

THE SOLA 5 CONFESSION OF FAITH

Adopted 30 September 2005

1 GOD

1.1 There is one living and true God,^{1,2} who exists in three distinct Persons—Father, Son and Holy Spirit.³ Each Person is fully God, yet the Godhead is one and indivisible.⁴

1.2 God's existence derives from himself,⁵ and he is set apart from all his creatures.⁶ He is pure spirit,⁷ having no body or unstable emotions.⁸ God is infinite in his being and perfections: changeless, eternal, almighty, most holy, all-knowing, most wise and

free.⁹ He is most loving, gracious, merciful, compassionate and forgiving;¹⁰ he rewards those who seek him,¹¹ but hates sin and is perfectly just in the punishment thereof.¹²

1.3 God is sovereign and works all things according to his own righteous will, for his own glory.¹³ From all eternity God decreed everything that would ever happen in time;¹⁴ he did this in perfect wisdom and holiness.¹⁵ Furthermore, God sustains and governs all his creatures by his supremely wise and holy providence. In so doing he fulfils the purpose for which they were created, in order that his own attributes and glory may be praised.¹⁶

1.4 In the providential outworking of his decree, God ordinarily works in an orderly, regular way, so that certain causes consistently produce the same

¹ Scripture texts are given to support the statements in this Confession. The aim in doing this is to give expression to the Confession's own conviction that the Bible alone is our final authority in all matters of faith and practice, and to encourage readers to ground their convictions directly on the Scripture. This Confession is not based on a superficial approach to theology whereby texts are used in isolation from their contexts to support statements by means of superficial verbal parallels. Rather, it is built on a responsible exegesis of the relevant texts in their literary and historical contexts, with due regard for the theological unity of Scripture.

² Deut 6:4; Jer 10:10; 1 Cor 8:4–6; 1 Thess 1:9.

³ Matt 28:19; 2 Cor 13:14.

⁴ Exod 3:14; John 14:11; 1 Cor 8:6; Acts 5:3–4; 1 Cor 3:16–17.

⁵ Isa 48:12; Acts 17:24–25.

⁶ Ps 113:4–6; 1 Tim 6:16.

⁷ Deut 4:15; John 4:24.

⁸ Num 23:19; Ps 33:11; Mal 3:6; Jas 1:17.

⁹ Mal 3:6; Jas 1:17; Ps 90:2; Rev 1:4; Isa 6:5; Rev 1:8; Isa 6:3; Rev 4:8; Ps 139:1–6; Ro 11:33–34; Dan 4:35; Rom 11:35–36; Eph 1:11b.

¹⁰ Exod 34:6–7; Ps 103:8–10.

¹¹ Jer 29:13; Heb 11:6.

¹² Neh 9:32–33; Ps 5:4–6; Hab 1:13; Rev 16:5–6; 19:11.

¹³ Rom 11:33–36.

¹⁴ Prov 16:4; Isa 46:10; Eph 1:11b; Rom 11:33–34; Rev 15:3–4.

¹⁵ Rev 15:3–4.

¹⁶ Ps 104; Matt 10:29–32; Acts 17:25–28; Ps 145:7; Isa 63:14; Rom 9:17; Eph 3:10.

effects. (This we call ordinary providence.)¹⁷ However, God is also free to work differently so that the normal relationships of cause and effect are temporarily suspended.¹⁸ (This we call extraordinary providence.) Recognizing God's ordinary and extraordinary providence is essential to the proper exercise of human responsibility in humble dependence on God.

- 1.5 God has revealed himself generally to all people in creation, in providence, and in their inner consciousness and conscience. This revelation does not lead to a saving knowledge of God but does leave people without excuse for their failure to glorify him as God and to give him thanks.¹⁹ God in grace has revealed himself savingly in Christ and through the Scriptures.²⁰

2 SCRIPTURE

- 2.1 God has revealed himself and his gospel fully and finally in the Person of his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.²¹ This revelation is preserved for us in the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments—the Bible.²²
- 2.2 The Bible in its original autographs is a supernatural, verbal revelation, given by the plenary inspiration of the Holy Spirit. God is its Author and it is therefore infallible, inerrant and

authoritative.²³ By God's singular care and providence his word to us has been faithfully preserved through the centuries.

- 2.3 All of God's special revelation to man in the present day is found in the Bible.²⁴ The Bible is sufficient, revealing all we need to know for salvation and godly living.²⁵ Nothing must be taken away from Scripture and nothing added to it. The Bible alone is our final authority in all matters of faith and practice; our consciences are bound by it alone, not by any council, creed, individual or supposed new revelation.²⁶
- 2.4 We recognize that our interpretation of Scripture is not infallible; nevertheless, we may gain a true and valid understanding of God's mind revealed in the Scripture.²⁷ To this end, our interpretation must be governed by the author's original intention and the context of the Scripture itself. There-

¹⁷ Ps 104; Isa 55:10–11; Acts 27:22, 31, 44.

¹⁸ Exod 3:2–3; 2 Kgs 6:6; Dan 3:27; Luke 1:34–35; Rom 4:19–21.

