



FIG. 1

# FOUNDATIONS

Exploring and understanding TBC's Statement of Faith

# WHY HAVE A STATEMENT OF FAITH?

We all know that is not simply what you believe but how you express it that makes the critical difference in life. As a church we are defined not only by what we do, but by what we believe. Not only are we defined by what we believe, we're shaped by it to - the language that we use in speaking of God communicates to each other and the world around us how the convictions we have compel us to serve Jesus.

Our statement of faith does several things

**It speaks of matters of first importance:** The Bible ranks truth - there ARE issues of first importance, things that we believe that are about being in relationship with God that cannot be compromised without doing damage to our relationship with Him and our relationships with one another. There are also issues which we must make up our own minds about - secondary and tertiary levels of importance with regard to salvation and belonging to the church. The matters in our statement of faith are what we believe are matters of first importance. It does not seek to be exhaustive but it does seek to be comprehensive and comprehensible: it is broad enough in its scope to touch the points of saving faith without seeing to speak to everything that is relevant.

**It is a central point of our unity:** when we become Christians we are united to God by faith in Jesus, through faith by grace. This means we also are united with God's people. Our unity is in Christ and leads toward community - Paul's letter to the Ephesian church talks about this in chapter 4. We are being united more and more together and that is experienced as a greater understanding of God's truth together: mature, steadfast, solid, growing, dynamic and transformed. Our statement of faith is both foundational and aspirational: we grow from it and we grow toward it. We express it faith in a few words but the truths are profound and deeply challenging. Each of our members are asked to express agreement with the statement of faith and our leaders and pastors are required to be committed to it and able to explain it.

**It is a safe foundation for building family and community:** Church is not a building, not a place, but a people. Our statement of faith gives us a common language to talk together about where we begin in our building of community and welcoming people in. When people want to know what makes us distinctive we're able to say that this is what we believe about the Bible, about God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, about the world and about history. Our statement of faith connects us to the global church - believers from all over the world will come and recognise that they too can belong here because of what we

believe - and to our national expression of belonging to Christ - believers from all over the country will know they are 'with us' as we understand our own beliefs. As God adds to our number those who are coming to faith in Jesus our statement of faith makes it clear the things we are committed to.

**It is a call to greater maturity:** We don't simply believe - these words are not a mantra to be recited, not a catechism to be memorised - there is depth behind the statement of faith. Our hope is that as we study God's Word together, listen to it preached, read it faithfully in our day to day lives, our understanding of truth will deepen and we will grow in the knowledge of God and in our character become more and more like Him. These truths are worth living for and dying for - they will change the choices we make and mess with the priorities we have. They disturb as well as comfort. We are called to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow after Jesus - our statement of faith fuels our passion to deepen our walk with Jesus.

**It is a reminder of truth:** As the statement of faith says we are sinners - without Christ we are without hope. We need to be reminded of that truth, held to a standard that will at times fill us with awe and at others leave us heart-sore. The statement of faith in our Constitution is there to anchor us - it is rightly difficult to change so that we do not easily or lightly walk or drift away from truth. It feeds our consciousness of the importance of what we believe and it is a reminder to our conscience that as the first thing in our constitution what we believe must be the primary mould of our thinking and action, as we live under God's care.

That being said, however, the statement of faith is not a replacement for the Holy Spirit's work in our church and our lives; nor does it say everything that must be said. It is the starting point not the limit of our conscious unity, maturity, holiness and mission. It is a statement of what we believe not the sum total of all that we hold dear: though it seeks to express Scripture's teaching it is not an authority over Scripture; though an expression of our common faith it is not a shackle on our liberty of conscience or a barrier to fellowship. As we consider what our statement of faith says - let us seek God and His glory in our community and wider world.

Below each of the points in our statement of faith are laid out and explained. There are some Biblical references which demonstrate how we have come to these convictions. Again the explanations below are not exhaustive but do seek to inform and provide a context for further discussion if you would like that.

The Bible is uniquely inspired by God and is therefore entirely authoritative and trustworthy in all Christian belief and practice.

