

Maffra Community Church
Explanations of Doctrinal Statement

1. We believe the whole of the Bible (Old and New Testaments) to be the inspired and only infallible Word of God. It is the final authority in all matters of faith and life, inerrant in the original writings and God-breathed.

Peter makes it clear that the writings of the Old Testament were not of human origin but "men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:19-21). The divine origin of the Scriptures is also affirmed by Paul (2 Timothy 3:16). The earliest preaching of the church included the thought that God had spoken by the mouths of the prophets (Acts 1:16; 3:18, 21; 4:25). This is consistent with the clear understanding of the Old Testament prophets that they were speaking the words of the LORD (Micah 4:4; Jeremiah 30:4; Isaiah 8:11; Amos 3:1; 2 Samuel 23:2). Jesus made two statements that show His overall attitude to Scripture; "the Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35) and "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished" (Matthew 5:17,18).

Peter spoke of "the command given by our Lord and Saviour through your apostles" alongside "the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets" (2 Peter 3:2). The Gospel writers record the life and teachings of Jesus who said "my teaching is not my own. It comes from Him who sent me" (John 7:16). Jesus consistently taught in John's Gospel that he had been sent by the Father. Luke claims to have carefully researched his Gospel (1:1-4) and John claims to have been written by an eye witness (John 21:24). Peter also wrote about how some distort the writings of Paul "as they do the other Scriptures" (2 Peter 3:16). John clearly identified what he wrote as God's word (1 John 4:6). A similar instruction not to add or detract from what is written (Revelation 22:18, 19) appears three times in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:32; Proverbs 30:5, 6). Paul regarded his message as the word of God (1 Thessalonians 2:13). Old and New Testaments alike claimed to be the word of God.

Thus the Bible is the only inspired and authoritative word of God and is the only source of Christian doctrine. The Bible is true and dependable in a way that is consistent with the character of its Author, and does not stand apart from its Author. The Bible is perspicuous and self interpreting, that is, it requires no interpretation outside of itself. Acknowledging that it was written in a specific setting it will need to be read in the light of that original cultural setting and its original purpose.

As God's word to us the Bible has the supreme right to define what we are to believe and how we are to conduct ourselves. This is made effective by the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives (John 14-16) and can be helped by the teaching of the church (Ephesians 4:11-13). However, authority ultimately rests with the word of God. It is our responsibility to discover its meaning and to humbly submit to its teachings regardless how pleasant or distasteful we find them.

Consistent with this view of the Bible our position on ethical issues will be determined primarily by our Biblical exegesis. Issues such as marriage and sexuality, abortion, euthanasia, interpersonal relationships, the use of drugs of addiction and many others will be approached on the conviction that God reveals His will through His word. Our aim will be to discover His will and teach it in such a way as to encourage personal obedience to it. A detailed discussion of many ethical issues can be found in the preaching of the church.

2. We believe in one Triune God, eternally existing in three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—co-eternal in being, co-eternal in nature, co-equal in power and glory, having the same attributes and perfections

In theological terms this is a statement of the doctrine of the Trinity. This is not taught explicitly in the Bible but is conclusion drawn from different lines of Biblical evidence.

Primarily the Old Testament emphasises the unity of God. He is single and unique demanding the exclusion of all pretended rivals (Deuteronomy 6:4; 5:7-11). This is a frequently repeated theme. There can be no question of tritheism (i.e. three separate Gods). However, in the Old Testament there are indications of plurality. In creation we see both the word of God and the Spirit of God (Genesis 1:2, 3; Psalm 33:6). God's decision to create people is expressed in the plural "Let Us make man in Our image, in Our likeness" (Genesis 1:26) as is the resolve to confuse the languages of people at Babel (Genesis 11:7). Wisdom is personified as the craftsman at His side during creation (Proverbs 8:22-31). The angel of the Lord who appears at different times as the messenger of God (Genesis 16:7;

24:7; 48:16) is synonymous with God at work (Exodus 23:23; Judges 2:1). The nature of the divine appearance to Abraham in Genesis 18 is very interesting as is the statement in Isaiah 48:16 that "the Sovereign LORD has sent me, with His Spirit".

