

THE WATCHER'S LANTERN

A STATEMENT OF FAITH

CURRENT WORKING REVISION



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This working revision incorporates the theological review completed through the doctrine of the atonement.

I. Scripture

I believe the sixty-six books of the Protestant Bible are the complete and sufficient Word of God, inspired without error in the original manuscripts and faithfully translated. Writings outside the Bible may aid our understanding of history, but they lack scriptural authority and must yield to Scripture in any conflict. While God may still speak today, every claimed message must be tested by Scripture alone, not by feelings, tradition, or intuition, and does not carry equal or greater authority than the written Word.

Every believer, indwelt and guided by the Holy Spirit, is responsible before God to read, examine, understand, obey, and test all teaching by Scripture. This responsibility does not make biblical interpretation a merely private or isolated activity. Christ has given pastors and teachers to equip His people, elders to guard sound doctrine, and the gathered church to encourage, correct, and sharpen its members.

The church therefore possesses real ministerial authority to teach Scripture, correct error, exercise discipline, and call believers to obedience. It does not possess magisterial authority to create doctrine, speak infallibly, or bind the conscience beyond what Scripture teaches. No pastor, council, denomination, tradition, confession, or theologian has authority equal to or greater than the written Word of God.

Believers should receive faithful teaching with humility and appropriate submission while also examining everything by Scripture. Teachers and leaders remain accountable to the same Word they proclaim. Interpretation should therefore take place within the fellowship of the church, with prayer, careful study, mutual correction, and respect for the wisdom of faithful Christians across generations, while recognizing that every human interpreter and tradition remains fallible.

The existence of many denominations and theological traditions reflects both human limitation and, at times, human sin. Genuine believers may disagree because they understand some passages differently, possess incomplete knowledge, or have inherited assumptions they have not fully examined. Such disagreement does not indicate a failure in Scripture or in the Holy Spirit. Christians should pursue truth and unity without pretending that all interpretations are equally faithful. The full unity of Christ's people will be perfectly realized when He completes His work and gathers His redeemed people in His presence.

REFERENCED SCRIPTURES

- 2 Timothy 3:16-17: inspiration, sufficiency, and completeness of Scripture
- 2 Peter 1:20-21: human authors carried by the Holy Spirit
- Isaiah 8:20: Scripture as the test of every prophetic claim
- 1 Thessalonians 5:19-21: test everything; hold fast what is good
- John 16:13: the Spirit guides believers into all truth
- 1 John 2:27: the Spirit's anointing confirms and preserves believers in apostolic truth
- 1 John 4:1: test the spirits; many false prophets have gone out
- Deuteronomy 29:29: hidden things belong to God; revealed things to us.
- 1 Corinthians 13:12: now we know in part.
- John 17:20-23: Christ's prayer for the unity of all believers.
- Revelation 7:9: the redeemed from every nation standing as one.
- Acts 17:11: the Bereans receive teaching eagerly while examining Scripture daily.
- Acts 15:1-29: doctrinal controversy addressed through communal deliberation under Scripture and the Spirit.
- Ephesians 4:11-16: pastors and teachers equip the saints and protect the church from doctrinal instability.
- 1 Timothy 3:15: the church as God's household and the pillar and foundation of the truth.
- 2 Timothy 2:2: truth entrusted to faithful teachers who will teach others.
- Titus 1:9: elders hold firmly to sound teaching, encourage others, and refute error.
- Hebrews 13:17: believers respond appropriately to faithful spiritual oversight.
- James 3:1: teachers face stricter judgment.
- 1 Corinthians 14:29: claimed prophetic speech is evaluated by others.
- 2 Peter 3:15-16: Scripture can be distorted by ignorant and unstable interpreters.

II. God

I believe in one God who is eternal, self-existent, and uncreated, the creator and sustainer of all things. God is a personal being, not an idea or force. Scripture reveals His Fatherhood, signifying His authority, justice, and love. God has always been Father to the Son and is Father to believers by grace and adoption. His holiness is foundational to all His attributes; nothing in creation is holy apart from His presence, declaration, or action. God's justice and love are united in His holy nature and never in conflict. He is unchanging in nature, character, and purpose, yet responds to repentance with mercy and relents from judgment, which reflects His consistent character. God experiences grief, delight, and emotion, always in harmony with His holiness. He created humanity as the most significant part of creation, forming people and giving them life in a unique way.

REFERENCED SCRIPTURES

- Exodus 3:14: I AM WHO I AM, God's self-existence and eternity.
- Psalm 90:2: from eternity to eternity, God is God.
- Genesis 1:1: God as sovereign creator of all things.
- Genesis 1:31: God saw all He had made, and it was very good.
- Genesis 2:7: God personally forms man and breathes life into him.
- John 17:24: the Father's love for the Son before the foundation of the world.
- Isaiah 6:3: holy, holy, holy, holiness as God's defining declaration
- Revelation 4:8: the eternal repetition of God's holiness
- Leviticus 11:44: be holy because I am holy, derived holiness
- 1 Peter 2:9: the church as a holy nation by God's declaration
- Psalm 89:14: righteousness and justice as the foundation of God's throne
- 1 John 4:8: God is love
- Malachi 3:6: I the LORD do not change
- Jeremiah 18:7-10: God's principle of relenting in response to repentance
- Jonah 4:2: God's relenting as an expression of His unchanging character
- Genesis 6:6: the LORD grieved and regretted
- Zephaniah 3:17: God rejoicing over His people with singing
- Ephesians 4:30: do not grieve the Holy Spirit.
- John 11:35: Jesus wept
- Hebrews 1:3: Jesus as the exact representation of the Father's nature

III. The Trinity

I believe in one God who exists eternally as three distinct persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each person is fully and equally God. They are not three separate Gods, nor are they different forms or manifestations of one person. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are truly distinct, eternally united in being, purpose, glory, and love, and always act in perfect harmony.

