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*"[F]or us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist"*

1 Corinthians 8:6

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## Introduction

Now we press on to consider *Our Faith: How We Know and Love the Lord*. Before we dive in, I want to give you a sense of how this session will be structured:

1. First, I simply want to reintroduce our Value of Faith to us.
2. Then, I want to discuss two particular Passions that flow from this Value.
3. Finally, we will discuss our Core Confession and Doctrinal Distinctives.

## From Him, for Him, and through Him

As I attempt to quickly introduce our Value of Faith, let me begin by directing us to the short description I gave us last time: "Faith: Knowing and Loving the Lord—We are the Bride of Christ, created and redeemed to enjoy intimate union with Him. This Value presses our church upwards in love for Him."

I chose 1 Corinthians 8:6, as the key verse for this Value. Commenting on this verse, Leon Morris writes: "We came from him and we live for him; he is our origin and goal" (TNTC 7, p. 125).

Human beings were created and designed to participate in transcendent reality—a reality that extends far above us, a reality that invigorates and infuses the material, tangible world in which we live. We are not supposed to look up at the stars, see the endless expanse, and merely confine our reflections to the realms of our science or art. We are to move in our reflections beyond the stars to the God who created them and us—"The heavens declare the glory of God" (Psa 19:1). It's as if God is crying out for relationship with us from all corners of His creation. That's why Paul would say: "He is actually not far from each one of us, for 'In Him we live and move and have our being'" (Acts 17:27–28). He is all around us. He is our atmosphere. He is our reason for being.

This is what makes the secular humanistic worldview of our culture so thoroughly dissatisfying—"Life is all about man; we don't need God!" They suck the soul right out of the universe. And everything just falls to the floor like a corpse. There's no transcendent anymore. There's no meaning anymore. There's no God.

We mistakenly think getting rid of God will be our freedom, but it truly becomes our slavery. We mistakenly think getting rid of God will make us more like gods—we get to call the shots, rule our lives, do what we want—but it truly makes us more like the animals—we are ruled by our instincts, in bondage to our lusts, destructive in our habits.

The second part of 1 Corinthians 8:6 points us in the direction of God's great redemption and rescue. He has not left Himself without a witness in creation. And He has not left us without a Savior in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, the One through whom He created all things, is also now the One redeeming all things. He is the One "through whom

we exist". He is the One who "suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God" (1 Pet 3:18). He puts the soul back in the universe, He gives the stars back their singing voice, He brings man back to God! And now we can again know and love Him, just as we were created to do!

This is what we mean when we say we value Faith in this church. We are pressing upwards into this relationship.

## Our Passions

### 1. The Divine Word

But how do we know that any of what I just said is actually true? How do we know that this is what God is like—that this is what God has done and is doing? How do we come to know and love this God?

Answer: He has spoken to us—"Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son" (Heb 1:1-2).

From the beginning, our God speaks. He knows and loves us and wants to be known and loved by us. He doesn't leave us to our vain imaginations. He speaks through the fog and reveals Himself truly to us. That's why we speak of this Value as Faith: "[F]aith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ" (Rom 10:17). We come to know and love God by trusting what He has spoken and revealed to us of Himself.

This leads us to what I would identify as a Passion of Mercy Hill Church: namely, we are passionate about The Divine Word. In other words, we are passionate about the Bible, for the Bible is God's word to us: "All Scripture is breathed out by God" (2 Tim 3:16). In the Scriptures, it's as if God pulls up a chair next to us, and begins to speak.

As a church, there are two ways we can relate to this Divine Word that I want to quickly reflect on: (1) We Sit Under It; and (2) We Stand Upon It.

#### 1. We Sit Under It

The Word of God, as it has been recorded for us in Scripture, is to be set over us, and we are to situate ourselves under it. We do not place ourselves above Him, but take our place under Him, at His feet. May it always be that God gets the first word in this church!

In fact, it's 2 Timothy 3:16 that fuels the charge Paul gives to Timothy in 4:1-2—" [P]reach the word." "Set this word over your people Timothy...and preach it!"

I remember hearing Mark Dever speak about the symbol of the pulpit in our churches. So many in this postmodern era have been ready to do away with the pulpit and the preaching that animates it. "Isn't preaching an outdated way of communicating? Isn't such a method detestable to the postmodern man?"

Have you ever heard someone say, or perhaps you've even said yourself: "Don't preach at me!" What is meant by this? Is it not that we are saying: "Don't talk down to me, as if you know and I don't. How could you be so arrogant?!" Preaching in our day has come to be synonymous with pride and pushiness.

If we want to effectively reach people in the current cultural climate, should we not break down our pulpits and use their wood to build tables, around which we can sit and simply, harmlessly, humbly dialogue with others?" Certainly there is a place in the church for the table. But the table must not replace the pulpit, or the church will go with it!

Preaching—what I am doing right now—must not be interpreted as: “Nick thinks he is better than everyone else in this room.” Certainly men have used the pulpit for this kind of vainglory, and this perhaps is why so many now have a great disdain for it. But the pulpit and preaching serve a much more sublime reality. They remind us not that Nick is above us, but that God is above us—that God gets the first word; that we have been created because God spoke over the formless void and life came forth; that we have been redeemed because God spoke over our dead bones and life came forth once more.

