

# GRACE

Community Church New Plymouth

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

## **TWELVE EVANGELICAL DISTINCTIVES**

**The following are Biblical principles that have always characterised Evangelical (bible believing Christianity) but which have been hotly contested at various stages of church history and are still challenged today. We still hold to these principles along with orthodox Evangelicals around the world.**

### **1. THE UNIQUE SUPREMACY OF CHRIST.**

*This is a distinctive view of Jesus.*

The Bible teaches that Jesus claimed to be not merely a prophet or super-human. He is not merely the best of many ways to God. He is uniquely and eternally God the Son, now fully human as well. He is the complete and unique self-revelation of God. He is the complete and uniquely true and living way to be saved by God. He is now risen and enthroned at the right hand of the Father as supreme Lord to rule and judge us all.

*The reason that we needed this uniquely supreme saviour is because of:*

### **2. THE SERIOUSNESS OF SIN.**

*This is a distinctive view of humanity.*

The Bible teaches that we share the guilt of the original rebellion of our representative ancestor, Adam. We are also guilty of enjoying our slavery to the world's hostile rebellion against God, to Satan's influence to distrust his word, and to our nature's proud and selfish desires. We are not only corrupted in our physical desires but also in our perception and wills.

We all therefore naturally suppress our awareness of God from creation and conscience in favour of the idolatrous versions of him that we prefer in the spiritual ideologies of man (which we call religions!). We are all naturally dead to God and deserving of his eternal condemnation and just punishment in hell.

*To rescue us from this deserved wrath of God we therefore need:*

### **3. THE PENAL SUBSTITUTION OF CHRIST'S DEATH.**

*This is a distinctive view of the death of Christ.*

The Bible teaches that just as a football substitute takes the place of a player on the pitch, so Jesus took our place on the cross in 'substitution' for us. It was 'penal' in that he suffered there the penalty or punishment for our sin. God did this to satisfy his own personal justice.

This means that Christ's death not only conquered Satan and his power of death, not only set us an example of sacrificial love to follow but, supremely, satisfied God for our sins. His death was the

pleasing sacrifice for our cleansing from corruption (as modelled in the temple system). His death was the price for our ransom from slavery (as modelled in the redemption of Israel from Egypt). His obedience unto death was the righteousness to secure our acceptance or justification (as modelled in the legal system).

*Only on the basis of such a death could God justly provide:*

#### **4. THE JUSTIFICATION OF BELIEVERS BY GRACE ALONE.**

*This is a distinctive view of our salvation.*

The Bible teaches that we are acceptable to God and reckoned righteous or ‘justified’ in his judgement only by the righteousness of Christ’s perfect obedience counted as ours. This is not because of anything good in us i.e. it is by the generosity of his ‘grace’ alone.

Christ ‘swapped’ places with us: God the Father treated Jesus just-as-if-he-was-me (and punished him) so that he can treat me ‘just-as-if-I’d’ been Jesus (and accepted or ‘justified’ me). By faith in Jesus we have already received God’s judgement declaration that we are acceptable to him, not because of God’s work in us by his Spirit or through the sacraments or by our service but solely because of his work in Christ as a loving gift to us. Jesus lived the Christian life I cannot live in my place. His resurrection demonstrated that his life was acceptable for our justification for every day of our lives. This sets us free to serve God not in order to be saved but because we have already been saved in Christ.

*Such a salvation by God’s gracious initiative is only possible because of:*

#### **5. THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD THE FATHER.**

*This is a distinctive view of history.*

The Bible teaches that God created the world and governs every detail of history including the salvation of the sinners that he has elected to save for eternity. The future is not uncertain or at risk to God as some suggest! We can only know the part of his plans that he has published in the Scriptures. But all who have been called by God through the gospel are assured that God is at work in all things, however painful and confusing some will be, toward his good purpose of our becoming like Christ. He will keep us persevering to the end for he chose and predestined us from before the creation of the world to share his glory. Indeed, none of us would have any chance of being saved had he not done so. These are truths to reassure worried Christians and not for speculating about who may or may not have been chosen. Knowing that God has chosen to save many, we preach the gospel to everyone that will listen.

*This salvation in Christ is applied personally to us through:*

#### **6. THE REGENERATION OF GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT.**

*This is a distinctive view of Christian experience.*

The Bible teaches that God creates new life in us, not through baptism but through his gospel. Through God’s word, God’s Spirit creates the faith to believe his Word and to repent or turn from sin. He indwells every Christian bringing new life and a love for keeping the law of Christ. He helps us to know Christ, to speak of Christ, to serve one another like Christ, to bear the fruit of Christ-likeness and to pray to our Father like Christ.

The supreme blessing of life under the 'New Covenant' (promise or arrangement) of the gospel is to enjoy the presence of the Spirit of God himself within us, transforming us gradually through his Word to become fitting residences for the Living God and uniting us by faith into Jesus himself.