¹⁹ Ps 19:1–6; Rom 1:19–21; 2:14–15.

²⁰ Ps 19:7–14; John 1:14, 18; Rom 1:16–17.

²¹ John 1:14, 18; Heb 1:1–3.

²² Luke 24:25–27, 46–47; Rom 1:1–2; 2 Pet 1:12–21; 1 John 1:1.

²³ Exod 20:1; 2 Sam 23:1–2; 2 Kgs 17:13; 2 Chr 34:21; 36:21; Neh 9:30; Isa 8:20; Jer 1:9; 36:1–2; Ezek 1:3; Zech 7:12; Mal 4:4; Matt 21:42; 22:31–32, 43; 26:54, 56; Mark 12:24, 36; Luke 1:70; 24:44; John 1:23; 5:39; 10:34–35; 14:26; 16:13; 19:36–37; 20:9; Acts 1:16; 3:18; 7:38; 13:34; 28:25; Rom 1:2; 3:2; 4:23; 9:17; 15:4; 1 Cor 2:12–13; 6:16; 9:10; 14:37; Gal 1:11–12; 3:8, 16, 22; 4:30; 1 Thess 1:5; 2:13; 2 Tim 3:15–17; Heb 1:1–2; 3:7; 4:12; 9:8; 10:15; 2 Pet 1:18–21; 3:16; 1 John 4:6; Rev 14:13; 22:19.

²⁴ This statement is supported by the Biblical Theology of revelation; the following references should be read in relation to one another: Heb 1:1–2; Acts 1:21–22; 1 Cor 9:1; 15:7–8; Eph 2:20. See also §6.2.

²⁵ Isa 8:20; Luke 16:29–31; Eph 2:20 2 Tim 3:16–17.

²⁶ Deut 4:2; 12:32; Isa 8:20; Matt 15:1–9; 22:29, 31–32; Acts 17:11; 28:23–25; Rev 22:18–19.

²⁷ Ps 19:7–11; Prov 2:1–11.

fore, in seeking to understand a text, we depend on the illumination of the Holy Spirit, use the normal grammatico-historical rules of interpretation, and are assisted by the understanding of the true church throughout the ages.²⁸

3 CREATION, THE FALL AND SIN

- 3.1 In the beginning the Triune God created the heavens and the earth out of nothing, by the power of his word, in six days according to Scripture.²⁹ God created everything good and perfect for the glory of his own name.³⁰ God created mankind, male and female, in his own image.³¹ The whole human race is descended from Adam and Eve, the first man and woman.³²
- 3.2 God also created angels as moral, personal and spiritual beings.³³ Some of the angels rebelled against God and were cast out of heaven, thus becoming evil spirits called devils or demons; the chief among them is Satan.³⁴ Within the limits of God's permission, these creatures have a certain capacity to influence the world and oppose the work of God.³⁵
- 3.3 Adam and Eve wilfully and freely broke God's commandment.³⁶ By so

doing they lost their original righteousness and communion with God.³⁷

- 3.4 Since Adam was appointed to stand in the place of all mankind, each of his descendants inherits the guilt of his sin,³⁸ to which is added guilt for sins personally committed.³⁹ Furthermore, all people inherit a corrupt nature from their original ancestors, Adam and Eve. Thus, all people are by nature subject to God's wrath, to death, and to temporal and eternal misery unless the Lord Jesus sets them free. The corrupt nature inclines them away from all good and is the cause of all sin actually committed.⁴⁰ Apart from the regenerating work of the Spirit, man is dead in sin and therefore unable to turn himself towards God, or to exercise saving faith in Jesus Christ.⁴¹
- 3.5 Sin is rebellion against God and his law.⁴² It expresses itself in acts of disobedience by doing what he prohibits and failing to do what he requires.⁴³

4 REDEMPTION, THE PERSON AND WORK OF CHRIST

- 4.1 Although mankind, through Adam's fall, became dead in sin and unable to save himself, God was pleased to provide a way of salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ alone.⁴⁴ In order to inherit eternal life, it is essential for a person, by the sovereign intervention of God, to be taken out of Adam and

²⁸ 1 Cor 2:6–14; Eph 4:11–13; 2 Pet 3:15–16.

²⁹ Gen 1:1–2:3; Heb 11:3.

³⁰ Gen 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31; Ps 104:31; Rom 11:36.

³¹ Gen 1:26–27.

³² Gen 1:28; Acts 17:26.

³³ Col 1:16.

³⁴ Rev 12:7–9.

³⁵ Job 1:12; 2:6; Rev 12:10–17.

³⁶ Gen 3:1–19; Rom 5:14.

³⁷ Gen 3:10–11, 22–24;

³⁸ Rom 5:12–19.

³⁹ Rom 3:10–20.

⁴⁰ Ps 51:5; Rom 3:10–19; Eph 2:1–3.

⁴¹ Matt 11:27; 16:17; Rom 8:7; 1 John 5:1.

⁴² Rom 1:21; Eph 2:1–3; 1 John 3:4.

⁴³ Eph 2:1.