That is why we are passionate about the pulpit in this church! Not so that Nick can push his agenda on everyone, but so that God can bring the dead to life and, once alive, can continue guiding, nourishing, cherishing, and preserving His bride!

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*May it always be that God gets the first word in this church!*

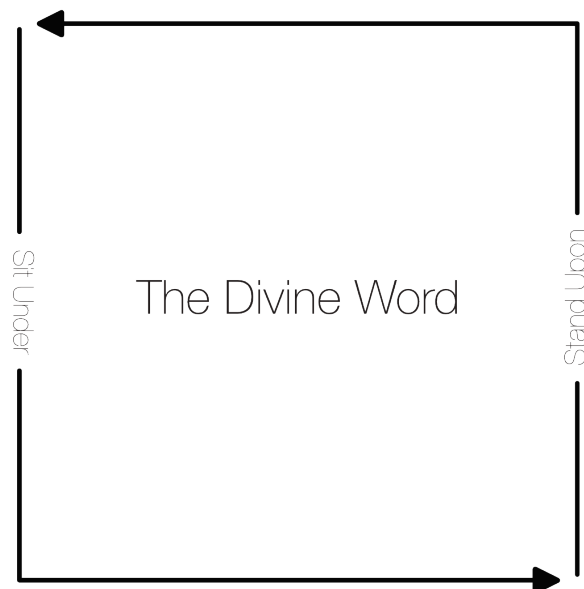
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## 2. We Stand Upon It

And this leads to the second way we relate as a church to this Divine Word: We Stand Upon It. We are a church that sets over us the Word of God. Preaching is just one way we do this. It’s symbolic of the whole of our lives, lived under the authority of His Word.

But, although God’s word is over us, it doesn’t oppress us. God is not a tyrant. He’s a Servant. So as we set His Word over us, we find that it actually starts to lay a stable foundation underneath us. That which we sit under, we find that we stand upon! God speaks, even hard words, not to tear us down, but to build us up.

Hear now the full context of 2 Timothy 3:16 into verse 17: “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” God is profiting you, completing you, equipping you as He speaks! The Divine Word which we sit under is also that which we stand upon!



## 2. Mysterious Orthodoxy

There's a second Passion I want to highlight at this point. We are passionate about what I call "Mysterious Orthodoxy". Here's what I mean. Is God one or is He three? Is Jesus God or is He man? Is God sovereign or is man responsible? The answer to all of these questions is simply: yes. But when we are asked how this is so, the answer is simply: I don't know. God says it. I believe it.

Now, perhaps, you see how the first passion flows into the second. We take God at His word, even when it leads us headlong into mystery.

So much of what is now considered biblical orthodoxy has been forged along the lines of mystery. The church has learned over the years to articulate clearly even what she doesn't understand fully—the doctrines of the trinity and of Christ being perfect examples.

On the other hand, so much of what is now understood to be heresy, veered off into such error precisely because men felt they must strip God of the mystery. "It must fit into our minds or it cannot be so." Jesus could not have been both fully God and fully man. Therefore, maybe He wasn't fully God (the heresy of Arianism). Or maybe He wasn't fully man (the heresy of Docetism). Mysterious Orthodoxy says, "I don't know how, but He's both."

I am reminded here of what J.I. Packer says concerning biblical truth and what he calls "antinomies":

[An antinomy] is an apparent incompatibility between two apparent truths. An antinomy exists when a pair of principles stand side by side, seemingly irreconcilable, yet both undeniable. There are cogent reasons for believing each of them; each rests on clear and solid evidence, but it is a mystery to know how they can be squared with each other. You see that each must be true on its own, but you do not see how they can both be true together. Let me give you an example. Modern physics faces an antinomy, in this sense, in its study of light. There is cogent evidence to show that light consists of waves, and equally cogent evidence to show that it consists of particles. It is not apparent how light can be both waves and particles, but the evidence is there, and so neither view can be ruled out in favor of the other. Neither, however, can be reduced to the other or explained in terms of the other; the two seemingly incompatible positions must be held together, and both must be treated as true. Such a necessity scandalizes our tidy minds, no doubt, but there is no help for it if we are to be loyal to the facts.<sup>1</sup>

Speaking particularly of the antinomy that entails between God's sovereignty and man's responsibility, Packer goes on to write:

What the Bible does is to assert both truths side by side in the strongest and most unambiguous terms as two ultimate facts; this, therefore is the position we must take in our own thinking. C. H. Spurgeon was one asked if he could reconcile these two truths to each other. "I wouldn't try," he replied; "I never reconcile friends." Friends?—Yes, *friends*. This is the point that we have to grasp. In the Bible, divine sovereignty and human responsibility are not enemies. They are not uneasy neighbors; they are not in an endless state of cold war with each other. They are *friends*, and they work together.<sup>2</sup>

Again, we must learn to articulate clearly what we can't understand fully. And such a thing is actually quite reasonable. To say that God will, in some sense, always be unreasonable to us, is, in fact, one of the most reasonable things I could say. For how unreasonable is it to think that the infinite, eternal, omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, holy One could be fully contained within the miniscule compass of a creature's mind? He is the Creator, we are the creature. Can an ant comprehend the full extent of human complexity? Certainly we would not say so. And yet the distance between man and God is infinitely greater than that between the ant and

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<sup>1</sup> *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

man. How much more so should we be willing to admit, then, that some mystery will, even must, subsist at the very core of our faith. And so it does!

