

Statement of Faith & Church Practices High Level Christian Fellowship

STATEMENT OF FAITH

PREAMBLE

This Statement of Faith is a consensus reached after several years of discussion. It should be seen as a confession, showing how the teachings of the Scriptures are currently interpreted and understood by the congregations of High Level Christian Fellowship.

These are the fundamental beliefs of the Christian faith as they have been discerned in the Scriptures. While this statement reflects convictions inherited from the Anabaptist-Mennonite theology of the 16th century Reformation, the Bible has been regarded as the final authority on what is to be believed.

This statement has been designed to create clarity, to give direction and to provide the basis for fellowship and working together. Because of the confessional nature of this statement, it will be normal to continue to reflect on the accuracy with which it reflects the teachings of the Scriptures.

I. BIBLE

We believe that the Scriptures, the Old and New Testament, are the inspired and infallible Word of God. They are the supreme and final authority in all matters of faith and conduct (Matt. 5:18; II Tim. 3:16, 17; II Peter 1:16-21).

II. GOD

We believe in only one God, eternal, infinite and unchanging. He alone is the Creator, the Sustainer and Redeemer. He exists and reveals himself in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. All persons in this trinity are fully and equally God (Gen. 1:26; 17:1; Deut. 6:4; Psalm 90:2; 139:7-12; 147:5; Isa. 40:28; 44:6; 57:15; Mal. 3:6; Matt. 11:25; 28:19; Mark 12:29; John 6:27; 8:41-59; 15:26; 16:13, 14; 17:1,8,18,23; Acts 5:3, 4; Rom. 15:6; I Cor. 2:10, 11; 8:4; II Cor. 13:14; Heb. 1:8, 12).

1. GOD THE FATHER

We believe in God, the Father of all believers and in a special sense, the Father of Jesus Christ. He has revealed himself in nature, in the Scriptures and especially in the person of Jesus Christ (Gen. 1:1- 2:3; Deut. 6:4; Psalm 47:1-9; 139:1-12; Mal. 2:10; Matt. 11:26; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42; John 1:8,9; Acts 17:28; Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6; Eph. 4:4-6; Titus 3:4-6).

2. GOD THE SON

We believe that Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God. He became man, being conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He is fully God and fully man, yet without sin.

We believe that Jesus Christ, the divinely appointed Substitute, provided the only atonement for sin by shedding his blood. Through his death he defeated the Devil, enabling people to be set free and to be reconciled to God. He arose from the dead, bringing life and hope. He ascended to the right hand of the Father. There he rules as Lord and lives to intercede for those who come to God by him (Isa. 7:14; 53:5,6; Matt. 1:20-23; 28:5; Luke 1:35; John 1:1,14; Rom. 1:4; 5:8-10; 6:2-4; I Cor. 15:20; II Cor. 5:21; Eph. 2:4,5; Col. 2:15; Heb. 2:9,10,14; 7:25).

3. GOD THE SPIRIT

We believe that the Holy Spirit exists eternally as one of the persons of the Trinity, co-equal with the Father and the Son. He convicts the world of sin, of righteousness and of judgment to come. He indwells believers and is the guarantee of their salvation. He encourages, comforts, and guides them into truth. He empowers for service and enables believers to live holy lives (Matt. 28:19; John 16:7,8,13; Acts 1:8; 5:3,4; Rom. 8:1-4; I Cor. 3:16; II Cor. 3:3,17; Gal. 4:6; Eph. 1:13,14).

III. THE CREATION

We believe that God created everything as revealed in Scripture (Gen. 1-2; Ex. 20:11; Neh. 9:6; Job 38-39; Psalm 8; Mark 10:6; John 1:3; Col. 1:15-17; Rom. 11:33-36; Heb. 1:1-3).

IV. THE DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN RACE

We believe that God created the human race, both male and female, in his own image. We believe, therefore, in the sanctity of all human life, regardless of age, ability or stage of development. (Gen. 1:26,27; 2:7,16,17; Ex. 20:13; Psalm 139:13-16).

