

We Believe

Exploring the core beliefs of our Christian faith.



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Introduction

Welcome to *We Believe*—a resource that assists adults and older teens in studying the core beliefs of our Christian faith. *We Believe* is grounded in the Holy Scriptures and expressive of GCI's statement of beliefs and incarnational Trinitarian theology. *We Believe* draws on similar documents from other Christian denominations and utilizes key statements from the historic Nicene Creed (referred to in *We Believe* as “the Creed”). Here is the text of the Creed, adapted from the translation in *The Book of Common Prayer* (1979):

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth, and of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true
God from true God, begotten not made, of one Being with the Father.

Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation,
he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit
he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered
death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance
with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated
at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to
judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds
from the Father and the Son. With the Father and the Son he is
worshipped and glorified. He has spoken through the prophets.

We believe in one holy, all-embracing and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look
forward to the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.

Amen.

Following the trinitarian structure of the Creed, *We Believe* begins by addressing the triune God, answering the question, *Who is the God Christians worship?* That section is then followed by ones addressing each of the three Persons of the Trinity (God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit). Following those sections are ones addressing the kingdom of God, humanity, the Holy Scriptures, the sacraments, the Church, the Christian, the gospel, God's grace, sin, faith-salvation-repentance, the Christian life, and last things.

In each section of *We Believe*, you will find **bold face** questions followed by answers in regular type. Following the answers are relevant references to verses in the Bible given as links that you can click on to take you to the referenced Scriptures online.

It is our prayer that you will be richly blessed by your study in *We Believe*.

Section 1: The Triune God

1.1 Who is the God Christians worship?

In accordance with the testimony of the Holy Scriptures, the God we worship is one divine Being in three eternal, co-essential, yet distinct Persons—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. (Mark 12:29; Matt. 28:19; Acts 20:28; 2 Cor. 13:14; Heb. 10:29; 1 Pet 1:2)

1.2 What does being triune tell us about God’s nature?

That God is the eternal communion of holy love shared by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. (John 14:9; 1 John 4:8; Rom. 5:8; Titus 2:11; Heb. 1:2-3; 1 Pet. 1:2; Gal. 3:26)

1.3 Does that mean there are three Gods?

No. The triune God is one God who exists eternally as three distinct Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The triune God is one in being and three in Persons.

1.4 How can God be both *one* in being and *three* in Persons?

Though we cannot know exactly how God’s being functions since we are mere creatures, we can say that, unlike human persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are related to each other in such an absolutely unique and profound way that they are *one in being*. The oneness of God’s being is a tri-unity.

1.5 Are the three Persons of the Trinity three different ways God acts towards his creation, or three roles the one God plays?

No, in the being of God there is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit who know, love and glorify each other for all eternity. There never was a time when God was not triune.

1.6 Is one of the Persons of the Trinity the origin of the others, and thus superior?

No, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are equally eternal and divine and share the same authority and power, and have the same mind, will and purpose in all things.

1.7 Does the equality of the three divine Persons mean that they are interchangeable with each other?

No, the divine Persons are not interchangeable “parts” of God. Each has a unique relationship of holy love to the other two, and each has an eternal name that reveals their real personal distinction.

1.8 What are the unique relationships in the being of the triune God that are not interchangeable?

The Father eternally begets the Son, the Son is eternally begotten by the Father, and the Holy Spirit proceeds eternally from the Father and through the Son.

1.9 Do the three divine Persons act independently of each other towards creation?

No, all the works of the triune God toward his creation are indivisible since God is one in being and of one mind, will, authority and holy love.

1.10 Is there no difference, then, in how the three divine Persons relate to creation?

There is a difference, for though the acts of the divine Persons are undivided, each contributes uniquely to the perfectly united works of the one triune God.

1.11 How can we speak of the unique contributions of the three divine Persons without separating their works?

We could say that one of the Persons initiates, or takes the lead, in one or another of the distinct and gracious acts towards the triune God's creation, while the others perfectly follow in complete harmony with each other.

1.12 What are the primary acts of the triune God towards creation?

The Father is most associated with creation, the Son with redemption, and the Holy Spirit with bringing all things to perfection. However, all three of the divine Persons are involved in all the works of the one triune God.

1.13 Why did the triune God create?

Because the triune God is a living, loving and generative God who creates for the sake of communion and holy love with his creation.

1.14 Why did the triune God redeem creation?

From the beginning, God's human creatures, in distrusting God, have alienated themselves and sought to live autonomously from their good, faithful and life-giving Creator. But because the triune God is a faithful and loving God who does not give up on his creatures, God himself made a way for them to be reconciled to him and thus return to fullness of communion with him as their Lord and Savior.

1.15 Why does the triune God now work to perfect the creation?

Because the triune God is a communion of perfect holy love who created us to share in the triune God's love and life for all eternity and in that way give glory to God.

1.16 How can we finite creatures know, love and trust the triune God?

The triune God has the desire, will and ability to make himself known to his human creatures who do not have the desire, the will, or the ability to know God on their own. That revelation, which culminated in the Father's personal self-revelation in Jesus Christ, has, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, been preserved for us in the Holy Scriptures.

1.17 What do the Holy Scriptures say about the triune God?

The Bible records Jesus' teaching concerning the eternal names of the divine Persons of the Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) and the relationships in the eternal being of God—most specifically knowing, loving and glorifying one another. Coming from the eternal communion of the Trinity, Jesus is the only one who can tell us surely and authoritatively that God, from eternity, is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Only the Father knows the Son, and only the Son knows the Father and those to whom the Son has chosen to reveal him. (Luke 10:22; Matt. 11:27; John 1:18; 17:25; Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14)

1.18 What do Christians understand from the Holy Scriptures about the character of the triune God revealed by Jesus Christ?

We learn that the character, mind, purpose, will and heart of the triune God is identical to what we see and hear in Jesus Christ, demonstrated by what he accomplished in his earthly ministry. Those who have met and seen the Son have indeed met in him the Father. We know the Father by knowing the Son. They are united in such a way that they have the same nature, character, heart, mind, will, authority, power and purpose. (John 10:30; 14:9; 17:11, 21-22; 1 John 2:23)

Section 2: God the Father

2.1 Who is God the Father?

God the Father is the first Person of the Trinity, of whom the Son is eternally begotten and from whom the Holy Spirit eternally proceeds through the Son. (John 1:1, 14; 14:16-17, 26; 15:26)

2.2 Why is the first of the three divine Persons of the Trinity called “Father”?

Our Lord Jesus called God his eternal Father and identified himself as his only eternal Son. Thus, the Father is, first of all, the Father of the Son. The Son also taught his disciples to address God as Father in prayer. The apostle Paul teaches that God adopts believers as his children, sending the Spirit of the Son into their hearts so they cry out, “Abba, Father.” As adopted children in the Son, we may address the Father as Jesus does. (Matt. 6:9; John 14:9-10; Rom. 1:7; 8:15-17; Gal. 4:4-7)

2.3 What is meant by calling God “Father”?

In calling God “Father,” we acknowledge that God exists in personal relationship, and that we were created by God for personal relationship with him. God made humankind according to his image, which is revealed in his eternal Son. We were created to trust in God as our Creator, Sustainer, Protector and Provider, putting our hope in God as his children who, in Jesus Christ, are God’s heirs. (Gen.1:26, Matt. 6:25-33; Rom. 8:16-17, 29)

2.4 Does calling the first Person of the Trinity “Father” mean that God is male?

No. Only creatures, having bodies, can be either male or female. But God has no body, since by nature God is Spirit. The Holy Scriptures reveal God as a living God beyond all sexual distinctions. Scripture uses diverse images for God, female as well as male. (Is. 49:15; 66:13; Matt. 23:37)

2.5 Why does the Creed say that God the Father is “Almighty”?

God the Father is “Almighty” as the God who is love—a holy love that is powerful beyond measure. God is omnipotent—he can do anything he wants to do. (Lam. 3:22; Song 8:7; 1 John 4:8)

2.6 How do Christians understand the love and power of God?

We understand the love and power of God most clearly through Jesus Christ. In Jesus’ life of compassion, his death on the cross, and his resurrection from the dead, we see how vast God’s love for the world is—a love that is ready to suffer for our sakes, yet so strong that nothing will prevail against it. In the power of his love, God is for us and is eternally against all that is against us and his loving purposes for us. (John 3:16; Heb. 1:3; 1 John 4:9; Matt. 9:36; Ps. 106:8)

2.7 What comfort do Christians receive from this truth?

This powerful and loving God is the one we may trust in all the circumstances of our lives, and to whom we belong both in life and death. (Ps. 12:6; Rom. 8:38-39)

2.8 What do Christians mean by God’s “providence”?

That God not only preserves his creation, but also continually provides for it, attends to it, ruling and sustaining it with wise and benevolent care. God is concerned for every creature and, in the end, will eradicate all evil and deliver all of creation from it. (Ps. 145:15, 17; Gen. 50:20; Rom. 8:28; Eph. 1:9-10; 1 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1)

2.9 What comfort do Christians receive by trusting in God’s providence?

The eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ watches over us continuously, blessing, guiding and compassionately correcting us wherever we may be. God strengthens us when we are faithful, comforts us when discouraged or sorrowful, raises us up when we stumble, and brings us at last to

the fullness of eternal life. Entrusting ourselves wholly to God's care, we receive the grace to be patient in adversity, thankful in the midst of blessing, courageous against injustice, and confident that no evil afflicts us that God will not turn to our ultimate good. (Ps. 146:9; Is. 58:11; 41:10; 2 Cor. 1:3-5; Ps. 30:5)

2.10 What does the Creed mean in saying that God is "Maker of heaven and earth"?

First, that God called heaven and earth, with all that is in them, into being out of nothing by the power of his Word. Second, that by that same power all things are upheld and governed in perfect goodness, righteousness and wisdom, according to God's eternal purpose. (Rev. 4:11; Gen. 1:1; Heb. 11:3)

2.11 Did God need the world in order to be God?

No. God would still be God, eternally perfect and inexhaustibly rich, even if no creatures had ever been created. Yet, without God, all created beings would fail to exist. Creatures can neither come into existence, nor continue, nor find fulfillment apart from God. God alone is self-existent and self-sufficient. (Acts 17:24-25; John 1:16; John 5:26; Eph. 1:22)

2.12 Why then did God create the world?

God's decision to create the world was an act of grace. God chose to grant existence to the world simply to bless it. God created the world as a place to make known God's glory, to share the love and freedom at the heart of God's triune being, and to give us eternal life in communion with God, all demonstrating the goodness and glory of God. (Ps. 19:1; 2 Cor. 3:17; Ps. 67:6-7; Eph. 1:3-4; John 3:36)

Section 3: God the Son

3.1 Who is God the Son?

The Son of God is the second Person of the Trinity, eternally begotten of the Father. Like the Father, there never was a time when the Son did not exist. The Son is the eternal Word and the express image of the Father. The Father created all things through the Son, and the Son sustains all things by his Word. He was sent by the Father to be God revealed in the flesh for our salvation, Jesus Christ. (John 1:1, 10, 14; Col. 1:15-17; Heb. 1:3; John 3:16)

3.2 What do Christians believe in confessing their faith in Jesus Christ as "God's only Son"?

That without ceasing to be the uncreated Son of God, the eternal Son was sent by God the Father "from above" to do a unique work in the Spirit as a true human being, here "below." There is only one eternal Son of God by nature. We become the adopted children of God by the grace of the only eternal Son of God, sharing in the gift of his sonship. (Luke 3:21-22; 12:49-50; John 8:23)

3.3 How do Christians understand the *uniqueness* of Jesus Christ?

No one else will ever be God incarnate. No one else can reconcile God and humanity in his own Person. No one else can make us true sons and daughters of God except the Son of God. No one else will ever die for the sins of the world, judge all sin, and overcome all evil and the death it brings. Only Jesus Christ is such a Person. Only he could do such a work, and he has done it. Jesus Christ is himself the only true mediator between God and humanity. (Is. 53:5; John 1:29; Col. 1:15-20; 1 Tim. 2:5)

3.4 What does the Creed mean when it says that Jesus was "conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary"?

First, that being born of a woman, Jesus was truly a human being. Second, that our Lord's incarnation was a supernatural, holy event, brought about solely by the free divine grace of the Holy Spirit, surpassing any human possibilities. Third, that from the beginning of his life on earth, Jesus was set apart by his unique origin that joined his divine nature with human nature in the womb of Mary, all for the sake of accomplishing our salvation. (Luke 1:31, 35; Heb. 2:14; Phil. 2:5-7)

3.5 What do Christians affirm when they confess their faith in Jesus Christ as their "Lord"?

That having been raised from the dead, Jesus Christ reigns with compassion and justice over all things in heaven and on earth, especially over those who confess him by faith; and that by trusting, loving and serving him above all else, we give glory and honor to God. (1 Cor. 15:3-4; Rev. 11:15; Eph. 1:20-23; Phil. 2:9-11)

3.6 What is the significance of affirming that Jesus Christ is "true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father"?