**The bible** - There are 66 books in the Bible with around 40 authors. Bible simply means 'library' and it is a collection of books in a single volume. These books were written by approximately 40 authors over a timespan of about 1000 years. Some of them began life in oral tradition - prior to written communication. There are different styles of writing in the Bible (genre) covering narrative history (biography, story), poetry, law, prophecy (God speaking through people), wisdom literature (exploring and applying broad principals of truth), apocalyptic (symbolic writing about the end of the world/God acting in history), gospel (theologically focussed biography of Jesus) and letters. How we read and understand the Bible depends on what type of literature it is: "Your eyes behind your veil are doves. Your hair is like a flock of goats descending from the hills of Gilead" (Song of Solomon 4:1) was a compliment in its day!

**is uniquely inspired by God** - we do not believe that "God wrote the Bible", people did. It is a 100% humanly authored book - real, imperfect people writing to and about God's people, at God's direction, with God's perspective and to God's glory. But neither do we mean that the Bible is JUST a human book, because God spoke to and through the authors so that we have a record that is God's Word, it is a 100% divinely authored book. Paul and Peter in two New Testament letters help us to understand this clearly. Peter writes in 1 Peter 10-12 about the prophets of old 'searching intently' directed by 'the Spirit of Christ in them' 'it was revealed to them they were not serving themselves but you' - human reason played its part under God's action in their lives. The Bible is a reasoned and reasonable book. In 2 Peter 1:21 he clarifies even further, "For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit". The Bible is reasoned and reasonable but it does not originate in human deduction but in God's self-revelation. Peter reflects on how the old testament writers experienced the inspiration of God, in 2 Timothy 3:16 Paul reflects on the nature of Scripture as it was given and is now experienced in the life of believers, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." God spoke and speaks still in these collected books, we experience and know God's own Word in human words, given to us as "holy scripture" (2 Tim 3:15) - unique in their composition and inspiration.

**and is therefore entirely authoritative and trustworthy in all Christian belief and practice.** - because it is God's self-revelation it is the first and final word in our understanding of what it means to live in Christ, for Christ, by the power of the Spirit to the glory of the Father (2 Timothy 3:16). We must read it, reflect on it, study it, memorise it, talk about it together, teach it to each other and work out together what it means to live according to God's Word today (Deuteronomy 11:18-21). The Bible is not something to get around but something to live with (Psalm 119:33-40), God's Word is not to be explained away but taught in a way that makes plain it's meaning for the original hearers and then unpack how we are to believe it, trust it, obey it and make it known, today (2 Timothy 2:1-7, 24-25; 2 Peter 3:15-18). When the Bible is read and taught and meditated on it challenges how we see things, changes how we understand the world we live in and, by the work of God's Spirit, comforts us in sorrow, convicts us of sin, feeds our hearts and strengthens our faith. We sit under its authority and treasure its power to make God known (Hebrews 4:12). Our starting point in our life as a church is to consider what God has said and to seek to live by it and make it known today (Colossians 3:16)

There is only one, living, true and eternal God, the creator of all. He is holy, just and infinite in wisdom, love, and power; sovereign over all things. He reveals Himself as Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. God is at the same time One and Three: united in the one nature.

**There is only one, living, true and eternal God** - "in the beginning God" are the first words in the Bible, Genesis 1:1. Everything begins in Him, in His unique position in creation: nothing before God, nothing greater than or that can compete with Him. God is not an abstract idea from human imagination, He is personal and alive - distinct from all that we experience of the world, that means he is not limited to our experience of Him. God has always been and always will be - there has never been a time where God has not been nor will there be a time where he does not exist. All other ideas about existence that do not start with Him are false. All other philosophies and religious ideas, all other gods, are counterfeit - they may contain elements of the truth, but they are ultimately false ideas and false gods, which must be repented of and repudiated. God asks the defining questions in Isaiah 40:18, "With whom, then, will you compare God? To what image will you liken Him?" and in Isaiah 40:25, 'To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?' There is one simple answer - no-one, nothing, is comparable: there is only one, true, living and eternal God and he has made himself known in Scripture and supremely in Jesus (Hebrews 1:1-4)

**the creator of all** - Chapter one of Genesis starts with God and continues with Him speaking creation into being. People disagree over whether Genesis 1 is speaking poetically or historically but the Bible is 100% insistent that God is the creator of all that there is (Colossians 1:15-17). How we experience creation isn't how God first created it, sin and judgement have changed it. God created this world without sin and destined it to be a means of Him displaying His goodness and glory (Psalm 19:1-6). He is not the same as creation, he is not the 'god of the sea' or the 'god of the stars', but He is the God over all creation - everything rightfully belongs to Him (Ps24:1-2).