The Father sends and initiates the work of redemption, the Son reveals the Father and accomplishes redemption, and the Holy Spirit applies that redemption, indwells believers, empowers them, and makes them holy. These distinctions describe their revealed works without dividing their divine nature or implying that any person is lesser than another.

The Father has eternally loved the Son, and the Son has eternally loved and glorified the Father. The Holy Spirit eternally shares in the life, love, glory, and fellowship of the Father and the Son as a fully divine and distinct person. Through Christ and by the Holy Spirit, believers are brought into fellowship with the Father and participate by grace in the life and love of the triune God.

REFERENCED SCRIPTURES

- Deuteronomy 6:4: the LORD our God, the LORD is one
- Matthew 28:19: baptizing in the singular name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- Matthew 3:16-17: all three persons simultaneously present at the baptism of Jesus
- John 1:1: the Word was with God and the Word was God
- John 10:30: the Father and I are one
- John 14:16: Jesus asks the Father to send another Helper
- John 17:21-24: the Father's love for the Son before the foundation of the world
- John 20:28: Thomas declares My Lord and my God to the risen Christ.
- Colossians 1:16-17: by the Son all things were created, and in Him all things hold together
- Colossians 2:9: the entire fullness of God's nature dwells in the Son bodily
- Philippians 2:6: the Son existing in the form of God before the incarnation
- Hebrews 1:3: the Son as the radiance of God's glory and exact expression of His nature
- Hebrews 1:8: the Father addresses the Son as God.
- Acts 5:3-4: lying to the Holy Spirit is lying to God
- 1 Corinthians 3:16: the Spirit dwells in believers as God dwells in His temple
- 2 Corinthians 3:17: the Lord is the Spirit
- Romans 5:5: God's love poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit
- Genesis 1:2: the Spirit of God hovering over the waters at creation
- Daniel 7:13-14: the Son of Man receiving worship alongside the Ancient of Days
- John 14:26: the Father sends the Spirit in the Son's name.
- John 15:26: the Son sends the Spirit from the Father.
- John 16:13-15: the Spirit glorifies the Son and receives what belongs to Him.
- 2 Corinthians 13:14: the grace of Christ, love of God, and fellowship of the Spirit.
- Ephesians 2:18: through Christ believers have access to the Father by one Spirit.
- 1 Peter 1:2: the Father, Spirit, and Christ acting together in salvation.

IV. Humanity

I believe God created humanity as the most significant part of creation, granting people unique dignity. God made humans in His own image, enabling them to reflect Him in thought, choice, creativity, language, and the pursuit of meaning. People are called to rule, care for, and represent God in creation. The image of God is most evident when people maintain right relationships with God, one another, and the world. God personally gave life to humanity, and His creation was very good.

When Adam disobeyed God, sin and death entered the world. This act was more than a moral failure; it broke humanity's relationship with God, damaged relationships among people, harmed creation, and introduced shame and self-deception. The image of God in people was not erased but was deeply marred. As a result of the fall, people are not merely weak but spiritually dead, unable to seek God, understand spiritual truth, or save themselves. Every aspect of human nature is affected: minds are darkened, wills are selfish, emotions are disordered, and bodies decay and die. Any remaining desire for God reflects the original design but cannot restore spiritual life. Only God can do that.

REFERENCED SCRIPTURES

- Genesis 1:26-27: humanity created in the image and likeness of God
- Genesis 1:28: the cultural mandate to rule, steward, and fill the earth.
- Genesis 1:31: God saw all He had made, and it was very good
- Genesis 2:7: God personally forms man and breathes life into him
- Genesis 2:25: the pre-fall intimacy, naked and not ashamed
- Genesis 3: the fall, temptation, disobedience, and comprehensive relational rupture
- Genesis 9:6: the image persists after the fall, murder prohibited on that basis
- James 3:9: human dignity grounded in the persistent image of God
- Romans 5:12-19: Adam as federal head, one man's trespass brought condemnation to all
- Romans 3:10-12: no one righteous, no one seeks God.
- Psalm 51:5: guilt and sinfulness present from conception
- Ephesians 2:1-3: humanity described as dead in trespasses and sins
- 1 Corinthians 2:14: the person without the Spirit cannot receive what comes from God.
- 1 Corinthians 15:45-49: the first Adam and the last Adam.
- Colossians 3:10: believers renewed in knowledge according to the image of their Creator.
- 2 Corinthians 3:18: being transformed into the image of Christ from glory to glory.
- Romans 8:19-21: creation waiting eagerly for the restoration of God's children.

V. Sin

I believe sin entered the world when Satan deceived Adam and Eve, causing them to doubt God's character and disobey Him. The fall was not merely human weakness but a choice to believe a lie about God. Although deceived, Adam and Eve remained responsible for their actions, and their decision brought sin and death to all humanity. Sin is spiritual death, breaking the relationship with God so completely that people are not only distant from Him but spiritually dead. They cannot seek God, please Him, or save themselves by any effort or good works. All people inherit this condition by nature. Sin is the breaking of God's law, rebellion against Him, and bondage to a power that affects every part of human nature. Nothing people do can repair the separation caused by sin; no effort, religion, or willpower can restore spiritual life. This total helplessness makes God's grace essential.

