

# GRACE

Community Church New Plymouth

*Loving God, Loving God's People, Loving Gods World*

## **WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A CHRISTIAN, EVANGELICAL AND REFORMED CHURCH?**

### **CHRISTIAN?**

- The Bible teaches that 'all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God' and that 'there is no-one righteous not even one.'  
*THEREFORE A Christian is someone who admits that they have tried to rule their own lives their own way and as a result has failed to live in a way that pleases God the Rightful King.*
- The Bible teaches that 'the wages of sin is death'.  
*THEREFORE A Christian is someone who knows and believes that they deserve to be punished by God because of their rebellion against God.*
- The Bible teaches that God 'presented Jesus as a sacrifice of atonement for sins'.  
*THEREFORE A Christian believes that God the Son entered this world and became a man, Jesus of Nazareth, in order to die, bearing the penalty that our sins justly deserve.*
- The Bible teaches that a 'righteousness comes from God through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe'.  
*THEREFORE A Christian is someone whom God accepts as being perfectly righteous because they trust in Jesus' death on the cross.*
- The Bible teaches that 'to all those who received Him, to those who believed in His name He gave the right to become children of God'.  
*THEREFORE A Christian is someone who has a relationship with God as his/her Father through Jesus Christ as Lord as they are assisted by the indwelling Holy Spirit.*

### **EVANGELICAL?**

An Evangelical is someone who is committed to:

1. a specific view of the Bible and
2. certain vital doctrines that are clearly taught by the Bible.

#### **1. Evangelicals have a very specific view of the Bible:**

This understanding can be explained by the simple concept that GOD HAS SPOKEN (Psa 33:6-9; Heb 1:1; Exod 19:9; 20:18-19; Mark 9:7; Heb 1:1-2) and IT IS WRITTEN (Rom 15:4; 2 Timothy 3:15-17; John 10:35!; 2 Pet 3:16!)

The whole Bible is inerrant and infallible.

*"I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book." Revelation 21:18,19*

In the light of an Evangelical view of the Bible, we are committed to doing three things:

1. Preaching the Word (2 Tim 4:2)
2. Evangelism (2 Tim 4:5)
3. Training (2 Tim 2:2)

## **2. An Evangelical firmly believes in at least these essential and foundations teachings of the Bible:**

1. We believe there is only one God. God is One and exists eternally in three Persons; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. These three Persons are distinct from each other but are never separate from each other.
2. We believe in God the Father, the cause, origin, and beginning of all things, visible and invisible, the provider of all my daily spiritual and physical needs.
3. We believe in Jesus Christ the Son of God, and in His death on the cross as an atoning sacrifice for us, His bodily resurrection from the grave and His ascension into heaven. We believe that there is no salvation for anyone apart from faith in Him.
4. We believe in the person and work of the Holy Spirit, the third member of the divine Trinity, in drawing people to Christ, enabling them to believe on him, and strengthening them to live godly lives.
5. We believe the Bible to be the inspired, inerrant and authoritative written Word of God.
6. We believe in the sinfulness of all men and women and their resulting inability to seek out or please God by their own efforts.
7. We believe the necessity for Christians to follow Jesus Christ in personal and often costly discipleship, through acts of love, obedience and trust.
8. We believe the church to be a fellowship of born again persons, committed to helping one another grow in their Christian lives and in the unified worship of God.
9. We believe in the privilege and power of prayer.
10. We believe the importance of Christians reaching into all the world to call people to faith in Christ and helping influence their world, both near and farther away, for good.
11. We believe in the return of Jesus Christ to judge all persons and to take those who had faith in Him to heaven to live with Him for all eternity.

## **REFORMED?**

'Reformed' is nothing new, but simply the old, old Christian faith handed down from Christ to His Apostles and from them, down through the last 2000 years to millions of Christians all over the world.

It is important to note that being 'Reformed' and being a Christian are not the same thing. There are real Christians today who would not call themselves 'Reformed' either because they don't really know what it means or, because they don't agree with some of the teachings of the Reformation.

Why are we 'Reformed'?

Because, 'Reformed' is a necessary consequence of us being Evangelical – that is, of us having a very particular view of the Bible. Being Evangelical means that we view the Bible as

1. Inerrant and infallible
2. Fully sufficient (unable to be detracted from or added to).

Evangelical Christianity means that we will believe what the Bible says EVEN where it conflicts with our tradition (religious; secular; humanist), or experience (doubt; suffering; ecstasy) or reason (unbelief; intellectual arguments).