The New Testament also is emphatic that there is only one God, a fact which causes the demons who believe to shudder (James 2:19). The New Testament affirms (not necessarily as directly as we would always like) the deity of Father (1 Corinthians 8:4, 6; 1 Timothy 2:5, 6), Son (Philippians 2:6-11; Hebrews 1; John 8:58; 10:30) and Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3, 4; 1 Corinthians 3:16, 17; 6:19, 20). Further these three are seen together and working as one. The Holy Spirit and the power of the Most High are active in the conception of the Son of God (Luke 1:35). At His baptism the Father speaks from heaven, the Holy Spirit descends as a dove and the Son Himself is baptised (Luke 3:21, 22). In His disputes with the Jews Jesus claimed to be sent from the Father (e.g. John 6:38, 39). In teaching the disciples He told them that both He and the Father would send them the Holy Spirit (John 14:26; 15:26). Jesus instructed His disciples to baptise in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19).

Attempting to express these different strands of teaching in a reasonably simple statement was an early challenge for the church. The Creed of Nicea (325) and the Constantinopolitan Creed of 381 (popularly known as the Nicene Creed) are the basic expression of the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. They are reflected in The Thirty Nine Articles of 1563.

"There is but one living and true God ... And in unity of this Godhead there be three Persons, of one substance, power, and eternity: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost." (Creeds of the Churches, John H. Leith, 266)

The element of mystery here should never surprise us. We are only ever creatures and God is God. Ultimately the knowledge of God defies human analysis and understanding. The Bible contains the self revelation of the one God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. A revelation we must ultimately accept by faith.

3. We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, became man without ceasing to be God, having been conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary in order that He might reveal God and redeem sinful man. We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ accomplished our redemption through His death on the cross as a substitutionary sacrifice, and that our justification is made sure by His literal, physical resurrection from the dead. We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ ascended into heaven and is now exalted at the right hand of God where, as our High Priest, He fulfills the ministry as Representative, Intercessor, and Advocate. We believe Jesus is coming again to judge the living and the dead.

That Jesus was truly God can be argued from many different parts of the New Testament. The angels of God are his angels and the Kingdom of God is His kingdom (Matthew 13:40-43; Luke 12:8, 9; 15:10). Only God can forgive sins yet Jesus did (Mark 2:1-12). The Son will be the judge at the last judgement (Matthew 25:31-46). He has authority over the Sabbath which God established (Exodus 20:8-11; Mark 2:27, 28). God is the one who has the power to kill and make alive (1 Samuel 2:6; Psalm 119) yet Jesus claims to be the resurrection and the life (John 11:25, 26) who can give life to whoever He pleases (John 5:21). He used the formula 'I am' of Himself, notably to claim pre-existence (John 8:58), which in Exodus 3:14, 15 is used of God. This statement prompted an attempt on His life. At His trial He was accused of claiming to be the Son of God (John 19:7), a charge He accepted (Matthew 26:63, 64). Jesus accepted Thomas' affirmation, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28). John 1 and Hebrews 1 are both chapters that provide developed statements of the deity of Jesus Christ as does Paul in Colossians 1:15-20; 2:9 and Philippians 2:5-11.

In the Gospels the humanity of Jesus is taken for granted as if it would not occur to anyone to question it. He lay in a cradle (Luke 2:7), he grew (Luke 2:40) and learned (Luke 2:52). He was tired (John 4:6) and sorrowful (Mark 14:33, 34). He questioned (Mark 15:34), and was surprised (Luke 7:9). He died and was buried (Mark 15:33-47). In several passages His humanity is underlined (John 1:14; Galatians 4:4; Hebrews 2:9,17; 4:15; 5:7,8; 12:2).