Only God deserves worship and only God can reveal to us who God is. Only God can save us from our sins, forgive us, rescue us from all evil and bring about a new heaven and earth. Only God can make us truly and eternally his beloved children. Being truly one in being with the Father, Jesus meets these conditions. As true God, Jesus, the Son incarnate, is the proper object of our worship as the self-revelation of God and the Savior of the world. (John 20:28; Matt. 11:27; 1 John 4:14)

3.7 What is the significance of affirming that Jesus is also "truly human"?

Being truly human, Jesus entered fully into our fallen situation and overcame it from within. By his pure obedience of faith in his Father, he lived in unbroken unity with God, even to the point of accepting a violent death. As sinners at war with grace, this is precisely the kind of life we fail to live. When we accept him and what he has done for us by faith, Jesus by his Holy Spirit removes

the alienation our disobedience causes, clothes us with his perfect righteousness, and restores us to the right relationship with God that he worked out in his humanity and earthly life. (Heb. 2:17-18; 4:15; 5:8-9; Rom. 5:19)

3.8 How can Jesus be both truly God and truly human?

The mystery of Jesus Christ's divine-human unity surpasses our understanding; only faith given to us by the Holy Spirit enables us to affirm it. When the Bible depicts Jesus as someone with divine power, status and authority, it presupposes his humanity. When the Bible depicts Jesus as someone with human weakness, neediness and mortality, it presuppose his deity. Though we cannot understand how this could be, we can trust that the God who made heaven and earth and fashioned humanity according to his image revealed in his Son, is free to become God incarnate and thus to be God with us in this wonderful, awe-inspiring way. (Mark 1:27; 4:41; Matt. 28:18; Luke 22:44; John 1:1-5, 14; Job 5:9)

3.9 Was the covenant that God made with Abraham everlasting?

Yes. The covenant, made first with Abraham, was extended to Israel, then expanded, confirmed and fulfilled in the coming of Jesus. By faith in Jesus, Gentiles were welcomed into the covenant with God, thus confirming the promise that through Israel, God's blessing would come to all peoples. Although for the most part Israel has not yet accepted Jesus as the Messiah, the God who has reached out to unbelieving Gentiles will not fail to show mercy to Israel as his people in an everlasting covenant. (Jer. 31:3; 2 Sam. 23:5; Rom. 11:29)

3.10 How did God use Israel to prepare the way for the coming of Jesus?

When God extended the covenant to Israel, God said they would be his people and he would be their salvation. He also promised that through them all the peoples of the earth would be blessed. Therefore, no matter how often Israel turned away from God, God still cared for them and acted on their behalf. God sent them prophets to declare God's Word, priests to lead them in worship and to make sacrifice for the people's sins, and kings to rule justly in the fear of God, upholding the poor and needy, and defending the people from their enemies. (Gen. 17:3-4; Ex. 6:4-5; Gal. 3:14; Jer. 30:22; 1 Pet. 2:9-10; Zech. 1:6; Lev. 5:6; Ps. 72:1, 4)

3.11 Why was the title "Christ" applied to Jesus?

"Christ" means "anointed one." Israel's prophets, priests and kings were anointed and their offices culminated in Jesus. By fulfilling the offices of prophet, priest and king, Jesus transformed them. In doing so he fulfilled Israel's election for the sake of the world. (2 Cor. 1:20; Acts 10:37-38; Luke 4:17-19)

3.12 How did Jesus Christ fulfill the office of *prophet*?

Jesus was God's Word to a dying and sinful world; he embodied the love he proclaimed. His life, death and resurrection became the great "yes" that continues to be spoken despite how often we have said "no" to God. When we receive this Word by faith, Christ enters our hearts that he may dwell in us forever, and we in him. (Acts 3:20, 22; John 1:18; Eph. 3:17)

3.13 How did Jesus Christ fulfill the office of *priest*?

As the lamb of God who took away the sin of the world, Jesus was both our priest and sacrifice. Confronted by our hopelessness in sin and death, he interceded by offering himself in order to reconcile us to God. Jesus now mediates all the things of God to us and our responses back to God. He even mediates and leads in our worship. (Heb. 4:14; John 1:29; Heb. 2:17; Eph. 1:7)

3.14 How did Jesus Christ fulfill the office of *king*?

Jesus was the Lord who took the form of a servant; perfecting royal power in temporal weakness. With no sword but the sword of righteousness, and no power but the power of God's holy love, Christ defeated sin, evil and death by reigning from the cross. He continues to reign at God's right hand. He is Lord over all authorities and powers whether earthly or heavenly, natural or human, private or political. (John 19:19; Phil. 2:5-8; 1 Cor. 1:25; John 12:32)

3.15 What does the Creed affirm in saying that Jesus "was crucified under Pontius Pilate"?

First, that Jesus was rejected and abused by the religious and secular rulers of his day. His lordship was a threat to all evil powers and authorities since his righteousness exposed their injustice. Jesus' death at the hands of these authorities provided a display that exposed the guilt of all humanity in all times and places. Second, and even more importantly, though innocent, Jesus submitted to condemnation by an earthly judge so that through him we, though guilty, might be acquitted before our just heavenly Judge. (Luke 18:32; Is. 53:3; Ps. 9:9; Luke 1:52; 2 Cor. 5:21; 2 Tim. 4:8)

3.16 What does the Creed affirm in saying that Jesus "suffered death and was buried"?

That Jesus died, just like we do, showing that there is no sorrow he has not known, no grief he has not borne, and no price he was unwilling to pay to reconcile us to God. Jesus' real death (confirmed by his burial) shows that he has taken on the ultimate consequence of sin, which is death. Rather than shrinking back, he endured death in order to overcome it. There is nothing we go through, not even death, that Jesus cannot redeem. (Matt. 26:38-39; Is. 53:5; Gal. 3:13; Heb. 2:9; 2 Cor. 5:19)

3.17 Why did Jesus have to suffer as he did?

Because grace is more abundant, and sin more serious, than we suppose. However cruelly we may treat one another, all sin is primarily against God. God condemns sin, yet never judges apart from grace. In giving Jesus to die for us, God took the burden of our sin into himself, where he judged it and removed it once and for all. The cross in all its severity reveals an abyss of sin endured and swallowed up by the suffering of divine love. Undoing sin and its consequences involves great cost to God—the price Jesus paid to make all things right, a price he willingly paid "for the joy that was set before him." (Ps. 51:4; Rom. 8:1, 3-4; 1 Cor. 1:18; 5:8; Col. 1:20; James 2:13; Heb. 12:2)

3.18 What does the Creed affirm in saying about Jesus that "on the third day he rose again"?

That our Lord could not be held by evil and the power of death. Through his life, death and resurrection, Jesus overcame all evil and its ultimate consequence, renewing and restoring human nature to reach God's intended purposes for all human beings. Jesus rose triumphant from the grave in a new, exalted kind of human life. In showing his followers the scars on his hands, feet and side, the one who was crucified revealed himself to them as the living Lord and Savior of the world. (Acts 2:24; 1 Cor. 15:3-4; Luke 24:36-40; John 20:15-18; 1 Cor. 15:5-8; John 20:27)

3.19 What does the Creed affirm in saying that Christ "ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father" and that he will "come again in glory"?

Forty days after his bodily resurrection, Jesus was taken up bodily and visibly into heaven to be with the Father. He did not leave his human nature behind, but remains fully human, though now glorified. One with us and with the Father, Jesus is the one mediator between human beings and God. As one of us, he continues his intercessions on our behalf. Though now visibly hidden from us, Jesus is not cut off from us in the remote past, nor is he in a place from which he cannot reach us. Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus is present to us by grace. From heaven he reigns with the authority of the Father, protecting us, guiding us, and interceding for us until he returns visibly and bodily to earth in glory. We now live between the times of his first and second advents, awaiting his return. (Acts 1:6-11; Col. 3:1, 1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 7:25)

3.20 What does the Creed mean when it says that Jesus, when he returns in glory, will “judge the living and the dead”?

Scripture teaches that all humans will stand in the general resurrection before the judgment seat of Christ. The Judge before whom they will stand is the one who submitted to God’s judgment for our sake. By him our sin is identified and judged as evil, and in him it is condemned to obliteration so that we can be separated from our sin and be saved in him from evil’s ultimate destruction. That is the grace of God’s judgment in Jesus Christ. (John 5:22; 2 Cor 5:10; Rom. 14:10-11)

3.21 What will be the results of such a judgment?

Standing personally before the One who is their Lord and Savior, everyone will give an answer as to whether they will bow to him willingly and enter the kingdom of God prepared for them, or unwillingly bow and refuse to enter and exist under his gracious lordship forever. Thus, there will be a final separation of all those who repent and acknowledge their sin and their need for grace to deliver them from sin and be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ, and those who refuse to repent and receive God’s grace. (Phil. 2:10-11)

3.22 What will be the spiritual condition of those who refuse to acknowledge their need for forgiveness, refuse to repent and confess their sin, and despise God’s grace for them in Jesus Christ?

All those who refuse will have rejected God’s righteous and merciful judgment in Christ, and the separation of themselves from their sin that is available in Christ. They will have come to the place of knowingly and deliberately blaspheming or repudiating the Spirit who draws them and extends to them forgiveness of sin and reconciliation with God accomplished for them by Jesus according to the Father’s will. Clinging to their sin in pride, they will condemn God and justify themselves against God, charging God with being evil. (Matt. 12:32; Heb. 2:3; 4:1-2; 6:3-6; 10:36-39)

3.23 What will be the ultimate consequences for those who self-righteously repudiate and despise God and all his benefits in Jesus Christ?

Repudiating God’s grace to deliver them from evil, bound to their sin, they will experience the ultimate condemnation of evil. They will experience this condemnation, not so much because of their sins, but because of their refusal to repent and the rejection of the grace extended to them through the merciful judgment executed upon sin for them in Jesus Christ. (2 Cor. 5:10; Eccl. 12:14; Acts 17:31; Rom. 8:38-39; 1 John 4:17; 1 Cor. 3:12-15; Acts 10:42)

Section 4: God the Holy Spirit

4.1 Who is God the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit is the third Person of the Trinity, eternally proceeding from the Father through the Son. The Holy Spirit is the comforter promised by Jesus Christ, who unites us with the Father and the Son, and transforms us into the image of Christ. (Matt. 28:19; John 14:16; 15:26; Acts 2:38; John 14:17, 26)

4.2 How are Jesus and the Holy Spirit related?

Jesus' whole life was lived in intimate communion with the Holy Spirit. He was conceived by the Spirit in the womb of Mary, baptized with the Spirit, and on the cross fulfilled his sacrificial ministry to the Father in the Spirit. Jesus now ministers in the world by sending the Spirit who ministers in accordance with the finished work of Christ. (Matt. 1:20; Luke 1:35; 4:1, 18; Matt. 12:18; Luke 3:22; 10:21; 24:49; 23:46; Heb. 9:14)

4.3 Was the Holy Spirit at work in the world before the incarnation of the Son of God?

Yes, the Spirit was at work at creation and in the history of the world, with a focus on the people of Israel, the particular people God called to be a blessing to all peoples—blessings given ultimately in and through Jesus. The Spirit's ongoing ministry will eventually bring all creation to full maturity, harmony and perfection. He is the Lord and the giver of life. (Gen. 1:1-2; Joel 2:28; Ezek. 11:19; Luke 24:49; Acts 2:1-21; Rom 1:4; 8:22-24; 1Pet. 1:2)

4.4 What do Christians believe in confessing their faith in the Holy Spirit?

Apart from the Spirit, our Lord Jesus Christ can neither be known, loved or served. The Holy Spirit is the personal bond by which Jesus Christ unites us to himself. He is the teacher who opens our hearts to Christ, and the comforter who leads us to repentance. He is the liberator who frees our enslaved wills, empowering us to live joyfully and freely in Christ's service. By the working of the Spirit, our love, knowledge and service of Christ are inseparably related. (John 14:26; 1 Cor. 12:3; Rom. 5:5; 1 Cor. 6:17, 19; 3:16; John 4:24)

4.5 How do Christians receive the Holy Spirit and what is the result?

We receive the Spirit by receiving the Word of God. As the midwife of the new creation, the Spirit arrives with the Word, frees us to hear, accept and trust in it as the Word of God, brings us to rebirth and assures us of eternal life. The Spirit nurtures, corrects and strengthens us with the pure spiritual milk of the Word. By the Spirit, we are conformed to the character of Christ, growing in faith, hope and love in personal and responsive relationship with the Father through the Spirit. (Eph. 6:17; John 14:16-17; John 3:5-6; Luke 11:13; 1 Thess. 1:5; John 16:8; Rom. 8:15-16; 1 Pet. 2:2)

4.6 Why do we not, by the Spirit, experience here and now all that Christ has done for us?

We live in the time between Christ's resurrection and return, which the Bible calls "the present evil age." During this "time between the times," we do not experience all that Christ has for us, though we are assured that we will when he returns. In the meantime, we are given the Spirit as a "down payment"—the "first fruits" and "sealing" of the fullness yet to come. (Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30; Col. 1:12; 1 Pet. 1:4; Gal. 1:4; 2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Rom. 8:23)

4.7 What is the Holy Spirit's ministry to believers?

Sent by Jesus, the Holy Spirit ministers to all people on the basis of Christ's finished work. The Spirit then ministers to believers in a particular way, helping them share in all that Jesus has accomplished on their behalf (John 7:39; 16:7; Gal. 3:13-14).

