

# ***What We Believe***

## **About Doctrine and the Bible**

**We believe** there are *essential* doctrines that comprise the fundamental “**absolutes**” of historical Christianity through which Christians may unite. These are “heaven-or-hell” doctrinal issues which are unalterable.

**We believe** there are *non-essential* doctrines based on “**convictions**” and are “disputable matters.” We believe Christians should have the liberty to believe and teach convictions without condemnation from other believers, as long as they are reasonably scripture-based and do not contradict the *essential* doctrines. These are “*non*—heaven-or-hell” doctrinal issues.

**We believe** there a variety of *non-essential* cultural “**preferences**” where churches exhibit worship to God in ways that range from “liturgical and quiet” to “contemporary, demonstrative and loud.” These are “*non*—heaven-or-hell” issues and simply a matter of one’s taste and style.

**We believe** that in both *essential* and *non-essential* doctrines, Christians should show charity rather than bigotry. In the spirit of fellowship and the sake of unity, Christians should be able to “agree to disagree” without becoming uncharitably disagreeable and break fellowship.

**We believe** in what is termed “The Apostle’s Creed” as embodying fundamental facts of the Christian faith and we endorse the historic creeds of the church.

**We believe** that the Bible is 100% the inspired, unalterable Word of God to us and, therefore, to be received as our primary source of authority on understanding God’s nature; Creation, His will for our lives; His wisdom for daily living; His perspective on nature, the arts and sciences, historical and societal changes; life after death; and His divine plan and purpose for those who believe in Him.

## **About God**

**We believe** that there is only one true and living God, eternally existent in three divine Persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit—all of one substance, equal in power and in glory.

**We believe** in God the Father, an infinite, personal Creator, perfect in holiness, wisdom, power, and love; that He concerns Himself mercifully in the affairs of men; that He hears and answers prayer; and that He saves from sin and death all who come to Him through His Son, Jesus Christ.

**We believe** in Jesus Christ, God the Son, co-equal with the Father and the Holy Spirit. On earth He was 100% God and 100% man. We believe in His virgin birth, sinless life, miracles and teaching, His substitutionary atoning death, bodily resurrection, ascension into heaven, perpetual intercession for His people and personal visible return to earth. We believe that in His first coming Jesus inaugurated the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God.

**We believe** in the person of the Holy Spirit, Who came forth from the Father and the Son to convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment, and to regenerate, sanctify, and empower for ministry all who believe in Christ. We believe the Holy Spirit indwells every believer in Jesus Christ and that He is an abiding Helper, Teacher, and Guide.

## **About People and Salvation**

**We believe** all people matter to God and therefore matter us.

**We believe** that people were created to exist forever. We will either exist eternally separated *from* God because of our sins; or *with* God—in heavenly bliss—through our faith *in* and acceptance *of* the atoning work of Jesus Christ.

**We believe** that all people are sinners by nature and choice and are therefore under condemnation; and that the only means of being cleansed from our sins is through accepting the atoning sacrifice Christ made of his own life on the cross. His blood was shed so that our sins may be forgiven and washed away.

**We believe** that salvation does not result from good deeds, but is a free gift of God. That salvation requires repentance—turning away from one’s own works to God’s atoning work of the cross. That salvation is a free gift received through faith in Jesus Christ and His death, burial, and resurrection. That regeneration (rebirth – John 3:3-8) by the Holy Spirit is essential for personal salvation. That true salvation will be manifested by a changed life; i.e. a life that demonstrates an effort to live in submission and obedience to the teachings of Jesus Christ.

**We believe** that we are predestined to eternal life if we accept God’s provision of salvation through Jesus Christ. We also believe that we must guard our salvation from carelessness, apathy, and neglect that could take us back to the destructive habits and life-style God delivered us from. Willful sinning for an extended period of time can endanger our secure position if we persistently reject the Holy Spirit’s call to repentance and restoration. The person who has reached the point of forfeiting their salvation (though extremely difficult to accomplish), will become incapable of conviction that leads back to repentance. They will simply not care.