⁴⁴ John 5:39; 14:6; Acts 4:12.

united with Christ.⁴⁵ Salvation is in Christ and in him alone. God’s work of redemption proceeds from God’s grace alone, on the basis of Christ’s mediatory work alone, through faith alone.⁴⁶ In the deepest sense, all the initiative in salvation lies with God, and the glory for salvation belongs to God alone.⁴⁷

- 4.2 God’s salvation is revealed in the gospel, which forms the central focus of both Old and New Testaments.⁴⁸ In the Old Testament, the gospel was proclaimed through the promises, types and prophecies, which predicted the “sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow”;⁴⁹ the New Testament proclaims the fulfilment of God’s redemptive purposes through the life, ministry, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ.⁵⁰ Thus, believers of all ages receive salvation through their union with Jesus Christ, the only mediator between God and man.⁵¹
- 4.3 God calls all men to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and freely promises to all such people that they will be redeemed from sin and inherit eternal life.⁵² Furthermore, God has promised to give his Holy Spirit to all of his elect, in order that they may be made willing and able to repent and believe.⁵³ The elect constitute a great multitude of men and women whom

God appointed to eternal life before the foundation of the world.⁵⁴ God’s election was not based on anything seen or foreseen in the elect; it proceeded from his free and sovereign grace alone.⁵⁵ Furthermore, God the Father entrusted the elect to his Son, who undertook to redeem, call, justify, sanctify and glorify them.⁵⁶

- 4.4 In order to give effect to God’s eternal purpose, the eternal Son of God, the Second Person of the Trinity, took on human flesh: he was conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, and in this way two whole, perfect, distinct natures—divine and human—were inseparably joined together in one Person, the Lord Jesus Christ.⁵⁷ Being thus true God and true man, unchangeably sinless,⁵⁸ the Lord Jesus Christ was appointed mediator between God and man, prophet, priest and king.⁵⁹
- 4.5 Jesus Christ lived on this earth as a man under God’s law, which he perfectly fulfilled.⁶⁰ On the cross, he acted as substitute for his elect, bearing their sins and suffering God’s wrath in their place.⁶¹ He died and rose bodily on the third day; forty days after that he ascended to the right hand of the Father, from where he poured out his Holy Spirit on the Day of

⁴⁵ Rom 5:12–19.

⁴⁶ Rom 1:2–4, 16–17; Eph 2:8–9.

⁴⁷ Rom 11:33–36; Eph 3:1–14; Rev 5:9–10; 7:10.

⁴⁸ Luke 24:26–27, 44; John 20:30–31; Rom 1:1–4.

⁴⁹ Heb 10:1–12; 1 Pet 1:10–12.

⁵⁰ Acts 13:38–39; Gal 3:16–22.

⁵¹ Rom 4:16, 23–25.

⁵² Isa 55:1; John 3:16; Rom 9:33; Rev 22:17.

⁵³ Ps 110:3; John 6:37, 44; Acts 13:48; 16:14.

⁵⁴ Eph 1:4; Rev 5:9–10.

⁵⁵ Deut 7:7–8; Rom 9:11–16; 2 Tim 1:9.

⁵⁶ Isa 53:10–11; Matt 20:28; Luke 19:10; John 6:37–40; 10:27–28.

⁵⁷ Luke 1:35; John 1:1, 14; Rom 1:3–4; Phil 2:6–11; Col 2:9.

⁵⁸ Heb 4:15; 1 Pet 2:22.

⁵⁹ Luke 1:32; John 1:45 (quoting Deut 18:18); Heb 7:21; 1 Tim 2:5.

⁶⁰ Gal 4:4–5; Heb 5:8–9.

⁶¹ Is 53:4–6; Matt 20:28; 2 Cor 5:21.

Pentecost;⁶² at God's appointed time, he will return personally to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.⁶³ Jesus Christ is thus the Last Adam, through whose sinless life and atoning death believers are reconciled to God.⁶⁴ Through him, also, God is reconciling all things to himself.⁶⁵

- 4.6 By his perfect obedience and the once-for-all sacrifice of himself, the Lord Jesus Christ has brought about reconciliation and purchased an everlasting inheritance for all those given to him by his Father.⁶⁶ His death and resurrection are thus the guarantee of their eternal salvation.⁶⁷ By his present work of intercession, effectual calling, sanctification and sovereign rule, he certainly and effectually applies and communicates eternal redemption to all those for whom he obtained it.⁶⁸

5 THE APPLICATION OF REDEMPTION

- 5.1 When the time is ripe, the Holy Spirit lays claim to each of the elect through regeneration, enabling them to believe in Christ and thus be united to him.⁶⁹
- 5.2 Saving faith is ordinarily produced through the ministry of the Word.⁷⁰ It requires a knowledge of what God has revealed—about himself, man and the gospel—includes a conviction that these things are true, and comes to

fulfilment as the believer accepts, receives and rests upon Christ alone for justification, sanctification and eternal life.⁷¹ Any reliance which a person places in his own morality, good works or ceremonial faithfulness disqualifies him or her—whether that reliance is in place of or in addition to faith in Christ.⁷²