The Holy Spirit's particular ministry to believers includes many things:

- Renewing believers by sharing with them Christ's resurrected, glorified human nature. (Rom. 8:2, 10-11; Titus 3:4-6)
- Opening their hearts and minds to Jesus and his teachings. (Acts 26:8; John 14:26; 15:26)
- Granting them repentance by which they see their need for forgiveness and confess their sin. (John 16:8-11; 1 Thess. 4:1-6)
- Granting them faith by which they affirm from the heart that Jesus is Lord. (1 Cor. 12:3)
- Indwelling them, thus uniting them to Christ in a spiritual union. (John 14:17; 17:23; 1 Cor. 6:19; Rom. 8:11)
- Granting them freedom and comfort, enabling them to pray when they are at a loss for words. (2 Cor. 3:17; Acts 9:31; John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7; Rom. 8:26-27)
- Joining them to other believers as brothers and sisters within the one body of Jesus Christ, the Church, where they experience a unity and harmony that embraces the diversity of the Church's many members. (1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 2:22; 4:4; Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:27)
- Granting them the fruit of the Holy Spirit, which is Christ's love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. (Gal. 5:22-23)
- Granting them gifts for ministry in and through the Church, by which they participate with Christ in his ministry to fulfill the Father's mission to the world. (1 Cor. 12:4, 11; Matt. 28:16-20; Acts 1:8; 13:4; 15:28; 16:6; 21:4)
- Leading them to use these gifts in ways that express the fruit of the Spirit, thus avoiding the self-centeredness that leads to division within the body of Christ. (1 Cor. 12:31-13:13)

4.8 What is the Holy Spirit's ministry to unbelievers?

The Spirit is at work in the world, continuing the earthly ministry of Jesus, reaching out with God's compassion and wisdom to all people, because Christ died for all. The Holy Spirit is present in many ways to the world, including ministering to unbelievers, often in ways unseen to us, though often involving the Spirit-led ministry of the Church (John 3:8; Acts 8:26-39; John 12:32; Heb. 7:25).

The ministry of the Holy Spirit in the lives of unbelievers includes many things:

- Seeking to bring all to repentance and faith. (2 Pet. 3:9; 2 Tim. 2:25)
- Preparing and freeing unbelievers to receive God's forgiveness, to accept God's freely-given grace, to die to pride and any hope of justifying oneself, and to experience the benefits of what Christ has already done for them, including sending the Holy Spirit to draw them to Christ. (John 16:8-11; 1 Thess. 4:1-6, Acts 10:43)
- Resisting the resistance of those who seek to avoid or reject the grace of God. (Acts 26:8; John 14:26; 15:26)

4.9 What happens to unbelievers who resist the Holy Spirit's ministry?

The Spirit does not indwell people who, in resisting him, do not receive Christ through repentance and faith. Because the Spirit does not unite unbelievers to Christ in a spiritual union, they are not incorporated into the body of Christ (the Church) in the way believers are. People who continually refuse to repent, die to self and receive God's grace are not able to enjoy the benefits of the completed work of Christ done on their behalf. The Bible gives strict warnings concerning the consequences of blaspheming the Holy Spirit, thus rejecting his ministry on their behalf. (John 14:17; Acts 2:38; 1 Cor. 2:14; 1 John 4:6; Heb. 4:2; Mark 3:29; Acts 26:18)

Section 5: The Kingdom of God

5.1 What is the kingdom of God?

In the broadest sense, the kingdom of God is God's supreme sovereignty—his reign over all the world through the operation of the Holy Spirit based on the completed work of Jesus Christ. That reign is now partially and provisionally manifest in the Church and in the life of each believer as they submit to God's Word and will. The kingdom of God will be fully manifest over the whole world after the return of Jesus Christ when he delivers all things to the Father and all are either willingly or unwillingly in submission to his rule and reign. (Luke 17:20-21; Rom. 8:12-17; 1 Cor. 15:24-28; Gal. 4:7; Col. 1:13; Rev. 1:6; 11:15; 21:3, 22-27; 22:1-5)

5.2 When Christians pray for God's kingdom to come, what are they desiring?

We are praying to God to bring about his ultimate purpose so that the whole creation may enjoy full restoration to its rightful Lord, that all things be put right, and that God's full glory shines forth to all. (Rom. 8:22-25; Phil. 2:9-11)

5.3 How does God's kingdom come?

God's rule and reign on earth, which was foreshadowed in the Old Testament, founded in Christ's incarnation, established with his ascension, and is ever more widely proclaimed with the fulfilling of the Great Commission by the Church, will come to fullness when Christ delivers the kingdom to God the Father following the final judgment at his return. (2 Chron. 7:1-4; Matt. 10:5-8; 28:18-20; Luke 24:1-12; Acts 1:6-11; 1 Cor. 15:19-28)

5.4 How do Christians live now in God's kingdom?

As Christians, our kingdom life now consists of living with faith, joy, hope and peace as children of God, citizens of heaven and faithful disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ. We become glad worshipers of God and witnesses to the coming kingdom by embodying in our lives now temporary, partial and provisional signs or parables of the kingdom that is coming in its fullness when Christ returns. (Rom. 14:17; Eph. 4:6; Col. 1:13-14; 3:4; 1 Thess. 4:11)

Section 6: Humanity

6.1 What is God's purpose for humanity?

That through a never-ending life of worship we will share in the eternal love and life of the triune God: by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, for the love of God, in the communion of the Holy Spirit. (2 Cor. 13:14)

6.2 How do Christians live by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ?

The Lord Jesus Christ loved us so much that he sacrificed himself so that we might have eternal life. In response to that grace, we entrust ourselves completely to his care, giving thanks each day for his wonderful goodness. We reject all idolatry, most especially any hope or desire to justify ourselves before God or apart from God's grace. Rather, we receive our identity, meaning, significance, security and destiny from him alone, which he freely gives us out of his abundant goodness and generosity. We live in total gratitude for God's justifying, sanctifying and glorifying grace. (Col. 1:2; 3:17; Eph. 5:20)

6.3 How do Christians live for the love of God?

God, who is love, gave us life in and for love. The Father loved us so much that he gave his one and only Son to deliver us from the sin that destroys life and negates love. Sharing in God's love for all people, we reach out to love those in need, knowing that God loves them no less than he loves us. (John 3:16; 1 John 4:19; 2 Cor. 5:14)

6.4 How do Christians live in the communion of the Holy Spirit?

By the Holy Spirit, we are united with the Lord Jesus Christ. We are baptized into the body of Christ, the Church. As members of this community of faith and under the Lord's headship over us, we trust in God's Word, share in the Lord's Supper, and turn to God in prayer. As we grow in grace and knowledge, we are led by the Spirit to participate with God in the good works God intends for our lives. Those works are the fruit of our daily fellowship with God by the Holy Spirit, according to his living Word, Jesus Christ, and his written word, the Holy Scriptures.

6.5 What does it mean that human beings were "created in God's image"?

Jesus Christ is the image of God and we were created to be his representatives, bearing his image. We were created to be images of Jesus, who is the perfect Image of God. Jesus, as one of us, through his earthly life lived in total dependence on the Father by the Spirit—a relationship of faithful, free and holy love. In accordance with God's purpose for us to be the image of Jesus, we live in total dependence upon God and in a relationship of love and freedom with one another. Toward those ends, God has given us the human capacities of reason, imagination and volition. (Gen. 1:26-27; Col. 1:15; 3:10; 2 Cor. 3:18; 1 Cor. 15:49; Rom. 8:29; Luke 3:21-22; John 1:18; 5:19; 17:21-22)

6.6 What does our creation in God's image reflect about God's love for us?

Out of his love, God created us for eternal fellowship and communion with himself. When we live wholeheartedly for God, we honor our Creator as the source of all good things. We also honor God by loving others as God loves them. We were created to live like Jesus, who obeys the two Great Commandments: to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength; and to love others in a way that reflects how God loves us. (Ps. 9:1; 1 John 4:7; 4:11; Matt. 5:14-16)

6.7 Was God's image lost when humankind turned from God by falling into sin?

Yes and no. Because of sin, our relations with God and his creation became distorted and confused. Although we did not cease to be *with* God, our fellow human beings, and other creatures, we did cease to be *for* them. Although we did not lose our distinctive human capacities completely, we did lose our ability to use them rightly, especially in relation to God. Having ruined our connection with God by distrusting and then disobeying God's will, we are persons with hearts curved in upon ourselves. Having become enslaved to sin, we are unable to free ourselves. Though some freedom remains for us as sinners, our freedom is exercised only within the bounds of sin and is always exposed to the power of sin, which looks to take advantage of the weakness of human nature. (John 8:34; Rom. 3:23; 3:10; 1:21; Is. 59:1-3)

6.8 How does Jesus restore to us the image of God?

Though humankind turned from God by falling into sin, God did not turn from us. Instead, he sent Jesus to restore our broken humanity. In living completely for God, Jesus gave himself completely for us, even to the point of dying on our behalf. In doing so, he perfectly fulfilled the two Great Commandments on our behalf: loving God with all he is and all he has; and loving all people in a way that reflects how the Father loves him. By living so completely for others in the name of the Father, Jesus manifested what he was—the perfect image of God. In union with Christ by the Spirit, we, by grace, become conformed to Christ through faith. In communion with Christ, we share by the Holy Spirit in his regenerated human nature. In fellowship with our risen Lord, our humanity is renewed in such a way that the image of God that was lost in Adam is restored in us. (Is. 65:2; Phil. 2:8; Col. 1:15; Rom. 8:29)

Section 7: The Holy Scriptures

7.1 What are the Holy Scriptures?

By God's grace, the Holy Scriptures are sanctified to serve as God's inspired Word and faithful witness to Jesus Christ and the gospel. They are the fully reliable record of God's revelation to humanity, culminating in his self-revelation in the incarnate Son. The Bible is therefore foundational to the Church and is viewed as infallible in all matters of faith and practice.

7.2 What is in the Holy Scriptures?

The Bible is made up of 66 books—39 in the Old Testament, and 27 in the New Testament. The Old Testament contains the record of God's creation of all things, the revelation of God's design and provision for humanity, humankind's original disobedience, God's covenant with Abraham, God's calling of Israel to be his people, God's law, God's wisdom, God's saving deeds, and the teaching of God's prophets who present God's promises. The Old Testament points to Jesus, revealing God's intention to redeem and reconcile the world through Christ in fulfillment of God's promises. The New Testament contains the record of Jesus' birth, life, ministry, death, resurrection and ascension, the Church's early ministry, the teaching of the apostles, and the revelation of Christ's return and the fullness of his eternal kingdom. The New Testament shows us God's ultimate purposes and their consummation. (2 Pet. 1:20; 1 Thess. 2:13; 1 Cor. 2:13; Gal. 1:12)

7.3 How are the Old Testament and New Testament related?

The Old Testament shows us God's covenant promises revealed first to Abraham, then to Israel. The New Testament reveals to the renewed people of God (the Church), the ultimate fulfillment of those covenant promises. The Old Testament prepared the people of God to recognize and receive the fulfillment of God's Word in Jesus Christ. It also shows how the people of God were to live by faith in the promises of God as Israel, a particular chosen people. The New Testament shows the church how to live by faith after the fulfillment of those promises by Jesus Christ and in hope of their ultimate consummation upon Christ's bodily return. (Heb. 1:1-2; Gal. 3:24-25).