V. THE FALL OF THE HUMAN RACE

We believe our first parents, in unbelief and disobedience, fell into sin by their free choice. This broke their fellowship with God and brought the whole human race into the same state of sin and separation (Gen. 1:26,27; 2:7,16,17; 3:1-24; John 6:44; Rom. 3:23; 5:12; Eph. 2:1-10).

VI. SATAN

We believe Satan is a personal spirit being. He heads the kingdom of all evil and opposes God and all that is holy, pure, and just (Matt. 4:1-11; Luke 10:17-21; Eph. 6:10-18; I Tim. 4:1; Rev. 12).

The destiny of Satan will be the lake of fire, which God prepared for him and his angels (Matt. 25:41; Rom. 8:38,39; Gal. 4:8; I Cor. 2:8; II Cor. 4:4; Eph. 1:19-23; 2:1-3; 3:10; 6:10-18; Col. 1:13; 2:14,15; Heb. 2:14; Rev. 12; 20:7-10).

VII. SALVATION

We believe people are saved by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The basis of this salvation is Christ's life, his atoning death and his resurrection. Justification, the new birth and the transformed life come about through repentance and faith in Christ. His atonement covers children until they reach the age of accountability (II Sam. 12:22,23; Matt. 18:1-14; Mark 10:13-16; Luke 24:47; John 1:9-13; 3:3-8,15-18; Acts 4:12; 20:21; Eph. 2:1-10; James 2:14-24).

We believe it is the privilege of all Christians to know that they have passed from death to life and that God can keep them from falling. Faith and obedience are essential in maintaining this assurance and growth in grace (John 8:31,32; Rom. 8:14-17; Gal. 3:11; II Cor. 5:21; I Peter 1:5-11; I John 3:14; 5:13).

VIII. DISCIPLESHIP AND NONCONFORMITY

We believe that our relationship to the Saviour is to be an unconditional commitment to discipleship. Discipleship is the total life of the believer patterned after the life and death of our Lord (Matt. 4:16-22; Acts 11:26; 26:28; Rom. 5:5; 12:1,2,7-12; 13:8-14; II Cor. 6:14-7:1; Eph. 1:1-10; 4:32-5:2; Col. 3:1-17; Titus 2:11-14; I Peter 2:13-24; 4:16).

IX. THE LIFE OF PEACE

We believe in the life of peace. We are called to walk in the steps of the Lamb of God, the Prince of Peace. Everything about his life, his teachings and his redemptive death on the cross, summons us to a life of nonviolence.

As nonresistant Christians, we cannot support war, whether as officers, soldiers, combatants or noncombatants, or direct financial contributors.

Instead of taking arms, we should do whatever we can to lessen human distress and suffering, even at the risk of our own lives. In all circumstances, we should be peacemakers and ministers of reconciliation (Isa. 53:3-9; Matt 5:7; 28:18-20; John 18:36; Rom. 12-13; Phil. 2:3-4; Col. 2:14,15; Heb. 1:1,2; 2:14; I Peter 2:9, 20-23).

X. THE CHURCH

We believe all who have experienced new life in Christ belong to his church. All who repent and make a faith commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord are united to his holy church by baptism of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 16:18; 28:18-20; Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8; 16:31; 17:30; 20:21; Rom. 8:20; I Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:25; 4:19; Eph. 1:22,23; 4:5; Col. 1:18; 3:1-4; I Peter 3:21).

We believe God calls the church to conform to the image of Christ, to care for its members and to evangelize all people. Those who are a part of the church seek to

- 1) live holy lives, considering their bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit and denying themselves and their lusts (Mark 8:34,35; Rom. 13:14; I Cor. 6:19,20; II Thess. 3:6; Titus 2:11-14).