- 5.3 Evangelical repentance is a gift of God which is inseparable from saving faith. In repentance a person perceives that he or she has offended a holy God,⁷³ yet grasps that God in Christ is merciful to penitent sinners;⁷⁴ this leads to a turning from sin towards God, with the full purpose of and endeavour after obedience in all that God has commanded.⁷⁵
- 5.4 All who are united to Christ through saving faith are justified (declared righteous) by God.⁷⁶ This justification is an objective, legal declaration by which Christ's active obedience to God's law (i.e. his obedience to all of God's commands) and his passive obedience in death (i.e. his submission to the penalty of death) are imputed to the believer.⁷⁷ Justification is thus founded only upon the righteous life and sacrificial death of Christ, having no dependence on the personal righteousness of the believer.⁷⁸ Faith is the instrument of justification because it (from the human side) unites the believer to Christ; it is in no

⁶² Acts 1:3; 2:33; 1 Cor 15:3–6.

⁶³ 1 Thess 4:16; Heb 9:28.

⁶⁴ Rom 3:22–25; 5:18–19.

⁶⁵ Eph 1:10; Col 1:20.

⁶⁶ John 17:2–5; 2 Cor 5:18–19; 1 Pet 1:3–4.

⁶⁷ Rom 5:9–10; 8:32; Rev 5:9–10.

⁶⁸ Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25; John 6:37, 39; 10:4, 16, 27; 17:19; 1 Cor 1:30; Heb 10:10, 14.

⁶⁹ John 1:12–13; 3:3–8; 1 John 5:1.

⁷⁰ Rom 10:14–17.

⁷¹ John 20:20–31; Rom 10:9–11.

⁷² Gal 1:9; 3:10; 5:2–6.

⁷³ Ps 51:1–6; Acts 2:37–38.

⁷⁴ Is 55:7; Joel 2:12–13; Mark 1:4–5; Luke 15:17.

⁷⁵ Luke 3:8–9; 15:18–20; Acts 26:20; 1 Thes 1:9.

⁷⁶ Rom 3:22, 24; 4:5.

⁷⁷ Is 53:4–6; Rom 4:5–6; 5:18–19; 2 Cor 5:21.

⁷⁸ Luke 18:9–14; Rom 4:4–6; 1 Cor 1:30; Eph 2:8–9; 1 John 5:12.

way the basis of God's acceptance of the believer.⁷⁹ In Christ, believers are also adopted as God's children.⁸⁰

5.5 Saving faith and justification will, however, always result in a life of good works characterized by supreme love for God and for one's neighbour.⁸¹ According to Scripture, good works proceed from true faith, conform to the law of God, and are motivated by a desire for God's glory.⁸² Whereas unbelievers are unable to perform such works, believers have been and are increasingly sanctified by God's Word and Spirit to their performance.⁸³ Though the war with remaining sin continues as long as life in this world, the power of Christ enables believers increasingly to mortify sin and to grow in grace, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.⁸⁴ Therefore, while good works are not the root of true faith or the ground of justification, they are the necessary fruit—and evidence of the genuineness—of saving faith and justification.⁸⁵ Sanctification is so inseparable from justification that a person who fails to produce good works (as defined above) as a habit of life has no grounds for considering himself a believer.⁸⁶

5.6 Those whom God has regenerated, enabled to believe, justified, adopted and sanctified will certainly persevere in the state of grace to the end and be

eternally saved.⁸⁷ Believers may be severely tested by the world, the flesh and the devil, and may even, for a time, fall into grievous sins whereby they incur God's fatherly displeasure and grieve the Holy Spirit.⁸⁸ Yet they will certainly be kept by the power of God, who continues to nourish in them faith, repentance, love, joy, hope and all the graces of the Spirit.⁸⁹ This wonderful assurance is no encouragement to sin, for the Lord clearly warns that those who persist steadfastly in apostasy prove themselves never to have been true believers.⁹⁰

5.7 While the Word of God places a strong emphasis on God's initiative in the salvation of a sinner, it has an equally strong emphasis on human responsibility in the outworking of certain elements of the process of salvation: faith, repentance, sanctification and perseverance.⁹¹ This requires from the believer absolute commitment to the end of life.⁹² It is of the utmost importance to maintain the biblical tension between the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man in the process of salvation.

6 THE HOLY SPIRIT IN REDEMPTION

6.1 The Holy Spirit is from eternity truly God, the third Person of the Divine Trinity.⁹³

⁷⁹ Rom 6:3–10; Gal 2:20–21.

⁸⁰ Eph 1:5.

⁸¹ Rom 6:4, 14; Eph 2:10; 1 John 5:1–5.

⁸² Ps 112:1; Rom 2:7; 14:23; 1 Cor 10:31; 1 Tim 1:5.

⁸³ Rom 8:3–11.

⁸⁴ John 15:5; Rom 7:14–15; 3–4; 1 Cor 9:24–27.

⁸⁵ James 2:17, 26.

⁸⁶ Matt 7:21–23; 1 John 2:4.

⁸⁷ Rom 8:28–39; Phil 1:6.