7.4 What does it mean that the Holy Scriptures are “inspired”?

It means that the Bible is “God-breathed.” The Holy Scriptures were given by the Holy Spirit through prophets and apostles and were preserved by the Spirit as the revelation of God and his acts in human history. They are not simply a collection of human opinion. Jesus gave his apostles authority to speak and teach for him, and a unique gifting from the Spirit to do so (Luke 9:2; Mark 3:14; Mark 16:20; Luke 22:35; Acts 16:10; Rom. 1:1; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Cor. 10:8; 13:10; 1 Thess. 4:2)

7.5 What does it mean that the Holy Scriptures are “the written word of God”?

Because the Bible is inspired by the Holy Spirit, it is rightly called the written word of God. Though God is revealed to us in his mighty works (including the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, the living Word of God), God's works and will are made known to us through the inspired words of Scripture, the written word. The written word of God is to be understood and interpreted as the Word that belongs to Jesus Christ, who personally appointed authoritative representatives to preach and preserve in writing an authorized witness to him, empowered by the Holy Spirit. (1 Thess. 2:13)

7.6 Why is Jesus Christ called “the living Word of God”?

The fullness of God's revelation is found in Jesus Christ, who not only fulfills the Holy Scriptures (the written word of God) but is himself the living Word of God. Ignorance of the written word is thus ignorance of Jesus, the living Word. We worship and pray to him, not to the Bible, for Jesus alone is the Way, the Truth and the Life. But he has given us his written word through his appointed apostles, and so we cannot truly know him apart from the Holy Scriptures. (John 1:1, 14)

7.7 What is the relationship between the Holy Scriptures and the living Word of God?

By the Holy Spirit, the Holy Scriptures put us in touch with Jesus Christ, the living Word of God. By the Spirit, the living Word of God can speak personally to his people in and through the Bible. Through the authoritative and infallible written word of God, we come to know surely and definitively who Jesus Christ is in relationship to the Father and the Holy Spirit. While the written word can be distinguished from the living Word, they can never be separated—they must always be treated together, for their ministries are inseparable in the Holy Spirit. (Heb. 1:1-2; 10:15-17; 12:25-27; John 5:39)

7.8 How should Christians interpret and teach the Holy Scriptures?

Just as the Holy Scriptures were not originally given through private understanding of the things they address, so they must not be understood (and translated, read, interpreted, preached, taught and obeyed) privately. Instead, the Bible is to be understood, conveyed and lived out in the community of the body of Christ, the Church. It is to be interpreted in its plain and canonical sense, respectful of the Church's historic and consensual reading of it. We do so taking seriously the providentially appointed form of human languages, times and circumstances in which the Bible was written. The Holy Scriptures are to be interpreted with Jesus Christ as their center, for he alone is the Living Word of God, the Son of the Father. (John 10:25; Luke 24:27; 2 Peter 1:20-21; Eph. 3:3; Gal. 1:12)

7.9 Isn't preaching also the word of God?

Yes. Preaching and other forms of Christian witness are also God's word when faithful to the living Word of God (Jesus Christ) and the witness of the written word of God (the Holy Scriptures). By the power of the Spirit, preaching gives to us what it proclaims—the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faith comes by hearing God's word in the form of faithful proclamation. (Mark 16:15; 2 Cor. 4:5; Rom. 1:15-16; 10:17)

7.10 How do Christians relate to the Holy Scriptures?

We expect God to use them uniquely to teach, rebuke, correct and train us to live in communion with God. The written word of God is God's gift to grow in us faith, hope and love for God, and to teach us how to live out that relationship in all we think, do and say. Therefore, on a regular basis, even daily, we seek to hear, read, study, learn and inwardly digest the Bible. By becoming intimately familiar with the whole of Scripture, seeing its parts in terms of the whole and its living Center, Jesus Christ, we will understand that the biblical story is our story as well. This encourages us to live in ways that conform to that story rather than to worldly influences. (Matt. 4:4; 2 Tim. 3:16; Rom. 10:17; Col. 3:16; Luke 4:4)

7.11 Does the Holy Spirit ever speak apart from the Holy Scriptures?

Since the Holy Spirit is not given to the Church apart from the Bible, true messages from the Spirit depend on the written word of God. Since that word cannot be grasped without the Spirit, true interpretation of Scripture depends on prayer. However, just as the wind blows where it will, the Spirit may speak or otherwise work in people's lives in unexpected or indirect ways, yet always according to the Holy Scriptures, never contradicting, diluting or dismissing them. However, such direction of the Spirit can never become normative for the Church in the way Holy Scripture is and always will be. (John 3:8; Acts 8:29-31; Eph. 6:18; 2 Pet. 1:20-21; Num. 22:28)

7.12 Aren't some people, apart from the Bible, sometimes wiser than some people who know the Holy Scriptures?

In some ways, yes, especially comparing individuals and not taking into consideration the whole Church. But when this happens, it cannot be confidently known except in the light of the teaching of the Bible, especially when it comes to the knowledge of God. The important question for the Church is not so much where an insight comes from—the important question is the norm by which to test it. Our faithful discernment of what is true depends on God's Word as conveyed to us in the Holy Scriptures. There is no other normative and authoritative source of the knowledge of God and of his ways and purposes for human beings. However, in its light other relative truths may be confirmed. (Titus 1:9)

7.13 Doesn't modern critical scholarship undermine the Christian belief that the Holy Scriptures are a form of God's Word?

No. The methods of modern biblical scholarship are a good servant but a bad master. They are neither to be accepted nor rejected uncritically. Properly used, they help us rightly and richly interpret the Bible. Improperly used, they can usurp the place of faith or establish an alternative faith. Though these methods provide a useful tool, the Holy Scriptures remain, for the Church, reliable and irreplaceable in all essential matters of faith and practice. Such methods are to be used to help us clearly hear and properly understand the written word of God as it bears witness to the living Word of God. Methods and approaches that obscure, contradict or relativize the normative and authoritative witness of the Holy Scriptures are to be dismissed. No valid method will place the Word of God under its judgment. (Prov. 1:5-6; 10:14; 1 Cor. 1:20, 25)

Section 8: The Sacraments

8.1 What is a “sacrament”?

It is a special act of Christian worship, instituted by Christ, which uses a visible sign to proclaim and receive the promise of the gospel for the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. A sacrament is received in faith, trusting in God to minister to us by the Holy Spirit through it. By God’s grace, the sacrament seals God’s promise to believers and is a special means to convey to us what is promised by the sign. In baptism, the sign is that of water; in the Lord's Supper, the sign is that of bread and wine. (Mark 1:9-11; 14:22-25; John 6:53; 1 Cor. 10:16; 11:25; 2Cor. 1:22)

8.2 Why do we participate in the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper?

We baptize because Jesus Christ was baptized for us and commanded us to baptize. We share in his baptism by being baptized in his name. Our baptism bears witness to Jesus’ baptism for us, and expresses our faith in his baptism for us. Our partaking of the Lord’s Supper bears witness to the communion he has set out for us at his Table and expresses our faith that his self-offering has restored our communion with him and with the Father in the Spirit. In the Lord’s Supper we receive from him what he has to give us, namely himself. We receive from him his body broken for us, and his life-blood poured out for us. Through the two sacraments, we bear witness not so much to our faith, but to who Jesus Christ is and what he has done for us through his baptism and self-sacrifice.

8.3 What is the relationship between the word of promise and the sacramental sign?

Take away the word of promise, and the water of baptism is merely water, and the bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper are merely bread and wine. The elements have no natural power in themselves to convey the blessings of God. But consecrated by the Spirit and Word of promise, the elements become visible words of God that we receive in action. In this way the elements, by grace, convey to receptive faith what they promise—the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ. The sacraments are thus visible words that uniquely assure and confirm that no matter how greatly we may have sinned, Christ died for us and comes to live in us and with us by his Spirit. They are specially appointed means that God has provided for us to receive the transforming, healing, reconciling grace of God. (Luke 24:30-31; 1 Cor. 10:16; Matt. 28:20; Col. 1:27)

8.4 What is the main difference between baptism and the Lord's Supper?

While baptism is received only once, the Lord's Supper is received again and again. Being unrepeatable, baptism indicates not only that Christ died for our sins once and for all, but that by grace we are also united with him once and for all through faith. Being repeatable, the Lord's Supper indicates that as we turn unfilled to him again and again, our Lord continually meets us in the power of the Holy Spirit to fill us—to renew and deepen our faith. (Acts 2:41; John 6:33, 51, 56; 1 Cor. 11:26)

8.5 What is the meaning of baptism?

Baptism is a sign and seal through which we are joined in union with Christ. It proclaims that we are saved by Christ alone and not through our own repentance and faith. It is a participation in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, in which our old nature has been crucified and renounced in Christ and we have been freed from the shackles of the past and given a renewed nature through his resurrection. Baptism proclaims the good news that it is only in Christ that we receive the new life of repentance and faith. Grace Communion International typically baptizes adults by immersion and infants by sprinkling. (Rom. 6:3-6; Gal. 3:26-27; Rom 4:11; Col. 2:12; Acts 2:38)

8.6 At What age should a person be baptized?

For infants and children, it is a parent's choice and some prefer to ask for a blessing to be prayed for the infant and leave the choice of baptism to the child as he or she matures to an older age. **Is it appropriate to baptize infants?** Yes. Baptism is a sign of God's promise that an infant is embraced in the covenant community of the body of Christ, the Church. Those who in repentance and faith present infants to be baptized vow to raise them in the knowledge and fear of the Lord, with the expectation that the child will, one day, profess Christian faith as their own. That personal faith is then normally demonstrated at a service of Confirmation when, as discerned by the elders of the congregation, the child reaches a personal awareness, in which a testimony of their faith in Christ is shared. (Acts 2:39)

8.7 What signs of the Holy Spirit's work do Christians hope and pray to see as a result of their baptism?

They hope and pray that the Spirit who indwells them will help them become active members of a Christian community; participate in worship; come to love studying the Bible; continually repent and so return to God; serve their neighbors; strive for justice and peace; mature in the faith, love and hope that are theirs in Christ; and purposefully share in Christ's mission to the world through the Church and their vocations. (Heb. 10:25; 12:14; 1 Pet. 3:15; 1 John 1:9; 2:1; Acts 1:8)

8.8 What is the meaning of the Lord's Supper?

In the Lord's Supper (also called Communion and the Eucharist), we partake of bread and wine in remembrance of our Savior, proclaiming his death until he comes again. The Lord's Supper is a participation in the death and resurrection of our Lord. Just as the bread and wine become part of our physical bodies, so we are made by grace to partake spiritually of Jesus Christ in his body and blood. Thus, the Lord's Supper declares to believers that in every aspect of their Christian life they rely not on any obedience or righteousness of their own, but solely upon the grace of God in Christ. (1 Cor. 11:23-26; 10:16; Matt. 26:26-28; 1 Cor. 1:9; 10:16-17; 2 Tim. 1:9)

8.9 What is required of people when they come to receive the Lord's Supper?

That in response to the proclamation of the Word of God, they come to receive the grace of God made available to all through Jesus Christ. They are to come to the Table with open hearts ready to be identified with Christ, ready to depend upon him, ready to follow him, ready to give up whatever stands in the way of living out of trust in him and in his Word to them. Coming to his Table, they will have repented of their sins and be ready to leave behind any sin that might be revealed even at the Table. They will come intending to follow the lead of the Holy Spirit to depend on Christ and his faithfulness. Above all, they will receive Christ anew, rejoicing in the gift of communion they can have with him and through him with the Father and the Spirit. They will do so looking forward to Jesus' return and the coming of the fullness of the kingdom of God. (1 Cor. 11:27-32)

8.10 Who may receive the Lord's Supper?

All may receive it who receive Christ in faith, rejoicing in so great a gift, who confess their sins, and who, in faith, intend to lead the new life that Christ shares with them. This includes children who have expressed a desire to participate and have been instructed in the meaning of the sacrament in a way they can understand. Receiving the Lord's Supper will normally have taken place after the person has been instructed and baptized, but for adults the Lord's Supper can be received upon their first hearing the Word of God proclaimed and, in response, desire to receive Christ by partaking of it. Instruction and baptism would then normally follow. (Luke 13:29; 1 Cor. 11:2; Phil. 4:4)

8.11 What is expected of people after they have shared in the Lord's Supper?

Having been renewed in their union with Christ and his people through sharing in the Lord's Supper, it is expected that they will continue by the Spirit and under the written Word of God to live in holiness, avoiding sin, showing love and forgiveness to all, and serving others freely in gratitude and in the hope of Christ's return in power and glory. (1 Cor. 11:27-33)

Section 9: The Church

9.1 What is the Church?

It is the whole community of faithful Christians in heaven and on earth who are incorporated into Jesus Christ by the personal and particular ministry of the Holy Spirit. On earth, the Church gathers in local congregations to worship God in Word and sacrament, and to witness to God by serving and obeying God in faith and according to the Holy Scriptures, thus fulfilling the mission Christ gave to it under the leadership of those God appoints in the Church for that purpose. (Acts 1:8; Eph. 4:11-13; 1 Pet. 2:9)

9.2 What is the mission of the Church?

Before ascending, Jesus commanded his followers to “make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all I have commanded you.” This “Great Commission” is for the Church in all times. (Matt. 28:16-20)

9.3 How should Christians view the Church?

The New Testament teaches us to view the Church as God’s covenant people and family, as the body and bride of Christ, and as the temple where God in Christ dwells by his Spirit. (John 1:12; 1 Pet. 2:9-10; 1 Cor. 3:16-17; 2 Cor. 6:16-7:1; Rev. 19:6-10; 21:9-10)

9.4 Why is the Church called “the body of Christ”?

Because all who belong to the Church are united to Christ as their head and source of life and are thus united to one another in Christ for mutual love and service to him, all in response to the ministry of the Holy Spirit being carried out on the basis of Christ’s completed earthly ministry. (1 Cor. 12:12-27)

9.5 What are the identifying characteristics of the Church?

The Creed lists four identifying “marks” of the Church: one, holy, all-encompassing and apostolic.