#### **About Christian Ordinances**

**We believe** in and practice the ordinance of water baptism as an outward sign of an inward work. Since water baptism follows repentance and believing in the work of the cross, we do not baptize infants who are incapable of repentance and faith. As demonstrated in the Book of Acts, we baptize by full immersion in water and in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

**We believe** in the ordinance of the Lord’s Supper—a unique time of communion when the elements of bread and wine are taken in remembrance of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. The bread is symbolic of the body of Christ; the wine (we use grape juice) is symbolic of the blood of Christ. This observance is open to all persons who profess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. We observe this ordinance on Sunday each month.

#### **About the Holy Spirit’s Activity in Us**

**We believe** in the baptism of the Holy Spirit as a subsequent gift from God to empower and endow the believer with the gifts of the Spirit to edify the church and the believer. The pervasive visible evidence and pattern of this experience in the early church was speaking in a language unknown to the recipient.

**We believe** that God still heals today, that divine healing is the power of the Holy Spirit in us to heal the sick in answer to our prayer of faith.

**We believe** in the present ministry of the Holy Spirit and in the exercise of all Biblical gifts of the Spirit. We believe the Holy Spirit enables the believer to live a godly life that will manifest the fruit of the Spirit.

**We believe** in the laying on of hands as a means of imparting and releasing the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in a person’s life. We lay hands on people to commission them, to bless them, to receive healing, to impart spiritual gifts or to appoint them to an office of responsibility.

#### **About the Church**

**We believe** in the universal church of Jesus Christ, the living spiritual body of which Christ is the Head and that all regenerated persons are members. The church is the manifested expression of God’s kingdom rule on earth through his people and is not confined to a building or a Sunday service. In God’s kingdom there is no sacred/secular divide.

**We believe** in the local autonomy of every local church fellowship, not an ecclesiastical structure outside the church. We do not believe any individuals or organization should mandate control. Each local church should be free to govern its own affairs through a body of elders who are accountable to each other and submitted to

the Lordship of Christ and the leading of the Holy Spirit. We do believe, however, *if possible*, that the pastor and local church leaders have an accountable relationship with an apostolic father and/or apostolic group of seasoned leaders in the event that intervention is needed to settle local church disputes and/or doctrinal matters (see section on Spiritual Covering in this book).

**We believe** in the wisdom to network with other local Churches and denominations for the benefit of seeking godly input and counsel. The office of the apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher among these networks are gifts given by God to equip and strengthen the local and universal church of Jesus Christ.

**We believe** in the principle of tithing on our personal income, as practiced in the Old and New Testaments, in order to support the work and mission of the local church to reach the lost and make disciples for Christ. We do not believe in coercion, for God loves a cheerful giver (tithing is a revelation and conviction which comes through the Holy Spirit and God's Word). For this reason we place a box at the entrance for our tithes, which are recorded and sent to our donors at the first of the New Year for tax returns. Our pastor exempts himself from knowing who and what each member gives so as to not influence his relationship with them, or theirs with him.

#### About Spiritual Authority

**We believe** that God is the establisher of all authorities, i.e. family, church, and civil authorities (Romans 13:1-7). He established his authorities to lead, serve, and protect the righteous (Romans 13:2-5; Hebrews 13:17). He requires respect and submission toward his authorities (Romans 13:1-2; Hebrews 13:7, 17; 2 Thessalonians 5:12-13). We are commanded not to receive an accusation against a spiritual leader without two or three witnesses (1 Timothy 5:19). Leaders are not lords over God's people (2 Corinthians 1:24) but servants of love, who may at times need to confront or correct (2 Timothy 4:2-4). No one is placed in a leadership position in River's Edge without adequate time to test their submission, fruit, faithfulness, reputation, team-spirit, and character (Matthew 7:17-20; 1 Timothy 3:1-13; 5:22; Philippians 2:22).

#### About Judging

**We believe** God delegates the authority to church leaders and the church corporately to judge problems and sin within the church (i.e. disputes between believers—Matthew 18:15-17 and 1 Corinthians 6:1-4; sexual immorality—1 Corinthians 5; doctrines and ministries—Matthew 17:15-20; Romans 16:1; Revelation 2:2; idle busybodies and gossips—2 Thessalonians 3:6-15; divisive, quarreling persons—Titus 3:9-11; and prophetic words—1 Corinthians 14:29; 1 John 4:1). See also 1 Peter 4:17.