**He is holy, just and infinite in wisdom, love, and power; sovereign over all things** - God is not like His creation, though aspects of His character are clearly seen and understood by the inherent beauty of all that He has made (Romans 1:20). God is not limited by human understanding or by the nature of physical existence (John 4:24, Revelation 1:8, Jeremiah 32:17-19). God is good and there is no hint of wrongdoing in Him (1John 1:5). God does not just help us to understand where goodness comes from, He Himself is the beginning of our reference point to understand what it means to be good (Mark 10:17). God is completely different to humanity in all of His perfections, without His commitment to make Himself known we would not only have no way to approach Him but we would be destroyed by His perfection in attempting to do so (Isaiah 48:17, 55:8-11; Leviticus 10:1-2). There is nothing outside of His control and He sustains all of created order as King (Revelation 1:7-8, 21:5-7, 22:13)

**He reveals Himself as Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. God is at the same time One and Three: united in the one nature** - God is eternally one in three persons: Father, Son and Spirit. The word 'trinity' does not appear in Scripture, as so we've kept it out of our formal statement of faith. We are, like the thousands of generations before us, people who believe that the Bible shows us God in three distinct but eternally united persons. It is something that the Bible makes clear from its beginning but is made explicit in the New Testament. Some accuse Christians of 'making up' this doctrine but it is something found in Scripture, like gold in a stream, rather than something which is manufactured. God is Father, Son and Spirit according to the Scriptures. God The Father has made Himself known fully to us in God the Son coming in complete humanity and perfect divinity in Jesus Christ. God is made present to us in God the Holy Spirit(Matthew 25:19-20). We declare God to be one and three: as Jesus told us, as Scripture declares, and as we have been taught.

God created all people in His image but each person has rebelled against Him and we are therefore subject to God's just judgment of death. Jesus Christ died as a sacrifice in the place of sinners so that whoever believes in Him will not perish but receive eternal life. This gift of salvation is given by God's grace, received in faith, and is not because of any human merit or work.

**God created all people in His image** - "Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness'" (Genesis 1:26). The innate value and dignity of human beings arises from this reality; at the core of our sense of being is God's own being - we reflect His beauty, glory, majesty and Personhood. Genesis goes on to say, "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." (Gen 1:27). They are installed as the head stewards over creation and given honour in work and worship. Men and women of all races and backgrounds are inalienably and intrinsically valuable as God's image bearers.

**but each person has rebelled against Him and we are therefore subject to God's just judgment of death.** Genesis 3 relates the story explaining what is often called "The Fall" - Adam and Eve, living in a world without fault, are tempted by the serpent to take what God had forbidden and warned them would cause death. They take and eat of this fruit of the tree of good and evil having seen that it was "good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise" despite it being against what God had said. God's response subjects creation to judgement: once fit for faultless humanity now it becomes the faulted home of rebellious people. God having been rejected by them justly delivers them to the consequences of their actions: death is their end, frustration their way of life and alienation from God, each other and creation their experience. The bible sums this up in this way, "For the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23<sup>a</sup>). Each of us will get the pay we have stored up for ourselves in our 'daily work' of rejecting God.

**Jesus Christ died as a sacrifice in the place of sinners so that whoever believes in Him will not perish but receive eternal life.** God did not leave the story at the just pronouncement of death, even though that would have been entirely just. Even in pronouncing judgement over creation there is a promise of hope. God speaks to the serpent who tempted Adam and Eve and says this, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel." (Genesis 3:15) The Bible tells the story of God keeping this promise and the hope of the 'serpent crusher' emerging in a world of brokenness and rebellion. Jesus is the one that God promises. In accordance with Scripture he breaks the curse of death by dying as one who has never sinned, choosing to sacrifice his life on the cross in the place of lives that have justly earned death. He rises from the dead, never to face death again so that all those who trust in Jesus as Lord and saviour, who died in their place, come to be reconciled to God and given the right to be His children (John 1:12), forgiven of their sin (Acts 10:43,13:38,26:18), set free from the curse of death (1John 3:8) and receive the gift of eternal life. (John 3:16)

**This gift of salvation is given by God's grace, received in faith, and is not because of any human merit or work.** In our brokenness and alienation from God we are unable to do anything which would merit God's favour, "You were dead through the trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:1). In this death of sin all our actions, even at their best, are without any merit before God, "We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away." (Isaiah 64:6). "But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." (Ephesians 2:4-6). Death is earned but forgiveness and eternal life are given as a gift, "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 6:23).