9.6 In what sense is the Church *one*?

The Church is called *one* because it is the company of *all* faithful people who have given their lives to Jesus Christ, as he has and continues to give himself to them by his Word and the Holy Spirit. The members of the Church are *one* because they form the one body of Christ, having “one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all.” The Church is called to express this unity in all relationships between believers. (Eph. 4:5-6)

9.7 In what sense is the Church *holy*?

The Church is called *holy* because the Holy Spirit dwells in it and sanctifies its members, setting them apart to God in Christ, and calling them to moral and spiritual holiness of life. Since Christ cannot be separated from his people, the Church is holy because he is holy. Despite all its remaining imperfections here and now, the Church is called to become ever more holy, sharing more fully in all that Christ has done for it, for that is what it already is in Christ. (Gal. 2:20; 1 Cor. 1:2; Lev. 11:44; 1 Pet. 1:15-16; Rev. 5:9)

9.8 In what sense is the Church *all-encompassing*?

The Church is called *all-encompassing* (*catholic* in some translations of the Creed, not in reference to a denomination, but, from the original Greek, meaning *universal*). The all-encompassing Church holds the whole faith once for all delivered to the saints and maintains continuity with the apostolic Church throughout time and space, thus uniting, in Jesus Christ, all local congregations and various associations of the one, universal Church.

9.9 In what sense is the Church *apostolic*?

The Church is called *apostolic* for two reasons: First, because its members hold the faith of Christ's first apostles—they are in continuity with them and their message. Second, because the Church, like the apostles ("apostle" meaning "sent") is sent to proclaim the gospel and to make disciples throughout the world. (Matt. 28:18-20; Luke 9:1-6; Acts 1:8; John 15:26-27; Eph. 3:8-10)

9.10 How are we as members of the Church to view each other?

In union with Christ, we are united to each other within the body of Christ, the Church. As Jesus by his death removed our separation from God, so by his Spirit he removes all that divides us from each other. The ties that bind us together in Christ are deeper than any other human relationships and are more fundamental than what distinguishes us from one another. (Eph. 2:19-20; 2:14; 4:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:4-7, 12-13, 27; Gal. 3:28)

9.11 How are we to live out the oneness we have in Christ?

Through the Holy Spirit, we have communion with Christ, which means we share in the relationship that Jesus has with the Father and the Holy Spirit. As members of the body of Christ, we also have communion with each other through him. That fellowship is lived out by loving and serving one another, and by worshipping together, hearing the gospel preached, and together partaking of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. (John 17:20-21)

9.12 How are we to serve within the Church?

The Holy Spirit gifts each member of the Church with certain gifts that are to be used to serve the Church, and through the Church to serve the world. Each of these gifts, which vary from member to member, are important and are not interchangeable. They are essential contributions to the unity of the one body of Christ. The equality of the members of the Church does not derive from the interchangeability of the parts, but in the fact that the gifts given the members are all of grace—gifts from God through Jesus by the Holy Spirit. The differences among the members are good and are to be used to bless each other in ways that individual members cannot bless themselves. The differences in the Church constitute a non-hierarchical ordering of the members where their gifts are utilized in and for love. (John 17:20-21; 1 Cor. 12:1-11)

9.13 How are the Church on earth and the Church in heaven joined?

The worship of the Church on earth is a participation in the eternal worship of the Church in heaven. One day we will be able to experience this unity. When we worship here on earth we are joining in with the eternal worship that is already and forever taking place. (Heb. 12:22-24)

9.14 How do Christians enter into communion with Christ and with one another?

By the ministry of the Holy Spirit working through Word and sacrament. Because the Spirit uses these means to bring about his saving purposes, the Word of God and the sacraments are called "means of grace." We practice two sacraments, baptism and the Lord's Supper, because these were instituted for the Church by Jesus Christ. (1 Cor. 10:17; 12:13; Col. 3:16)

9.15 Why should Christians gather for worship?

As members of the body of Christ, we gather for worship to honor God with thanks and praise, to receive the sacraments, and to hear God's Word proclaimed so that the gospel may be in our hearts and put into practice in our lives. Through these encounters with God in worship, we are reminded of God's nature and character, and we grow in faith, hope and love for him. This prepares us to go out from worship to make God known in word and deed. We typically hold our primary worship gathering on the first day of the week in celebration of the fulfillment of God's promise to be our rest through our Lord's resurrection. (Rom. 10:8; Acts 2:42, 46; Mark 16:2; Acts 20:7; 4:33)

Section 10: The Christian

10.1 What is a Christian?

A Christian is any person who, in response to hearing the Word of God, responds with faith in Jesus as God's eternal Son, trusting in the grace freely given to us through his life, death on the cross, and resurrection to everlasting life. Recognizing Jesus as being their Lord and Savior, they turn to him in repentance and faith to receive salvation, including the gifts of forgiveness of sin and reconciliation with God. Submitting to the holy, loving Lordship of Christ, they no longer live for themselves, but for the praise and glory of God. They entrust their life to Jesus' transforming oversight, care and service. (Rom. 10:9-13)

10.2 What happens when a person becomes a Christian?

They experience new birth through the regeneration of the Holy Spirit, leading them to embrace their adoption as God's children. By the Holy Spirit, they share in the communion that the incarnate Son of God has with the Father, drawing them into right relationship with the triune God and fellow humans. (Rom. 10:9-13; Gal. 2:20; John 3:5-7; Titus 3:5; Mark 8:34; John 1:12-13; 3:16-17; Rom. 5:1; 8:9, 14-15; John 13:35)

10.3 Is Christianity the only true religion?

When used to promote self-justification, war-mongering or prejudice, religion is a form of sin. Religions, Christianity included, too often have been mis-used in that way. Nevertheless, by grace, despite the sins of its followers, Christianity offers the truth of the gospel. No other religion can or does affirm the name of Jesus Christ as the hope of the world. The exclusive claim of Jesus Christ is that in him alone can all be included in the kingdom of God. He alone is the eternal Son of the Father who reveals the Father and sends the Holy Spirit. He alone makes us adopted children of the Father in the Spirit. (Matt. 7:3; James 1:26, 27; Acts 4:12; John 14:6; Rom. 1:16; 2 Cor. 4:7)

10.4 How will God deal with followers of other religions?

God has made salvation available to all human beings through Jesus Christ. How God will deal with those who do not know or do not follow Christ, but who follow another tradition, we cannot say. However, we can say that God is gracious and merciful, and that God will not deal with people in any other way than we see in Jesus Christ, who came as the Savior of the world. (Rev. 7:9; Ps. 103:8; John 3:19; Titus 2:11)

10.5 How should a Christian treat non-Christians and people of other religions?

As much as possible, we should meet friendship with friendship, hostility with kindness, generosity with gratitude, persecution with forbearance, truth with agreement, and error with truth. We should express our faith with humility and devotion as the occasion requires, whether silently or openly, boldly or meekly, by word or by deed. On the one hand, we should avoid compromising the truth, but on the other hand we should not refuse to listen to or engage with those who disagree with us. In short, we should always welcome and accept these others in a way that honors and reflects the Lord's welcome and acceptance of us as his followers. (Rom. 15:7; Luke 6:37; Matt. 5:44; Eph. 4:25; Acts 13:47; Rom. 12:21; 13:10)

10.6 Why are Christians people of prayer?

Prayer means calling upon God, whose Spirit is always present with us, moving us to prayer. In prayer, we approach God with reverence, confidence and humility. Prayer involves both addressing God in praise, confession, thanksgiving and supplication, and listening for God's Word within our hearts and minds echoing his written word. Prayer brings us into communion with God. The more our lives are rooted in prayer, the more we sense how wonderful God is in grace, purity, majesty

and love. Prayer means offering our lives completely to God, submitting ourselves to God's will, and waiting faithfully for God's grace. Through prayer, God frees us from anxiety, equips us for service, and deepens our faith. Through prayer, our minds and hearts are being conformed to God's will and heart. (Ps. 48:1; 96:8-9; James 5:16; 1 John 1:9; Ps. 107:8; 75:1; 50:15; 145:18)

10.7 Is prayer for the purpose of overcoming resistance from God or his neglect of us?

No. We do not pray to change God's mind or to get God to do what he is reluctant to do. Rather, we pray to discern what God wills and wants. As we pray to the Father, the Spirit enables us to join with Jesus our High Priest in his prayers. Prayer is communion with our triune God. (Eph. 6:18; Ps. 62:8; 139:1; Phil. 4:6; Matt. 7:7-8)

10.8 How does God respond to a Christian's prayers?

God takes all our prayers into account, weighing them with divine wisdom, and responding to them by a perfect will. Although for the time being God's answers may seem beyond our understanding, or even painful, we know nonetheless that they are always determined by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. God answers our prayers, particularly for temporal blessings, only in ways that are compatible with the larger purposes of God's glory and our salvation. Giving us communion with God is the heart of all the answers to all our prayers. (1 John 5:14; James 1:17; Matt. 6:33)

10.9 What encourages a Christian to pray each day?

The God who has adopted us as his children is the heavenly Father who encourages and commands us to pray. When we do, we are responding with love to that greater love which meets us from above. Before we enter into prayer, God is ready to grant all that we truly need. We may turn to God with confidence each day, not because we are worthy, but simply because of God's grace. By praying, we acknowledge that we depend on grace for all that is good, beautiful, life-giving and true. Prayer is an essential aspect of our relationship with our triune God as one of the fundamental disciplines of our life in Christ. (Is. 65:24; Luke 11:12-13; Phil. 4:8; Eph. 3:20-21)

10.10 What prayer serves as the Christian's pattern for prayer?

In Matthew 6, Jesus gives us a pattern for prayer in what is commonly called *The Lord's Prayer*:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.
For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

(Matt. 6:9-13, NKJV)

10.11 Why do we address God as "Father"?

In teaching us to pray this way, Jesus gave us permission to address God as Father as he does. We call God Father because he first is the eternal Father of the eternal Son. Then, through and with the Son, we too, as children adopted by grace, call God our Father. By addressing God as "our Father," as does the Son, we draw near with childlike reverence, and place ourselves securely in God's hands. We do not view God the Father in the way we view our human fathers, for God the Father, as revealed to us in relationship to the Son, sets a standard that all human fathers fall short of.