⁸⁸ Ps 51:3–12; Matt 26:70, 72, 74.

⁸⁹ John 10:28–29; 1 Thess 5:23–24; 1 Pet 1:5.

⁹⁰ Col 1:22–23; Heb 10:26–27.

⁹¹ Matt 23:37–38; Phil 2:12–13.

⁹² Matt 10:22; 24:12–13.

⁹³ Acts 5:3–4; 2 Cor 13:14.

6.2 The foundation on which the church is established is God's revelation in Jesus Christ.⁹⁴ This foundation was laid as the Holy Spirit made the truth regarding Jesus Christ known to the apostles, thus enabling them to bear witness to him.⁹⁵ In this way, the apostles and their intimate co-workers were inspired by the Spirit to put the New Testament message into writing, and so to complete the Scripture.⁹⁶ Since the work of the apostles was unique and unrepeatable, the office of apostle ended when the last of the New Testament apostles passed from the scene.⁹⁷ Ever since the completion of the canon, the Spirit's means of communicating God's truth has been to illuminate the Scriptures which he inspired.⁹⁸

6.3 Although the Holy Spirit was already active in the Old Testament period, he was, according to the promises of the prophets, poured out in matchless abundance on the church after the ascension of Christ.⁹⁹ This happened on the Day of Pentecost, the Old Testament harvest festival. The Holy Spirit is therefore, in a special way, the Spirit of the New Testament harvest, which consists of the elect from the entire human race. His work is largely concerned with their calling and preservation in this life, and is accomplished by mediating Christ to his people.¹⁰⁰ Thus the work of the Holy

Spirit in believers is absolutely essential for their salvation.

- 6.4 The Holy Spirit is the central gift of the New Covenant.¹⁰¹ Ever since Christ poured out the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, believers have received the gift of his indwelling presence immediately upon the exercise of saving faith.¹⁰² Thus, all true believers have been baptized in (or by) the Spirit¹⁰³ and possess the gift of the Spirit—a gift which is neither to be patiently tarried for nor carnally peddled.
- 6.5 The initial work of the Spirit in illumination and regeneration leads to repentance and saving faith.¹⁰⁴ By the gift of the Spirit, God assures his children of their sonship and eternal life,¹⁰⁵ gives to them a foretaste of what is yet to come,¹⁰⁶ restores in them the image of God, conforming them to the likeness of Christ,¹⁰⁷ instructs them in the words and ways of Christ,¹⁰⁸ liberates them from the bondage of sin and enables them to obey God from the heart;¹⁰⁹ assists them in their prayers;¹¹⁰ mediates Christ's presence;¹¹¹ and unites them to one another.¹¹²
- 6.6 The Holy Spirit resides irrevocably in the hearts of all true Christians from the moment of their conversion, being

⁹⁴ John 1:18; 1 Cor 3:11.

⁹⁵ John 15:26–27; 16:13–15; Acts 1:21–25; Eph 2:20; 3:4–5.

⁹⁶ 1 Thess 2:13; 2 Pet 1:12–21; 3:15–16.

⁹⁷ 1 Cor 15:5–8.

⁹⁸ 2 Tim 3:16–17.

⁹⁹ Neh 9:20; Isa 63:11; Acts 2:1–39.

¹⁰⁰ John 14:16–18; 16:8–11; Eph 1:13–14.

¹⁰¹ Ezek 36:27; Acts 2:16–21.

¹⁰² Acts 2:39; Rom 8:9.

¹⁰³ 1 Cor 12:13.

¹⁰⁴ John 1:12–13; 1 Cor 2:6–16; 1 John 5:1.

¹⁰⁵ Ro 8:14–17.

¹⁰⁶ Ro 8:23; Eph 1:14.

¹⁰⁷ 2 Cor 3:18; Col 3:10.

¹⁰⁸ John 14:26.

¹⁰⁹ Gal 5:16–26.

¹¹⁰ Rom 8:26.

¹¹¹ John 14:16–18.

¹¹² 1 Cor 12:13.

received once and for all;¹¹³ nevertheless, the same Spirit continues to be supplied to them throughout their lives. Thus, it is the duty of those already indwelt by God's Spirit both to request further supplies and larger measures of the Holy Spirit, and to be filled continually with (i.e. controlled by) the Holy Spirit.¹¹⁴

6.7 It is crucial to recognize the Holy Spirit's work in the individual believer; nevertheless, since believers are baptized by the Spirit into the body, the corporate nature of the Holy Spirit's work should not be ignored.¹¹⁵ The Holy Spirit works within the individual in the context of the community of believers: both the gifts of the Spirit and the fruit of the Spirit assume the corporate nature of the Holy Spirit's work.¹¹⁶

6.8 The gift of the Holy Spirit is never completely taken away from true Christians, but he can be so grieved by their rebellions and backslidings, that for a season his presence is greatly withdrawn and his influences largely withheld.¹¹⁷ Therefore, it is the duty of all believers neither to grieve nor to quench the Holy Spirit.¹¹⁸