If a man is to become a Christian, he must finally reach a place where he is willing to say: “Jesus, I want you not just as my Savior, but as my Lord.” By this I mean that he must fully surrender to Christ’s authority: “What You say goes.” Until then, I am quite certain that a person cannot even be saved. You either have Him as Savior and Lord, or you do not have Him at all.

And when Jesus is Lord, if we come to things in His Word that we don’t understand, we don’t raise our objections and our fists. We might struggle. We might question. This is okay. But at last, we have learned the secret of Psalm 131: “O Lord, my heart is not lifted up; my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me” (v. 1). We let Him be God. We receive His interpretation of reality, even if we can’t figure out how it all fits together.

Somewhere along the way we started thinking the we must have all our questions answered before we can believe. But this is really quite foolish when once we step back and consider it. How can we, a finite, time-bound creature possibly wrap our little minds around the infinite, eternal Creator? It is unthinkable (pun intended). Far better would it be for us if we would stop trying to steal the seat of honor around the table and just put ourselves in the seat of a child (they have more of the fun anyways). God is on the throne. Ours is to trust Him and relax.

Now I am not saying we are not to think deeply about the revelation He has given us in the Scriptures. I am giving my life over to such deep thinking! But I do mean to say that, when at last we have studied and prayed and inquired, and still we don’t know how God can be both one and three, or how Jesus can be both God and man, or how God is absolutely sovereign and yet man is still responsible—we don’t throw it all out, but accept it on faith. Not blind faith, but a faith that sees clearly: He is God, and we are not. We embrace the mystery, because He is Savior, because He is Lord, and we trust Him.

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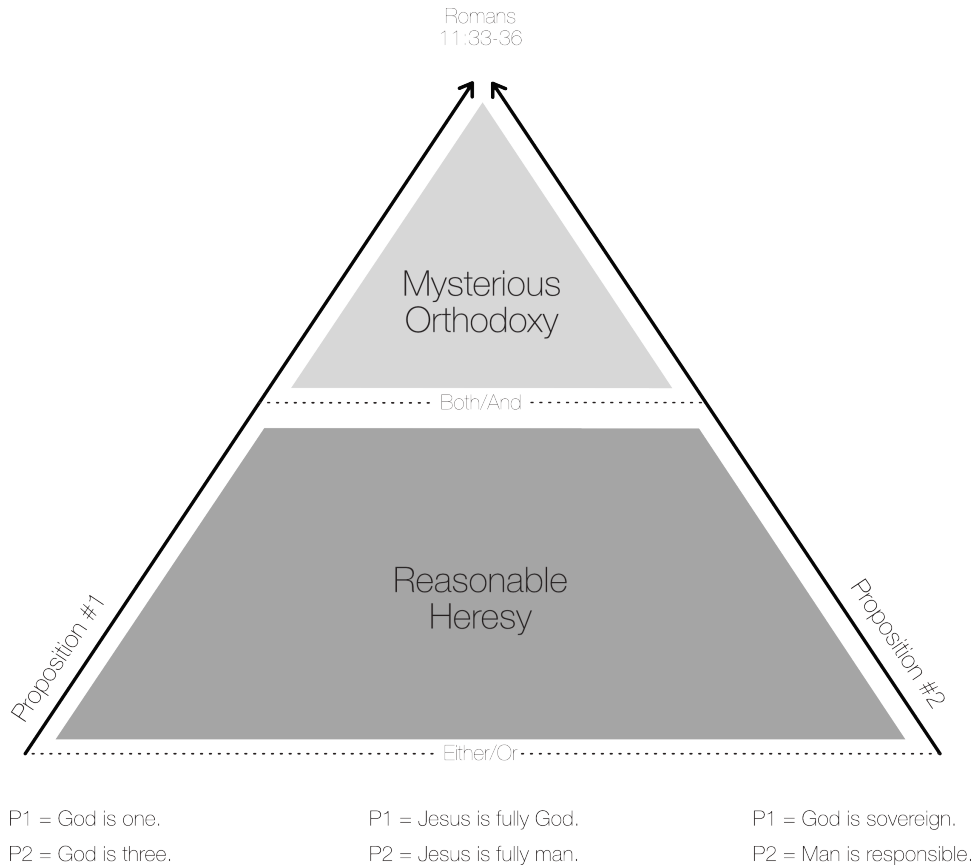
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This mystery will ultimately lead us to one of two places: grumbling or glorying. It either fuels our resentment of God or our worship of Him.

We want to come out where Paul comes out in Romans 11 after dealing with the deep mysteries of God’s sovereign grace and election: “Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and how inscrutable His ways! ‘For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been His counselor?’ ‘Or who has given a gift to Him that he might be repaid?’ For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be glory forever. Amen” (vv. 33–36).