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- 2) avoid entering into binding relationships with unbelievers (Rom. 12:1,2; II Cor. 6:14-18; Eph. 5:11).
- 3) exercise proper stewardship of their abilities, time and possessions (I Cor. 16:1,2; II Cor. 8-9).

XI. ORDINANCES

An ordinance is a symbolic observance, instituted according to Scripture, which is to be administered in and by the church as a visible sign of spiritual truth. We believe Christ instituted three ordinances; water baptism, the Lord's Supper and footwashing (Matt. 28:18-20; John 13:1-17; I Cor 11:20-32).

1. BELIEVERS WATER BAPTISM

We believe a Christian should be baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. To qualify for baptism, one must repent of sin and by faith accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. Water baptism represents the baptism of the Holy Spirit at the time of conversion and the washing of regeneration which the believer has experienced. It is an act of obedience which identifies the believer with the church of Christ (Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 2:36-47; 10:47,48; 18:8; 22:16; Rom. 6:1-4; Titus 3:5).

2. THE LORD'S SUPPER

We believe that Christians are to celebrate the Lord's Supper as instituted by Christ. The elements - the bread and the cup - symbolize the body of Christ and his shed blood.

With this celebration, Christians call to mind Christ's suffering for the sins of the whole human race and proclaim the Lord's death until he returns to take his followers to himself. It involves fellowship, self-examination, testimony, confession, praise and thanksgiving. Christians should examine their own relationship to God and to other people before participating in this commemoration (Matt 26:26-29; I Cor. 10:16,17; 11:17-34; Eph. 2:11-22; Heb. 9:12,25-28; I John 2:1,2).

3. FOOTWASHING

We believe in the practice of footwashing. When Jesus washed the feet of his disciples he gave the church an example to follow. Footwashing is an expression of humility, love, and equality. It symbolizes cleansing from sin and the Christian's commitment to a lifestyle of servant hood. When we accept the washing of our feet by other Christians, we demonstrate that we accept Jesus' ministry to us (John 13:1-20; I Tim. 5:10).

XII. THE RESURRECTION

We believe Jesus Christ rose bodily from the dead. All, believers and unbelievers, will be raised from the dead as well, the believers to the resurrection of condemnation. We also believe that people enter the eternal state at the time of death. The righteous go into the presence of their Lord and the unrighteous into conscious suffering (Dan. 12:2; Luke 16:19-31; 23:43; John 5:28, 29; 20:20, 24-29; Acts 24:15; I Cor 15; Phil. 1:19-26; Rev. 20:11-15).

XIII. THE RETURN OF CHRIST AND FINAL TRIUMPH OF CHRIST

We believe in the personal, visible, bodily return of Jesus Christ. This is the blessed hope of believers. Christ's return will be the occasion of the resurrection of the dead and the eternal separation of the just and the unjust. Everything will be bought into the subjection of his authority and rule as his eternal kingdom is realized (Matt. 24:44; 25:31-46; John 14:1-6; Acts 1:11; I Cor. 15:19-28; I Thess. 4:13-18; Titus 2:11-14; Heb. 10:37; II Peter 3:3-13; Rev 20-22).

At his return, Christ will judge all people. After the judgment, the righteous will be with God, the unrighteous in hell. Death will be destroyed, and Satan and his angels will be thrown into the lake of fire. Christ will hand over the kingdom to God and the Father, after destroying all dominion, authority and power. Then the righteous will reign with Christ forever (Matt. 25:31-46; John 5:22, 23; I Cor. 15:20-28).

CHURCH PRACTISES

PREAMBLE

The statements in this section are to give direction to the congregations as they seek to apply the teachings of the Scriptures to specific issues of Christian living.

It is understood that the different historical backgrounds and geographical locations of the congregations will have a bearing on how the Bible will be interpreted and applied. However, membership in the Conference assumes a covenant relationship in which there is a commitment to listening to each other and learning from each other. There is value in giving respectful consideration to the cumulative insight, which the different congregations bring to the larger body.