10.12 What is meant by addressing God as "Our Father in heaven"?

Although God is everywhere, God is said to exist and dwell "in heaven." While God is free to enter into the closest relationship with the creature, God does not belong to the order of created beings. "Heaven" is the seat of divine authority in creation, the created place from which God reigns in glory and brings salvation to earth. Our opening address in The Lord's Prayer expresses our confidence that we rest securely in God's sovereign yet intimate care, and that nothing on earth lies beyond the reach of God's grace. (Rom. 8:15; Jer. 23:23-24; Acts 17:24-25)

10.13 What is meant by the first petition, "Hallowed be your name"?

It is placed first because it comprehends the goal and purpose of the whole prayer. The glory of God's name is the highest concern in all that we pray and do. God's "name" stands for God's being as well as God's attributes, works and reputation. When we pray for his name to be "hallowed," we are asking that we and all others will know and glorify God as God really is, and that all things will be ordered in a way that demonstrates God's faithfulness, goodness and glory. (Jer. 9:23-24; Rom. 11:36; Ps. 115:1)

10.14 What is meant by the second petition, "Your kingdom come"?

We are asking God to come and rule among us, helping us share in his ways through faith, love and justice. We pray for both the Church and the world that God will rule in our hearts through faith, in our personal relationships through love, and in our institutional affairs through justice. We ask especially that the gospel will not be withheld from us, but rightly preached and received. We pray that the Church will be upheld and increase, particularly when in distress; and that all the world will more and more hear of and submit to God's reign, until the day that Christ establishes the fullness of the kingdom of God, and we live forever with God in perfect peace. (Ps. 68:1; 2 Thess. 3:1; Rev. 22:20; Rom. 8:22-24; 1 Cor. 15:20, 28)

10.15 What is meant by the third petition, "Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven"?

All that God wills is consistent with the nature and character of the triune God revealed in Jesus Christ. Whatever God wills, he eventually brings to pass, whether we desire it or not. The phrase "on earth as it is in heaven" means that we are asking for the grace to do God's will on earth in the way that it is being done in heaven—gladly and from the heart. We thus ask that all opposition to God's will might be removed from the earth, and especially from our own hearts. We ask for the freedom to conform our desires and deeds more fully to God's, so that we might be completely delivered from our sin. We yield ourselves, in life and in death, to God's will. And we expectantly look forward to the day when heaven and earth will be reunited in the new heaven and earth. (Ps. 119:34-36; 103:20, 22; Luke 22:42; Rom. 12:2)

10.16 What is meant by the fourth petition, "Give us this day our daily bread"?

We ask God to provide for all our needs, for we know that God, who cares for us in every area of our life, has promised us temporal as well as spiritual blessings. God commands us to pray each day for all that we need and no more, so that we will learn to rely completely on God. We pray that we will use what we are given wisely, remembering especially the poor and needy. Along with every living creature, we look to God, the source of all generosity, to bless us and nourish us, according to the divine good pleasure. (Prov. 30:8; Ps. 90:17; 55:22; 72:4; 104:27-28)

10.17 What is meant by the fifth petition, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors"?

We pray that a new and right spirit will be put within us. We ask for the grace to treat others, especially those who harm us, with the same mercy we have received from God. We remember our need to turn humbly to God daily for our own forgiveness. We know that our reception of that forgiveness can be blocked by our unwillingness to forgive others. We ask that we will not delight in doing evil, or in avenging any wrong, but that we will survive all cruelty without bitterness, and overcome evil with good, so that our hearts will be knit together with the mercy and forgiveness of God. (Matt. 18:33; 6:14-15; Ps. 51:10; 1 John 2:1-2)

10.18 What is meant by the sixth petition, "Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one"?

We ask God to protect us from our worst impulses and from all external powers of destruction in the world that are attributable, ultimately to Satan, the evil one. We ask that we might not yield to despair in the face of seemingly hopeless circumstances. We pray for the grace to remember and believe, despite our unbelief, that no matter how bleak the world may sometimes seem, there is nonetheless a depth of love and hope that is deeper than our despair, and that this love — which delivered Israel from slavery in Egypt and raised our Lord Jesus from the dead — will finally swallow up forever all that would now seem to defeat it. We pray this because we know and trust that this is God's will. (2 Cor. 4:8; Eph. 3:19; Matt. 26:41)

10.19 What is meant by the traditional closing doxology, "For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen"?

We give God thanks and praise for God's present and coming kingdom that is more powerful than all enemies, for the power perfected in the weakness of love, and for the glory that includes our well-being and that of the whole creation, both now and to all eternity. We give thanks and praise to God who is made known to us through Christ our Lord and King who will reign over all forever, never to be defeated. (Rev. 5:12; 4:11; 1 Chron. 29:11, 13)

Section II: The Gospel

11.1 What is the gospel?

The gospel is the good news of the kingdom of God and salvation by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ. To preach the gospel is to proclaim the fulfillment of God's purposes through the sending of the eternal Son of God in the power of the Holy Spirit to break into our fallen world, overthrow its evil, and transform and redeem all who were captive to sin and evil's power and eternal consequences.

11.2 What are the central events of the gospel?

The central events of the gospel are about Jesus: his birth, life, ministry, crucifixion, death, burial, resurrection and ascension. Through these events in the life of Jesus, God's kingdom has broken into our time and space to bring about our salvation. (1 Cor. 15:1-4; Romans 5:15; John 1:12; 1 John 5:11-12)

11.3 Is the forgiveness declared in the gospel extended only after repentance?

No. The gospel is the astonishing good news that *while we were yet sinners*, Christ died for us. God's forgiveness of us is unconditional, and it is given before our confession of sin and repentance. Freed by the Holy Spirit in response to the Word of God, repentance is how we receive the forgiveness that has already been freely given to us on the basis of Christ's atoning work on the cross. To refuse to repent is thus to refuse God's gift of forgiveness. (Col. 3:13; Mark 11:25; Col. 2:13; Matt. 18:21-22; Heb. 12:14)

11.4 How should we respond to the gospel?

With repentance and faith. The Son of God was sent by the Father to assume our human nature to himself and to rescue and transform it in himself. This was done to reconcile us to God so that we might become his beloved adopted children. Jesus Christ came, lived and died for our sins and has made us his own before and apart from our believing in him. He has bound us to himself by his love in such a way that he will never let us go. Therefore, the Lord calls on all humans to repent and believe in him as Lord and Savior. (Rom. 10:9-10; Acts 16:31)

11.5 If sin is so evil, how can God forgive it?

God forgives our sins because he has the grace and power to overcome them and set things right. In forgiving our sins, God is not overlooking or ignoring evil. God is opposed to sin and evil and always will be. God judges what is sinful and evil and condemns it. By forgiving us, God rescues us from the dominion and eternal consequences of sin, making all things new, including our human nature.

11.6 How does God make human nature new?

Our problem as humans is not merely that we sin, but that, by nature, we are sinners. We have a corrupt, fallen nature that is inclined toward sin, often not able to resist temptation to sin. That is the bad news. But the good news is that God has remade human nature in and through the eternal Son of God who, in becoming human, took upon himself our corrupt human nature and healed it on our behalf. (2 Cor. 8:9; Heb. 2:17)

11.7 What part does the Holy Spirit have in this renewal?

Because Jesus renewed human nature, the Holy Spirit is able to minister to us as individuals on the basis of Christ's finished work, uniting us to Jesus with his perfected human nature in a spiritual union. Through this union, the Holy Spirit imparts to us a continuous sharing in Jesus' love and life so that we are transformed, little by little, into the image of God found in Jesus. (2 Cor. 3:18)

11.8 How can anyone resist the Holy Spirit's bringing about this transformation?

No one can entirely resist the Holy Spirit. In the end the Holy Spirit will make clear and evident to all the truth and reality that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior of all. In the end, all will either willingly or unwillingly admit the truth that Jesus Christ is Lord of all. However, Scripture warns of the real danger of willfully rejecting, and thus blaspheming the Holy Spirit. Apparently, some will do this, even after being convicted of the Holy Spirit's undeniable witness that Jesus is Lord and Savior and there is no other. Exactly how this rejection is possible we are not told. We are simply warned of its possibility, which we are to take seriously lest we resist the Holy Spirit, presume upon God's grace and minimize the many directives in Scripture to accept, receive and respond positively in repentance and faith to the proclamation of the grace of God in Jesus Christ that comes to us by his Word and Spirit. (Mark 3:29; Rom. 14:11)

Section 12: God's Grace

12.1 What is God's grace?

All that the triune God does toward his creation is good and right, and it is all done freely. That is grace. God's grace, which is free and unmerited, arises out of God's eternal nature and character. God's grace is expressed in everything God does. The deepest and most costly expression of grace is the Father's redemption of sinful and rebellious humanity and the entire cosmos from the power of sin and its ultimate consequence, death. This redemption was accomplished through the incarnation and atoning death of Jesus Christ. By grace, the Holy Spirit now frees and empowers humans to repent of unbelief and to know, have faith in, love and worship the Father and Jesus Christ and thereby experience the joy of eternal salvation in the kingdom of God. (Eph. 2:8-9; 1 John 2:1-2; Col. 1:20; Rom. 11:32; 8:19-21; 3:24; 5:2, 15-17, 21; John 1:12; Titus 3:7)

12.2 Why do all people need God's grace?

Because all humans are sinners and cannot set themselves free from the power of sin or sin's ultimate consequences, which are alienation from God and death. All people need the good news that God loves us unconditionally, has forgiven our sins, and has reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ. That good news (the gospel) includes the invitation to receive, by faith in Christ, all the benefits of living under God's grace by the Holy Spirit. While we should not cease to pray to God for mercy, we can, in faith, be confident that God has forgiven us and that he is at work freeing us from all our sins. By grace we can confess our sins, repent of them, and grow in love and knowledge day by day. By confession and repentance we receive, as often as needed, the grace of God freely given to us. (Mark 7:21-23; 1 John 3:8; Eph. 2:2; Gal. 5:19-21; Rom. 6:23; 3:23-24; Eph. 2:12-13; Ps. 14:3; Eph. 2:8; Ps. 130:3-4; Col. 1:13-14; 1 John 1:8)

12.3 What is forgiveness of sin?

Through the incarnation and crucifixion of Jesus Christ, God has taken responsibility to overcome evil and put all things right. Because of Christ, God no longer holds our sins against us. Christ alone is our righteousness and our life; he is our only hope. Grace alone, not any merits of our own, is the basis on which God has forgiven us in Christ. Faith alone, not our works, is the means by which we receive Christ into our hearts, and with him the forgiveness that makes us whole. Christ alone, grace alone, and faith alone bring the forgiveness from God that is attested to in the gospel. (1 Cor. 1:30; 1 Tim. 1:1; Rom. 11:6; Eph. 1:10; 2:8; Rom. 5:15; 4:16; 3:28)

12.4 Does forgiveness mean that God condones sin?

No. God never approves of sin. Although God is merciful, God does not condone what God forgives. In the death and resurrection of Christ, God judges what God abhors—everything hostile to holy love—by abolishing it at its roots. Because God is for his creatures, he must be against all that is against them. Evil thus has no future. In this judgment the unexpected occurs: good is forcibly (not naturally) brought out of evil circumstances, hope out of hopelessness, and life out of death. God spares sinners who welcome God's judgment and his condemnation of all sin and evil, including their own, which was accomplished in Jesus Christ. God turns them from enemies into friends. The uncompromising judgment of God to do away with all evil and its consequences is revealed in the suffering love of the cross. (Hab. 1:13; Is. 59:15; Heb. 9:22; Rom. 5:8-10; 1 Chron. 16:33)

12.5 Does our forgiveness of those who have harmed us depend on their repentance?

No. We are to forgive as we have been forgiven. The gospel is the astonishing good news that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Just as God's forgiveness of us is unconditional, and precedes our confession of sin and our repentance, so our forgiveness of those who have harmed us does not depend on them confessing and repenting of their sin. However, when we forgive the person who has done us harm, giving up any resentment or desire to retaliate, we do not condone the harm that was done, nor do we excuse the evil of the sin. Rather, we trust in God's judgement upon the evil, the power of his redemption, and in the hopeful rescue and transformation of all who have done evil. (Col. 3:13; Mark 11:25; Col. 2:13; Matt. 18:21-22; Heb. 12:14)

12.6 How can people forgive those who have hurt them badly?

Without the grace that comes from above, we cannot love our enemies, we cannot pray for those who persecute us, we cannot even be ready to forgive those who have hurt us badly. We cannot be conformed to the image of God's Son apart from the power of God's Word and Spirit. Yet we are promised that we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. We never forgive others in our own names, but only in the name of Jesus. In our forgiveness, we trust that God has not allowed us to experience anything that in the end cannot be put right and redeemed. In our forgiveness, we hand over those who have sinned against us to God's own gracious judgment in the hope that they will one day submit to God's judgment, repent of their evil, die to themselves and be transformed by God's grace, just as we have. (Luke 6:27-28; James 1:17; Rom. 8:29; Phil. 4:13)