6.9 Each true congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ is charismatic by nature—in the sense that every believer receives a gift (or gifts) and is responsible to exercise it (or them) in practising the priesthood of the believer.¹¹⁹ This does not mean,

however, that the equipping work of the Holy Spirit is limited to the gifts that are explicitly mentioned in the New Testament. Neither does it mean that all the gifts which are mentioned still appear today. Clearly, the gifts associated with the work of the apostles in the time before the New Testament was completed—especially the revelatory gifts—disappeared with the finalization of the canon, since they were no longer needed.¹²⁰

7 THE CHURCH

7.1 The universal church consists of all the elect that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one under Christ, its head.¹²¹ This universal church is the bride and body of Christ, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way, and the agency which forms the focus of God's work of reconciling all things to himself.¹²² The universal church may be called invisible with respect to the internal work of the Spirit.

7.2 All those who profess faith in Christ and obedience to the gospel, and who do not destroy their profession by unholiness of conduct, are to be regarded as visible saints. A local church ought to be constituted only of visible saints.¹²³ In addition to this fundamental principle, true churches are recognized by their faithful preaching of the gospel,¹²⁴ pure observance of the ordinances in the

¹¹³ Eph 1:13.

¹¹⁴ Luke 11:13; Eph 5:18.

¹¹⁵ 1 Cor 12:12–13.

¹¹⁶ 1 Cor 12:4–11; Eph 5:18–21.

¹¹⁷ Eph 4:30.

¹¹⁸ 1 Thess 5:19.

¹¹⁹ Rom 12:3–8; 1 Cor 12:4–11; 1 Pet 4:10–11.

¹²⁰ See §6.2.

¹²¹ Heb 12:23.

¹²² Eph 1:9–10, 23; 3:6–11; 5:25–32.

¹²³ Matt 18:15–20; Acts 2:37–42; 1 Cor 5:1–9.

¹²⁴ Gal 1:6, 9.

fear of God,¹²⁵ practice of church discipline¹²⁶ and mutual love.¹²⁷

- 7.3 Christ is the Head of every local church, and he has given to each local church all that power and authority which are necessary for the exercise of worship and discipline.¹²⁸
- 7.4 Although officers are not essential to the existence of a local church, they are necessary for its well-being.¹²⁹ In the present age (i.e. the age after the founding and establishment of Christ's church on earth), Christ has appointed two offices for the government of the local church: elders (also known as pastors, bishops or overseers) and deacons.¹³⁰ It is the particular responsibility of elders to keep watch over the flock as men who must give an account, to provide sound teaching for the edification and strengthening of the saints, and to prepare God's people for works of service.¹³¹ Certain elders may be set apart to labour in preaching and teaching.¹³² Deacons are appointed to attend to ministries of mercy and other practical service, in order to free the elders for prayer and the ministry of the Word.¹³³
- 7.5 All believers are one under the headship of Christ, and it is his desire that they be perfected in unity.¹³⁴ Therefore, when God's providence provides the opportunity, local

churches ought to promote fellowship and cooperation among themselves.¹³⁵

- 7.6 In cases of difficulties—whether in matters of doctrine or administration—that concern the churches in general or any one church, it is Christ's will that representatives of the churches meet together to consider the matter and give their advice to all concerned.¹³⁶ It should be understood that the governance of a church is only valid to the extent that it conforms to the will of Christ the Head,¹³⁷ because Christ's will is not defined by the decisions of a local church or of its leaders, a church may often be helped to follow Christ by obtaining counsel from other churches.¹³⁸ The representatives do not have power to impose their decision on any church or its officers or members, but their counsel must be taken seriously, in the spirit of genuinely seeking the Lord's will; local churches should be aware of the danger of rejecting wise and godly counsel.¹³⁹
- 7.7 Baptism is one of the two New Testament ordinances (sometimes called sacraments). It is the formal expression of a believer's entry into a saving relationship with God through Christ,¹⁴⁰ and as such is a visible word: from the side of the person baptized, baptism is a visible and decisive expression of his or her repentance and faith in Christ;¹⁴¹ from God's side, baptism is a sign of the baptized

¹²⁵ Matt 28:18–20; 1 Cor 11:23–25.

¹²⁶ Matt 18:15–20; 1 Cor 5:1–9.

¹²⁷ John 13:34–35.

¹²⁸ Matt 18: 17–20; 1 Cor 5:4–5.

¹²⁹ Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5.

¹³⁰ 1 Tim 3:1–13.

¹³¹ Acts 20:28; Tit 1:9; Heb 13:17.

¹³² 1 Tim 5:17.

¹³³ Acts 6:1–7; 1 Tim 3:8–13.

¹³⁴ John 17:23.

¹³⁵ Acts 15:1–4; 2 Cor 8:18–24; Gal 2:10; Phil 1:4–5.

¹³⁶ Acts 15:1–35; Gal 2:2.

¹³⁷ Rev 1:12–20.

¹³⁸ Prov 12:15; 13:10; 19:20.

¹³⁹ Prov. 1:20–33.

¹⁴⁰ Acts 2:38–41; 1 Pet 3:21.

