

PETRA
BIBLE CHURCH

Petra Doctrinal Statement

Doctrine

Doctrine is extremely important, eternally important. We are accountable to God for what we believe, think, practice, and apply of the truth He has revealed to us through His Word. All of Scripture testifies that God desires us to know Him, trust Him, and walk in a right relationship with Him, and this cannot happen apart from believing sound doctrine (John 17:3; 1 Tim. 4:16; Titus 1:9; 2:1).

This statement summarizes what Petra Bible Church believes the Bible teaches. It stands in the historic Reformed and Baptist tradition, rooted in the Protestant Reformation, and it is always subordinate to the Word of God, which alone is our final authority. We hold these truths with conviction and humility, for the purpose of glorifying God, guarding the gospel, and equipping His people for faithful life and mission.

Our Interpretive Framework

At Petra Bible Church, we read God's Word through a progressive covenantal framework. We believe the whole Bible tells one unified story of redemption and that every book of Scripture points to the glory of Jesus Christ (Luke 24:27, 44). This story unfolds through a series of covenants, each building on the one before it and progressively revealing God's eternal plan, the mystery now revealed in Christ (Eph. 3:4-6). We believe Scripture reveals six covenants:

1. **The Covenant with Creation** (Adam): God made man in His image to rule over creation, with Adam as covenant head of the human race (Gen. 1:26-28; 2:15-17).
2. **The Covenant with Noah**: God promised to preserve His creation after the flood (Gen. 9:8-17).
3. **The Covenant with Abraham**: God promised a people, a land, and a seed through whom all nations would be blessed (Gen. 12:1-3; 15; 17; Gal. 3:16).
4. **The Mosaic Covenant** (the Old Covenant): God gave Israel His law, revealing His holiness, exposing sin, and pointing to Christ (Exod. 19–24; Gal. 3:24).
5. **The Covenant with David**: God promised David a son who would reign on his throne forever (2 Sam. 7:12-16).
6. **The New Covenant**: God promised to write His law on the hearts of His people, give them His Spirit, and fully forgive their sins (Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:25-27).

Each covenant finds its fulfillment in Christ. He is the true Adam, the promised seed of Abraham, the Son who perfectly kept the law, and the eternal King from David's line. Through His blood, He established the New Covenant, creating one new people of God from Jew and Gentile, every member of whom is born of the Spirit and knows the Lord (Luke 22:20; Eph. 2:14-16; Heb. 8:6-13). Therefore, we interpret all of Scripture in light of its place in this covenantal story and its fulfillment in Christ.

The Five Solas

We stand with the historic Protestant Reformation in affirming the five solas (Latin for "alone"). These summarize the biblical gospel and guard it from any addition of man.

***Sola Scriptura* (Scripture Alone):** The Scriptures alone are the inspired, inerrant, and sufficient Word of God and the final authority over all faith and practice. With the completion of the New Testament, the canon is closed; God has spoken fully and finally in His Son, and no further revelation is to be expected. Church tradition, councils, creeds, and personal experience are subordinate to Scripture and must be judged by it. (2 Tim. 3:16–17; 2 Pet. 1:20–21; Heb. 1:1–2; Jude 3; Rev. 22:18–19; Isa. 8:20; Acts 17:11)

***Sola Gratia* (Grace Alone):** Salvation is entirely a work of God's sovereign grace. Grace is God's unmerited, undeserved favor. It is His kindness freely given to sinners who have earned nothing from Him but His wrath. Sinners who are dead in their trespasses and sins contribute no merit to their salvation; God alone gives new life to the spiritually dead (Eph. 2:1-5, 8-9; Rom. 3:24; 11:6; Titus 3:5).

***Sola Fide* (Faith Alone):** A sinner is justified before God through faith alone, not by works, sacraments, or religious rituals. The righteousness of Christ is imputed to the believer and received by faith. Good works are the fruit of saving faith, never its root. (Rom. 3:28; 4:5; 5:1; Gal. 2:16; Phil. 3:9; James 2:17-18)

***Solus Christus* (Christ Alone):** Salvation is found in the person and finished work of Jesus Christ alone. He is the only mediator between God and man; no priest, saint, or other intercessor can take the place of Christ as He alone is Savior and mediator through His once-for-all sacrifice. (Acts 4:12; John 14:6; 1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 7:25; 10:12-14)

***Soli Deo Gloria* (To the Glory of God Alone):** Because salvation is of the Lord from beginning to end, all glory belongs to God alone. The whole of the Christian life—worship, work, family, and mission—is to be lived before His face for His glory and not for the glory of man. (Rom. 11:36; 1 Cor. 10:31; Isa. 42:8; Eph. 1:6, 12, 14; Gal. 6:14)

The Bible

Its inspiration. We believe the Bible, the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments, is the very Word of God. Scripture is verbally and fully inspired: every word, and every part of the whole, was breathed out by God (2 Tim. 3:16; Matt. 5:18). God did not dictate His Word mechanically. Over about 1,500 years, the Holy Spirit carried along some forty human authors, working through their own personalities, languages, backgrounds, and callings, so that the words they wrote are the very words of God, exactly as He gave them in the original manuscripts (2 Pet. 1:20-21; 2 Sam. 23:2; Jer. 1:9).

Its inerrancy and authority. Because God cannot lie, His Word is without error in all that it affirms, whether in matters of faith, history, or the created world (Num. 23:19; Ps. 12:6; John 10:35; 17:17; Titus 1:2). Scripture is the supreme and final authority over all faith and practice. Every tradition, council, creed, teacher, and experience must be judged by it (Isa. 8:20; Acts 17:11).