REFERENCED SCRIPTURES

- Genesis 3: the full anatomy of the fall, deception, choice, consequence, and rupture.
- Genesis 2:17: the promised consequence of disobedience, you will certainly die.
- Genesis 3:8: Adam and Eve hiding from God, the first visible symptom of spiritual death.
- Revelation 12:9: Satan identified as the ancient serpent who deceives the whole world.
- 2 Corinthians 11:3: the serpent's deception of Eve as an ongoing template of spiritual danger.
- 1 Timothy 2:14: Adam was not deceived but sinned with fuller awareness.
- Isaiah 59:2: iniquities separating humanity from God.
- Psalm 51:5: conceived in sinfulness, the inherited condition.
- Romans 5:12: sin and death entering the world through one man spreading to all.
- Romans 3:23: all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.
- Romans 3:20: no one justified before God by works of the law.
- Romans 6:23: the wages of sin are death.
- Romans 7:14-25: sin as an indwelling power in conflict with the new nature.
- Romans 8:7-8: the mindset of the flesh is hostile to God and unable to submit.
- Ephesians 2:1-3: dead in trespasses and sins.
- John 8:34: everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin.
- 1 John 3:4: sin is lawlessness.
- Jeremiah 17:9: the heart is more deceitful than anything else.
- Jeremiah 13:23: the incapacity to do good rooted as deep as nature itself.
- Mark 7:21-23: sin originating from within, from the heart.
- Colossians 1:21: alienated and hostile in mind because of evil actions.

VI. Salvation

I believe salvation is entirely God's work. It begins with His grace, is accomplished by His Son, and applied by His Spirit. God saves those who are spiritually dead and unable to help themselves. Salvation is not a partnership with human effort, but God alone raising the spiritually dead to life through the gospel and the Holy Spirit.

Christ's death on the cross was a decisive and effective act of redemption. He bore sin, satisfied God's justice, defeated the powers of evil, and accomplished reconciliation through His own life and blood. The cross did not merely create a hypothetical possibility of salvation. It secured every saving benefit received by those who are united to Christ through faith.

Scripture speaks particularly of Christ laying down His life for His sheep, giving Himself for the church, and securing a people for God. It also speaks broadly of God loving the world, Christ tasting death for everyone, and His sacrifice being sufficient to ground the sincere proclamation of the gospel to all people. These truths must not be set against one another or flattened to fit a theological system.

I believe Christ's death was sufficient for all, is genuinely proclaimed and offered to all, and is savingly effective for everyone who believes. In God's sovereign saving purpose, Christ certainly secured the redemption of those the Father gave Him. No one for whom the saving benefits of His atonement are applied will finally be lost.

Scripture does not reveal every dimension of the relationship between God's particular saving purpose and its universal language with equal clarity. I therefore affirm both without claiming greater precision than the biblical text permits. Christ's sacrifice is complete, sufficient, and victorious; everyone who comes to Him in faith will be saved, and all who are saved owe their redemption entirely to His finished work.

Salvation is received by faith alone. Faith is not achieved by human effort but is a gift from God, the response of a heart made alive by grace. Repentance and faith are evidence of the Spirit's work and new life; they do not cause salvation.

I believe no one comes to Christ unless the Spirit draws them and gives faith. Repentance and faith are genuine and necessary responses. The gospel invitation is sincere and open to all, and everyone who calls on the Lord will be saved. Scripture affirms both God's sovereignty in salvation and the reality of human response, even if it does not fully explain their relationship. I accept both truths,

trust God's sovereignty, share the gospel urgently, and remain humble about what we cannot fully understand.

God preserves all whom He saves. Salvation depends on His faithfulness, not ours. God will complete the good work He began. Not sin, failure, or death can separate believers from God's love in Christ. Our security rests not in our grip on God, but in His unwavering hold on us.

REFERENCED SCRIPTURES

- Ephesians 2:1: dead in trespasses and sins, the condition salvation addresses
- Ephesians 2:8-9: saved by grace through faith, not from works; it is God's gift.
- Titus 3:5: saved not by works of righteousness but according to His mercy
- Romans 5:8: while we were still sinners Christ died for us
- John 3:16: God so loved the world that He gave His only Son
- John 10:15: I lay down my life for the sheep
- John 10:27-29: I give them eternal life, and they will never perish
- John 17:9: Jesus praying specifically for those the Father has given Him
- John 6:37-44: all the Father gives will come; no one comes unless the Father draws
- 2 Corinthians 5:21: He who knew no sin became sin so we might become the righteousness of God.
- Isaiah 53:4-6: the substitutionary suffering of the servant.
- Hebrews 9:22: without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.
- Romans 3:24-26: justified freely by grace through the redemption in Christ Jesus, demonstrating God's righteousness.
- Romans 4:4-5: faith credited as righteousness to the one who believes.
- Philippians 1:29: it has been granted to you to believe in Christ.
- Acts 16:31: believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.
- Acts 2:21: everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.
- Romans 8:29-30: foreknown, predestined, called, justified, glorified.
- Romans 9:11-16: election not from works but from the one who calls.
- Romans 10:14-17: genuine human response and the necessity of proclamation.
- Ephesians 1:4-6: chosen in Him before the foundation of the world.
- Acts 13:48: all who had been appointed to eternal life believed.
- Romans 8:38-39: nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.
- Philippians 1:6: He who began a good work will carry it to completion.
- 1 John 2:19: they went out from us because they never truly belonged to us.
- Hebrews 9:12: He entered once for all, securing eternal redemption.
- Colossians 2:15: disarming the rulers and authorities, triumphing over them by the cross.
- Mark 10:45: the Son of Man came to give His life as a ransom for many.
- John 1:29: Christ as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.
- John 6:51: Christ gives His flesh for the life of the world.
- Romans 8:32-34: those for whom Christ died are justified and cannot be successfully condemned.
- 2 Corinthians 5:14-15: one died for all, so those who live should live for Him.
- 1 Timothy 2:5-6: Christ gave Himself as a ransom for all.
- 1 Timothy 4:10: God described as Savior of all people, especially of believers.
- Hebrews 2:9: Christ tasted death for everyone.
- 1 John 2:2: Christ as the atoning sacrifice for our sins and for the whole world.
- Revelation 5:9-10: Christ's blood purchases people from every tribe, language, people, and nation.