By 'Reformed' we mean that we hold to certain truths that are very clearly taught in the Bible and were rediscovered and most clearly set out during the historical revival known as the 'Reformation'. The Reformation was a period characterised by a return to the Bible as the source of all spiritual truth as opposed to the Church traditions that had built up during the Medieval period known as the 'dark ages' (about 451AD to 1500AD). At the heart of the Reformation lay these 5 great affirmations:

***sola scriptura;***  
***sola gratia;***  
***sola fide;***  
***sola Christus;***  
***solus deo gloria***

1. **The Bible alone.** Christianity is based entirely on what God has said. Everything we ever need to know about God is contained for us in the Bible. The Bible is the highest source of authority. We are not required to believe anything that is not taught by the Bible directly or by reasonable and necessary inference.
2. **Christ alone.** Salvation is entirely due to the finished work of Jesus Christ in His life, death and resurrection. He alone is our Prophet, Priest and King.
3. **Grace alone.** God alone is sovereign, ruling over all creation. He chooses some to be saved, not for anything they have done, nor because they believe in Him but rather because of His free and undeserved gift. As a result of His work through the Holy Spirit, we then turn to Him and believe. Without His Spirit working in us no-one would ever turn to Him or believe His Gospel.
4. **Faith alone.** God's salvation is to be received by faith. We are to live by God's word as we live in His world. There is absolutely nothing we can do to earn our salvation or even contribute to our salvation. We are saved by faith in Christ alone. This kind of faith will always lead us to become more and more like Jesus.
5. **To God be the Glory alone.** These teachings are the only teachings that magnify the wonder of God's gracious salvation and debase human pride and self-sufficiency. Any other teaching of salvation leaves room for human boasting and detracts from God's glory in saving us and is not in line with what the Bible teaches.

And these 5 great affirmations in turn lead to 5 further doctrines that most clearly explain the wonderful gospel of Jesus Christ. They are best remembered by the acronym TULIP.

### 1. **T = Total Depravity**

All of humanity, because of original sin through which we have inherited a corrupt nature, and through our own evil deeds, is thoroughly affected by sin. Every part of us is affected to such an extent that the very best good in us is tainted by evil. This does not mean we are as evil as we could be; God's common grace restrains our evil desires. The result of this teaching is that we are completely unable to save ourselves, or contribute to our salvation or even desire to be saved. Because of this, the clear teaching of the Bible is that every single one of us deserves hell. (Rom 7:18-19; Rom 3:9-12; John 8:34; Eph 2:1-2)

### 2. **U = Unconditional Election**

Since we are totally depraved, it follows that the only reason that anyone is saved from hell is because God, in His astounding love and kindness chose some to be saved. Before the creation of the world, God chose a bunch of people and gave them to His

Son, Jesus. There is absolutely nothing in these people that made God choose them. It is entirely in His inscrutable, sovereign and wonderfully good will that He decided to save some. God does not make salvation possible. God actually saves. God does not wait for us to choose Him. He chooses us. (Eph 1:4-5; John 15:6; Rom 9:11-16; Rom 8:28-30; Acts 13:48)

### 3. **L = Limited Atonement**

This teaching is much better called 'Particular Redemption'. It simply means that Jesus died for His people. Jesus died for a very specific people: those whom God has chosen before the world began. It is true that His death is sufficient to atone for all the sins of this world and a million other worlds, but, Jesus died specifically and purposefully for His people only. In short, Jesus died, not to make salvation possible, but to achieve salvation for those whom He died. When He cried, 'It is finished', sin really was done away with.

"To think that my Saviour died for men who were or are in Hell, seems a supposition too horrible for me to entertain." Spurgeon.

(John 10:11,15 and 26; Romans 8:32-34; Romans 6:4, 5)

### 4. **I = Irresistible Grace**

This is the simple idea that nothing can stop God from raising the dead. Just like none of us chose to be born, and could not stop it, so we cannot stop becoming Christians when God begins to draw us. When God the Spirit begins to give us new life that process is unstoppable. God the Spirit comes to us and changes our hearts, He changes our attitude towards God, and He turns our stubborn wills around so that we repent and believe. God does not respond to us; we respond to Him.

(John 3:1-8; Ephesians 2:1-9; Acts 9)

### 5. **P = Preservation of Christians**

God will never allow a true Christian to lose their salvation. God will always keep His people going to the very end. They will fall; they will stumble; they will suffer and struggle, but in the end God will keep them believing and trusting until they are safely in heaven.

(John 10:27-29; Phil 1:6; Rom 8:28-39; Jude 24)

It is immediately obvious why these teachings are so unpopular with proud, sinful human beings. But it is just as clear that these teachings give all the glory, honour and majesty to God because, "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counsellor? Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?"

For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen." (Romans 11:34-36)

The 5 great teachings (TULIP) called the 'Doctrines of Grace' have the following affect upon our Church:

#### 1. **T = Total Depravity**

This clear teaching of the Bible leads us as a Church to...