Its sufficiency. Scripture is sufficient for every area of life and godliness. It makes us wise unto salvation through faith in Christ and fully equips us for every good work (2 Tim. 3:15-17; 2 Pet. 1:3). Genesis to Revelation is God's complete written revelation to mankind; we need no additional word beyond it (Heb. 1:1-2; Jude 3; Rev. 22:18-19). Scripture is therefore sufficient for the care of the soul, revealing the true nature of man, the root of his problems in sin, and the only lasting remedy in Christ (Ps. 19:7-11; Heb. 4:12). We do not accept any psychology as an authority alongside or above God's Word. Because all truth is God's truth, observations about human behavior may at times reflect what God has revealed in His creation (Ps. 19:1; Rom. 1:20). Yet psychology is at its very best only when it bows before the Word of God, and every theory must be judged by Scripture and rejected wherever it contradicts it (Col. 2:8; 2 Cor. 10:5).

Its canon. The sixty-six books of the Bible make up the complete canon of Scripture as God has divinely ordained. The church did not create the canon but recognized the books God had already inspired. The Apocrypha, though it has historical value, is not inspired Scripture and carries no authority in matters of Christian doctrine or practice (Luke 24:44; Rom. 3:2).

Its clarity and power. Scripture is clear. What must be known, believed, and obeyed for salvation is plainly revealed, so that ordinary people, not only scholars, may understand it through the ordinary use of means (Deut. 30:11-14; Ps. 19:7; 119:105, 130). Yet because of sin, the natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God and cannot spiritually discern them (1 Cor. 2:14). Therefore, the Holy Spirit illumines the mind so that a person can rightly understand Scripture. He opens the hearts of the elect so that they receive it, believe it, and obey it (Luke 24:45; Acts 16:14; 1 Cor. 2:12; Eph. 1:17-18). God's Word faithfully reveals His character and will, and it will accomplish all of God's sovereign and perfect purposes, decreed before the foundation of the world (Isa. 55:10-11; Heb. 4:12).

God

One God in three persons. We believe there is only one true and living God (Deut. 6:4; Isa. 45:5; 1 Cor. 8:4-6). He eternally exists in three distinct persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Each person is fully and equally God, sharing the one divine essence, co-equal in power and glory, and co-eternal (Matt. 3:16-17; 28:19; John 1:1; Acts 5:3-4; 2 Cor. 13:14). There are not three Gods (tritheism), nor is God one person who appears in three modes or manifestations (modalism). God is one in essence and three in persons (John 10:30).

His perfections. God is self-existent and self-sufficient, needing nothing outside Himself (Exod. 3:14; Acts 17:24-25). All His perfections exist in Him in perfect unity; He is not made up of parts, and each of His attributes is fully what He is (Mal. 3:6; James 1:17). Some of His perfections belong to God alone. He is eternal, without beginning or end (Ps. 90:2). He is immutable, never changing in His being, character, or purposes (Mal. 3:6; Heb. 13:8). He is omnipotent, all-powerful, able to do all His holy will (Jer. 32:17; Matt. 19:26). He is omniscient, knowing all things past, present, and future (Ps. 139:1-6; Isa. 46:9-10). He is omnipresent, present everywhere with His whole being (Ps. 139:7-12; Jer. 23:24). He is transcendent, exalted above and distinct from all He has made (Isa. 40:28; 55:8-9), and yet He is near to His people (Acts 17:27-28). Other perfections God reflects, in part, in those made in His image. He is holy, loving, good, merciful, gracious, just, wise, true, and faithful (Exod. 34:6-7; Isa. 6:3; Deut. 32:4; 1 John 4:8). God's wrath is not a sinful passion but the holy and just response of His nature against all sin (Rom. 1:18; Nah. 1:2-3).

His sovereignty. God is the Creator of all things, visible and invisible (Gen. 1:1; Col. 1:16). Before the foundation of the world, He freely and unchangeably decreed all things that come to pass, according to the counsel of His own will (Isa. 46:9-10; Eph. 1:11). Nothing happens by chance, and nothing lies outside His control. In His providence, He upholds, directs, and governs all creatures, actions, and events, from the rise and fall of nations to the fall of a sparrow and the roll of the dice (Ps. 115:3; Prov. 16:33; 21:1; Dan. 4:34-35; Matt. 10:29-30; Heb. 1:3). He even rules over the evil acts of men and Satan, directing them to accomplish His good purposes, as He did supremely at the cross (Gen. 50:20; Acts 2:23; 4:27-28). Yet God is never the author of sin, nor does His sovereignty remove the real responsibility of His creatures (James 1:13-14).

God is also absolutely sovereign in salvation. Salvation belongs to the Lord (Jonah 2:9). He chose His people in Christ before the foundation of the world, not according to their works or will but according to His own purpose and grace (Rom. 9:15-16; Eph. 1:4-5; 2 Tim. 1:9). All whom the Father has given to the Son will come to Him, and the Son will lose none of them (John 6:37-39, 44). Those God predestined, He also calls, justifies, and glorifies (Rom. 8:29-30). All things exist from Him, through Him, and to Him, to whom be glory forever (Rom. 11:36).

Man

His creation. God created man, male and female, good and upright, in His own image and likeness (Gen. 1:26-27, 31; Eccl. 7:29). As His image-bearer, man was given a mind to know God, a will to love and obey Him, and emotions to delight in Him. He was created in righteousness and holiness, to rule over creation and glorify God (Gen. 1:28; Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10).

His fall. Our first parents, deceived by the cunning and temptation of Satan, sinned against God by eating the forbidden fruit (Gen. 3:1-13; 2 Cor. 11:3). By this sin they fell from their original righteousness and communion with God, and so became dead in sin

and wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body (Gen. 2:17; Eph. 2:1; Titus 1:15; Rom. 3:10-18). Because Adam stood as the root and covenant head of all mankind, the guilt of his sin is imputed to all his posterity, and the same death in sin and corrupted nature is passed down to all who descend from him by ordinary generation (Ps. 51:5; Rom. 5:12-19; 1 Cor. 15:21-22). From this original corruption, by which we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and opposed to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil, come all actual sins (Gen. 6:5; Rom. 8:7; Col. 1:21; James 1:14-15; Matt. 15:19). Therefore every person is by nature a child of wrath, under the curse of the law, and subject to death (Eph. 2:3; Gal. 3:10; Rom. 6:23).