VII. Jesus Christ

I believe Jesus Christ is God, the second person of the Trinity, equal and eternal with the Father and the Spirit. All things were created through Him and for Him, and He sustains everything. Jesus reveals the Father's glory and is the exact expression of God's nature. He is not a reflection or lesser form of God, but fully God in person.

At the appointed time, the eternal Son entered creation, being conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. His conception was a unique and sovereign act of God, fulfilling Scripture and revealing that salvation comes from God rather than from human power or initiative.

Jesus was fully human in every respect necessary to share our humanity. He experienced hunger, thirst, fatigue, grief, suffering, and temptation, yet He remained entirely without sin. He did not merely appear human, nor was His humanity incomplete. He possessed a true human body, mind, will, and affections while remaining the eternal Son of God.

Scripture teaches the virgin conception and the complete sinlessness of Christ but does not explain the transmission of sin in biological terms. Christ's sinlessness should therefore not be attributed merely to the absence of a human father. He is the holy Son of God who entered humanity by the power of the Holy Spirit and stood as the last Adam, beginning a new humanity rather than continuing Adam's rebellion.

When the Son became human, He did not cease to be God or surrender His divine nature. Jesus Christ is one person with two complete natures, truly God and truly human, without confusion, change, division, or separation. He remains fully God and fully human forever and is therefore the only qualified mediator and sinless substitute between God and humanity.

Jesus obeyed the Father perfectly, succeeding where Adam failed, and fulfilled the law on behalf of His people. He willingly went to the cross, bearing sin, satisfying God's justice, and securing redemption for His people. His sacrifice is sufficient for all and savingly effective for everyone who is united to Him through faith. His death accomplished what no human effort or religion could achieve. Jesus, who had no sin, became sin so His people could become righteous in Him. Through His sacrifice, the separation caused by sin was healed: those far from God were brought near, enemies reconciled, the dead raised to life, and the redeemed united with God.

On the third day, Jesus rose from the dead in a real, physical body. This was not merely symbolic or spiritual, but a true historical event. The same body that was buried emerged from the tomb, transformed and glorified, yet still bearing the marks of the cross. The resurrection confirmed Jesus' righteousness, the defeat of death, and the truth of His words. It is the foundation of the Christian faith; without it, sin is not forgiven, and the gospel has no power. Jesus' resurrection also guarantees that believers will be raised. He is the first of many to come.

Jesus ascended to the right hand of the Father, not merely departing but assuming His place as King. He now rules over all as head of the church, intercedes for His people before the Father, and builds His kingdom through the Spirit's work. Jesus is not absent or waiting; He is reigning now.

Jesus will return in person, in a real and visible manner. He will not come as a suffering servant, but as the reigning King. He will restore all that is broken, address every injustice, defeat every enemy, and fulfill every promise. Those He has redeemed will live with Him forever in the new creation, as God has always intended.

REFERENCED SCRIPTURES

- John 1:1-3: the Word was God, and all things were created through Him
- John 1:14: the Word became flesh and dwelt among us
- John 1:11: He came to His own and His own did not receive Him.
- John 8:58: before Abraham was, I am, the divine name claimed by Jesus
- John 14:6: I am the way, the truth, and the life.
- John 17:5: the glory the Son shared with the Father before the world existed
- John 17:21-23: union with God patterned on the union of Father and Son
- John 20:27: the nail marks present in the risen body
- Colossians 1:15-17: image of the invisible God, creator and sustainer of all things
- Colossians 2:9: the entire fullness of deity dwells in Him bodily
- Philippians 2:5-8: the kenosis, the self-emptying descent to the cross
- Hebrews 1:2-3: the Son through whom creation was made, radiance of the Father's glory
- Hebrews 2:14-17: the Son truly shared humanity, defeated death, and became a merciful and faithful High Priest.
- Hebrews 4:15: tempted in every way as we are yet without sin.
- Hebrews 7:25: He always lives to intercede for His people.
- Isaiah 7:14: the virgin birth foretold.
- Isaiah 53:4-6: the willing substitutionary suffering of the servant.
- Luke 1:35: conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of a virgin.
- Luke 24:39: flesh and bones, the bodily resurrection affirmed.
- Matthew 4:2: Jesus experiencing genuine human hunger.
- John 4:6: Jesus experiencing genuine human exhaustion.
- John 11:35: Jesus experiencing genuine human grief.
- John 19:28: Jesus experiencing genuine human thirst.
- Romans 1:4: declared Son of God in power by the resurrection.
- Romans 5:10-11: reconciled to God through the death of His Son.
- Romans 8:34: Christ at the right hand of God interceding for us.
- 2 Corinthians 5:21: the great exchange.
- Ephesians 1:20-22: seated at the right hand far above all rule and authority.
- Ephesians 2:13: those far away brought near by the blood of Christ.

- Acts 1:9-11: the ascension and the promise of His return.
- Acts 4:12: salvation in no one else.
- 1 Corinthians 15:3-8: the resurrection appearances, the historical core.
- 1 Corinthians 15:17: if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless.
- 1 Corinthians 15:20: the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.
- Revelation 5:6: the Lamb appearing as though slain in the throne room.
- Revelation 19:11-16: the return of Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords
- Matthew 1:18-25: the virgin conception of Jesus by the Holy Spirit and His birth to Mary.
- John 8:46: Jesus challenges anyone to convict Him of sin.
- Romans 5:12-19: Adam and Christ as representative heads of two humanities.
- 1 Corinthians 15:21-22: death through Adam and resurrection through Christ.
- 1 Corinthians 15:45-49: Christ as the last Adam and the man from heaven.
- 1 Peter 2:22: Christ committed no sin.
- 1 John 3:5: in Christ there is no sin.

VIII. The Holy Spirit

I believe the Holy Spirit is the third person of the eternal Trinity, fully God, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and the Son, present and active from the beginning of creation, hovering over the waters before time had a shape. He is not a force, an influence, or a divine energy to be channeled. He is a person, with intellect, will, and emotion, who can be known, grieved, quenched, and obeyed.