- Absolutely rely on God for salvation. (Eph 2:1-5)  
*We are afraid of the sin that lies within us. We live a life of total dependence on God not trusting ourselves at all. Hence the Bible is so central. We stay humble. 'God does not love me because I'm so special; God loves me because He is so special'.*
- Our meetings are characterised by straight-forward, simple, clear bible teaching. (2 Tim 2:2-4; Acts 20:19-20)  
*Because people are depraved we must resist the temptation to 'do what works', or 'give them what they want'. We avoid at all costs manipulating people through music, images,*

or messages of 'positive living' that people want to hear. Instead we preach just what Scripture says and nothing else – even where what Scripture says makes us feel uncomfortable and convicts us. 'The pew must not dictate to the pulpit.'

- Watch our life and doctrine closely. (1 Tim 4:15-16)  
*We don't relax our vigilance, and we don't put ourselves in the way of temptation. We really believe that we can fall into error both in sin and in doctrine.*
- Pray for one another to keep going. (Eph 6:18)  
*Because we believe our hearts are evil we pray earnestly for each other to keep going. Especially for our leaders who are tempted with many sins, especially pride and self-conceit and discouragement.*
- Keep meeting to be encouraged. (Heb 10:25)  
*We don't want to miss Church because the sin that is in us will quickly lead us astray. The Bible says that those who miss Church are hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.*

## 2. U = Unconditional Election

This clear teaching of the Bible leads us as a Church to...

- Stop being proud or boastful. (Eph 2:8,9.)  
*Because there is nothing in us that makes God choose us, we have absolutely no reason to boast at all. We should be very humble, grateful and gentle and kind to others.*
- Be absolutely confident that people are going to be saved. (2 Tim 2:19)  
*The Bible says that God knows those who are His. He is going to save them. We can have great confidence that Christianity will work and that the preaching of the gospel will save some. Praise God that it is not up to us or our hearers, but that the Sovereign God saves His people!*
- Pray and invite our lost friends. (John 10:14-16)  
*There would be no point in praying to God if salvation was up to our friends. The fact that God changes our hearts and turns us to Him means that He is control and this drives us to pray all the more for our unconverted friends and family. We must pray for the lost.*

## 3. L = Limited Atonement

This clear teaching of the Bible leads us as a Church to...

- Be confident that Christ's people will be saved. (John 10:14-16)  
*It is such a comfort to know that it is not our efforts or our methods that will save people. Jesus has His people and they will be saved. Not one person for whom Christ died will ever go to Hell.*
- Be filled with praise. (Rom 3:25-26)  
*This teaching makes us adore the Perfection of God even more. We praise God for the way His justice and His mercy so perfectly work together without cancelling each other! Therefore, we should be a Church that sings heartily, loudly and full of joy.  
"Heaven's peace and perfect justice kiss a guilty world in love"*
- We should be absolutely confident of our salvation. (Heb 10:18-22)  
*If we rely on Jesus' death in our place and live lives of obedience that show that we really do trust Jesus, we can have all the confidence in the world that we are really forgiven and heaven is our inevitable destiny.*

## 4. I = Irresistible Grace

This clear teaching of the Bible leads us as a Church to...

- Trust the preaching of the Gospel for saving sinners. (Rom 1:17; Rom 10:17)  
*The gospel of God as the power to produce faith in people. People don't have faith. The Holy Spirit through the preaching of the gospel produces faith in people. When can trust*

*the gospel as the way God saves, we don't have to manipulate people or promise them things that will make them become Christians.*

- We evangelise everything that moves because we believe in miracles. (Romans 10:14; 2 Cor 4:5,6)

*We don't tell the good news of Jesus to people we think will hear. We tell everyone because God will save some whether they like it or not. In fact, God loves to save the most unlikely people to the 'praise of His glorious grace'. (Eph 1:11,12)*

## **5. P = Preservation of Christians**

This clear teaching of the Bible leads us as a Church to...

- Depend upon grace and not good works to get to heaven.  
*Sadly, some Christians think that God saves us, but we have to keep ourselves going to the end. The Bible teaches that God will never let a true Christian fall from grace. (Rom 10:11; 8:28-39)*
- We don't have to worry that we have 'blown it'. (1 John 1:8-10; Hebrews 4:14-16)  
*When we sin, we can have confidence to go back to God, confess our sin and receive the forgiveness He so freely offers.*
- We put out our very best efforts into our Christianity (2 Peter 1:4-12)  
*The fact that Jesus keeps us going to the end, means that we will put our very best efforts into growing as a Christian. We do not neglect the means of grace. God's grace is channelled to us through His word; prayer; fellowship and growth in Christ-likeness. If we neglect these things we will forfeit the grace that could be ours. If we sit back and relax, and take our Christianity for granted, to our awful shock, we may end up discovering that we were never really saved at all. (1 John 2:19)*

*PLEASE NOTE: This is a extract from our 'Joining In Course. If you wish to see the context of this extract and the full document then please contact us.*