The image of God in man was not wholly annihilated, for man remains a rational and moral being who bears God's image and must be treated with dignity (Gen. 9:6; James 3:9). Yet, as Calvin taught, that image was so corrupted that what remains is a frightful deformity. The true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness in which man was first created were lost, and are restored only through regeneration in Christ (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10).

His depravity. Man is totally depraved: sin has corrupted every part of his being. His mind is darkened and cannot understand the things of God (1 Cor. 2:14; Eph. 4:18). His will is enslaved to sin; he freely chooses what he desires, but he never desires God (John 8:34; Rom. 8:7). His emotions are disordered, so that he loves darkness rather than light (John 3:19). His heart is deceitful above all things (Jer. 17:9). Therefore, man is unable to come to God or please Him (John 6:44; Rom. 8:8). He will live in open or hidden rebellion against God until the Holy Spirit regenerates his heart, so that he repents and believes in Christ alone for salvation (Ezek. 36:26; John 3:3-8; Eph. 2:4-5).

Jesus Christ

His deity. Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God, the second person of the Trinity. He is not a created being; He is of the same essence as the Father, fully and eternally God, through whom all things were made (John 1:1-3; 10:30; Col. 1:15-17; Heb. 1:3, 8). He is worshiped as God and called God (John 20:28; Rom. 9:5; Titus 2:13). In becoming man, He did not cease to be God or lay aside any of His divine nature or attributes. The incarnation was not the subtraction of deity but the addition of humanity. He "emptied Himself" not by giving up His deity but by taking the form of a servant (Phil. 2:6-7). In Him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily (Col. 2:9).

His incarnation. In the fullness of time, the eternal Son took on a true human body and a rational soul, with a real human mind and will, conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary (Matt. 1:18-23; Luke 1:35; 2:52; Gal. 4:4). He is truly God and truly man: two complete and distinct natures united in one person forever. This is called the hypostatic union. The two natures are joined without confusion or change, so that His deity was not mixed with or diminished by His humanity, and without division or separation, so that He is one Christ, not two persons (John 1:14; Col. 2:9; Heb. 2:14-17). Each nature keeps its own properties, and whatever He did as God or as man, He

did as one person. Because He is fully God, His sacrifice has infinite worth; because He is fully man, He could truly stand in our place (1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 2:17; 4:15).

His life, death, and double imputation. Jesus lived a perfectly sinless life, fulfilling all righteousness in obedience to the Father. This is called His active obedience, by which He perfectly kept God's law in our place (Matt. 3:15; Rom. 5:19; Heb. 4:15). He then died on the cross as the perfect sacrifice for His people, bearing the wrath of God as their substitute. This is called His passive obedience, by which He suffered the full penalty our sins deserved (Isa. 53:4-6; Matt. 1:21; John 10:11; Rom. 3:24-26; Phil. 2:8; 1 Pet. 2:24). In Him there is a double imputation, meaning a double crediting: the believer's sin is credited to Christ, who paid its penalty in His death, and Christ's perfect righteousness, earned by His sinless life, is credited to the believer (2 Cor. 5:21; Rom. 4:5-8; Phil. 3:9). His work of redemption is finished and complete (John 19:30; Heb. 10:12-14).

His resurrection and exaltation. On the third day, Jesus rose bodily from the dead, conquering sin, death, and Satan (1 Cor. 15:3-8, 20). He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father, where He reigns as Lord over all (Acts 1:9-11; Eph. 1:20-22; Phil. 2:9-11).

His offices. Christ holds three offices, and He fulfills each one for His people now. He is our Prophet, who has revealed God to us perfectly and continues to speak to His church today through His Word by His Spirit (John 1:18; Heb. 1:1-2; John 16:13-14). He is our Priest, who offered Himself once for all and now always lives to intercede for us at the Father's right hand (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:24-27; 1 John 2:1). He is our King, who reigns now over all things for the sake of His church, ruling and defending His people, subduing His enemies, and building His kingdom through the gospel (Matt. 28:18; Eph. 1:20-22; 1 Cor. 15:25; Col. 1:13). At His return, His reign will be fully revealed, when He comes in glory to judge the living and the dead (Acts 10:42; Rev. 19:16).

The only Savior. There is no other name under heaven by which a person can be saved, for Jesus Christ is the only begotten Son of God, the perfect sacrificial Lamb, and the one mediator between God and sinful man (John 3:16; 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 Tim. 2:5). No one is saved by good works, good intentions, sincerity, or by being a kind or moral person, for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:20, 23; Gal. 2:16; Titus 3:5). Neither religion, ritual, church membership, nor the intercession of saints can save. Nor can psychology, self-improvement, or any human effort to heal the soul, for these cannot remove guilt before a holy God or give new life to a heart dead in sin (Jer. 17:9; Eph. 2:1-9). Salvation is found in Christ alone, received through faith in Him alone (John 3:36; Rom. 10:9-14).

The Holy Spirit

His person. The Holy Spirit is God, the third person of the Trinity, fully equal with the Father and the Son and possessing all the attributes of God (Matt. 28:19; Acts 5:3-4; 1 Cor. 2:10-11). He is not an impersonal force or power but a personal being who thinks,

speaks, wills, teaches, and can be grieved (John 14:26; 16:13; Acts 13:2; 1 Cor. 12:11; Eph. 4:30).