This is not to be seen as an exhaustive statement on Christian ethics; rather, these are the issues on which it was felt necessary for the Conference to speak at this time. As new or different issues emerge, they also will need to be addressed.

I. THE LORD'S DAY

We believe that in the fourth commandment we have the principle of one day of rest in seven. During the New Testament period, the first day of the week was designated as the Lord's Day. It commemorated the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. On the Lord's Day, Christians worship the Lord, teach the Scriptures, have fellowship and refresh themselves in body and spirit (Deut. 5:12-15; Ex. 20:8-11; Isa. 58:13,14; Mark 2:23-27; 16:2; Heb. 10:23-25; Rev. 1:10).

II. CHRISTIAN STEWARDSHIP

We believe God owns and sustains his creation. He calls us, God's people, to be trustworthy stewards of creation. Stewardship is demonstrated in our lifestyles, in our relations with poor and the disadvantaged, in our view of possessions, in our concern for all of God's creation and in our response to global economic injustice. Biblical stewardship includes faithful proclamation of the Gospel, careful exercise of our gifts and abilities and proper use of our powers, possessions and time, to accomplish God's will "on earth as it is in heaven" (Gen. 1:1,20,21,28; 2:15,19; Lev. 25:23,24; Psalm 8:6-8; 24:1; 104:16-18; Micah 2:1,2; Hag. 2:8; Mal. 3:8-10; Matt. 25:14-30; 28:18-20; Rom. 12:3-8; I Cor. 4:1-3; 10:26; II Cor. 8-9; Eph. 4:7-16; I Peter 4:7-11).

III. THE CHRISTIAN HOME

We believe in the importance of Christian homes. A Christian home is where Christians reside. Both the celibate single and the heterosexual married life are honorable and respectable in the sight of God. In the Christian home, the lordship of Christ is recognized and people worship regularly. It is a place of security and peace; a place to learn to work, play and plan together. In the home, members are to regard one another as equals before the Lord, while recognizing God-given roles.

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God instituted marriage for the intimate companionship of husband and wife and for the procreation and nurture of children. Marriage pictures the relationship between Christ and the church. God's will for marriage is the union of one man and one woman. Since it is a lifelong covenant, those who marry should share a common Christian commitment. Believers should not marry unbelievers. Social friendships which tend to lead towards courtship with unbelievers are discouraged.

God planned for marriage to be permanent. We believe that divorce violates God's intention for marriage. Divorce, permitted under the Law of Moses, was a concession to the sinfulness of people. It should not be seen as a solution to marital problems. Instead, couples with problems should seek spiritual or professional help to mend their marriages. The church must deal redemptively with those who have broken the marriage covenant. Even in judgment of sin, God deals redemptively. The church, too, must judge sin and yet exercise genuine forgiveness.

Our belief in a God who heals and our commitment to community enables the church to play a role in ending discord or domestic violence. The church should confront and counsel the abuser and provide comfort and safety for the abused. Separation may be necessary in certain cases of violence, sexual abuse or other serious problems (Gen. 1:27; 2:18,24; Deut. 6:4-9; Mal. 2:13-16; Matt. 5:31,32; 19:4-12; Mark 10:1-12; I Cor. 6:12-20; 7:7-9,32-38; II Cor. 6:14-16; Eph. 5:21-6:4).

IV. INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

We believe people should pattern all their relationships, personal and official, after Christ. He loved others and forgave those who mistreated him (Matt. 4:16-22; 5-7; Acts 11:26; 26:28; Rom. 5:5; 12-13; II Cor. 6:14-7:1; Eph. 4:32-5:2; Col. 3:1-17; Titus 2:11-14; I Peter 2:13-24; 4:16).