Jesus Christ is the eternal sinless Son of God, through whom and for whom the universe was created. In fulfilment of the scriptures He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He is fully God and truly human. He was crucified and died for the forgiveness of sins. He rose bodily from the dead and ascended into heaven to be Lord of both the living and the dead.

**Jesus Christ is the eternal sinless Son of God, through whom and for whom the universe was created.** John's account of Jesus life makes it clear that Jesus is God (John 1:1-2) from eternity, that in and through Him everything was created (John 1:3) and that life originates in Him (John 1:4). In Colossians 1:15-17 it is clear Jesus is the eternal Son of God through whom everything is created and in Ephesians 1 Jesus is demonstrated to be the one in whom God has planned and acted to save since 'before the foundation of the world' (Eph 1:4). As He is the eternal Son of God, He has forever been in obedient submission to God The Father. Sinless in his character and action, having become human in Jesus (John 1:14) He remains in obedience even to death on the cross (Phil 2:6-8), dying for sinners (Rom 5:8), taking on the penalty of sin (Rom 4:25, 2Cor 5:21) without being a sinner himself (Hebrews 4:15).

**In fulfilment of the scriptures He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary.** Jesus was born having been conceived as a miraculous work of God The Holy Spirit. The manner of His birth was foretold by the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 7:14) and declared by an angel to both Mary, Jesus' mother (Luke 1:26-38), and her then fiancé, Joseph (Matthew 1:18-24).

**He is fully God and truly human.** The full humanity of Jesus is without dispute, he grows up (Luke 2:40), becomes tired and sleeps (Mark 4:38), eats (Matthew 11:19), weeps (John 11:35) and dies (Luke 23:44-49). Jesus is more than a man without diminishing his humanity, he speaks as God to creation (Matthew 8:23-27), evil and sickness (Luke 7:21) and forgives sin (Matthew 9:2-7).

**He was crucified and died for the forgiveness of sins.** Jesus died on the cross, condemned as a criminal although he was found to be innocent of any charge (John 18:39, 19:4,6, 15-16), giving his life as a ransom (Mark 10:35) to pay for sin as the atoning sacrifice to reconcile people to God (1 John 2:2) fulfilling the sacrificial system as the perfect sacrifice (Hebrews 9:11-14).

**He rose bodily from the dead and ascended into heaven to be Lord of both the living and the dead.** Jesus physically rose from death, never to die again, and ascended to heaven (Ephesians 2:6) and sustains the universe by his power (Hebrews 1:1-3). He is therefore the Lord of all things, seen and unseen, the one who rules as judge over the living and the dead (Romans 14:7-9)

The Holy Spirit convicts, converts and makes alive forever everyone who believes in Jesus; joining them to the body of Christ, The Church, and indwelling each one so as to guide, empower and equip all for godly living and service.

**The Holy Spirit convicts, converts and makes alive forever everyone who believes in Jesus** – Jesus promises that when he returns to the Father they will give the Holy Spirit (John 14:25-26) who is equally and eternally God with God the Father and God the Son. The Spirit is given to all who believe in Jesus and works in their hearts to show them truth and error, right from wrong (John 15:26; 16:13), bringing us to the saving and transforming relationship of forgiveness from God the Father (Titus 3:5-6). It is the Holy Spirit's work that makes Jesus' death on the cross real in the lives of everyone who comes to trust in Jesus as Lord and Saviour (Ezekiel 36:26-27, John 3:5-8) and so it is He who brings eternal life as He takes up residence in the believer's life (John 6:63, Romans 8:1-2).