Section 13: Sin

13.1 What is sin?

Sin is the state of alienation from God of all humanity and consists of anything that is contrary to God's will, including acts of wrongdoing, neglect to do good, and unbelief in the God of grace and love as made known in Jesus Christ. At its root, sin is distrust or unbelief in the goodness and faithfulness of God and his Word. It indicates a broken relationship with God and issues in lives that misrepresent God and his good purposes for human beings. Sin is refusal, in whole or in part, to live in dependence upon God for our meaning, significance, identity, purpose and destiny. It is a refusal to worship God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and to be his faithful representative or witness in all we do, think and say towards all. In sin we put our ultimate trust in idols—in that which is not God. (1 John 3:4; James 4:17; Rom. 14:23; 5:12, 17-19; 7:24-25)

13.2 Why is sin so bad?

The Bible associates sin with the devil, whose work Jesus came to destroy. Sin results in damaged relationships, suffering and death. Sin in act, word or thought bears false witness to the character of God and is rebellion against the good and right purposes for which God created human beings and their relationships with one another and his good creation. Out of distrust and unbelief in God and his Word, we sin in our attempt to live as if we could justify ourselves, having no need for God's goodness, grace and mercy. Acting out of unbelief, sin amounts to living the lie that we can have life and being apart from God, as if we could be gods to and for ourselves—as if we could gain life from sources other than the living God. Sin slanders God's holy character, trustworthiness and good purposes for human beings. (Mark 7:21-23; 1 John 3:8; Eph. 2:2)

13.3 If Jesus Christ has already conquered the devil and sin, why is there still so much evil in the world?

No one can say why, for evil is a terrible abyss beyond rational explanation. Its ultimate origin is obscure and its enormity perplexes us. It is, most simply, what ought not to be. Nevertheless, we boldly affirm that God's triumph over evil is certain. In Jesus Christ, God suffers with us, knowing all our sorrows. In raising him from the dead, God gives new hope to the world. Our Lord Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, is himself God's promise that suffering will come to an end, that death shall be no more, that evil has no future, and that all things will be made new. (Ps. 23:4; 1 Pet. 1:3; 2 Pet. 3:13; Rom. 8:21; Job 19:25)

Section 14: Faith, Salvation & Repentance

• Faith

14.1 What is faith in God?

Faith in God is a gift of God, rooted in Jesus and enlightened by the witness of the Spirit in the Holy Scriptures. Through faith, God prepares and enables our minds to share in Christ's knowledge and trust in God the Father by the Spirit. Jesus is the author and perfecter of our faith. To have faith is to respond with trust and love to who Jesus is revealed to be according to the gospel. (Eph. 2:8; Rom. 12:3; 10:17; Heb. 11:1; Rom. 5:1-2; 1:17; 3:21-28; 11:6; Eph. 3:12; 1 Cor. 2:5; Heb. 12:2)

14.2 Is Christian faith irrational?

No. Faith is the kind of knowledge that results from the open and personal consideration of the revelation of God given through the Person of Jesus and the testimony to that revelation in the Holy Scriptures. Faith has an object that can be known and understood, namely the objective revelation that culminates in the Person and teaching of Jesus Christ. Faith is the personal knowledge of God based on God's own achievement of self-revelation. As such it is public knowledge.

14.3 Is Christian faith purely subjective?

No. Christian faith is not the result of an act of will or the decision of an individual to affirm or assume something. Faith is a response to the object of revelation, conveyed primarily through hearing, not seeing. Faith has a subjective aspect that is required for all knowledge. Faith involves the humility and at least a mustard seed of trust that corresponds to hearing the truth of what is revealed in God's Word, both living and written. That mustard seed of trust and humility is a gift of the Holy Spirit who works in our subjectivity, but is not our subjectivity or subjective states.

14.4 Is there any mystery to Christian faith?

Yes. In the New Testament, a "mystery" refers to what human beings can come to know only by God's gracious act of revelation. In that sense, mystery does not mean what cannot be known but what must be revealed by God. Though there are things God has not revealed, God is faithful and wants to be known. What he reveals to us is not in any way misleading. As we contemplate God's revelation, we do so knowing there is more depth to it than we are able to grasp. Though we can apprehend God's revelation, we cannot fully comprehend it. (John 1:18; Col. 1:27; Eph. 3:3-5; 1 Cor. 2:9-11; Deut. 29:29)

• Salvation

14.5 What is salvation?

It is the restoration of human communion with God and the deliverance of the entire creation from the bondage of sin and death. In saving us, God grants us reconciliation with him, forgiveness of sins, adoption into his family, citizenship in his kingdom, union with him in Christ, new life in the Spirit and the promise of eternal life. (2 Cor. 5:17-19; Col. 1:13-14; Gal. 4:4-7; Eph. 2:19-21; Rom. 6:3-5; Titus 3:4-5; John 3:16)

14.6 Why is salvation needed?

Ever since the first human beings, the human race has rebelled and distrusted the perfect goodness and holy love of the triune God and therefore alienated themselves from their Creator and rejected the fellowship they were created to have with him as their God. As a result, the human race has:

- Cut itself off from the source of its life and existence, resulting in physical death and subjecting itself to eternal spiritual death.

- Promoted a lie about the nature and character of the triune God their maker, bearing false witness to God's name and reputation by rejecting his faithfulness, goodness, grace and holiness.
- Undermined and at times even attempted to destroy the faith, hope and love for God and so stop the good, right and life-giving worship of the triune God by others, thereby incurring spiritual guilt and shame before God, which only God himself can remedy and has done so in the atoning work of Christ.
- Exposed itself to being manipulated by and enslaved to the power of sin from which it cannot free itself, leading to the corruption, warping and twisting of human nature itself, which it cannot undo.
- Experienced disharmony between the human soul, mind and body, leading to broken and even destructive and evil relationships between parents and children, between men and women, between nations and ethnic groups, and between human beings and the natural environment.

14.7 How are people saved?

Salvation is accomplished for us through the life and sacrificial death of Jesus Christ on the cross. Salvation is freely given to us by the grace our triune God. It is personally received and experienced through faith in Jesus enabled by the ministry of the Spirit. It is not earned by good works or through personal merit. (Rom. 8:21-23; 6:18, 22-23; 1 Cor. 1:9; 1 Tim. 2:3-6; Matt. 3:17; Col. 3:1; Eph. 2:4-10)

14.8 Is there any way of salvation other than through Jesus Christ?

No. The apostle Peter said of Jesus that "salvation is found in no one else" (Acts 4:12). Jesus is the only one who can save us from our damaged and twisted nature and reconcile us to God so that we can live according to God's ultimate purposes for human beings. He is the only one who can enable us to share in God's eternal life, free from the power of evil and its consequence, which is death. (1 Tim. 2:5)

14.9 Will all people be saved?

All who call upon the Lord will be saved. No one who seeks after God will be turned away. God's work of atonement was accomplished for the benefit of all. Jesus is Lord and Savior over all persons, though Scripture does not say that all people will necessarily receive the salvation that is theirs in Christ, or that none will irreversibly reject the ministry of the Holy Spirit to unite them to Christ. Salvation is the fruit of a relationship with the triune God—a gift that is complete in Jesus and that must, through the work of the Spirit, be personally received in order for its benefits, especially eternal life in eternal communion with God, to be fully enjoyed. (Heb. 10:31; Rom. 11:32; Matt. 18:12-14; Eph. 2:8; 1 Tim. 2:3-4; John 3:17-18; Ezek. 18:32; 2 Cor. 5:14-15)

14.10 Through salvation, do humans eventually become God?

No. Though ultimate salvation does not make us God (or parts of God), it does give us a full sharing in the sanctified and glorified humanity of Jesus Christ. We remain human, becoming fully and truly human as Jesus was and still is. Through the incarnate Son of God, we enjoy union and communion with the whole of God, while remaining fully human.

• Repentance

14.11 What is repentance toward God?

It is a change of mind and attitude in response to the grace of God prompted by the Holy Spirit and grounded in the Word of God. Repentance includes awareness of personal sinfulness as well as trust in and allegiance to Jesus Christ, through whom all humanity has been reconciled to God.

Repentance accompanies the new life sanctified by the Spirit through faith in Jesus. In repentance, we reject all attempts to justify ourselves, turning instead to God to receive our lives and righteousness from him as free gifts of his grace. We turn away from all evil and call upon God to open our eyes to deception and give us strength to resist all temptation. (Acts 2:38; 2 Cor. 5:15, 18-19; Rom. 2:4; 10:17; Col. 1:19-20; Rom. 12:2)

14.12 How may a person repent and place their faith in Jesus Christ?

Anyone may do so at any time. One way is by sincerely saying a prayer similar to this:

Father, I confess my faults, shortcomings, sins,
and rebellious acts, and ask you to forgive me.
I embrace you, Lord Jesus, as my Savior and Lord.
Thank you for your atoning death on the cross in
obedience to your Father's will to put away my sins.
I enthrone you, Lord Jesus, to be in charge of every part of my life,
and I ask you to indwell and empower me with your Holy Spirit,
so that I may live as your faithful follower from now on.

In Jesus name, amen.

(John 15:16; Acts 16:31-34; Rom. 10:9; Heb. 12:12)

Section 15: The Christian Life

15.1 What should a person do once they have turned to God for salvation in repentance and faith?

If they have not already been baptized, they should, following proper instruction, be baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus, and thus into membership in his body, the Church. (Matt. 28:19-20; 1 Cor. 12:13)

15.2 What does God desire to accomplish in a Christian's life?

God first draws us into a deepening and personal worship relationship with him. His desire in doing so is that, through the relationship, we will be transformed into the image of Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, under the teachings of the Holy Scriptures, which are the infallible and final authority in all matters of faith and practice (Christian living). (2 Cor. 3:18)

15.3 How are Christians to conduct their lives?

The life of a Christian is characterized by trust in and loving allegiance to Jesus, who loved us and gave himself for us. Trust in Jesus is expressed by belief in the gospel, by baptism, and through participation in our Lord's works of love. Through the Spirit, Jesus transforms the hearts of believers, producing in them his love, joy, peace, faithfulness, meekness, kindness, goodness, gentleness, self-control, righteousness and truth. (1 John 3:16, 23-24; 4:20-21; 2 Cor. 5:15; Eph. 2:10; Gal. 5:6, 22-23; Eph. 5:9; John 14:23-26; Col. 1:9-12; Eph. 5:1-2; Rom. 12:9-21)

15.4 How does God accomplish this transformation in a Christian's life?

God transforms us over time through corporate worship (including Word and sacrament), private worship (including prayer, Bible reading and study), fellowship with God's people, pursuit of holiness of life, witness toward those who do not know Christ, and acts of love toward all. All these take effect in us only by the ministry of the Holy Spirit who frees and enables us to share in the regenerated and renewed humanity of Jesus Christ. (Acts 2:42; Heb. 10:23-25)

15.5 What are the dynamics of the Christian life?

They can be summed up in the biblical terms of justification, sanctification and glorification. Together these three describe the complete Christian life. All three are already complete for us in Jesus' glorified human nature—thus joined together in Jesus and received from him through our trusting him to provide us our complete salvation: justification, sanctification and ultimate glorification. (1 Cor. 1:30, ESV)

15.6 What is justification?

Justification marks the fact of our being both forgiven by and reconciled to God—sharing in Jesus' right relationship with the triune God. As we come to first recognize this truth and reality, we begin to affirm and trust in the free gift of our justification. We live in confidence that God has indeed reconciled us to himself, holding nothing against us. We draw near to God because he has reconciled us to himself by his grace. (Rom. 3:25; 4:25; 5:16-18; 8:30; 1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 5:21; Is. 53:5)

15.7 What is sanctification?

Sanctification is the dynamic relationship with God that begins to take place as we receive the good news of our justification. By the Word of God and the Holy Spirit, we begin to share more in the life of Christ—growing deeper in relationship with him, trusting more and more in him in every situation in life, and so becoming more and more conformed to him. (Heb. 2:11; 10:10, 14; 12:10, 14; Eph. 4:24; 1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 7:1)

15.8 What is glorification?

Sanctification anticipates receiving from Christ our glorification, which completes our sanctification. While our sanctification points to or leads to our glorification, it will not be fully experienced until we pass through death and Christ returns. Only then, in the new heaven and new earth in the age to come, will we benefit fully in Christ and so share fully in his glorified human nature for all eternity. (Rom. 8:30; 1 Cor. 15:42, 49; Rev. 20:5-6; Phil. 3:10-11)