V. DEVOTIONAL LIFE

We believe Christians should seek to know God better through studying the Scriptures, through prayer, fasting and Christian service. They should refrain from anything that would dishonor God, bring reproach to the church or exert harmful influence on others or on themselves (Joshua 1:8; Matt. 4:2; Acts 17:11; 13:2,3; Rom. 12:1,2,9-21; I Cor. 7:5; II Cor. 11:2,3; Col. 3:1-14; I Tim. 2:8-10; II Tim. 3:16,17; James 3:17,18; I Peter 3:1-6; I John 3:1-3).

VI. COMMITMENT TO SERVICE

We believe Christian disciples seek to serve rather than to be served. They work to relieve suffering and would rather personally suffer than inflict pain on others. Disciples of Christ commit themselves to righteousness, justice, peace and love, in their homeland and in the global community. Foundational to these commitments is the commitment to the verbal proclamation of the Gospel (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 10:35-45; John 12:26; Acts 1:8; Gal. 4:13; I Thess. 1:9; Heb. 9:14).

VII. DIVINE HEALING

We believe that the redemption through our Lord Jesus Christ is for the whole person. God may choose to bring healing and encouragement through medical care, through prayer or through the anointing of oil and prayer by the elders of the church.

However, God often achieves his purposes through permitting suffering. Believers who find help and hope in suffering by faith in a sufficient God are valuable witnesses. Through faithfully enduring suffering, believers may experience a healing of the spirit. We should leave to God the results of all prayers and the means used. Our attitude should be the same as that of Jesus when he said, "Not my will but Thine be done" (Matt. 8:1-17; 26:39; II Cor. 12:7-10; James 5:13-18).

VIII. SOCIETIES AND ASSOCIATIONS

We believe Christians are not to become part of any organization where oaths or secret vows are required for membership or where such membership might foster the formation of intimate alliances with unbelievers.

Christians should not become involved in cults and in the occult (Matt. 7:15; John 3:21; Acts 19:17-20; II Cor. 6:14-18; Eph. 5:8-13; I Tim 4:17; James 5:12; I John 4:1,2; II John 7).

IX. THE STATE

We believe that God has instituted human government.

We believe this arrangement of government includes two basic functions: directing the interaction of society and serving as God's agent of wrath or punishment.

Christians should respect civil authorities and pray for them; pay taxes; assume social responsibility; oppose corruption, discrimination and injustice; and obey all their requirements that do not conflict with the Scriptures.

Concerning the second function of the state, that of serving as God's agent of wrath, the Scriptures urge Christians never to exercise vengeance but to leave it to God's wrath. Authorities carry out this particular function; Christians leave vengeance to God.

We should determine all matters concerning the Christian and the state by carefully interpreting the Scriptures with a deep sensitivity to moral problems involved (Matt. 4:8-10; 5:39-48; Luke 4:5-8; John 12:31; 16:11; 18:36; Acts 4:19; 5:29; Rom. 12-14; I Tim. 2:1-3; Titus 3:1; I Peter 2:13-17; I John 5:19; Rev. 13).

X. LAWSUITS

We believe Christians should take seriously what the Scriptures teach about lawsuits and strive to deal redemptively with victims and offenders, working for restitution and reconciliation. We believe Christians are not to initiate any lawsuits which would violate the principle of love (Matt. 5:38-48; Rom. 12:17-21; I Cor. 6:1-11; I Peter 2:19-21).

XI. JURY SERVICE

We believe regular court jury service to be incompatible with the nonresistant position. There is, however, a difference between an inquest (e.g. coroner's jury) and a regular court jury (Matt. 5:38-48; John 18:36; Rom. 12-13). *

XII. SWEARING OF OATHS

We believe that Christians should be people of integrity and truth. The Scriptures forbid the swearing of oaths and of anything beyond affirmation (Matt. 5:33-37; James 5:12). **

* The Canadian government requires its citizens to serve as jurors in a court of law. However, exceptions are made for members of Mennonite churches.

** An affirmation is accepted in Canadian courts and in other public offices