It is by the Spirit that Christ came into the world, the active agent of the incarnation, overshadowing Mary and bringing the eternal Son into human flesh. Through the Spirit Christ was anointed for ministry, led through temptation, empowered in His works, and offered Himself without blemish to the Father on the cross. Every decisive moment of redemption is a Trinitarian act, and the Spirit is present at every one of them.

To the believer the Spirit is Comforter, Counselor, Advocate, and Teacher, another of the same kind as Christ, continuing and completing His ministry in the lives of those who belong to Him until Christ returns. He regenerates the dead soul, indwells the believer permanently, seals them as God's possession, bears witness with their spirit that they are children of God, intercedes for them with groanings too deep for words, and transforms them progressively into the image of Christ. He is not a temporary visitor. He is a permanent presence, and His presence is the defining mark of belonging to Christ. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Him.

The Holy Spirit is not an impersonal power to be accessed by formula, technique, or sufficient human faith. He is a divine person who moves sovereignly according to His own will and the Father's purposes. He cannot be summoned, manipulated, or directed by human desire. He distributes His gifts as He wills, works where and how He chooses, and is to be known, submitted to, and obeyed rather than treated as a means to human ends. Any approach to the Spirit that prioritizes what He can provide over who He is has fundamentally misunderstood Him.

I believe the gifts of the Spirit are real and remain active in the present age, given for the building up of the body of Christ, the proclamation of the gospel, and the continuation of His work in the world until Christ returns.

I believe the gift of tongues is a genuine work of the Holy Spirit, distributed according to His sovereign will for the glory of Christ and the building up of the church. At Pentecost, tongues clearly consisted of real human languages miraculously spoken by those who had not learned them and understood by people from different nations. Similar events in Acts marked significant moments

in the spread of the gospel and the incorporation of new groups into the new covenant community.

The New Testament does not state with equal clarity whether every occurrence of tongues described in 1 Corinthians must be understood exclusively as a known human language. I therefore affirm confidently what Scripture makes clear while remaining cautious about what it does not fully explain. Tongues may involve miraculously given human language, and any genuine manifestation requires the sovereign action of the Spirit rather than learned imitation, emotional pressure, or human technique.

Not every believer speaks in tongues, and tongues are not the necessary evidence of salvation, Spirit baptism, spiritual maturity, or superior faith. In the gathered church, tongues must never be exercised without interpretation. If no interpreter is present, the speaker must remain silent. All genuine gifts operate under biblical order, submit to evaluation, exalt Christ, and serve the common good rather than drawing attention to the individual.

I do not believe Scripture supports manufacturing tongues through repetition, instruction in how to produce sounds, social pressure, or the imitation of others. Nor should unintelligible speech be treated automatically as evidence of the Holy Spirit. Spiritual experiences may be sincere and still be misunderstood, psychologically produced, or counterfeit. Every claimed manifestation must therefore be tested by Scripture, judged by its fruit, and exercised under the discernment and accountability of the gathered church.

Scripture may describe forms of prayer in which human anguish or communion with God exceeds articulate expression, but this should not be confidently equated with the public gift of tongues or turned into a required private prayer practice. Where Scripture leaves the precise nature of an experience uncertain, believers should remain humble, avoid dogmatism, and refuse to bind the consciences of others.

I believe prophecy is a genuine gift of the Holy Spirit given for the strengthening, encouragement, consolation, warning, and edification of the church. In Scripture, prophecy includes more than preaching or teaching. It may communicate a specific warning, insight, application, or disclosure prompted by the Spirit. Teaching and prophecy may overlap, but Scripture presents them as distinguishable gifts.

The prophets and apostles through whom God gave Scripture occupied a unique and foundational role in redemptive history. Their authoritative revelation, preserved in Scripture, remains the final standard by which every later claim must be judged. No present-day prophetic impression, message, dream, vision, or

utterance can add to Scripture, establish Christian doctrine, possess authority equal to Scripture, or bind the conscience apart from Scripture.

Any person who believes the Spirit has prompted a message should communicate it with humility and without claiming infallible certainty. Language such as 'Thus says the Lord' or 'God told me' can improperly place divine authority behind a fallible human interpretation and may pressure others to submit without examination. A person may instead say that they believe or sense the Spirit may be directing their attention to something, while remaining open to testing, correction, or rejection.

Every claimed prophecy must be evaluated by Scripture, centered on Christ, weighed by mature believers, and judged by its truth, character, purpose, and fruit. A claim that contradicts Scripture, introduces new doctrine, manipulates behavior, exalts the speaker, produces unhealthy dependence, or refuses examination must be rejected. The responsibility for a prophetic claim rests on the person making it, not on those who carefully test it.

Discernment is closely connected with prophecy but should not be confused with it. Discernment is the Spirit-given ability and the Christian responsibility to distinguish truth from error and genuine spiritual activity from deception. The church must neither accept every spiritual claim uncritically nor reject the Spirit's work merely because counterfeit claims exist. It must test everything, reject what is false, and hold firmly to what is good.

Healing is a genuine gift and miraculous healing remains possible: God heals, the gift is real, and the abuse of it does not negate its reality. Genuine healing ministry moves quietly toward the vulnerable, belongs entirely to God's sovereign will, and follows the pattern of James 5 rather than the performance culture of staged spectacle. The sick are not responsible for their lack of healing through insufficient faith. The exploitation of desperate and suffering people through performance-driven healing culture is among the gravest abuses of spiritual gifts Scripture addresses: the fleecing of the vulnerable flock that Ezekiel 34 indicts with the full weight of divine anger.