As a church, when we come to things we can’t piece together in His word, this is where I want us to go! Not to grumbling and resentment, but to glorying and worship!

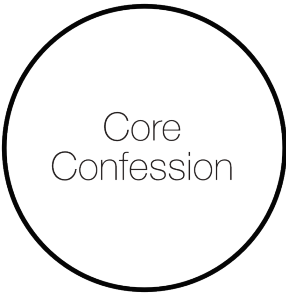


## Our Core Confession

All of this was to set us up to talk about Our Faith in particular—what we believe in this church; our Core Confession and our Doctrinal Distinctives.

In Appendix 3 you will find what we are calling our Core Confession. It's a statement that's been adapted with some significant modification from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary's Abstract of Principles.

This Core Confession provides an index of core biblical teaching, all of which you would need to hold to in order to be a Covenant Member here. Many of the articles we would consider necessary for salvation. All of the articles we would consider necessary for spiritual health.



This does represent an official change in our church's statement of faith, a change that came through much discussion with the Elders and some of the Deacons. But please do not worry. Nothing substantially has changed regarding what we as a church believe. There is nothing in this Core Confession about Joseph Smith or golden plates. I just simply appreciated the fact that this confession self-consciously roots itself in the historical confessions that came before it, and I thought it was more articulate and comprehensive in its presentation.

We did modernize a bit of the language and modify a bit of the content. If I could say a word about this modification. We actually modified the statement to be intentionally ambiguous regarding the secondary issues of the faith. We took out clear statements about God's sovereignty in salvation, about the proper administration of baptism, among other things. The goal was not to water down our church's positions on these secondary matters (as we'll see in our Doctrinal Distinctives), but to widen our church's doors so as to welcome into the membership of this local church more of those who seem to be genuine members in Christ's universal church.

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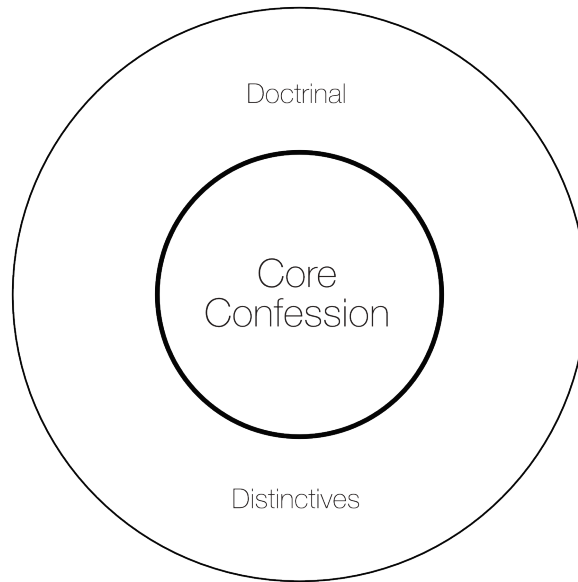
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We also wanted to make space in our community for people to wrestle with these secondary matters. Yes, they believe that Jesus lived, died, rose again for their sins. But they might not yet understand the sovereign work of God in it all. It might take a while to see the Bible's teaching on this point. It certainly took me a while. As a church, we want people to be able to grow in their faith, and not frontload the whole index of our theology on every member.

It seems to me that this is how Jesus Himself approached His disciples. There were so many things that these guys didn't understand fully, or even rightly, about Him. But they had this going for them: they knew they needed a Savior, and they knew they wanted Him to be their Lord. Jesus could work with that. And so can we.

## Our Doctrinal Distinctives

But from our Core Confession we press on into our Doctrinal Distinctives. These Distinctives lay out our position on the more secondary matters and distinguish us from other churches and other Christians. Complete agreement here is not required for the sake of membership, but will be required for the sake of Eldership. So it should be known that we will preach, teach and counsel in accordance with these convictions.



Some churches and denominations would limit their theology and ministry to the Core Confession, to the lowest common denominator. They might claim that pressing into Doctrinal Distinctives is unnecessarily divisive and a hindrance to the church's witness before the world. After all, it is these secondary matters, these Doctrinal Distinctives, that in many ways have given rise to the myriad and ever-splintering Christian denominations that exist today.

But there is a significant problem with this from a pastoral perspective. It is my call from the Lord, to preach to you the whole counsel of God. How in the world do I do that and not address these secondary issues in some way? What do you do when you come to Romans 9 or 1 Corinthians 12? You teach on it. And, oftentimes, you'll need to land somewhere. If we don't make a decision about baptism—whether it's for infants or only believers—then what? For the sake of unity do we just start neglecting baptism altogether? If we don't make a decision about male and female design and roles in the church, then what? Who preaches? Who can become an Elder? On a lot of these issues you will need to land somewhere in order to function as a church. It doesn't mean you claim to have a monopoly on the truth, but it does mean you claim to have a conviction about it, and you are doing your best to be faithful to the full counsel of God.