His work in salvation. The Holy Spirit is essential to the salvation of every believer. He convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8-11). He regenerates the spiritually dead sinner, giving new birth and granting repentance and faith (John 3:5-8; Titus 3:5). At conversion, He baptizes every believer into the body of Christ, comes to dwell within him permanently, and seals him as God's own possession, the guarantee of his full and final salvation (1 Cor. 12:13; Rom. 8:9; Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30).

His work in the believer. The Spirit teaches, guides into all truth, illumines the Scriptures He inspired, and brings to remembrance what God has revealed (John 14:26; 16:13; 1 Cor. 2:12-14; 2 Pet. 1:21). The Holy Spirit is the one who sanctifies the believer. A believer cannot make himself holy by his own strength, willpower, or religious effort (Gal. 3:3). It is the Spirit who conforms him to the image of Christ and produces His fruit in his life (Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18; Gal. 5:22-23; 1 Thess. 5:23). The believer is called to obey, to put sin to death, and to pursue holiness, yet even this he does only by the Spirit's power, for it is God who works in him both to will and to work for His good pleasure (Rom. 8:13; Phil. 2:12-13). He comforts, assures the believer that he is a child of God, and helps him in prayer (John 14:16-17; Rom. 8:15-16, 26-27). Believers are commanded to be continually filled with the Spirit, walking in obedience to Him rather than grieving or quenching Him (Gal. 5:16, 25; Eph. 4:30; 5:18; 1 Thess. 5:19).

His purpose. The Holy Spirit does not draw attention to Himself but glorifies Christ, and He empowers the church to bear witness to Christ to the ends of the earth (John 15:26; 16:14; Acts 1:8).

Election

Before the foundation of the world, God, according to the good pleasure of His will, graciously chose in Christ a people for Himself out of every tribe, tongue, people, and nation to be saved (Eph. 1:4-6; 2 Thess. 2:13; Rev. 5:9; 7:9). This election is unconditional; it is not based on any foreseen faith, merit, or good works in man, but on God's sovereign grace and love alone (Deut. 7:7-8; Rom. 9:11-16; 11:5-6; 2 Tim. 1:9). Those whom God has chosen, He calls, regenerates, justifies, and will glorify, and none of them will be lost (John 6:37-39; 10:26-29; Rom. 8:29-30). Election does not make man a puppet, nor does it remove his responsibility; every person is accountable to God for his sin and is commanded to repent and believe the gospel (Ezek. 18:30-32; Mark 1:15; John 3:18; Acts 17:30-31; Rom. 9:19-20).

Election and evangelism. Divine election is not a reason for idleness in evangelism; it is the great confidence of missions. God has chosen a people from every nation, and He has ordained that they be gathered through the preaching of the gospel (Rom. 10:13-17; 2 Thess. 2:13-14; Rev. 5:9). Because we do not know who the elect are, we proclaim Christ freely and urgently to all people, calling every sinner to repent and

believe (Matt. 28:19-20; Acts 17:30). We do so with confidence, knowing that all whom the Father has given to the Son will come to Him and that God's Word will not return to Him empty (John 6:37; 10:16; Isa. 55:11). This confidence sustained the apostle Paul. When the Lord told him, "I have many people in this city," he stayed and preached (Acts 18:9-11). He endured everything "for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 2:10). Wherever the gospel is preached, "as many as were appointed to eternal life believed" (Acts 13:48).

The fruit of this doctrine. Rightly understood, election humbles the believer, for he contributed nothing to his salvation (1 Cor. 1:26-31). It gives him assurance, for his salvation rests on God's unchanging purpose (Rom. 8:28-30). And it leads him to worship, to the praise of God's glorious grace (Eph. 1:3-6).

Salvation

God alone saves. We believe salvation is entirely the work of God's grace from beginning to end. It is monergistic (from the Greek monos, "one," and ergon, "work"): in regeneration, God alone acts to give spiritual life to the spiritually dead. We reject synergism (syn, "together," and ergon), the view that God's grace and man's free will cooperate to bring about the new birth, so that God's work depends on man's choice. Apart from the regenerating work of the Spirit, man's will is in bondage to sin; he cannot and will not come to God (John 6:44; Rom. 8:7-8). A dead man cannot raise himself. Just as Lazarus could not respond to Christ until Christ gave him life, the sinner cannot believe until God makes him alive (John 11:43-44; Eph. 2:1-5). God ordinarily accomplishes this new birth through the preaching of the gospel, as the Spirit effectually calls His elect by His Word (Rom. 10:17; James 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:23). Regeneration is therefore logically prior to faith and is its cause: "everyone who believes has been born of God" (1 John 5:1; John 1:13; 3:3-8). The sinner truly repents and truly believes; these are his own acts, yet he cannot produce them by his own power. Faith and repentance are themselves gifts God gives to those He has made alive by His power alone (Acts 11:18; 16:14; Eph. 2:8-9; Phil. 1:29).

The gift of salvation. God's law demands perfect obedience, and whoever keeps the whole law yet stumbles at one point is guilty of breaking all of it (Gal. 3:10; James 2:10). Every person has failed to keep God's law and stands condemned under His righteous wrath, for the penalty of sin is death (John 3:36; Rom. 3:23; 6:23). Man has no righteousness of his own; he was born in sin and is incapable of earning any merit before God (Isa. 64:6; Rom. 3:10-12). It cost Jesus His very life and blood to pay the full price for sin and its penalty, so that salvation could be offered freely to all as a gift (Isa. 53:5-6; Eph. 1:7; Rev. 22:17). All are commanded to repent of their sin, confess with their mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in their heart that God raised Him from the dead and that Christ finished the work of salvation on the cross of Calvary (Mark 1:15; John 19:30; Acts 2:38; 17:30; Rom. 10:9-10). No one will truly repent and flee to Christ until he understands that he has broken God's law and stands under God's wrath. The Holy Spirit uses the law to expose sin, create total desperation in the sinner, and drive

him to Christ alone, who perfectly fulfilled the law on our behalf (Rom. 3:19-20; 7:7-13, 24-25; Gal. 3:24; John 16:8; Matt. 5:17).