Matthew 1:18-25 makes it clear that Joseph accepted no responsibility for Mary becoming pregnant and we are specifically told that they had no union until Jesus was born. Luke 1:29-38 makes it clear that Mary wondered how the words of the angel could be true since she was a virgin. Both passages speak of the work of the Holy Spirit in the conception and both Joseph and Mary humbly accepted God's word to them.

Jesus boldly challenged His critics to prove him guilty of sin (John 8:46), a challenge they could only take up by charging Him with blasphemy at His trial. Even at His trial the governor declared His innocence (Luke 23:4, 14, 15, 22). He had no sin (2 Corinthians 5:21), He was tempted in every way like us yet He was without sin (Hebrews 4:15), He is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners (Hebrews 7:26), He committed no sin and no deceit was

found in His mouth (1 Peter 2:22) and in Him is no sin (1 John 3:5).

The Gospels contain many stories of how Jesus was able to do things that normal people are not able to do. These events which run counter to the observed processes of nature are called miracles. These miracles are consistent with the overall Biblical picture of God as actively involved in the world He created. They are an integral part of the revelation of the glory and love of God in the life of Jesus and are regarded as the vindication of Him by God (Acts 2:22). The central miracle of the New Testament is the resurrection which provides hope for the believer and without which we are a rather pitiable group (1 Corinthians 15). To reject these miracles is to deny God's work in His world and in our lives as individuals and corporately as His people.

The Biblical significance of Jesus' death is seen repeatedly. When instituting communion Jesus said "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:28). Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29, 36). He will give His flesh for the life of the world (John 6:51). He will give His life as a seed must die in order to produce many seeds (John 12:23-26). Paul uses the language of substitutionary sacrifice on different occasions to speak of the death of Jesus (Romans 4:25; 5:6,8; 8:3,32; Galatians 1:3-5; Ephesians 1:7; 1 Thessalonians 5:10; Titus 2:14). The letter to the Hebrews emphasises the finality and the eternal significance of Jesus' once for all sacrifice of himself for the sins of many people (Hebrews 7:26, 27; 9; 10). Peter tells us that Jesus "bore our sins in His body on the tree" (1 Peter 2:24), that He "died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous to bring you to God" (1 Peter 3:18). In the book of Revelation Jesus is the Saviour, ruler and judge of the world. One of the reasons that He is to be given glory and power for ever and ever is that He "has freed us from our sins by His blood" (Revelation 1:5). He is characterised as the Lamb who was slain and with His blood purchased men for God and who is worthy of all the praise of all creation (Revelation 5).

On the first day of the week following the death of Jesus His grave was found to be empty (Matthew 28:1-10; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-12; John 20:1-9), a fact reported by the guards (Matthew 28:11-15). Several appearances of Jesus to the disciples convinced them that He was alive. He had a tangible body which was recognisable yet different (Luke 24:13-49; John 20:10-21:25). The disciples preached courageously that Jesus whom the Jews had crucified had been raised from the dead by God and that the disciples were witnesses of this (Acts 2:14-39). The classic statement of the centrality of Jesus' resurrection for Christian belief and life is found in 1 Corinthians 15. Peter summarises this significance: "He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1:3).

The account of Jesus' ascension is given in Acts 1:1-12. Jesus indicated that this would happen (John 6:62; 20:17). It is spoken of in Ephesians 4:10; 1 Timothy 3:16; 1 Peter 3:22; Hebrews 4:14. Following His ascension Jesus now occupies the position of supreme power and authority in the whole universe (Ephesians 1:20-23), He intercedes with God on behalf of believers (Romans 8:34) and should be the focus of the hearts of believers (Colossians 3:1).