A better way, I think, has been forged by the Elders over at Bethlehem Baptist. This is how their Elder Affirmation of Faith ends:

We do not believe that all things in this affirmation of faith are of equal weight, some being more essential, some less. We do not believe that every part of this affirmation must be believed in order for one to be saved. Our aim is not to discover how little can be believed, but rather to embrace and teach—the whole counsel of God. Our aim is to encourage a hearty adherence to the Bible, the fullness of its truth, and the glory of its Author. We believe Biblical doctrine stabilizes saints in the winds of confusion and strengthens the church in her mission . . . We believe that the cause of unity in the church is best served, not by finding the lowest common denominator of doctrine, around which all can gather, but by elevating the value of truth, stating the doctrinal parameters . . . , seeking the unity that comes from the truth, and then demonstrating to the world how Christians can love each other across boundaries rather than by removing boundaries. In this way, the importance of truth is served by the existence of doctrinal borders, and unity is served by the way we love others across those borders.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-bethlehem-baptist-church-elder-affirmation-of-faith>.



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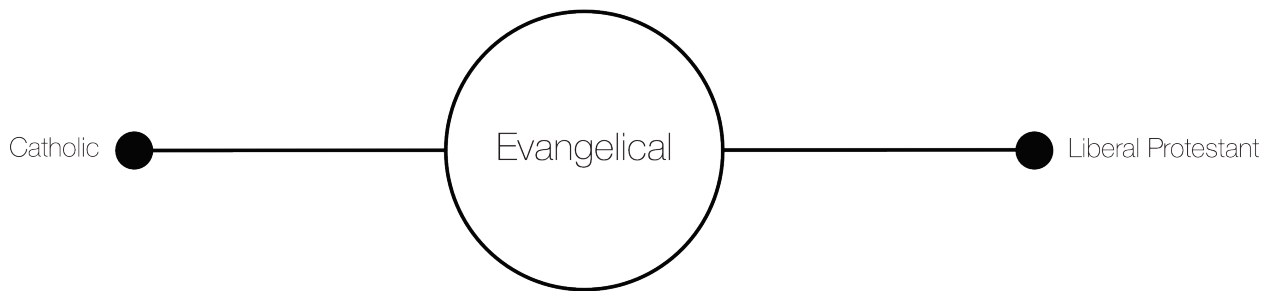
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Draw your doctrinal boundaries, but cross over them in love! We're not lobbing grenades across the lines we've drawn but putting out the right hand of fellowship.

So what are Mercy Hill's Doctrinal Distinctives? Beginning with the most fundamental and moving out from there, we are: (1) Evangelical; (2) Reformed; (3) Continuationist; (4) Complementarian; and (5) Baptist in our theology.

## 1. Evangelical



At the broadest level, we are Evangelicals. This really just serves to put a sharper point on all that our Core Confession maintains. By Evangelical we mean that we are not Catholic on the one hand—*adding to God's word and gospel*; nor are we Liberal Protestants on the other hand—*taking away from God's word and gospel*. We are Evangelical—*holding to the authority of God's word and the centrality of the gospel*.

For our conviction concerning the authority of God's word, see Appendix 4: Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy.

For our conviction concerning the centrality of the gospel, consider the following statement (quoting the first distinctive of the Acts 29 Network):

**We Are Passionate About Gospel Centrality**

We believe the gospel is the good news of what God has graciously accomplished for sinners through the sinless life, sacrificial death, and bodily resurrection of his Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ, namely our forgiveness from sin and complete justification before God; this gospel is also the foundation for our

confidence in the ultimate triumph of God's kingdom, and the consummation of his purpose for all creation in the new heavens and new earth.

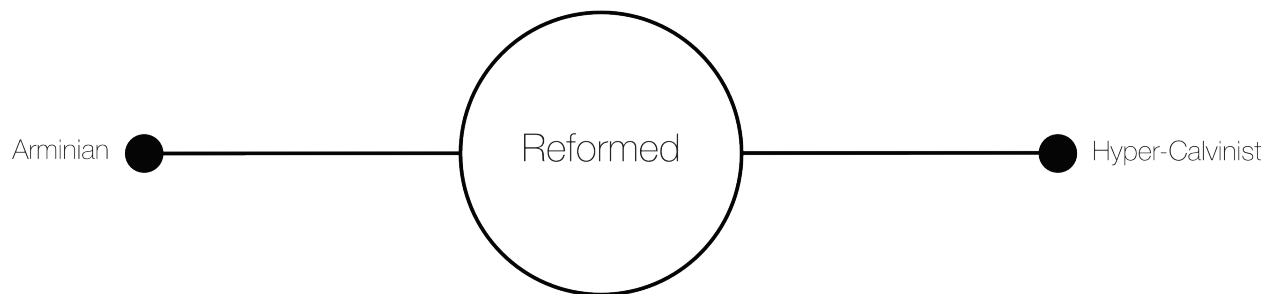
This gospel is centered in Christ, is the foundation for the life of the Church, and is our only hope for eternal life; this gospel is not proclaimed if Christ's penal substitutionary death and bodily resurrection are not central to our message.

This Gospel is not only the means by which people are saved, but also the truth and power by which people are sanctified; it is the truth of the Gospel that enables us to genuinely and joyfully do what is pleasing to God and to grow in progressive conformity to the image of Christ.

The salvation offered in this gospel message is received by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone; no ordinance, ritual, work, or any other activity on the part of man is required in order to be saved.