The devil is the great counterfeiter, capable of producing convincing imitations of genuine spiritual experience, movement, and gifts that deceive weak believers and are weaponized by those with ill intentions. The counterfeit operates most effectively when spiritual experience is elevated above Scripture as the primary authority, because experience can be imitated, but the Word of God cannot be successfully counterfeited when properly applied. Scripture and discernment together are the God-given equipment for recognizing and resisting spiritual deception: the Word as the fixed standard against which every experience is tested, and discernment as the Spirit-given capacity to apply that standard to

specific situations. The equipping of believers in Scripture and discernment is therefore not optional but urgent and protective, the primary defense against the snares of the devil in an age of widespread spiritual counterfeiting.

Prosperity theology is a completely false doctrine, not an unbalanced emphasis but a fundamental distortion of the gospel at the level of diagnosis, atonement, the pattern of Christian living, and the work of the Spirit. It misidentifies the human problem as lack rather than sin, distorts the atonement into a guarantee of present-tense material blessing, inverts the cross from the pattern of Christian living into an obstacle already removed, and reframes the Spirit as a dispenser of worldly flourishing rather than the agent of holiness and conformity to Christ. It is structurally designed to exploit, extracting money from the vulnerable while placing the burden of the system's failure on those it harms, and causes its greatest damage among the sick, the poor, and the grieving, leaving them not only unhelped but carrying shame and, in many cases, shipwrecked faith.

The presence of counterfeit spiritual activity does not prove that genuine gifts have ceased. Scripture warns that deception, manipulation, false teaching, and self-interest can imitate or corrupt spiritual experience. The church must therefore neither accept every extraordinary claim nor reject every claimed gift merely because abuses exist.

I believe genuine works of the Spirit may sometimes be less visible than counterfeit ones because the Spirit's work does not depend on spectacle, publicity, or human promotion. Authentic spiritual gifts often serve quietly, direct attention toward Christ, strengthen others, and operate without exalting the person through whom they are given. Their apparent rarity may therefore reflect, at least in part, our tendency to notice dramatic claims more readily than humble and faithful ministry.

It is possible that unbelief, poor teaching, fear, pride, disorder, greed, the pursuit of power, and the elevation of experience above Scripture may hinder the healthy exercise and recognition of spiritual gifts. Such practices may grieve or quench the Spirit and make congregations vulnerable to counterfeits. Scripture does not, however, permit us to claim with certainty that these factors fully explain how frequently genuine gifts appear in any particular time, place, or church.

The Holy Spirit distributes His gifts according to His own will. Their presence, absence, frequency, and form remain under His sovereign authority rather than human control. Believers should therefore pray for His work, seek the good of the church, test every claim, avoid manipulation, and remain humble about what God may or may not choose to do.

The church must not pursue spiritual power apart from communion with God, nor treat the Spirit primarily as a source of extraordinary experiences. The greatest

evidence of His presence is not spectacle but conformity to Christ, love, holiness, truth, and the fruit He produces in the lives of believers.

REFERENCED SCRIPTURES

- Genesis 1:2: the Spirit hovering over the waters at creation
- Job 33:4: the Spirit of God has made me
- Psalm 139:7-10: the omnipresence of the Spirit
- Isaiah 53:4: He bore our weaknesses and carried our diseases.
- Ezekiel 34:1-6: shepherds who fleece rather than feed the flock
- Matthew 4:1: Jesus led by the Spirit into the wilderness
- Matthew 6:6: prayer in private, the intimate and the public kept distinct
- Matthew 8:17: He took our weaknesses and carried our diseases.
- Mark 1:44: Jesus healing quietly and instructing silence
- Mark 6:5-6: few miracles because of unbelief
- Mark 7:33: Jesus taking the deaf man aside privately before healing
- Luke 1:35: conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of a virgin.
- Luke 4:1: Jesus full of the Holy Spirit.
- Luke 4:14: Jesus returning in the power of the Spirit.
- Luke 4:18: the Spirit of the Lord is on me because He has anointed me.
- Luke 9:23: take up your cross daily and follow me.
- John 14:16-17: the Father sending another Comforter, the Spirit of truth.
- John 14:26: the Spirit teaching and reminding believers of everything Christ said.
- John 16:7: it is for your benefit that I go away.
- John 16:8-11: the Spirit convicting the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment.
- John 16:13: the Spirit guiding believers into all truth.
- Acts 1:8: you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you.
- Acts 2:1-11: Pentecost, known human languages spoken and understood.
- Acts 8:18-24: Simon desiring spiritual power for its own sake.
- Acts 10:44-46: the Spirit falling on the Gentile household.
- Acts 11:15-17: Peter's argument that Gentiles received the same Spirit.
- Acts 15:32: Judas and Silas encouraging and strengthening through prophetic ministry.
- Acts 19:1-6: former disciples of John incorporated into the new covenant community.
- Romans 8:9: anyone without the Spirit does not belong to Christ.
- Romans 8:11: the Spirit who raised Christ dwelling in believers.
- Romans 8:14-16: the Spirit of adoption crying Abba Father.
- Romans 8:17: suffering with Christ as the path to glorification.
- Romans 8:26-27: groanings too deep for words.
- 1 Corinthians 2:10-11: the Spirit searching the deep things of God
- 1 Corinthians 12:7: gifts given for the common good
- 1 Corinthians 12:9: the gift of healing
- 1 Corinthians 12:10: discernment of spirits as a spiritual gift
- 1 Corinthians 12:11: the Spirit distributing gifts as He wills
- 1 Corinthians 12:13: baptized by one Spirit into one body
- 1 Corinthians 12:29-30: do all speak in tongues, the implied answer is no
- 2 Corinthians 1:22: the Spirit as a deposit guaranteeing what is to come
- 2 Corinthians 11:14: Satan disguising himself as an angel of light
- Galatians 5:16-25: walking by the Spirit and the fruit of the Spirit
- Ephesians 1:13-14: sealed with the promised Holy Spirit as a deposit
- Ephesians 4:11-12: prophets given to equip the saints and build up the body
- Ephesians 4:30: do not grieve the Holy Spirit.
- Ephesians 5:18: be filled with the Spirit
- Ephesians 6:10-17: the full armor of God, the Word as the primary weapon
- Philippians 3:10: the fellowship of His sufferings
- 1 Thessalonians 5:19-21: do not quench the Spirit, test everything