Matthew 24, 25; Mark 13 and Luke 21 are different accounts of some of Jesus' teaching about His return in power and glory. This return will take place following certain signs but its timing is absolutely unknown. It will be a time of salvation and judgement for which we are warned to be prepared. Jesus told His disciples that He was going to prepare a place for them and would return to take them to be with Him (John 14:3). The angels at His ascension said that He would return in the same way that He had gone into heaven (Acts 1:11). The early church preached it as part of God's great plan (Acts 3:21). Paul taught it as a major cause for encouragement in the Christian life (1 Thessalonians 2:19; 3:13; 4:13-5:11; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10; 2:1-12) and it occurs in his writings with direct practical application on several occasions (1 Corinthians 15:23; Philippians 3:20; Colossians 3:4; 2 Timothy 4:8; Titus 2:13). His second appearing will not be to bear sin but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him (Hebrews 9:28). The book of Revelation concludes the Bible on a note of anticipated blessing and warning. "Behold, I am coming soon!" (Revelation 22:7, 12, 20).

4. We believe that salvation is entirely of God brought to man by grace and received by personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, whose precious blood was shed on Calvary for the forgiveness of our sins.

To use the word salvation implies a predicament from which we need to be delivered, a fact about which the Bible leaves us in no doubt. This predicament is that people universally are sinners (Romans 3:23) who share in the guilt of Adam and Eve (Romans 5:12-21) and their sentence of death (Romans 6:23). The human mind is at enmity with God, it is morally and spiritually corrupt, blinded and a slave to its darkened understanding and rebellious mind (Romans 1:18-32; 3:9-23, 8:7-8; 2 Corinthians 4:4-6; Ephesians 2:1-3). People are thus unable, indeed incapable, of choosing things that are pleasing to God or to respond to the gospel of Grace (John 3:3-5; John 6:44, 65; 1 Corinthians 2:14, 12:3).

In one sense they are already condemned (John 3:18), in another sense they are yet to face the judgement of God. The outcome of this judgement will be that some will "go away to eternal punishment" and others "to eternal life" (Matthew 25:46). The eternal punishment is described as "the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41) or as a fiery furnace "where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Luke 13:37-43). This punishment is so terrible that it would be better to go through life crippled, maimed or blind than be "thrown into the fire of hell" which is never quenched (Matthew 18:7-9; Mark 9:42-49). Hell is pictured as a place of such torment that even a drop of water on the tongue would bring relief (Luke 16:19-31). In the book of Revelation the devil and his allies are thrown into the lake of fire and following the great final judgement anyone whose name is not found written in the book of life will also be thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:10-15).

Biblical salvation is deliverance from this fate. Jesus came to save his people from their sins (Matthew 1:21 cf Luke 19:10). It is possible because of what Jesus Christ has achieved on our behalf (Romans 3:21-26). Jesus spoke repeatedly of eternal life (e.g. John 3:16). His Father's house has many rooms that He will come and take His people to. The truly wonderful thing about heaven is that believers will see Jesus, they will be like Him (1 John 3:1, 2) and they will be with Him forever (John 14:1-3; Revelation 21:3). Jesus promised the penitent thief that he would be with Jesus in paradise that day (Luke 23:43). Paul knew that the alternative to continued life on earth was to depart and be with Christ, something he described as "better by far" (Philippians 1:23). The Bible uses different words to give a complete picture of the process of this salvation: substitution (Romans 5:8), justification (Romans 3:23, 24), propitiation (Romans 3:25, 26), reconciliation (Romans 5:10), redemption and forgiveness (Ephesians 1:7).

The Biblical picture of this salvation is that it is entirely of God. God has called and elected his people (John 6:44,65; Romans 8:28-30, 9:11-13; Ephesians 1:4-6, 12; 1 Thessalonians 1:4-5; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Timothy 1:9; Revelation 13:7-8, 17:8), and this choice was not due to any foreseen merit in us, but simply because he chose to bestow his love on us (Ephesians 1:5).

The Bible pictures the response to our call for in two ways. Firstly is faith. Initially faith is accepting something as true but a fully developed Biblical faith takes the next step of placing one's personal trust in what is believed. "And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6). "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). In response to the question "What must I do to be saved?" Paul replied "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved" (Acts 16:30, 31).