**joining them to the body of Christ, The Church** – The Holy Spirit indwelling all believers brings the essential unity of all in Christ into being (1 Corinthians 12:13, Acts 2:1-4) and thus establishes the single body of true believers stretching across all divides and bringing individuals into the family of God, the Body of Christ, the unity of the Spirit (Ephesians 2:21-11). No Christian can be one without reference to The Church and no individual church can claim to be solely the true Church (Romans 12:5) – whilst there may be circumstances that might prevent an individual from being with a church congregation on any given week, or even over a prolonged period (frailty or illness) it is ruinous to faith to compromise our unity with God's people by separating ourselves from meeting with the people of God (Hebrews 12:25)

**and indwelling each one so as to guide, empower and equip all for godly living and service.** Each and every Christian believer is indwelt by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:7) who sovereignly gifts and enables individuals to serve in the church for the growth of God's kingdom (Ephesians 4:4-13) and the displaying of His glory (Ephesians 2:7-10) as each church community experience increasing transformation into Christ-likeness in character; proclaiming Jesus as saviour and Lord in word, works of power, and action, to all the world until Jesus comes again in glory. (John 20:21-23, Acts 4:31-35, 1 Cor 12:7-11, Matthew 28:16-20, Acts 1:8)

God has established His Church as the community of all those who are saved by faith in Jesus through grace alone. We are part of that global community, the Body of Christ, and united with it by faith in glorifying God, advancing his kingdom.

God has established His Church as the community of all those who are saved by faith in Jesus through grace alone. Jesus Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for 'her' in His death (Ephesians 5:25). He has chosen to call and establish the church as an everlasting people (Matthew 16:18). He is risen and ascended ruling over all things for the sake of the Church (Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:17-20). The Church is constituted not by human constructs and effort but as a result of God's grace at work in the world and in the lives of believers through which he displays His glory to the whole universe (Ephesians 2:4-10). This inclusion by grace is for available to all, fulfilling God's promise in the Old Testament to Abraham, regardless of ethnicity and descent (Gen 12:1-3; Hebrews 2:16-18; Ephesians 2:13-18, Romans 11:11-24).

We are part of that global community, the Body of Christ, and united with it by faith in glorifying God, advancing his kingdom. Historically the good news about Jesus spread from Jerusalem, throughout Judea, into Samaria and then into the known world through the preaching of the Apostles and on into the next generations. All those who come to the obedience of faith to Jesus are part of His Church. Today we, as a body of believers in New Zealand, are connected to the generations who come before us and those who will come after us through our hope in Jesus Christ. The Church is multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, diverse and multiplying (Matthew 28:16-20, Acts 1:8, 2:6-12, Revelation 5:9,7:9,14:6). Our unity is essential – we are united with all who believe in Jesus. This unity is not something we choose, it arises out of our relationship with Jesus (John 17:20-21) and demonstrates the truth of the good news of Jesus as those who once had nothing in common are united in love and service (1 Peter 2:9-10, John 13:34) and brings glory to God The Father, through the work of the Holy Spirit (John 17:22-23). All believers are of equal standing with regards to salvation as God works in His Church to add daily to the number those who are coming to faith in Jesus.

**At the return of the Lord Jesus, God will draw history to a close and judge all people. Before God those who have received forgiveness for sins by faith in Jesus will be granted endless joy serving God in the new heavens and new earth; those who are not reconciled to God through Jesus Christ will face His just judgement.**

**At the return of the Lord Jesus, God will draw history to a close and judge all people.** As Jesus ascends into heaven 40 days after rising from death, angels speak with the disciples and indicate that he will return as he has gone (Acts 1:9-11). This sure hope is anchored in the promise of God, through the words of Jesus and attested to in the scriptures Scripture (Isaiah 34:8, Matthew 25:31, Revelation 22:12). Jesus will return as the Sovereign Lord; come to judge all who have ever lived at the resurrection of the dead (1 Corinthians 15:22-26). All will be drawn before Him on the day of judgement, the weight of our lives will be seen and judgement pronounced (Rev 20:11-15)

**Before God those who have received forgiveness for sins by faith in Jesus will be granted endless joy serving God in the new heavens and new earth;** All who have trusted in Jesus have the great hope of the bodily resurrection of the dead (1 Corinthians 15:42-49) which will be the end of suffering and struggling with sin (1 Corinthians 15:51-57) and an awakening to a new life fully freed as God's children to serve him in eternal and unrestrained joy (1 John 3:2, Colossians 3:1-4)

**those who are not reconciled to God through Jesus Christ will face His just judgement.** For those who trust in Jesus there is surety of being reconciled to God, given eternal life and forgiveness of sins (John 3:16, 36). The natural state of human beings is to be alienated from God and subject to his just judgement of death (Ephesians 2:1-3, John 3:36). Those who have not received eternal life through reconciliation to God through faith in Jesus as Lord and Saviour in this life have no share in the hope of the blessings of eternity but face God's just judgement (John 5:25-29, Revelation 20:12-15).