Justification by faith alone. A sinner is declared righteous before God not by any works of his own, but by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. At the moment of saving faith, God forgives all his sins and credits to him the perfect righteousness of Christ (Rom. 3:24-28; 4:5; 5:1; 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9). Good works do not produce salvation, but they are the necessary fruit and evidence of it (Eph. 2:10; James 2:17-18).

Adoption and sanctification. At salvation, every believer is adopted as a child of God (John 1:12; Rom. 8:15-17). From that moment, God Himself is at work to make His child holy. By the Holy Spirit, He progressively renews the believer, empowers him to put sin to death, and conforms him to the image of Christ, and He will complete this work on the day of glory (Rom. 8:13, 29-30; 2 Cor. 3:18; Phil. 1:6). The believer responds with surrender, repentance, obedience, thanksgiving, and worship, for it is God who works in him both to will and to work for His good pleasure (Rom. 12:1-2; Phil. 2:12-13). Because sin remains until glory, this repentance is daily. As Luther taught, when Christ said "Repent," He willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance (Matt. 4:17; 1 John 1:8-9).

Eternal security and perseverance. Salvation is eternal, not circumstantial, because it rests on God and not on man. Those whom God chose, called, and justified, He will also glorify, and nothing in all creation can separate them from His love in Christ (Rom. 8:30, 38-39). A true believer can never lose his or her salvation, for Christ gives His sheep eternal life, and no one can snatch them out of His hand or the Father's hand (John 6:37-40; 10:27-29). He who began a good work in them will bring it to completion (Phil. 1:6).

Those whom God has truly saved will persevere in faith and holiness to the end, not by their own strength but kept by His power (1 Pet. 1:5; Jude 24). A believer may fall into sin for a season, but God, as a loving Father, will discipline His child and bring him to repentance (Heb. 12:5-11). Therefore, if a person walks away from Christ and is not disciplined by God to the point of repentance, he shows that he was never born again in the first place (1 John 2:19). Assurance of salvation rests on the promises of God, the finished work of Christ, the inner witness of the Spirit, and the fruit of a changed life (Rom. 8:16; Heb. 6:9-12; 1 John 5:13).

The Church

Its nature. The church is the body of Christ, of which He alone is the head (Eph. 1:22-23). It is made up of all true believers, born again by the Spirit and united to Christ by faith alone (1 Cor. 12:12-13). The local church is a congregation of baptized believers who gather to worship, sit under the Word, observe the ordinances, and care for one another (Acts 2:41-47; Heb. 10:24-25).

Its order and discipline. Christ governs His church through qualified elders, who shepherd and guard the flock, and deacons, who serve its needs (Acts 20:28-31; 1 Tim. 3:1-13). The church is to exercise loving discipline to guard its purity and unity, both toward unrepentant sin and toward those who cause division, slander, or attack the flock and its leaders (Matt. 18:15-20; Rom. 16:17-18; Titus 3:10-11).

Its discipleship. The church is called to make disciples, not merely converts. Its leaders are to equip the saints, grounding every member in sound doctrine and obedience to God's Word, so that they grow to maturity and are not tossed about by every wind of doctrine (Matt. 28:20; Eph. 4:11-16). The truth is to be entrusted to faithful men who will teach others also (2 Tim. 2:2).

Its King and mission. Christ now reigns over His church from heaven, and the "thousand years" of Revelation 20 describes this present age between His first and second comings (Eph. 1:20-22; Rev. 20:1-6). Until He returns, the church is called to endure tribulation faithfully, preach the gospel boldly, make disciples of all nations, and plant churches among every people (John 16:33; Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 14:21-23). The day and hour of His return are known to God alone (Matt. 24:36).

Church Ordinances

Water Baptism (Believer's Baptism)

Baptism is an ordinance commanded by Christ for the church. It is done in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit as a public declaration of faith and commitment to Christ. Baptism pictures the believer's union with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection, and is administered by immersion in water. Baptism does not save or regenerate; it is the outward sign of the inward work of salvation already accomplished by God. The person who is baptized is one whom God has made a new creature by the regenerating work of His Spirit, and who has recognized his sin, repented, and believed in Christ.

Infant baptism. There is no example of infant baptism recorded in Scripture. Scripture does not connect baptism to the physical circumcision of infants. Rather, it connects baptism to the circumcision of the heart, "made without hands," which God performs in regeneration (Col. 2:11-12). This circumcision of the heart ordinarily takes place in a child or an adult who has heard the gospel (Rom. 10:17) and responded with repentance and faith (Acts 2:38). Unlike the Old Covenant community, which included both believers and unbelievers, every member of the New Covenant is born again (Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:26-27; John 3:3-5).

Therefore, baptism, the sign of the New Covenant, belongs only to those who give credible evidence of faith in Christ. Because an infant cannot exercise saving faith, we do not practice infant baptism. Parents may present their children to the Lord in a service of dedication, but water is not used, so that dedication is never confused with

the believer's baptism taught in Scripture. (Matt. 28:19; Acts 2:38, 41; 8:12, 26-39; 16:31-34; Rom. 6:3-5; Col. 2:11-12; 1 Pet. 3:21)

The Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper is an ordinance Christ instituted on the night He was betrayed, and His church is to observe it until He comes (Matt. 26:26-29; 1 Cor. 11:23-26). In obedience to His command, "Do this in remembrance of Me," we gather at His Table to remember His body broken and His blood shed for our sins, and to proclaim His death until He returns. Scripture does not command how often the Lord's Supper is to be observed, but says only, "as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup" (1 Cor. 11:26). At Petra Bible Church, we typically celebrate the Lord's Supper on the first Sunday of each month.