Mark 1:1; Luke 24:46-47; John 3:16-18; Rom 1:16-17, 18-25; 1 Cor 1:18-25; 2:2; 15:1-4; 2 Cor 4:1-6; 9:13; Gal 1:6-9; Eph 1: 7-10; Col 1: 19-20; 2 Tim 1:8-14; 2 Pet 3: 11-13 Jude 3-4; Rev 21:1-22:21

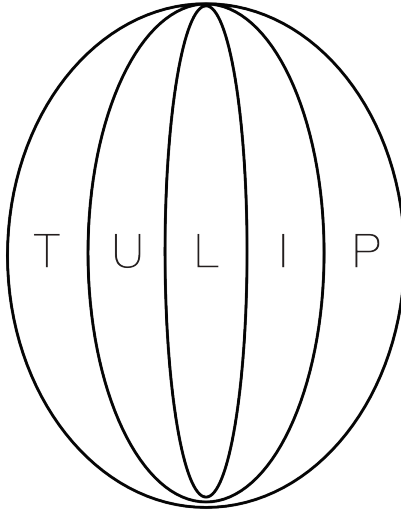
## 2. Reformed



By Reformed we mean that we hold to a view of God, in general, and salvation, in particular, that was regained and clarified in the Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, especially by John Calvin.

In our understanding of salvation, we are not Arminian on the one hand—*man's will is decisive in his salvation*; nor hyper-Calvinist on the other hand—*man's will is irrelevant in his salvation*. We are Reformed—*God's will is decisive in determining our salvation but He works, in a mysterious way, not apart from our will, but in and through it*.

This Reformed view of salvation is best crystallized in what has come to be known as the five points of Calvinism, memorably contained within the acronym T-U-L-I-P.



Total Depravity | Unconditional Election | Limited Atonement | Irresistible Grace | Perseverance of the Saints

Let's look at these five points briefly one by one.

### 1. Total Depravity

By Total Depravity we mean, essentially, that man is dead in his sin, wholly opposed to God by nature: "The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor 2:14).

Did you catch that? We are so corrupt in our sin, that we need the Spirit before we could ever receive the things of the Spirit. This is why Jesus would say to Nicodemus: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again [by the Spirit (v. 5)] he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).

Or consider Paul's devastating estimation of humanity in Ephesians 2:1-5:

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved.

The Scriptures depict men not as drowning in the sea of their sin, but dead at the bottom it. Salvation, therefore, is not God in Christ casting out a lifesaver for drowning people to grab a hold of if they so will. No! Salvation is God in Christ diving down to the ocean floor, grabbing a hold of us—ice-cold sinners, dragging us up to the surface, and bringing us back to life!

We are not merely drowning, we are drowned. We are born dead. And in Him, we are born again!

### 2. Unconditional Election

By Unconditional Election we mean that God chose you not on the basis of any condition you met, but with regard to His mercy alone: "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy" (Rom 9:15).

With Total Depravity as our presupposition, it is clear, we cannot choose God. Therefore, if we are to be saved, God must choose us. Which is why Jesus would turn to His disciples and say “You did not choose Me, but I chose you” (John 15:16). And it’s why Luke would record that when Paul and Barnabas were preaching in Antioch: “as many as were appointed to eternal life believed” (Acts 13:48).

And He chooses us, appoints us, elects us unconditionally: “[God] saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began” (2 Tim 1:9).

### **3. Limited Atonement**

Now this one gets a little controversial, even among the Reformed. Even I am not all that happy with the language. It’s a question of the perspective from which you view the atonement.

In one sense, Christ’s atonement, His death on the cross, is not limited but universal. It is sufficient to pay for the debt of all mankind. Jesus is “the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). It is not as if He needed 6 quarts of blood to purchase all of humanity but he only had 5—“Whoops, I guess I’ll settle for limited atonement.”

No! That’s not it. His blood is sufficient for any who would come. But, shifting perspectives, while it is *universal* in one sense, it is *limited*, or *definite*, or *particular*, in another sense. He paid for a specific people—those whom “God chose . . . in Him before the foundation of the world” (Eph 1:4). He offered up His life as the bride price, as it were. He died not hoping that His bride would come, but so that His bride would come.

This is why some prefer to call this Definite Atonement. But T-U-D-I-P doesn’t have quite the same ring to it.

### **4. Irresistible Grace**

By Irresistible Grace we mean that when God purposes to save a person, there is no stopping Him.

So many go to the story of Lazarus as an illustration of this. Lazarus is dead, but Jesus is the King. And from outside the tomb He ushers the royal summons: “Lazarus, come out” (John 11:43). And the dead man came out. He couldn’t resist this grace.

That’s how you and I got saved! Read Ezekiel 37 if you don’t believe me.

### **5. Perseverance of the Saints**

By Perseverance of the Saints we mean that, if you’re in Christ, you’re going to make it to the end.

Hear me, O sin-sick, storm-tossed Christian. You’re not even sure your faith will last through the day, let alone through to glory. Perseverance of the Saints says, “I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:6).

“He . . . began.” Because He began, He will bring it to completion. Do you really think God won’t finish what He’s started?! “[T]hose whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified” (Rom 8:30).