¹⁴¹ Acts 2:38–41; Rom 6:3–4.

person's union with Christ and remission of sins.¹⁴² It follows, therefore, that the only proper subjects of baptism are those who profess repentance and faith in Christ.¹⁴³ The due administration of this ordinance involves immersion in water.¹⁴⁴

- 7.8 The second New Testament ordinance is the Lord's Supper, which the Lord Jesus himself instituted on the night that he was betrayed. The Lord's Supper is observed by eating the bread and drinking the cup, which symbolize the body and blood of the Lord. The bread and cup are a visible proclamation of the death of Christ and its benefits for all who are united to Christ.¹⁴⁵ The Lord's Supper is to be observed regularly by all believers in good standing with their local church who, receiving the elements in faith, spiritually receive and feed upon Christ crucified and all the benefits of his death.¹⁴⁶

8 THE CHRISTIAN LIFESTYLE

- 8.1 It is the fundamental responsibility of all human beings to worship and serve their Creator.¹⁴⁷ Although unbelievers fail in this responsibility,¹⁴⁸ Christians, whose lives are being transformed and renewed by the gospel, are called to live lives of worship by offering

themselves as living sacrifices to God.¹⁴⁹

- 8.2 In addition to this worship, which embraces all of life, God's people are called to specific acts of public¹⁵⁰ and private¹⁵¹ worship. These specific acts of worship—including such elements as the preaching of the Word, prayer,¹⁵² observance of the ordinances,¹⁵³ and the singing of psalms, hymns and spiritual songs¹⁵⁴—are to be offered through Christ,¹⁵⁵ in spirit and in truth,¹⁵⁶ and according to the teachings of Scripture rather than in ways devised by man.¹⁵⁷
- 8.3 Christian ethics is controlled by God's Law, which is expressed in the two great commandments (to love God and our neighbour), summarized in the Ten Commandments, and applied to the New Testament believer by Christ and the apostles.¹⁵⁸
- 8.4 Christians are members of one another by virtue of their union with Christ;¹⁵⁹ therefore, participation in the fellowship of the Body of Christ through the local church is one of the believer's greatest privileges and responsibilities.¹⁶⁰ This fellowship is one of the most important means of proclaiming Christ to the world,¹⁶¹ as well as one of the believer's primary

¹⁴² Rom 6:3–4; Heb 10:22.

¹⁴³ Mat 28:19–20; Acts 2:37–41; 8:12–13, 36–38; 9:18; 10:47–48; 11:16; 15:9; 16:14–15, 31–34; 18:8; 19:3–5; 22:16; Rom 6:3–4; Gal 3:27; Col 2:12; 1Pe 3:21.

¹⁴⁴ John 3:23; 1 Cor 10:1–2.

¹⁴⁵ 1 Cor 11:23–29.

¹⁴⁶ John 6:29, 35, 47–58.

¹⁴⁷ Rom 1:19–21.

¹⁴⁸ Rom 1:18–23, 25, 28.

¹⁴⁹ Rom 12:1–2.

¹⁵⁰ Acts 2:42–47; 20:7.

¹⁵¹ Ps 119:148; Matt 6:6.

¹⁵² 1 Tim 4:13; 2:8.

¹⁵³ Matt 28:19–20; 1 Cor 11:18, 23–25.

¹⁵⁴ Col 3:16.

¹⁵⁵ 1 Pet 2:5.

¹⁵⁶ John 4:23.

¹⁵⁷ Lev 10:1–3; Deut 12:30–31; Matt 15:3.

¹⁵⁸ Matt 5:17–20; Mark 12:29–31; Rom 13:8–10.

¹⁵⁹ 1 Cor 12:12–27.

¹⁶⁰ Ps 84; Heb 10:25.

¹⁶¹ John 17:21.

sources of preservation, comfort and edification.¹⁶²

- 8.5 Christ has commanded his disciples to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.¹⁶³ Believers, therefore, have a responsibility to the world around them—without distinctions of race, language or class—to communicate the gospel of Jesus Christ by their actions, lifestyle and words.¹⁶⁴ In this way they are to make disciples of all nations.

9 CIVIL INSTITUTIONS: THE STATE AND MARRIAGE

- 9.1 As partakers of God's saving grace, believers are the firstfruits of God's new creation.¹⁶⁵ In the church, they begin to experience the fellowship that will characterize the new humanity.¹⁶⁶ Yet, believers continue to live in the present world and in human society, which is maintained and upheld by God's common grace.¹⁶⁷ In this human society, God has appointed civil rulers to maintain order and justice, if necessary, by the use of the sword.¹⁶⁸
- 9.2 Civil government is an institution separate from the church; it has no mandate to prescribe the doctrines and practices of any church, or to coerce its citizens into following one religion or another, or to prevent its citizens from practising religion.¹⁶⁹ Although

the church has no institutional connection with the civil government, believers have a prophetic responsibility to remind the government of its accountability to God and of those principles of justice which accord with the will of God revealed in Scripture and in the human conscience.¹⁷⁰

- 9.3 God has commanded Christians, within the limits of obedience to God, to submit to their rulers, to participate in the life of their society, and to promote the well-being of their fellow citizens.¹⁷¹
- 9.4 Marriage is a lifelong, covenantal union between one natural man and one natural woman; it must be entered into publicly and formally. It was ordained by God at creation for the mutual help of husband and wife, and for the propagation of the human race.¹⁷² Marriage is thus the basis of the family, which is the essential building-block of any stable society.¹⁷³
- 9.5 Since marriage is a creation ordinance, its privileges and commitments apply to both believers and unbelievers. However, it is the duty of Christians to marry only in the Lord.¹⁷⁴

¹⁶² Heb 3:13; 1 John 4:12.