Its meaning. The bread and the cup are signs and seals of Christ's body given and His blood shed for us. They do not become His actual body and blood, nor is the Supper a repeated sacrifice, for Christ offered Himself once for all (Heb. 10:10-14). Yet the Supper is far more than a memorial; it is a means of grace. Paul calls the cup and the bread a *koin ō nia* in the blood and body of Christ (1 Cor. 10:16). This Greek word means a real sharing and communion, not a mere remembrance. Christ is not physically present in the elements, but He is truly present by His Spirit to the faith of His people. As believers receive the bread and the cup in faith, they spiritually feed on Christ crucified and are strengthened in their communion with Him and with one another (John 6:53-57; 1 Cor. 10:16-17).

Its participants. The Lord's Supper is for baptized believers who are walking in repentance and faith. It is not a reward for the spiritually strong or a table for the sinless. It is a means of grace for sinners who trust in Christ. No believer comes worthy in himself; we come because Christ is worthy and His blood was shed for our sins (1 Cor. 11:26-28; 1 John 1:7-9). Partaking "in an unworthy manner" does not mean coming as an imperfect believer. It means coming in a careless manner, with unconfessed sin we refuse to forsake, or with a heart that despises Christ's body (1 Cor. 11:27-29).

Preparing our hearts. Before coming to the Table, each believer is to examine his own heart, confessing and turning from any known sin (1 Cor. 11:28, 31). This includes any bitterness or unforgiveness he is holding toward another. As God in Christ has forgiven us, we must forgive those who have sinned against us, promptly obeying the Spirit's prompting before we take the bread and the cup (Matt. 6:14-15; Mark 11:25; Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13). If we know that a brother has something against us, we are to seek to be reconciled, so far as it depends on us (Matt. 5:23-24; Rom. 12:18).

Our response. At the Table, we grieve over our sin, yet we come with joy, giving thanks and praising God as we meditate on the suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ on our behalf (Acts 2:46; 1 Cor. 15:1-19). We look forward with hope to His return, when we will eat and drink with Him in His kingdom (Matt. 26:29; 1 Cor. 11:26).

The Gifts of the Holy Spirit

Their source. Spiritual gifts are given by God in His sovereign will. The Holy Spirit distributes them to each believer as He chooses; they are never earned or demanded (1 Cor. 12:11; Heb. 2:4). Every believer has received at least one gift (1 Pet. 4:10). A single gift may be expressed in many different ministries, for "there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; varieties of service, but the same Lord; and varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all" (1 Cor. 12:4-6).

Their purpose. Spiritual gifts are given for the common good, to serve others and build up the body of Christ in love, not for selfish gain or personal glory (1 Cor. 12:7; 14:12, 26; Eph. 4:11-16). It is both the privilege and the responsibility of every believer to faithfully use his or her gifts in service to the local church, so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ (Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Pet. 4:10-11).

Their kinds. The New Testament gives several lists of gifts (Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:8-10, 28; Eph. 4:11; 1 Pet. 4:10-11). Peter summarizes them in two broad categories: speaking gifts and serving gifts. Whoever speaks is to speak as one who speaks the very words of God, and whoever serves is to serve in the strength God supplies (1 Pet. 4:11). Christ has also given His church leaders to equip the saints for the work of ministry (Eph. 4:11-12).

Foundational gifts. Some gifts, such as apostleship, revelatory prophecy, tongues, and the apostolic gift of healing, were foundational and served to authenticate the apostolic message while the church was being established (Eph. 2:20; 2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:3-4). These have ceased (see "Tongues and Revelatory Prophecy" and "Healings"). What remains is the faithful proclamation of God's Word from a closed canon (2 Tim. 4:2; 1 Pet. 4:11).

Discernment. Discernment is necessary in the use and oversight of spiritual gifts, because Satan disguises himself as an angel of light and seeks to counterfeit the works of God in the spirit of antichrist (2 Cor. 11:14; 1 John 4:1-3). Every gift must be exercised in submission to Scripture, under the oversight of the elders, and with order in the church, for God is not a God of confusion but of peace (1 Cor. 14:33, 40; Heb. 13:17).

Tongues and Revelatory Prophecy

We believe Scripture teaches that the gifts of tongues and revelatory prophecy were given by God for a unique and foundational period in redemptive history. With the close of the apostolic era and the completion of the canon of Scripture, these gifts have ceased. As the historic Reformed confessions affirm, God's former ways of revealing His will to His people have now ceased, for He has spoken finally and fully in His Son and has given us His complete written Word (Heb. 1:1-2; Eph. 2:20; Jude 3).

What tongues were. The gift of tongues in the New Testament was the miraculous ability to speak real human languages that the speaker had never learned (Acts 2:4-11). The tongues at Corinth were the same gift. Paul compares them to foreign languages, and they needed interpretation, which means translation, because the hearers did not know the language being spoken (1 Cor. 14:10-11, 13, 27-28). When Paul says that one who speaks in a tongue speaks "not to men but to God," he is correcting its use without interpretation, since no one present could understand it (1 Cor. 14:2). Scripture does not teach a private prayer language or "heavenly language," nor ecstatic speech that follows no linguistic pattern. Paul's reference to "the tongues of men and of angels" is hypothetical, part of a series of exaggerations meant to show that every gift is worthless without love, not a description of the gift itself (1 Cor. 13:1-3).