- 2 Timothy 3:16-17: Scripture equipping the believer completely
- Hebrews 4:12: the Word of God living and active
- Hebrews 9:14: Christ offering Himself through the eternal Spirit
- James 5:14-15: the elders called to the sick, genuine healing ministry
- 1 Peter 2:24: the healing of Isaiah 53 applied to spiritual restoration
- 2 Peter 2:3: in their greed they exploit with made-up stories
- 1 John 4:1: test the spirits to see if they are from God
- 1 Timothy 6:5: those who think godliness is a means of financial gain
- 1 Timothy 6:9-10: the love of money as a root of all kinds of evil
- Hosea 4:6: destroyed for lack of knowledge
- Isaiah 8:20: to the law and the testimony
- Deuteronomy 18:20-22: full accountability on the one who claims to speak in God's name
- Revelation 3:17: the Laodicean church thinking itself rich while spiritually poor
- John 3:8: the Spirit moves according to His sovereign freedom.
- Matthew 7:15-23: extraordinary claims and works do not by themselves prove genuine relationship with Christ.
- Acts 11:27-30: Agabus foretells a famine and the church responds with practical aid.
- Acts 13:1-3: prophets and teachers distinguished within the church at Antioch.
- Acts 21:10-14: Agabus gives a specific warning concerning Paul's imprisonment.
- Romans 12:6: prophecy exercised according to the faith given.
- 1 Corinthians 13:1-3: impressive gifts without love amount to nothing.
- 1 Corinthians 13:9: prophecy described as partial rather than exhaustive knowledge.
- 1 Corinthians 14:1-40: tongues, interpretation, prophecy, intelligibility, edification, evaluation, self-control, and order in the gathered church.
- 2 Timothy 3:5: the appearance of godliness can exist without its true power.
- James 3:13-18: heavenly wisdom recognized by purity, peace, gentleness, mercy, and good fruit.

IX. The Church

I believe in one holy, universal church, the full body of Christ, comprising every genuine believer across every age, every nation, and every tradition, bound together not by denomination or geography but by their union with Christ Himself. This is the church no power of hell can prevail against, indestructible because it is inseparable from the One who is its head, its life, and its foundation.

The local church is a gathered community of believers in a specific place, a living expression of the universal body, carrying real responsibility and real dignity. Christ is specifically present in the local gathering, and the local church functions as a lampstand in its community, bearing the light of the gospel in the particular place where God has placed it. It is not the whole body, but it is a genuine and significant expression of it.

I believe baptism is by immersion and for believers only, those who have genuinely repented and placed their faith in Christ. The physical act of immersion is not incidental to its meaning but essential to it: picturing the burial and resurrection of Christ and the believer's death to the old life and rising to the new. Baptism follows faith. It does not produce it, and the consistent New Testament pattern presents repentance and belief as the necessary preconditions for its administration.

I believe the Lord's Supper is an act of remembrance and proclamation: the church declaring the Lord's death until He comes through the physical act of eating the bread and drinking the cup. It is past-facing in its remembrance of His sacrifice and future-facing in its anticipation of His return, placing the participant at the center of the redemptive story every time it is observed. The elements do not become His body and blood. They proclaim it.

I believe church governance should follow the pattern Scripture establishes: a plurality of elders charged with shepherding the congregation, and deacons serving its practical needs, with the congregation itself carrying genuine responsibility in the life and decisions of the body. No single person holds monarchical authority over the gathered community. Leadership serves, equips, and protects rather than lords over those entrusted to its care.

I believe the church is fundamentally a training station: its primary purpose is to equip, sharpen, and send the people of God for the work of ministry in the world. Iron sharpens iron. The gathered community exists not to provide a service for passive recipients but to form, correct, challenge, and strengthen believers for faithful Spirit-empowered living outside its walls. Worship, fellowship, mission, and community are not separate programs to be manufactured and maintained.

They are the natural fruit of a body being genuinely equipped and sent. The church that is truly doing its work will produce all of them without chasing any of them.

REFERENCED SCRIPTURES

- Matthew 16:18: I will build my church and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it
- Matthew 18:17: the whole church involved in matters of discipline
- Matthew 18:20: where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.
- Matthew 28:19-20: the Great Commission, go make disciples, baptize, teach
- Matthew 3:6: John baptizing in the Jordan
- Matthew 3:16: Jesus coming up out of the water at His baptism
- John 3:23: baptizing at Aenon because there was plenty of water
- Acts 2:38: repent and be baptized.
- Acts 2:42-47: the early church devoted to teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer
- Acts 6:3-5: the whole congregation involved in selecting the first deacons
- Acts 8:12: when they believed, they were baptized.
- Acts 8:36-39: the Ethiopian eunuch: if you believe you may be baptized, going down into the water
- Acts 14:23: Paul and Barnabas appointing elders in every church.
- Acts 20:28: elders charged to shepherd the church God purchased with His own blood.
- Romans 6:3-4: buried with Christ by baptism, the resurrection symbolism of immersion.
- Romans 12:4-5: many members, one body.
- 1 Corinthians 11:23-26: the Lord's Supper: do this in remembrance of me, proclaiming His death until He comes.
- 1 Corinthians 12:12-27: the body of Christ, every member needed and placed by God.
- Ephesians 1:22-23: the church as the body of Christ, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.
- Ephesians 2:19-22: the church as God's household built on the apostles and prophets.
- Ephesians 4:11-12: equipping the saints for the work of ministry.
- Ephesians 5:25-27: Christ loving the church and giving Himself for her.
- Colossians 1:18: Christ as head of the church.
- Colossians 2:12: buried with Him in baptism, raised with Him through faith.
- Titus 1:5: appointing elders in every town.
- 1 Timothy 3: qualifications for elders and deacons.
- 1 Peter 2:9-10: a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people.
- 1 Peter 5:1-3: elders urged to shepherd willingly, not lording over those entrusted to them.
- Hebrews 10:24-25: not forsaking assembling together, stirring one another to love and good works.
- Proverbs 27:17: iron sharpens iron.
- Revelation 1:20: the seven churches as lampstands, local churches as light bearers.