Secondly is repentance. Repentance is a Godly sorrow for your sin and a determination to turn from it. John the Baptist introduced Jesus by preaching "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Luke 3:3). Jesus began his preaching by calling on people to "repent for the kingdom of heaven is near" (Matthew 4:17). Jesus told His disciples that "repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47). On the day of Pentecost Peter called on people to "repent and be baptised every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins" (Acts 2:38). Paul said that God now "commands all people everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30). In reality genuine faith and repentance will occur together. The true believer will seek to be an obedient disciple.

The redeemed, once saved, are kept by God's power and are thus secure in Christ forever. We believe that it is the privilege of believers to rejoice in the assurance of their salvation through the testimony of God's Word, which clearly forbids the use of Christian liberty as an occasion for the flesh (John 6:37-40, 10:28-30; Romans 8:30-39; 1 Corinthians 1:8-9; Philippians 1:6)

People will try all sorts of other ways to obtain salvation but Romans 1-3 and the book of Galatians make it clear that all human attempts are doomed to failure. The world offers a smorgasbord of ways of salvation but Jesus said "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). Peter said "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). This is not a minor claim inserted at random. It is, rather, thoroughly consistent with the rest of the Gospel.

5. We believe that those who acknowledge Christ as Saviour and Lord belong to the church universal, His body. Christ is the only head and each of us are members, united by the Holy Spirit.

In the New Testament those who respond with faith and repentance join the fellowship of groups of believers (e.g. Acts 2:42-47). We call that collective dimension of the Christian life the church. Jesus said that He would build His church and that the gates of hell would not prevail against it (Matthew 16:18). He also said that the church would have a role in settling disputes between His followers (Matthew 18:17). The church can be spoken of in universal terms as "the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven" (Hebrews 12:23) or in local terms (Acts 20:28; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 1 Peter 5:2).

The body is a frequently used image of the people of God in the New Testament. The church is the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22, 23; 4:12). Christ is the head of the body (Ephesians 1:22; 5:23; Colossians 1:18) and the body is dependant on Him for its life and growth (Ephesians 4:15, 16; Colossians 2:19). The picture of a body emphasises unity even though the body is made up of many different members who all make their own contribution whilst working together for the good of the body (Romans 12:4, 5; 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4:11-16). Jesus saw Himself as the one shepherd of His sheep who would constitute one flock (John 10:16). Jesus prayed for the complete unity of His followers so that the world would believe the Gospel (John 17:20-23). The fact of the unity of the church is stated in Galatians 3:26-28 and Ephesians 4:1-6. This unity is illustrated in Acts 2:42-47 and Acts 4:32-37.

We might use the word church of buildings, institutions or denominations but fundamentally the church is the people of God. In our society the people of God will establish both formal and informal structures and institutions which help us in our corporate life. At times such structures will even provide for legal membership. It is inevitable that some people will at time confuse the visible structures with the real church. It must be remembered that membership of a human institution known as a church does not necessarily imply membership of the true people of God. Membership of the true people of God is on the basis of the state of a person's heart before God, not on any human criteria. The parables of the weeds (Matthew 13:24-30), and the fishing net (Matthew 13:47-50) are sober reminders of this. Baptism is the Biblical symbol of the beginning of the Christian life and hence of our entrance to the true church. It is also the word used of the action of the Holy Spirit in placing us within the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13).

As the people of God we are all to be holy priests "offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5, 9). Paul regarded the proclamation of the Gospel as a priestly duty (Romans 15:16).

6. That each person upon believing in Christ is regenerated, baptised, indwelt and sealed by the Holy Spirit, who also gives gifts to the Church and enables each believer to produce the fruit of the Spirit.