*The urgent necessity of this priceless salvation by God derives from:*

## **7. THE REALITY OF GOD'S COMING JUDGEMENT.**

*This is a distinctive view of the future.*

The Bible teaches that Christ will return to raise all humanity to face his judgement. He will welcome all who have trusted the gospel about him into the eternal paradise Kingdom of the New Creation. All who don't know God or have failed to believe his gospel will forever be excluded from his presence in the ruinous destruction of eternally just and conscious punishment. There will be no purgatory or further chances for repentance. Those who have never heard of Christ will not be condemned for rejecting Christ (for they have never heard of him) but for rejecting their creator of whom they were aware from creation and conscience, preferring religious alternatives to him.

We can only consider such sombre truths with tears and heavy hearts but we are not at liberty to change the politically incorrect teachings of Scripture.

*It is this reality that has for generations driven Evangelicals to the conviction of:*

## **8. THE PRIORITY OF EVANGELISM.**

*This is a distinctive view of the world we live in.*

The Bible teaches that as Christ turned from concentrating on healing to focus upon preaching the gospel and as his apostles delegated their famine relief so as not to be distracted from their ministries of prayer and the Word, so we must recognise that the kindest and most loving thing that we can do for a poor and needy world is to proclaim the gospel.

Of course, Evangelicals have also always served the social needs of their societies. We aren't able to preach all the time, it is our love that so often opens people's ears to our message and it is inherently good to serve people and to contribute to the government of God's creation in accordance with his Word. But our highest priority is spreading the news about Jesus. Even more terrible than the awful tragedy of AIDS and the injustice of famine is the wrath to come and the spiritual starvation for the bread of life evident everywhere in our world.

When there is competition for our time and resources of money and energies we sometimes have to make painful choices. Evangelicals have recognised that we are here to maximise what we can do, as the people we are, with the gifts and opportunities that God has entrusted to us, to advance the work of teaching the gospel of Christ far and wide. The world won't understand or praise our commitment to missionary priorities, but they are the priorities of Jesus.

*The authority by which we address the nations with this gospel comes from:*

## **9. THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE.**

*This is a distinctive view of how we know God.*

The Bible teaches that as Christ regarded every word of the Old Testament as the contemporary voice of God, reliable and authoritative in every detail, so Christians should listen to the contemporary voice of God addressing us in the sentences of the Scriptures (the Old testament

fulfilled with the New Testament writings of Christ's authorised apostolic eye-witnesses). Interpreted in accordance with its various kinds of literature (including literary conventions such as approximation, poetic devices and the personal emphases of different authors) the Bible is without error in all it affirms. Moreover, since the Bible is God's complete summary of the person and work of Christ, it contains everything we could possibly need to know from God for salvation and righteousness. The Spirit of God guides us through the Word of God as the light to our paths to be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

The Bible carries authority over our own ideas, experiences and traditions including the leaders and councils of churches. None of us interprets the Bible perfectly. But God created us to understand his language, gives us his own Spirit to help us understand him and revealed himself in Christ in the Scriptures perfectly to enable us to grow in our personal relationship with him.

*This understanding of the Bible results in practice in:*

## **10. THE CENTRALITY OF BIBLE-TEACHING.**

*This is a distinctive view of Christian ministry.*

The preaching and teaching of God's Word is not simply the preferred option of certain kinds of intellectual churches. The Bible is how the Spirit of God grows and directs his churches and his people. As the Scriptures are taught in Sunday School, youth events, congregational meetings, outreach and missionary initiatives, the Spirit of God is calling the people of God to faith and repentance, granting new life, judging sin and approving righteousness, sanctifying and edifying his people to go out to live lives of sacrificial worship. The exposition of bible passages in the light of the biblical theological themes progressing through scripture and the summary doctrines of the Bible is the engine of life in Evangelical churches. It is not our informality or our management or our personalities that grows genuine churches in size and maturity. It is the faithful and passionate preaching of God's Word in the expectation of submission to it.

*The power of bible-teaching explains:*

## **11. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE LOCAL CHURCH.**

*This is a distinctive view of church.*

The voice of God in the Scriptures gathers the people of God around the Word of God into the church of God. All God's people are in Christ and therefore gathered in the heavenly church around the throne of God. This assembly is reflected on earth in the congregations of God's people gathering to hear God's Word.

Denominations and other federations can be helpful but are not strictly churches and their officers are not strictly the bishops or elders of the local church (even though they may be worthy of great respect for their biblical faithfulness, godliness and wisdom). It is the local church that by its mutual love and unity in the truth of the gospel displays the power of God in drawing people together under the rule of Christ and which has responsibility for upholding the truth in this godless generation. It is the distinctive community lives of Christ's churches that will attract unbelievers to consider the gospel.

*The witness of the churches to the holy character of God helps explain:*

## **12. THE NECESSITY OF HOLINESS.**

*This is a distinctive view of the worship that pleases God.*

Christ died to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do good. We are warned not to be deceived by those who turn the grace of God into a licence for immorality. We must be clear that those who continue without repentance in wicked lifestyles such as greed, slandering others or sexual immorality such as homosexual practice are not being saved. Our reasonable worship in response to the gospel is to offer our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God. We all fail and struggle.

We must strive to be holy not in order to be saved but because we have been saved and while we are saved not by works but by faith in his works, nevertheless, real faith will always be evident in the growing holiness of God's children that reflects the holiness of our heavenly father. This is particularly important to understand and contend for in the present permissive climate of our culture that is compromising so many church leaders across our nation and the western world.