Three Persons) and the Incarnation (Jesus is One Person with Two Natures, Fully God and Fully Man). With awesome wisdom, God effortlessly fits together what seems incompatible to human reasoning capacity.
- In embracing Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior through repentance and faith, we are careful not to credit ourselves but God for our salvation. We seek to gratefully, gladly and humbly worship the Lord who has made us the objects of His saving grace. In consideration of scripture, we cannot affirm that God merely “elects” those He foresees as first selecting Him. This position would assign to the recipient of grace the determining credit for salvation and “share” the glory between Jesus and those He saves – which conclusion cannot be true.

*And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were **appointed** to eternal life believed.* ^{Acts 13:48}

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as **he chose us** in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he **predestined us** for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.* ^{Ephesians 1:3-6}

*And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad-- in order that **God's purpose of election** might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls-- she was told, "The older will serve the younger." As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."*

What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.

You will say to me then, "Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?" But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like this?" Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use?" What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory-- even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles? ^{Romans 9:10-24}

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. ¹

^{Peter 2:9-10}

[God] saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began. ^{2 Timothy 1:9}

For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake. ^{Philippians 1:29}

For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."
^{1 Corinthians 1:26-31}

JESUS CHRIST IS THE SAVING ONE

THE ATONEMENT OF GRACE

- God is perfectly just and never accepts or condones sin. Rather, He requires that sin be paid for. Yet, God also freely chose to be merciful! In His mercy, the Heavenly Father sent Jesus to pay that price by suffering on the cross in the sinner's place. Note the *righteous love* of God, demanding that a price be paid, but also paying that price Himself in the person of His Son.
- Salvation is a free-gift to all who believe -- free to us but *not* to Jesus. We could not be saved apart from the atoning death of Christ. Believers did not contribute anything to rectifying their sin-problem or reconciling their account with God. That astounding cost was absorbed in its entirety by Christ Jesus. As the old hymn proclaims: "Jesus paid it all! All to Him I owe! Sin had left a crimson stain. He washed it white as snow."
- We believe that Jesus laid down His life to exclusively atone for those He would save -- variously called His people, His sheep, His bride and

- the elect. It is important to grasp that even the repentance and faith necessary for us to receive Christ as Lord and Savior, are paid for by Jesus and included as part of God's saving gifts to those He redeems. From first to last, every facet of a renewed relationship with God is derived from Christ's gracious atonement and eternal intercession.

He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died-- more than that, who was raised-- who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. ^{Romans 8:32-34}

In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.
^{Romans 3:24-5; 8:32-34}

[We] are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.
^{Romans 3:24-5; 8:32-34}

I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. ^{John 10:14-15}

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.
^{Ephesians 5:25}

This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. ^{Luke 22:20}

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ-- by grace you have been saved-- and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. ^{Ephesians 2:4-10}

THE HOLY SPIRIT IS THE RENEWING ONE

THE APPLICATION OF GRACE

- That Jesus died to forgive the sins of His people is absolutely wonderful and well-known. Yet, God was not about to simply fix the consequence of our wrong-doing without addressing the root cause – our fallen and sinful nature. Again, that condition should not be seen as a “tendency” of sinfully rejecting God and His will, but as a certainty of going and remaining spiritually astray.
- The salvation that the Lord provides includes both forgiveness and real heart change. Jesus exclaimed, “*You **must** be born again.*” The Holy Spirit accomplishes this act of recreating us: *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.* ^{2 Corinthians 5:17} Through this application of grace, God grants us a new heart as a free gift - He empowers a renewed will so that when we hear the gospel, it makes perfect sense and we will respond in repentance and faith.
- If we had been capable of choosing Christ as Savior on our own and before we were *born again*, why would we have even needed spiritual rebirth? If in our unsaved condition and nature, we had the capacity to make the greatest of all decisions -- choosing God over Satan, Christ over self, light over darkness, righteousness over sin, and heaven over hell -- why would we have even needed to be regenerated? If in ourselves we had the ability to make the greatest of decisions, to become the servant of God before being renewed, would we not also have been capable of serving Him in that condition? Instead, Jesus affirmed the necessity of our being made new by the Holy Spirit. Note how the book of Acts sequences the experience of Lydia. “*The Lord **opened** her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.*” ^{Acts 16:14}
- In describing our renewal Jesus stated, “*If the Son makes you free, you're free indeed.*” ^{John 8:36} However, until the Son makes us free in salvation, we are *not* free indeed but still enslaved in sin. Jesus Christ did not come down from heaven to reverence man's free will. He came down to free man's bound will. As stated previously, our will is not the answer but

part of the problem – not the liberator but the one in need of liberation. We turn to Jesus Christ and receive Him as Savior not through the will we were born with but through the will we are born again with.

Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit . . . It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. ^{John 3:5-8; 6:63}

For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. ^{Titus 3:3-7}

And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. ^{Ezekiel 36:26-27}

No one can say "Jesus is Lord" except in the Holy Spirit. ^{1 Corinthians 12:3}

THE LORD IS THE PRESERVING ONE THE ASSURANCE OF GRACE

- We confidently affirm that all those God redeems through Jesus Christ, those who are truly born again and made His children by grace, are saved for all eternity. Once justified by the Lord, believers never lose their right standing before God. They are no longer the objects of His condemnation and future wrath — though as necessary, the Lord will correct and discipline them as His own dear children.
- To assure those who truly believe in Him that their salvation is indeed eternal, Christ Jesus uses such graciously assertive language!

All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. John 6:37-40

Note how absolute are these phrases! All the Father gives to the Son to be saved will come to Christ. Jesus will not only receive them but will never reject any of them. The Lord explains that He came to fulfill God's will and that the Father's will is that everyone who believes, He will raise up on the last day. It is an impossibility for any of those God gives to and then brings to His Son not to be received by Jesus. It is an additional impossibility for those who believe on Him not to be kept and raised by Jesus unto eternal life. Otherwise, Christ would have failed to accomplish the will of the Father!

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one. John 10:27-30

Could anything be clearer? Genuine Christians will never perish. No one can snatch them out of Jesus' hand. Earlier in John's gospel, Jesus stated:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life . . . Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. John 3:16

- Divine Preservation and Human Perseverance fit together seamlessly. Jesus preserves His own and it is also true that genuine believers persevere in their faith - abiding in Christ. Christ keeps us faithfully by keeping us faithful. God is working in us *to will and do of His good pleasure* AND we are *working out our own salvation with fear and trembling* Philippians 2:12-13

For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world -- our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? 1 John 5:44

I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me. Jeremiah 32:40

And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God. Ezekiel 36:26-28

THE TRIUNE GOD ALONE IS TO BE GLORIFIED THE ACCLAMATION FOR GRACE

- When it comes to assigning credit for our salvation and the receiving of these remarkable divine blessings, who should be recognized as praise-worthy? Is it exclusively God who is to be acknowledged or should there be a shared accreditation between God and the person embracing Christ as Savior? *“Where then is boasting,”* Paul asks rhetorically in Romans 3:27? *“It is excluded.”* This prohibited *boasting* is not about over-the-top bragging but *any* form of human self-crediting. This same “ban” is repeated in other scriptures:

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. Ephesians 2:8-9

So that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.” 1 Corinthians 1:29-31

- The summing up of gospel grace involves an humble and grateful glorifying of God alone for our salvation. Just consider, if owing to our sinfulness we were incapable and disinclined to obey God’s commands; if we could not be forgiven and then accepted by God without Christ’s gracious death in our place; if our reception of God’s offer of salvation is entirely due to His choosing us; if our new birth is owing entirely to the Spirit’s regenerating us; if our hope of heaven and lasting faith is because of God’s keeping grace – if all this is true, what opportunity is there for anyone to receive glory for salvation other than God himself?
- It’s no wonder that the Apostle Paul, considering the wonder of God’s redemptive plan, burst into this delight of praise: *“Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?”* *‘Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?’* *For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.* Romans 11:33-36

When this age is past, it will be our greatest joy to stand before our wonderful Redeemer and join with every creature in heaven, singing: *“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!”* Revelation 5:13b

- All God’s acts are done to bring Him glory. He created the universe to display His glory. The purpose and outcome of His redemptive plan is to bring glory to Himself. It was for God’s own glory that Christ took on flesh and died in our place. It was for His own glory that He elected his people for eternal salvation. It was for His own glory that he regenerated us and sealed us for all eternity. It is exclusively for His glory that He works in us to make us like Jesus, and so . . . He commands us to do all things for His glory. Psalms 19:1; Revelation 4:11; Romans 11:36; Philippians 1:8-11, 2:5-11, John 12:27-28, 17:1-5; Ephesians 1:3-5; 1:13-14; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20; 10:31

Not unto us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness! Psalms 115:1

Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created. Revelation 4:11

In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. Ephesians 1:4-6