Everybody wants this fifth point. Sometimes they try to get it without the others: “I don’t like all this election stuff, but I’ll take perseverance and assurance.” But this assurance of salvation only blossoms on the rich stem and deep roots of the preceding four points! Because you couldn’t do this thing and God has taken it upon Himself to do it, you can be assured He’s going to get you to the harbor!

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*Everybody wants this fifth point. Sometimes they try to get it without the others. But this assurance of salvation only blossoms on the rich stem and deep roots of the preceding four points!*

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And lest you think that this is some kind of New Testament idiosyncrasy, let me assure you: it's not! These five points are wonderfully illustrated for us in God's dealings with Israel back in the Old Testament.

1. For they were in bondage in Egypt and couldn't break free. (Total Depravity)
2. They were elected of God not because they were the largest of nations—for they were the smallest—but because God had mercy upon them. (Unconditional Election)
3. And He puts the blood of the lamb over the doorposts of Israel, not of Egypt. And the Angel of Death passes over them. (Limited Atonement)
4. And then God summons His people. The divine voice, like the roar of a lion, shakes at the foundations of Egypt: "Let My people go!" (Exo 5:1). And out His people come. (Irresistible Grace)
5. And YHWH carries His people to the promised land so that Joshua could stand on the other side of the Jordan and say: "[N]ot one word has failed of all the good things that the Lord your God promised concerning you. All have come to pass" (Josh 23:14)!

So this is not some New Testament idiosyncrasy. This is how God has always saved His people. This is how God saved you.

This is why we are Reformed.

Consider, in summary, the following statement (quoting the second distinctive of the Acts 29 Network):

**We Enthusiastically Embrace the Sovereignty of God's Grace in Saving Sinners**

We affirm that God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, not on the basis of foreseen faith but unconditionally, according to his sovereign good pleasure and will.

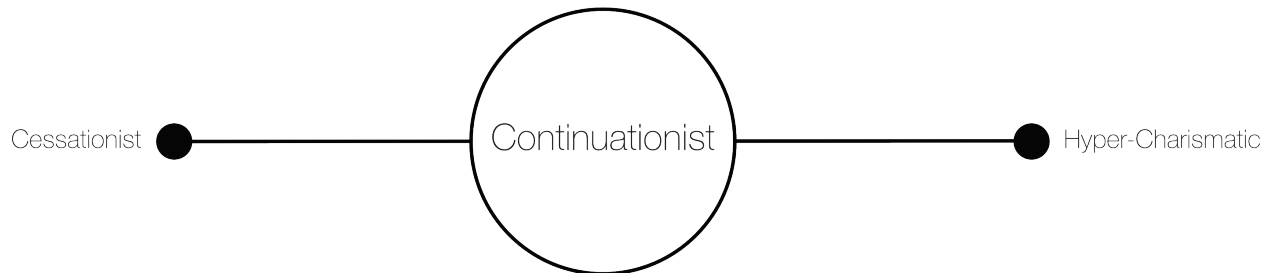
We believe that through the work of the Holy Spirit, God will draw the elect to faith in his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, graciously and effectually overcoming their stubborn resistance to the gospel so that they will most assuredly and willingly believe.

We also believe that these, the elect of God whom he gave to the Son, will persevere in belief and godly behavior and be kept secure in their salvation by grace through faith.

We believe that God's sovereignty in this salvation neither diminishes the responsibility of people to believe in Christ nor marginalizes the necessity and power of prayer and evangelism, but rather reinforces and establishes them as the ordained means by which God accomplishes his ordained ends.

John 1:12-13; 6:37-44; 10:25-30; Acts 13:48; 16:30-31; Rom 3:1-4:25; 8:1-17,31-39; 9:1-23; 10:8-10; Eph 1:4-5; 2:8-10; Phil 2:12-13; Titus 3:3-7; 1 John 1:7, 9

### 3. Continuationist



By Continuationist we mean that, with regard to spiritual gifts, we are not Cessationist on the one hand—*certain/all miraculous gifts have ceased*; nor are we hyper-Charismatic on the other hand—*the miraculous gifts are all operating in the same way today as they were in the apostolic age*. We are Continuationist—*the miraculous gifts have continued into the modern age, but are now subordinated to the apostolic deposit of Holy Scripture*.

Consider the following statement (quoting the third distinctive of the Acts 29 Network):

**We Recognize and Rest Upon the Necessity of the Empowering Presence  
of the Holy Spirit for All of Life and Ministry**

The Holy Spirit is fully God, equal with the Father and Son, whose primary ministry is to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ; he also convicts unbelievers of their need for Christ and imparts spiritual life through regeneration (the new birth).

The Spirit permanently indwells, graciously sanctifies, lovingly leads, and empowers all who are brought to faith in Christ so that they might live in obedience to the inerrant Scriptures.

The model for our reliance upon the Spirit and our experience of his indwelling and empowering presence is the Lord Jesus Christ himself who was filled with the Spirit and entirely dependent upon his power for the performance of miracles, the preaching of the kingdom of God, and all other dimensions of his earthly ministry.