¹⁶³ Matt 5:13–16.

¹⁶⁴ Matt 28:18–20; Rom 1:14; Titus 2:11–14.

¹⁶⁵ 2 Cor 5:17; Eph 3:10–11; Jas 1:18.

¹⁶⁶ Heb 12:22–23.

¹⁶⁷ Ps 145:9; Rom 2:15; 1 Pet 1:1.

¹⁶⁸ Rom 13:1–4; 1 Pet 2:14.

¹⁶⁹ Matt 5:43–47; Matt 18:15–17; Acts 4:19; 1 Cor 5:9–13; Rom 13:3–4.

¹⁷⁰ Ps 2; 146:7–9; Prov 31:8–9; Rev 18.

¹⁷¹ Jer 29:4–7; Matt 5:38–47; Acts 4:19; 1 Thess 4:11–12; 1 Pet 2:13–25.

¹⁷² Gen 1:27–28; 2:20–24; Deut 24:1; Matt 19:4–6.

¹⁷³ Ex 20:12; Deut 6:7, 20–25; Mal 2:15; Eph 6:1–3.

¹⁷⁴ 1 Cor 7:39.

10 DEATH, RESURRECTION, JUDGEMENT AND THE FINAL STATE

- 10.1 After death, the human body returns to dust; the spirit, however, is immortal and neither dies nor sleeps.¹⁷⁵ The spirits of the righteous are received into the presence of the Lord in anticipation of their final resurrection and full eternal inheritance.¹⁷⁶ The spirits of the wicked are cast into hell, where they await their final judgement.¹⁷⁷
- 10.2 A time is coming when all the dead shall be raised and their souls united to their imperishable, resurrected bodies forever.¹⁷⁸
- 10.3 After the general resurrection there will be a day on which God will judge the world in righteousness by Jesus Christ.¹⁷⁹ All people who have ever lived upon earth will be judged in perfect righteousness, according to what they have done.¹⁸⁰ The righteous will receive the reward of eternal joy, everlasting life and imperishable glory in the presence of the Lord; the wicked, who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, will be cast aside into everlasting torments, punished with everlasting destruction, and shut out from the gracious presence of the Lord and the majesty of his power.¹⁸¹
- 10.4 Although the final judgement is according to works, it is not as though the righteous earn or deserve the eternal life which they will receive.¹⁸² Their good works are merely the evidence of God's gifts of regeneration, faith, justification and union with Christ, for whose sake alone they are given their eternal inheritance.¹⁸³ On the other hand, those who will be condemned will be fully deserving of their punishment, since their works arise from a heart at enmity with God and find expression in the rejection of God's kindness, righteous claims and holy law.¹⁸⁴ Thus, the Day of Judgement will glorify God: by the display of his mercy and grace in the salvation of believers, and by the manifestation of his justice in the condemnation of unbelievers.¹⁸⁵
- 10.5 God has clearly revealed that the day and hour of Christ's coming are unknown to men.¹⁸⁶ His purpose is that they should shake off carnal security, reject the distraction of date-setting, and keep watch at all times, since they do not know the day or hour.¹⁸⁷ Thus prepared for the glorious appearing of their Lord and Saviour, they will always be ready to say, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly. Amen."¹⁸⁸

¹⁷⁵ Gen 3:19; Matt 10:28; Luke 16:23; 23:43; 2 Cor 5:6-8; Heb 9:27.

¹⁷⁶ Luke 16:23; 2 Cor 5:6-8; Phil 1:21-23; Rev 6:9.

¹⁷⁷ Luke 16:23-28; Acts 1:25; 2 Pet 2:9.

¹⁷⁸ John 5:28-29.

¹⁷⁹ John 5:26-3; Acts 17:31.

¹⁸⁰ Rom 2:5-10; Rev 20:12-13.

¹⁸¹ Matt 25:31-46; Rom 2:6-10; 2 Thess 1:9-10.

¹⁸² Rom 6:23; Eph 2:9-10.

¹⁸³ Rom 5:1-2, 9-10; 6:23.

¹⁸⁴ Rom 1:18-21; 2:1-5; 3:9-20.

¹⁸⁵ Rom 9:22-23; 2 Thess 1:10; Rev 15:3-4.

¹⁸⁶ Matt 24:36-41; 1 Thess 5:1-3.

¹⁸⁷ Matt 24:42-25:30; 1 Thess 5:4-11.

¹⁸⁸ Rev 22:20.