Why tongues were given. Tongues served as a sign. At Babel, God confused the languages of mankind and scattered the nations in judgment (Gen. 11:1-9). At Pentecost, He began to reverse that curse, as people from every nation heard the gospel proclaimed in their own languages and were gathered into one people (Acts 2:5-11; Rom. 1:16-17). Tongues were also a sign of judgment to unbelieving Israel (1 Cor. 14:21-22; Isa. 28:11-12). The visible outpouring of the Spirit, accompanied by tongues at Caesarea and Ephesus, publicly confirmed that Samaritans, Gentiles, and the disciples of John were received into the one people of God on equal footing with believing Jews (Acts 8:14-18; 10:44-46; 11:15-18; 19:1-7). This work of uniting Jew and Gentile in one body was accomplished through the ministry of the apostles (Eph. 2:11-22; 3:4-6). Once this unity was fully established and the apostolic foundation was laid, the sign of tongues had fulfilled its purpose and ceased with the close of the apostolic era (Eph. 2:20; Heb. 2:3-4).

A foundational and unrepeatable period. The church is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone" (Eph. 2:20; 3:5). A foundation is laid only once. The miraculous sign gifts authenticated the apostles and their message while that foundation was being laid (Acts 2:43; 5:12; 2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:3-4). The New Covenant was inaugurated by Christ's death (Luke 22:20; Heb. 9:15), and the book of Acts records the unique, unrepeatable period in which that covenant was established among Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles. The special divine enablement given to the apostles is therefore not a pattern for every believer to repeat. Yet Acts remains our pattern for mission: preaching the gospel, making disciples, planting churches, and appointing elders to shepherd them (Acts 2:42; 13:1-3; 14:21-23; 20:28). That foundational work is complete, and we now live in the New Covenant age established by the finished work of Christ (Heb. 8:6-13; Rev. 21:14).

The sufficiency of Scripture. God has spoken finally and fully in His Son, and the faith has been "once for all delivered to the saints" (Heb. 1:1-2; Jude 3). Scripture is sufficient to make the believer complete, equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:3). As the Reformed confessions affirm, nothing is to be added to Scripture at any time, whether by new revelations of the Spirit or by the traditions of men. Therefore there is no need for new revelation, a "prophetic word," or a private message from the

Lord to add to what God has spoken. Whoever speaks in the church today is to speak as one who speaks the very words of God, faithfully proclaiming His completed Word (1 Pet. 4:11; 2 Tim. 4:2).

The Spirit's ongoing work. The cessation of these gifts does not mean the Spirit has ceased to work. The Holy Spirit continues to illumine the Scriptures, lead God's children in holiness, give wisdom and discernment, help us in prayer, and empower the preaching of the gospel (Ps. 119:18; John 16:13-14; Rom. 8:14, 26; 1 Cor. 2:12; Phil. 1:9-10; 1 Thess. 1:5). God may guide His people through His providence and the counsel of godly believers, but no impression, experience, or circumstance ever carries the authority of Scripture. All must be tested by the Word He alone inspired (Acts 17:11; 1 Thess. 5:21; 1 John 4:1).

Healings

God heals today. We believe God, in His sovereign goodness, heals the sick today, both through ordinary means and at times miraculously, in answer to the prayers of His people. A sick believer is to call for the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord, trusting God to heal according to His will (James 5:14-16). God has also given means of health through His common grace: natural remedies from His creation, the skill of physicians and sound medicine, and the care of our bodies through rest and exercise, stewarding them as temples of the Holy Spirit (Ps. 104:14; Isa. 38:21; 1 Cor. 6:19-20; Col. 4:14; 1 Tim. 4:8; 5:23). All such means are to be used with prayer and discernment, for our trust rests not in the means but in the Lord who heals (Exod. 15:26; 2 Chron. 16:12).

The apostolic gift of healing. We distinguish between God healing in answer to prayer and the *gift* of healing given to individuals. In the New Testament, the apostles and those closely associated with them healed instantly, completely, and publicly, including people with lifelong conditions and even unbelievers (Acts 3:1-10; 5:12-16; 9:32-35; 28:8-9). These miracles were "the signs of a true apostle," given to authenticate the apostolic message while the foundation of the church was being laid (2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:3-4; Eph. 2:20). Even the apostles did not heal at will. Paul left Trophimus sick, and Epaphroditus nearly died (Phil. 2:25-27; 2 Tim. 4:20).

The apostolic office has ended. An apostle of Christ had to be an eyewitness of the risen Lord and personally commissioned by Him (Acts 1:21-22; 1 Cor. 9:1). Paul describes himself as the last to whom the risen Christ appeared (1 Cor. 15:8). With the death of the apostles, the apostolic office and the sign gifts that authenticated it have ceased. Therefore we do not recognize anyone today as having an apostolic gift of healing, and we reject all "healing ministries" that claim such a gift.

Sickness, faith, and suffering. All sickness is ultimately the result of living in a fallen world (Rom. 5:12; 8:20-23), but most sickness is not the result of a believer's personal sin or lack of faith (John 9:1-3; 2 Cor. 12:7-10; Gal. 4:13-14; 1 Tim. 5:23). At times God does use sickness as discipline for unrepentant sin (1 Cor. 11:30; James 5:15-16). We

reject the teaching that God promises health to every believer who has enough faith. Christ's atonement does secure the healing of our bodies, but that healing will be fully received at the resurrection, not guaranteed in this life (Isa. 53:4-5; Matt. 8:16-17; Rom. 8:23; 1 Cor. 15:42-44). God is glorified both when He heals and when He sustains His children through suffering by His grace. He uses affliction to refine their faith, produce endurance, and conform them to Christ (John 11:4; Rom. 5:3-5; 2 Cor. 4:16-18; 12:9; James 1:2-4). Satan can counterfeit signs and wonders, so every claim of the miraculous must be tested by the Word of God (Matt. 7:21-23; 2 Cor. 11:14; 2 Thess. 2:9; 1 John 4:1).