The Holy Spirit who indwelt and empowered Christ in like manner indwells and empowers us through spiritual gifts he has bestowed for the work of ministry and the building up of the body of Christ. Although there are different understandings in our network of the nature and function of these gifts, we all recognize that they are divine provisions central to spiritual growth and effective ministry and are to be eagerly desired, faithfully developed, and lovingly exercised according to biblical guidelines.

Matt 3:11; 12:28; Luke 4:1, 14; 5:17; 10:21; John 1:12-13; 3:1-15, 34; 14:12; 15:26-27; 16:7-15; Acts 2:14-21; 4:29-30; 10:38; Rom 8:9; 12:3-8; 1 Cor 12:7-13; 12:28-31; 14:1-33; 2 Cor 1:21-22; Gal 3:1-5; Eph 1:13-14; 5:18

To learn about where we stand as to “the nature and function of these gifts”, please read Appendix 5: A Case for Continuationism.

## 4. Complementarian



By Complementarian we mean that, with regard to manhood and womanhood, we are not Egalitarian on the one hand—*men and women are equal in every way without distinction*; nor are we misogynist on the other hand—*men are superior to women in every way without exception*. We are Complementarian—men and women are equal in value and dignity, yet distinct in design and role.

Consider the following statement (quoting the fourth distinctive of the Acts 29 Network):

**We Are Deeply Committed to the Fundamental Spiritual and Moral Equality of Male and Female and to Men as Responsible Servant-Leaders in the Home and Church.**

Both men and women are together created in the divine image and are therefore equal before God as persons, possessing the same moral dignity and value, and have equal access to God through faith in Christ. Men and women are together the recipients of spiritual gifts designed to empower them for ministry in the local church and beyond. Therefore, women are to be encouraged, equipped, and empowered to utilize their gifting in ministry, in service to the body of Christ, and through teaching in ways that are consistent with the Word of God.

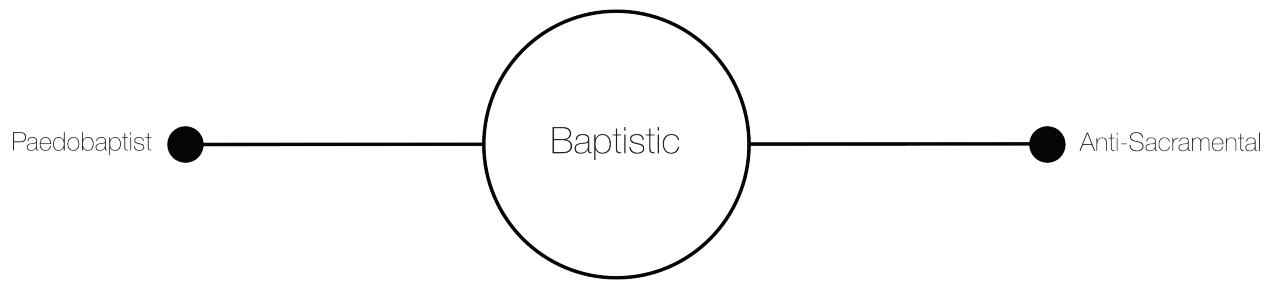
Both husbands and wives are responsible to God for spiritual nurture and vitality in the home, but God has given to the man primary responsibility to lead his wife and family in accordance with the servant-leadership and sacrificial love characterized by Jesus Christ. This principle of male headship should not be confused with, nor give any hint of, domineering control. Rather, it is to be the loving, tender and nurturing care of a godly man who is himself under the kind and gentle authority of Jesus Christ.

The Elders/Pastors of each local church have been granted authority under the headship of Jesus Christ to provide oversight and to teach/preach the Word of God in corporate assembly for the building up of the body. The office of Elder/Pastor is restricted to men.

Gen 1:26-27; 2:18; Acts 18:24-26; 1 Cor 11:2-16; Gal 3:28; Eph 5:22-33; Col 3:18-19; 1 Tim 2:11-15; 3:1-7; Titus 2:3-5; 1 Pet 3:1-7

For more on our Complementarian convictions, see Appendix 6: The Danvers Statement.

## 5. Baptist



By Baptistic, we mean that, with regard to the ordinance of baptism, we are not paedobaptist on the one hand—*baptism is a covenant sign for infants*; nor are we anti-sacramental on the other hand—*baptism isn't all that important either way*. We are Baptistic—*baptism is for believers upon their profession of faith as a sign of their union with Christ in His life, death, and resurrection*.

Consider the following statement (quoted from the 29<sup>th</sup> Chapter of The 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith):

**Baptism**

Baptism is an ordinance of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ. To those baptized it is a sign of their fellowship with him in his death and resurrection, of their being grafted into him, of remission of sins, and of submitting themselves to God through Jesus Christ to live and walk in newness of life.

Those who personally profess repentance toward God and faith in and obedience to our Lord Jesus Christ are the only proper subjects of this ordinance.

The outward element to be used in this ordinance is water, in which the individual is to be baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Immersion, or dipping of the person in water, is necessary for this ordinance to be administered properly.

Matt 3:16; 28:19, 20; Mark 1:4; 16:16; John 3:23; Acts 2:41; 8:12, 36-38; 18:8; 22:16; Rom 6:3-5; Gal 3:27; Col 2:12