**We believe** God has authorized leaders to judge only in their assigned jurisdiction in order to protect the righteous. Leaders are not authorized or responsible to judge another believer's *non-essential* religious convictions (Romans 14); other people's children (1 Timothy 3:4-5); other churches' methods or members (Romans 14:4-12); unbelievers outside the church (1 Corinthians 5:12-13a), or to make a final evaluation of a person's inner personality, character, or motives (1 Corinthians 4:5).

**We believe** judgment must be righteous (John 7:24), made with facts (Deuteronomy 13:12-15), facing accusers (John 7:51), on the testimony of two or three reliable witnesses (Matthew 18:16; 1 Timothy 5:19), and for the purpose of repentance, reconciliation, and restoration (Matthew 18:15; 1 Corinthians 5:4; 2 Corinthians 2:5-11).

#### About Our Walk as Christians

**We believe** that God is most glorified when we are most satisfied in our intimacy with Him.

**We believe** that telling others about our salvation experience in Christ and His work in us is the means by which we can deliver the lost soul from Satan's deception and the judgment that awaits him.

**We believe** that the experience and daily walk of the believer should never lead him into extremes of religious fanaticisms. Balance in doctrine and life produces healthy relationships and a healthy testimony.

**We believe** that we are predestined to eternal life if we accept God's provision of salvation. We also believe that we must guard our salvation from carelessness, apathy, and neglect that could take us back to the destructive habits and life-style God delivered us from. We believe to willfully sin for an extended period of time can endanger our secure position if we persistently reject the Holy Spirit's call to repentance and restoration. The person who has reached the point of forfeiting their salvation (though as extremely difficult it is to accomplish this), will become incapable of conviction that leads back to repentance. They will simply not care whether they're saved or not. As long as they do care, they've not reached the point of no return.

**We believe** that Christians practicing sex *outside* of God's ordained institution of marriage can be physically, emotionally, and spiritually destructive to the participating individuals and is condemned by God's Word as sin and sexually immoral (see 1 Corinthians 5; 6:13b-20; 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8; Hebrews 13:4). We do believe, however, that the power of the Holy Spirit and the provisions of the New Covenant can free those enslaved to lust, pornography, and fornication and that the Christian community can be a support and encouragement to those who desire and attempt to overcome such sins through the help of God's grace.

**We believe** that Christians practicing a lifestyle of homosexuality can be physically, emotionally, and spiritually destructive to the participating individuals and is clearly condemned by God's Word as sin, idolatry, unnatural, and sexually immoral (Leviticus 20:13; Romans 1:24-32; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11). We welcome all homosexuals who believe the provisions of Christ's New Covenant can free those enslaved to this lifestyle of idolatry (worship of the human body), lust, emotional co-dependency, and fornication. We also believe that the Christian community can be a support and encouragement to those who desire and attempt to overcome such sins through the help of God's grace.

#### **About Christ's Return and Eternal Judgment**

**We believe** in a final judgment where God will judge everyone for his or her deeds done in this life, both good and bad. The righteous will receive a judgment of "rewards" determined by their deeds *after* they become a Christian. The wicked will be judged for their deeds and the rejection of Christ as Savior, condemning themselves to eternal suffering and torment in the lake of fire.

**We believe** in the personal, visible return of Christ to earth at which time there will be a bodily resurrection of Old and New Testament saints to meet the Lord in the air. Christ will establish His kingdom for a thousand years on a regenerated planet where there will be no sinners, no Satan, and no sin nature—it will be a "Christian Millennium." At the end of the thousand years, the wicked will resurrect and be judged at the Great White Throne of Revelation 20. After that, God will create a completely new heaven and new earth for His redeemed people, from all nations, for all eternity.

**We believe** that the world is under the dominating, deceptive influence of Satan—the enemy of God and His church. He is a fallen angel (Lucifer), and ruler over the kingdom of darkness as well as a myriad of demons who serve his strategic attempts to thwart and overthrow God's Kingdom. He will be captured at the return of Christ, bound in chains in the abyss for a thousand years, set free for a short time, then thrown into the lake of fire for eternity along with his demons and fallen angels.