Our final hope. Complete healing awaits the resurrection, when God will make our bodies new and wipe away every tear (Rom. 8:23; Rev. 21:4).

Satan and Demons

Their origin. Satan and his demons are real, individual spiritual beings. God created them good, but they rebelled against Him in pride and fell (Ezek. 28:12-17; 2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6). Satan deceived Adam and Eve in the garden and brought sin into the world (Gen. 3:1-15; John 8:44). He is a created being, always under God's sovereign authority, and can do nothing apart from God's permission (Job 1:12; 2:6).

Their defeat. Christ Jesus defeated Satan and his demons through His death and resurrection, disarming them and triumphing over them at the cross (Col. 2:15; Heb. 2:14-15; 1 John 3:8). Through Christ's victory, Satan is bound in this age, so that he cannot deceive the nations or stop the advance of the gospel (Rev. 20:1-3; Matt. 12:28-29; John 12:31). This binding does not mean Satan is inactive. He still rages against the church and persecutes the saints, but only within the limits God permits, and he can never prevail against Christ's church (Matt. 16:18; 1 Pet. 5:8; Rev. 2:10; 20:4).

Our warfare. Though defeated, Satan still prowls like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour (1 Pet. 5:8). The child of God is to put on the full armor of God daily and stand firm against the lies and temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil, taking every thought captive to obey Christ (Eph. 6:10-18; 2 Cor. 10:5; 1 John 2:15-17). Yet of all the Christian's enemies, the most dangerous is not Satan or his demons, but his own flesh, which wages war against the Spirit (Gal. 5:17; James 1:14-15). Therefore, while we pray for God's protection from the world and the evil one, we must pray most often for protection from our own hearts, which are prone to deceive and corrupt us. We are to guard our hearts with all vigilance and ask God to search us, cleanse us from hidden faults, and keep us from willful sin (Ps. 19:12-13; 139:23-24; Prov. 4:23; Jer. 17:9; Matt. 6:13).

Possession and oppression. We do not believe that a true believer, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, can be possessed by any demon, for he belongs to Christ, and "He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4; 5:18; 1 Cor. 6:19-20; Col. 1:13). However, true believers can be oppressed by demonic forces, who may tempt, accuse, deceive, hinder, and afflict them, as Satan afflicted Job and incited David (Job 1:12–2:7;

1 Chron. 21:1; Luke 22:31-32; 2 Cor. 12:7; 1 Thess. 2:18; Eph. 4:27; Rev. 2:10; 12:10). The believer overcomes such oppression not by special rituals or formulas, but by submitting to God, resisting the devil, standing firm in the faith, holding fast to the Word of God, and crying out to the Lord in prayer, as David did in his many afflictions (James 4:7; 1 Pet. 5:9; Eph. 6:17-18; Ps. 18:1-6; 34:4-7, 17-19).

Their end. At the final judgment, Satan and his demons will be cast into the lake of fire for all eternity. They will never again assault God's glory or harm God's children (Matt. 25:41; Rev. 20:10).

The Return of Christ, the Final Resurrection, and Judgment

The return of Christ. We believe the Lord Jesus Christ will return personally, bodily, visibly, and in glory at a time known only to God (Acts 1:11; Matt. 24:30, 36; 1 Thess. 4:16; Titus 2:13). His one return will bring this present age to its close.

The intermediate state. At death, the souls of believers are immediately made perfect in holiness and enter the presence of Christ in conscious joy, awaiting the resurrection of their bodies (Luke 23:43; 2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:21-23; Heb. 12:23). The souls of unbelievers are held in conscious torment, awaiting final judgment (Luke 16:22-26; 2 Pet. 2:9). There is no purgatory, for Christ's sacrifice has fully cleansed His people from all sin (Heb. 1:3; 10:14; 1 John 1:7). There is no second chance after death, for "it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment" (Heb. 9:27).

The resurrection. At His return, Christ will raise all the dead bodily, the just and the unjust together in one general resurrection (John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15; Dan. 12:2). Believers who are alive at His coming will be changed in an instant and caught up together with them to meet the Lord (1 Cor. 15:51-53; 1 Thess. 4:16-17).

The final judgment. Christ, to whom the Father has given all judgment, will judge all people according to their deeds (John 5:22; Acts 17:31; Rom. 2:6-8; Rev. 20:11-15). Every person will give an account of his thoughts, words, and deeds, for these reveal the true condition of the heart (Matt. 12:34-37; Eccl. 12:14; 1 Cor. 4:5). Unbelievers will be justly condemned. Believers will not be condemned, for their sins have been fully paid by Christ (John 5:24; Rom. 8:1). Their works will be revealed and rewarded as the fruit of God's grace in them (1 Cor. 3:12-15; 2 Cor. 5:10).

The eternal destiny of the righteous. The elect of God, raised with glorified bodies like Christ's, will dwell with God forever in the new heavens and new earth, reigning with Christ in eternal joy, free from sin, sorrow, pain, and death (Phil. 3:20-21; 2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1-4; 22:3-5). Creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay (Rom. 8:19-23).

The eternal destiny of the wicked. The wicked, those who have not believed, will be cast into the lake of fire, to suffer conscious, bodily, and eternal punishment under the just wrath of God, separated from His favor forever (Matt. 25:41, 46; 2 Thess. 1:7-9;

Rev. 14:10-11; 20:15). The punishment of the wicked is everlasting, just as the life of the righteous is everlasting, for Jesus describes both with the same word: “eternal” (Matt. 25:46). Therefore, we reject both annihilationism, the belief that the wicked will be destroyed and cease to exist, and universalism, the belief that all will ultimately be saved.

Our hope. This blessed hope moves the church to holiness, perseverance, and urgency in proclaiming the gospel to all nations before the Day of the Lord comes (Titus 2:11-14; 2 Pet. 3:11-14; Matt. 24:14).