Regeneration is another word for the new birth. It is the inner re-creation of sinful human nature by the Holy Spirit without which it is impossible to see the Kingdom of God (John 3:5-8; Titus 3:5,6). John the Baptist said that in contrast to his own baptism with water Jesus would "baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire", the context suggesting that this would involve both salvation and judgement (Matthew 3:11,12). A few days before His ascension Jesus told the disciples that in a few days they would be baptised with the Holy Spirit in contrast to John's water baptism (Acts 1:5). On the day of Pentecost the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke in languages unknown to them (Acts 2). Some time later a group of Gentiles had the same experience which Peter identified as the fulfilment of Jesus' words (Acts 11:15-17). The reality of baptism by the Spirit is what makes us members of the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13).

Jesus taught that the Holy Spirit would dwell in believers (John 7:38,39; 14:17). Peter proclaims that the promise of the Holy Spirit is for all who repent and are baptised (Acts 2:38,39). Believers are to recognise that their bodies are God's temple in which God's Spirit lives (1 Corinthians 3:16,17; 6:19,20; Ephesians 2:21,22). The indwelling of the Holy Spirit is such an integral part of the Christian life that Paul could say "And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ" (Romans 8:9).

The presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives is also said to be a seal. The Christian is the possessor of a very rich inheritance, the full extent of which cannot be appreciated before the great and final day of redemption. In the meantime we are sealed with the Holy Spirit who guarantees our inheritance on that day (Ephesians 1:13,14; 4:30; 2 Corinthians 1:21,22). The Holy Spirit gives gifts to the people of God which are to be used in service of one another for the building up of the body of Christ (Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12,14; Ephesians 4:7-16). The indwelling Holy Spirit also works to produce the kind of character that is pleasing to God through sanctification (Romans 15:16; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:2), producing fruit in our lives (Galatians 5:22-24) and making us

like Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 3:17,18).

Explanations of Doctrinal Perspectives

1. We believe in baptism by immersion of those who are able to make a clear confession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the Gospels John baptised (Matthew 3:6,7,11; Mark 1:4,5,8; Luke 3:3,7,12,16; 7:29,30; John 1:25-33), Jesus was baptised (Matthew 3:13-16; Mark 1:9; Luke 3:21) and Jesus (or his disciples) baptised (John 3:22-26; 4:1,2). Jesus also referred to His death as a baptism (Mark 10:38, 39; Luke 12:50). In the book of Acts baptism followed almost immediately on belief (Acts 2:28, 41; 8:12, 36, 38; 9:18; 10:47, 48; 16:14, 15, 31-33; 18:8).

Jesus told His disciples to baptise new believers as an integral part of making them disciples. Another key part of this instruction was to teach the new disciples to obey everything that Jesus had commanded (Matthew 28:19, 20). Baptism into Christ Jesus is a baptism into His death and being buried with Him in order that we might rise with Him to live a new life (Romans 6:3, 4; Colossians 2:12). All who have been baptised into Christ have clothed themselves with Christ (Galatians 3:26, 27). These kind of statements are meaningless if baptism is not accompanied by saving faith and repentance and not followed by a new life.

The occurrences in the New Testament that give any indication suggest that there was a volume of water present and that the person being baptised was immersed in it (Matthew 3:16; Acts 8:38, 39). The word in the original Greek New Testament that we translate baptise means 'to dip under' and in non-Christian literature of the time it could also mean 'to plunge, sink, drench or overwhelm'. In addition, to baptise by immersion is the most appropriate way to symbolise the identification with Jesus' burial and resurrection.

So our practice is to baptise by immersion those who are able to make a clear confession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and who have a clear understanding of the meaning of baptism. We strongly encourage anyone who has not been baptised like this to carefully and prayerfully think about the relevant Bible passages.

2. We believe in the equality of men and women in their standing before God. We also believe that the Bible spells out different roles for men and women in some situations within the life of the church which in no way compromise this equality.