15.9 What is the Christian life like for us now?

In the time period between Jesus' first and second advents, the Christian life is one of growth, of transformation from one degree of glory to another. We are like clay vessels with the glory of Christ shining through. This means that, to some degree, we will experience dying with Christ and suffering with him. It will also involve being renewed and restored in faith, hope and love. We will not live ideal lives. We will experience grief and sorrow. We will experience some opposition, challenges and possibly even persecution. We will need to repent. We will never reach a plateau of coasting along. It will always involve being deliberate, striving and being renewed. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we are in a transitional time of growing up ("becoming") in Christ, and being continually renewed in Christ. (Rom. 8:29; 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 1:18; 3:19; 4:13; Col. 2:10; 3:10)

15.10 Can we measure or exactly mark our progress in the Christian life?

No. Nor is there a need to do so. The Christian life involves a turning away from all that blocks or leads us away from receiving daily God's transforming and healing grace—turning towards him in renewed faith, hope and love. This is true for all no matter how far along a person is in their journey with Jesus. It's always a matter of turning and facing in the right direction—towards Christ and his high calling to walk towards him and with him. (1 Thess. 1:3; 5:8; Phil. 2:12)

15.11 Why do we not necessarily make consistent and inevitable progress in the Christian life?

Because we live between Christ's first and second advents, we are in a time of transition and so our human natures are still prone to temptation by sin. The power of sin, still at work in the world, seeks to pull us away from God toward evil. We now have only the "down payment" or "first fruits" of the Holy Spirit and do not yet share fully in the glorified humanity of Jesus. The fullness of our sharing in Jesus Christ's fully-sanctified human nature will occur only after our death or upon his personal return, when he will fully manifest his kingdom in a new heaven and earth. (Eph. 6:12)

15.12 How do we resist temptations to pull away from God?

Scripture exhorts us to rely on our union with Christ and find our identity in belonging to Christ, body and soul. Secure in Christ, we place ourselves in trusting submission to God's Word and Spirit. We then expend effort, seeking support, encouragement and resources to "side" with the Holy Spirit's promptings, guidance and assurance so that we may participate in the renewed human natures that we have complete in Jesus. (Phil. 1:6)

15.13 Why should Christians obey God?

Not to win God's love, for God already loves us. Not to earn salvation, for Jesus Christ has already earned it for us. Not to avoid punishment, for then we would obey out of fear. Rather, with gladness of heart, we obey God out of gratitude for his freely given grace and mercy. We obey by faith in him and in all he has done, is doing and will yet do for us to the glory of God. (Ps. 118:1; Col. 3:17)

15.14 Why should Christians be loyal to God above all others?

For a Christian, no loyalty should come before loyalty to the triune God. We should worship and serve only God, expect all good from God alone, and love, fear and honor God with all our heart, mind and strength. To treat or trust anything other than the triune God as though it were God, is to practice idolatry. To assume that one's own interests are more important than anything else, is to make them into idols, in effect making an idol of oneself. (Deut. 6:5, 14; 1 John 5:21; Ex. 34:14; Rom. 1:22-23; Phil. 2:4; Matt. 6:24; 10:37; Prov. 9:10)

15.15 Why should Christians submit to and respect those in authority?

Though we owe reverence and worship to God alone, we respect those in positions of authority, including our parents. There are limits to obeying those in authority, including parents. No mere human being is God. Blind obedience is not required of us, for everything should be tested by loyalty and obedience to God, according to God's Word. When it seems as though we should not obey, we should always be alert to possible self-deception, and pray that we may walk in the truth of God's will. (Eph. 5:21; Rom. 12:10; Eph. 6:2; Prov. 1:8; Lev. 19:32; Luke 2:51; 1 Pet. 2:17; Acts 5:29)

15.16 Why should Christians not commit murder?

The life of another belongs to their Maker and Redeemer, not to another human being. Unlawfully taking another's life usurps God's rightful authority. God forbids anything that harms our neighbors unfairly. Murder or injury can be done not only by direct violence, but also by an angry word or a clever plan, and not only by an individual, but also by unjust social institutions. We should honor every human being, including our enemies, as persons made according to God's image. (1 John 3:15; Prov. 24:17; Rom. 12:19-20; Col. 3:12-13; Matt. 5:21-22; 26:52)

15.17 Why should Christians not steal?

God forbids all theft and robbery, including schemes, tricks or systems that unjustly take what belongs to someone else. God requires us not to be driven by greed, not to misuse or waste the gifts we have been given, and not to distrust the promise that God will supply our needs. Stealing dishonors God and destroys trust between human beings. (Job 20:19-20; Jer. 22:13; Prov. 18:9; 1 Tim. 6:9-10; 1 John 3:17; Luke 12:15; Phil. 4:19)

15.18 Why should Christians not lie?

God forbids us to damage the honor or reputation of our neighbors. We should not say false things against anyone for the sake of money, favor or friendship, for the sake of revenge, or for any other reason. God requires that we speak the truth, to speak well of our neighbors when we can, and to view the faults of our neighbors with tolerance when we cannot, and to be true to our word. Lying dishonors God and destroys trust between human beings. (Zech. 8:16-17; 1 Pet. 3:16; Prov. 14:5; James 4:11; 1 Pet. 4:8; Rom. 3:13, 15; Prov. 31:8-9; Matt. 7:1-2)

15.19 What is the Christian view of marriage?

As revealed in the Holy Scriptures, and as stated by Jesus, God established marriage as an exclusive, sacred union between one man and one woman. That union is a unique, living witness that reflects and honors God's covenant relationship with his people in Jesus Christ. It is a union that involves a unity—a difference and a harmonious coordination of being and action in holy loving. That unity, which normally has the potential to be fruitful by generating new-born life, bears witness to the life-giving nature of the triune God through the union and communion of the Father and Son in the Spirit. Christian marriage, lived as a witness to God's faithfulness, honors God and builds trust between human beings, especially between men and women. (Gen. 2:18-22; Matt. 19:4; Eph. 5:22-23; 1 Cor. 7:1-5; Rom 1:24-27)

15.20 Why should Christians not commit adultery?

We should not commit adultery because it is contrary to the bond of marriage created by God. That bond is deeply damaged if not irreparably broken by the sin of adultery. But more damaging, such unfaithfulness bears false witness to a God who is absolutely faithful to his people. It thereby harms our souls, undermines our faith, hinders our hope in God and diminishes our love for God and for others. It sows the seeds of unbelief in our hearts and minds and sets up barriers to trusting in God's faithfulness who will never betray us. Adultery dishonors God and destroys trust between human beings. (Rom. 2:22; Matt. 15:19)

15.21 Why should Christians avoid sexual immorality of all kinds?

Since love is God's great gift, God expects us to not corrupt it, or confuse it with momentary desire to fulfill our own selfish pleasures. God forbids all sexual immorality, whether in married life (adultery) or single life (fornication). Faithfulness is essential to experience the blessings of marriage. The faithfulness of celibacy is essential to experience the blessings of being unmarried. All sexual relations outside the safe boundaries of covenant marriage are forms of sexual abuse and harm our capacity to form healthy relationships of non-sexual love between members of the body of Christ and sexual relationships of married couples. Sexual relations are safe and healthy and honor God only when experienced within a lifelong commitment to marriage between one man and one woman. All else falls far short of the glory of God and his good purposes for humanity. All sexual immorality including sexual abuse and fornication dishonors God and destroys trust between human beings. (Eph. 5:3; Matt. 5:27-29; Heb. 13:4; 1 Thess. 4:3-4)

15.22 Why should Christians not covet what belongs to others?

Our whole heart should belong to God alone, not to money or to other things of this world. To covet is to desire something wrongfully. We should not resent the good fortune or success of our neighbors or allow envy to corrupt our hearts. These sins damage the soul, and corrupt relationships and undermine joyful and free generosity and compassionate service. Coveting dishonors God and destroys trust between human beings. (Heb. 13:5; Gal. 5:26)

15.23 Why should Christians not abuse the natural environment?

God commands that we care for the earth in ways that reflect his loving care for all of his creation. We are responsible for ensuring that the earth's gifts are used fairly and wisely, that no creature suffers from the abuse of what we are given, and that future generations may continue to enjoy the abundance and goodness of the earth in praise to God. Failure to be good stewards of the natural environment dishonors God and disrupts the fruitful harmony of human beings with their environment. (Ps. 24:1; 89:11; Gen. 1:26; 2:15; Is. 24:5; Rom. 12:2)

Section 16: Last things

16.1 What is meant by Jesus' "second coming"?

The Holy Scriptures teach that Jesus Christ, who came to earth first (his "first coming") through his virgin birth, will come again in what is often called his "second coming." The glorified human Person Jesus will return bodily to earth in power and glory to judge the dead and reign over all nations in the fullness of the kingdom of God. This return will inaugurate the resurrection of the dead and the final judgment, which will bring to an end all evil and usher in the reward of a new heaven and new earth to be enjoyed by all who place their trust in Jesus as their Lord and Savior and humbly receive his welcome into his eternal rule and reign. (John 14:3; Rev. 1:7; Matt. 24:30; 1 Thess. 4:15-17; Rev. 12:10-12; 22:12)

16.2 What is "the resurrection of the dead"?

When Jesus returns, he will resurrect back to a new kind of bodily life all who have died throughout human history. This is commonly referred to as the "general resurrection." (John 5:25-29; 1 Thess. 4:13-17)

16.3 What happens to people between death and the general resurrection?

When we die, our bodies of flesh and bones decay, but by the will of God, our spirit, which returns to God, lives on awaiting the general resurrection at Jesus' return when we will be given glorified bodies. (1 Cor. 15:42-44; 2 Cor. 5:1-4; 2 Pet. 1:4)

16.4 What is "the final judgment"?

Having been raised to a new kind of bodily life in the general resurrection, all humans will be judged in what Scripture calls "the final judgment." The Judge will be Jesus, who will judge all people as those belonging to God through him. This means that all humans, in spite of themselves, are loved, forgiven, and are intended by God through Jesus Christ to enter into his eternal kingdom. All who call upon the name of the Lord, acknowledging Jesus Christ as their only Lord and Savior, and who willingly submit to his lordship and desire to live in and under his eternal rule and reign will enter into his kingdom. God's judgment in Jesus Christ will bring about the ultimate end of evil and the renewal of the earth and all creation. Evil will have no place in the fullness of the kingdom of God. (2 Cor. 5:10; 2 Pet. 2:9; Heb. 9:27)

16.5 What happens to unbelievers in the final judgment?

God's love will never cease or diminish even for those who, at the final judgment, refuse his love and the truth of who they are because of Jesus. However, by their repudiation of grace and refusal to repent and receive forgiveness, they consign themselves to a condition of self-imposed torment that sometimes is called hell. In that condition, rather than enjoying the fruit of God's salvation, hating God's goodness and holy love, they will experience God's love as wrath. Remaining in themselves rebellious and unrepentant, demanding their own will and way, they will refuse to enter the kingdom of God. Blaspheming the Holy Spirit, they will cut themselves off from the truth and reality of who God is and what he has done for them in Jesus, and so experience the unavoidable consequences, which Scripture refers to as hell or Gehenna. However, their rejection does not change God's purpose, mind and love enacted towards them in Jesus Christ who is their Judge and Redeemer. Jesus remains, in truth and reality, their Lord and Savior though they deny it. (Acts 24:15; John 5:28-29; 3:17; Rom. 5:6; Col. 1:20; 1 Tim. 2:3-6; 2 Pet. 3:9; Rom. 5:15-18; Acts 10:43; John 12:32; 1 Cor. 15:22-28; Heb. 12:6; Eph. 1:10; Rev. 3:19-20; 21:7-8, 22-27; 22:14-15)

16.6 What happens to believers in the final judgment?

Those who in the final judgment bow in reverence to Jesus as Lord will receive a never-ending life of joyful communion with our triune God and with other resurrected believers, as they praise and serve God together in the new heaven and the new earth—a world of unending life and love. In this life together with the triune God and one another, they will experience “face to face” what they now glimpse only partially—their deepest, truest delights in this life being only a dim foreshadowing of the delights that await them in the fullness of the kingdom of God. By the grace of the triune God they will freely, willingly and gladly enter God’s kingdom extended to them in Jesus Christ and by the Holy Spirit. There they will enjoy forever all its benefits stored up for them in Jesus Christ who is Lord and Savior of all. (Ps. 16:11; John 14:2-3; Matt. 6:20; 8:11; Col. 1:5; 1 Cor. 13:12; Rev. 21:1-4)