X. Last Things

I believe every person is appointed to die once and then face judgment. There are no second chances, reversals, or escape from the accounting that follows death. This sequence is fixed and certain.

At death, the believer does not enter unconscious waiting but passes immediately into the presence of Christ, absent from the body, present with the Lord. This intermediate state is real, conscious, and far better than earthly life, though not yet final; the body remains in the ground awaiting resurrection, and the fullness of God's promise is reserved for the last day. The unbeliever also enters conscious existence at death, already experiencing the consequences of a life lived in rejection of God.

At Christ's return, the dead will be raised bodily: the same body that was buried will be transformed and glorified, preserving personal identity while being made fit for eternity. Every person who has ever lived will be raised: some to the resurrection of life, others to the resurrection of condemnation. The resurrection is universal, bodily, and certain.

I believe in the personal, visible, and bodily return of Jesus Christ. The same Jesus who ascended will return in the same way, with a shout, the voice of an archangel, and the trumpet of God. Every eye will see Him; His coming will be the most public event in history. At His return, the dead in Christ will rise first, and those alive will be caught up with them to meet the Lord, a real and glorious event that is part of the single, visible second coming, not a separate prior removal. The gathering of the elect occurs at His return, resulting in the permanent union of the redeemed with their King.

I believe the church is not promised removal from tribulation, but preservation and endurance through it. The New Testament consistently teaches that through many tribulations we enter the kingdom of God. The church endures, holds fast, and is refined by suffering rather than being removed from it. Christ prays not for His people to be taken out of the world, but to be kept from the evil one. The catching up of believers is not an escape from tribulation, but the culmination of endurance: the moment suffering gives way to glory.

I believe in a final judgment before the great white throne, where every person, great and small, from every age and nation, will stand before God and give account. The books will be opened, including the book of life. Every word, deed, and hidden thing will be revealed. Those whose names are written in the book of life will enter eternal life; those not found will face eternal conscious punishment: the second death, the lake of fire, a reality Jesus emphasized frequently and

solemnly. The same word describes both eternal life and eternal punishment (aionios); both are permanent and real.

I believe the final state of the redeemed is not disembodied existence in a spiritual realm, but the new creation: a renewed and glorified physical earth where resurrected and embodied believers dwell with God forever. God's dwelling will be with His people. He will wipe away every tear; death, mourning, crying, and pain will be no more. The old order will have passed away, and God will make all things new. Creation itself, long burdened by the fall, will be liberated and renewed, the rupture of Genesis 3 fully healed, and the eternal community of love for which humanity was destined finally realized.

The purpose of Scripture's teaching on last things is not to construct prophetic timelines or satisfy theological curiosity, but to inspire urgency, holiness, comfort, and hope. Christ is coming. The dead will rise. Every account will be settled. The redeemed will be with Him forever. This is enough to live by, enough to die by, and enough to proclaim to all who have not yet heard.

REFERENCED SCRIPTURES

- Hebrews 9:27: appointed to die once and after that comes judgment.
- 2 Corinthians 5:6-8: absent from the body present with the Lord
- Philippians 1:21-23: to die is gain, to depart and be with Christ is far better
- Luke 23:43: today you will be with me in paradise
- Luke 16:22-23: the rich man conscious and aware immediately after death
- John 5:28-29: the resurrection of life and the resurrection of condemnation
- Daniel 12:2: many who sleep in the dust will awake to everlasting life or everlasting contempt.
- Acts 24:15: a resurrection of both the righteous and the unrighteous
- 1 Corinthians 15:51-53: we will all be changed at the last trumpet
- 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18: the dead in Christ will rise first, caught up to meet the Lord
- Acts 1:11: this same Jesus will return in the same way
- Revelation 1:7: every eye will see him
- Matthew 24:29-31: immediately after the tribulation, the gathering of the elect
- John 16:33: in the world you will have tribulation
- Acts 14:22: through many tribulations we enter the kingdom of God.
- Romans 5:3-4: affliction produces endurance, which produces proven character, which produces hope.
- Romans 8:35-37: more than conquerors through him who loved us.
- John 17:15: not that you take them out of the world but that you keep them from the evil one.
- Revelation 7:14: coming out of the great tribulation.
- Revelation 20:11-15: the great white throne judgment, the book of life.
- Matthew 25:31-46: the sheep and the goats, eternal punishment and eternal life.
- Matthew 25:46: eternal punishment and eternal life, the same word aionios for both.
- Mark 9:43-48: the worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.
- Revelation 20:10: tormented day and night forever and ever.
- Revelation 21:1-5: the new heaven and new earth, God making all things new.
- Revelation 21:4: no more death, mourning, crying, or pain.
- Romans 8:19-21: creation waiting for liberation and renewal.
- Isaiah 65:17-25: the new creation foretold.
- 2 Peter 3:13: new heavens and a new earth where righteousness dwells.
- Genesis 3: the relational rupture the new creation fully heals.

A CLOSING NOTE

This statement of faith was not simply accepted, but carefully examined. Every belief was compared with Scripture and tested, not assumed. Honest uncertainty is acknowledged, not ignored. This is not a final word, but a current conviction, held with confidence where Scripture is clear and with humility where it is not.

Soli Deo Gloria