Our desire as a church is to be faithful to the whole range of Biblical teaching on this topic and not to allow pressure from vocal groups within our society to cause us to neglect parts of the Bible without adequate reason. Within the home the husband is the head of his wife as Christ is the head of the church. Wives should submit to their husbands and husbands should love their wives (Ephesians 5:21-33 cf 1 Peter 3:1-7). Our public worship should reflect the fact that "the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man" (1 Corinthians 11:2-16). The appeal to creation (1 Timothy 2:12-13 and 1 Corinthians 11:8-9), the angels (1 Corinthians 11:10) and the relation between Christ and the church (Ephesians 5:22-27) mean that we are unwilling to accept these verses as simply cultural or addressing limited local issues. In broad practice this means that our elders, preachers and the leaders of our church services will all be men (1 Timothy 2:12).

This does not imply any inferiority for ladies at all, any more than any other position within the church confers status. Jesus warned that "what is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight" (Luke 16:15) and that in His kingdom much human ranking will be reversed (Matthew 19:30). A large number of Scriptures present a very positive view of the role of women and their place within the people of God, most notably Galatians 3:28 with its emphasis on the abolition of all distinctions between people in our standing before God. We are all servants who should actively seek to emulate the self sacrificing servant heart of our Saviour (Mark 10:45; Philippians 2:1-11).

3. We believe that the Holy Spirit plays an indispensable role in the Christian life. While we believe that worship should be a warm and wholehearted response to God our practise of public worship does not include the expression of what are commonly regarded as charismatic gifts.

We value the indispensable role of the Holy Spirit in personal Christian living and in the corporate life and outreach of the church. The evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit is seen firstly in the display of the fruit of the Spirit (as outlined in Galatians 5:22, 23) in individual lives and in the collective life of the church, and secondly in the exercise of spiritual gifts. The Bible outlines common spiritual gifts in Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12:7-11, 1 Corinthians 12:28 and Ephesians 4:11-14 and emphasises that the purpose of them is the common good. The particular gifts of the Holy Spirit associated with worship in the New Testament are speaking in tongues,

interpretation of tongues and prophecy. Guidelines for the use of these gifts are given in 1 Corinthians 14 especially verses 26-33.

Since worship is the response of the whole person to the revelation of God it will include our intellects, emotions and behaviours. We value and encourage a warm and full hearted response to the person of God and His work in the world and in our lives. At times this response may include physical posture such as raised hands, kneeling or lying prostrate in the presence of God.

We are not cessationists. That means, we do not believe that any of the spiritual gifts ceased after the time of the apostles. While we affirm all the gifts as described in the Bible, we do have reservations about some of the unusual phenomena seen in some churches that do not bear any resemblance to Biblical precedents for the work of the Holy Spirit. We are convinced that enduring growth in the Christian life is the result of long term obedience and dedication to knowing God through His word, through prayer and being led by the Holy Spirit, having faith in His working for our good in every situation. Our priority is to proclaim the Gospel as central and fundamentally important without becoming distracted. We are not what is commonly called a charismatic church and would kindly point out that anybody seeking an overtly charismatic church may not be content within our fellowship.

4. We believe that based on Jesus' instruction and Paul's teaching communion occupies a central place in the worship of the church.

Three Gospels record Jesus' institution of what we call communion or the Lord's Supper (Matthew 26:26-30; Mark 22-25, Luke 22:17-23). As we share the one loaf we participate in the one body of Christ and as we drink we participate in the blood of Christ (1 Corinthians 10:16, 17). The cup that we drink is a cup of thanksgiving (1 Corinthians 10:16). In instituting communion Jesus gave thanks for both the bread and the cup before He distributed them to His disciples (Matthew 26:26-29). Every time we eat the bread and drink the cup we remember Jesus and we proclaim His death (1 Corinthians 11:24, 25). However, communion has limited life because it is only until Jesus comes again and is in a sense a reminder of His future return (1 Corinthians 11:26). Paul refers to communion as the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:20) recognising that He instituted it, outlining its key elements. Taking all of these ideas together we find that so many important elements of our Christian life are integral to communion that it naturally forms the focus of much of our worship. The glimpse we get of the early church at communion is that it was a joyful, informal and regular part of their life. Taking 1 Corinthians 11-14 as pretty much a whole gives the impression that communion was a part of their public worship and that a variety of people came prepared to contribute to the worship with little if any prior organisation.

This is balanced by some warnings. Some of the Corinthians were eating sacrifices offered to idols and so participating with demons. "You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's Table and the table of demons", to attempt to do so is to arouse the Lord's jealousy (1 Corinthians 10:18-22). Deep divisions within the church at Corinth and lack of consideration for each other caused Paul to say that "When you come together it is not the Lord's Supper you eat" (1 Corinthians 11:20). This leads to a very solemn passage:

Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognising the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgement on himself. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgement. When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world. (1 Corinthians 11:27-32)

In the light of passages such as Hebrews 9:25, 26 we do not believe that there is any element of a renewed sacrifice of Jesus in communion necessitating the leadership of a specially qualified priest.

5. We believe that generosity with material possessions reflects a true grasp of the Gospel and all of its implications.

In the Old Testament the people of Israel were to give God one tenth of their produce and their herds (Leviticus 27:30-32; Deuteronomy 14:22). Abraham set an early example when he gave a tenth of the spoils of battle to Melchizedek (Genesis 14:20; Hebrews 7:1-10). Jacob promised to give God one tenth of all that God would give him (Genesis 28:22). It is hard to get an accurate picture of exactly how these tithes were used. The tithes were at times to be given to the Levites as their inheritance in return for their work at the Tent of Meeting (Numbers 18:21-28), at other times the people were to eat them with rejoicing in the presence of God at the place He would choose

so that the people would learn to revere the LORD their God always (Deuteronomy 12:5-18; 14:23-25). Every third year the tithes were to be stored in the towns for the benefit of Levites, aliens, fatherless and widows (Deuteronomy 14:28, 29; 26:12). Not to bring the tithes is to rob God (Malachi 3:8) and renewed commitment to tithing was a part of spiritual revival (2 Chronicles 31:5,6,12; Nehemiah 10:37,38; 12:44; 13:5,12; Malachi 3:10). However, tithing can be done even when there is sin which needs to be dealt with (Amos 4:4).

Despite this emphasis on tithing the Israelites gave to God in different ways. There were special gifts for the building of the Tabernacle, vows that people made, and sacrifices and offerings that were a prescribed part of their worship. Every seven years they were to cancel debts and release Hebrew slaves (Deuteronomy 15) and every fifty years the land was to be freely returned to its original owners (Leviticus 25). In dealing with people generosity is encouraged and it becomes an act of faith as many times obedience is prerequisite for God's blessing (Deuteronomy 15).

Tithing is not prominent in the New Testament. Apart from the mention of Abraham giving Melchizedek one tenth (Hebrews 7:1-10) it is used as an example of inadequate religion. Jesus criticised the teachers of the law and the Pharisees who tithed spices and herbs but neglected the important things of justice, mercy and faithfulness (Matthew 23:23; Luke 11:42). The Pharisee whose prayer was unacceptable to Jesus told God how he tithed everything that he received (Luke 18:12). Yet Jesus calls His followers to costly discipleship (Matthew 6:19-24; 8:18-22; 19:16-22 Luke 9:21-25 12:16-21, 32-34; 17:33). This call is taken up by the apostles and is based on a full understanding of what God has done for us (2 Corinthians 5:15; Colossians 3:1-3; Romans 12:1, 2; 1 John 3:16-18). God's generosity to us should inspire our generosity.

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich. (2 Corinthians 8:9)

Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times; having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. (2 Corinthians 9:6-8)

We believe that generosity with material possessions reflects a true grasp of the Gospel and all of its implications. To regularly give is something we encourage all to aim at. We make no attempt to be prescriptive about how this money is given but encourage all to give to those areas of need for which God will give you a sense of burden. The ministry of the local church is greatly helped by your giving and in view of Galatians 6:6 we believe that those who benefit from the life of the church have a responsibility to direct part of their giving to the church.