

Bridgetown Church Statement of Belief



The ancient church father St. Augustine offers a helpful statement on any church's shared beliefs, "In essentials, unity. In non-essentials, liberty. In everything, love."

The idea bound up in these few words is that there exist essential teachings within Scripture that the church must be united on if the people are to experience the life of God in the family of God.

Additionally, the church has divided over the years time and time again over smaller disputes, for which there should be liberty within the church family to come as far as each member is able, honoring the continual process of belief that we each experience over a lifetime of walking with Jesus. The essentials are the anchors that hold us. The non-essentials are vital, extremely important, but the most loving, dignifying way to hold these teachings in the Christian Church is by liberty.

Finally, in everything, we are a family bound together by love. Right belief, expressed pridefully, is not love. Wrong belief, permitted freely, is also not love. Right belief, championed by love, is what Jesus embodied. We, the Body of Christ, should be a living expression of the same.

The Essentials: The beliefs we absolutely share as essential within the family of Bridgetown Church are **(1) The Bible**: The authority of Scripture and our submission to it's living counsel **(2) The Gospel**: The good news that God is ever-pursuing his original Creation mandate of human flourishing and perfect relationship, culminating in Jesus' sacrificial death and triumphant resurrection **(3) Salvation**: The necessity of salvation by grace for restored relationship with God and one another.

THE BIBLE

At Bridgetown Church, we believe the Bible (composed of Protestant Old and New Testaments) to be both true and authoritative. We make this claim because we believe God divinely inspired the original authors through the Holy Spirit to pen them. (See 2 Timothy 3:15-17 and 2 Peter 1:21)

Whereas we expect God to be present with and in us, always revealing, we do not subscribe to notions that God contradicts what the Scriptures have historically penned for us in practice and belief. God never contradicts Himself. Therefore, Scripture serves not only as inspiration into the life of God, but also as a guardrail for us to know the will of God and test the veracity of all things.

The Apostles' Creed

The Apostles' Creed is the foundational creed of Christian churches. It has received this title because of its great antiquity; most of the creed dates from the early 2nd century. The creed was apparently used as a summary of Christian doctrine for baptismal candidates in the churches of Rome. Though many churches and flavors of Christianity throughout the ages have different interpretations of the Bible, and embrace various doctrinal nuances, the essence of what the Scriptures teach is found in the words of the Apostles' Creed.

Therefore, we have fellowship with other members of the Body of Christ who profess their faith as follows:

We believe in God, the Father Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth,

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord:

who was conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell.

The third day He arose again from the dead.

He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, whence He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

We believe in the Holy Spirit,

the holy catholic (universal) church, the communion of saints,

the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting.

The Nicene Creed

Similarly, the Nicene Creed was developed in the 3rd Century as a foundational statement of belief for early Christian churches across the Greco-Roman world:

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God,

begotten of the Father before all worlds;

God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God;

begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made.

*Who, for us men for our salvation, came down from heaven,
and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man;
and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate;
He suffered and was buried;
and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures;
and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father;
and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead;
whose kingdom shall have no end.*

*And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life;
who proceeds from the Father and the Son;
who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified;
who spoke by the prophets.*

*And I believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for
the remission of sins;
and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.*

Amen.

The N.A.E. Statement of Faith

Founded in 1942, the National Association of Evangelicals seeks to honor God by connecting and representing evangelical Christians in the United States. It represents more than 45,000 local churches from 40 different denominations and serves a constituency of millions.

We believe the Bible to be the inspired, the only infallible, authoritative Word of God.

We believe that there is one God, eternally existent in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

We believe in the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, in His virgin birth, in His sinless life, in His miracles, in His vicarious and atoning death through His shed blood, in His bodily resurrection, in His ascension to the right hand of the Father, and in His personal return in power and glory.

We believe that for the salvation of lost and sinful people, regeneration by the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential.

We believe in the present ministry of the Holy Spirit by whose indwelling the Christian is enabled to live a godly life.

We believe in the resurrection of both the saved and the lost; they that are saved unto the resurrection of life and they that are lost unto the resurrection of damnation.

We believe in the spiritual unity of believers in our Lord Jesus Christ.

THE GOSPEL

No one theology can contain the enormity of this word. We find it most useful to articulate the Gospel as a statement and a story.

The Gospel Statement

The Gospel is the good news that God himself, the Creator, has come to rescue us from sin, and renew all things, in and through the work of Jesus Christ on our behalf, to establish his Kingdom, through his people, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

This good news is initiated by God, in grace.

This good news is substitutionary: Christ has come, lived, died, and risen on our behalf.

This good news is participatory: we are involved in declaring and joining the work of God in redemptive history as his faithful, fruitful people.

This good news is news of a Kingdom, not just individual hearts. It is the Lordship of Jesus tangibly worked out across all of creation.

This good news is powerful. It wakes people from death to life, promises the presence and power of God in us, and enables us to be a preview community of the work God will do in all creation.

In Colossians 1:15-20, the scriptures say, *The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.*

Paul Marshall writes, *“The gospel is for all things, and he makes a threefold statement about the Lordship of Christ. Everything was made by and for Jesus Christ. Everything holds together in Jesus Christ. Everything will be reconciled by Jesus Christ. The “everything” that is reconciled is the same everything that was made. The scope of redemption is the same as the scope of creation. The Creator and Redeemer are one and the same. Things in heaven, things in earth, things visible and invisible, dominions, and authorities will be reconciled by the cross of Jesus Christ.”*

Theologian Abraham Kuyper writes, *“There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: ‘Mine!’”*

The Gospel Story

Alasdair MacIntyre in *After Virtue* writes, *“I can only answer the question ‘What am I to do?’ if I can answer the prior question ‘Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?’”*

Creation

Before there was anything, there was God. We have only hints and fragments of stories about what was happening in the corridors of eternity past before God chose to reveal himself in creation, so we begin there. God—who is one God yet exists in three persons as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—was always living in community with himself before the creation of anything else including our measurements for time.

The first scene of action God chose to record for us is his calling into existence the natural world brimming with vibrant and innocent beauty, variety and wonder, power, majesty and life. God made the world well, a reflection of his greatness and called it “good.”

At the apex of his creation project, God, the spiritual being, created human beings in his image. They bore the mark of their Creator in ways distinct from all other plants, animals, and created things. They were not just natural, but spiritual beings, like God. The first human beings initially enjoyed intimacy with God in his creation. They thrived in deep connection to God and each other. They also lived in inner wholeness without fear, in harmony with the earth God had given them to enjoy, cultivate, and rule over with him.

Fall

However, evil soon entered the story. An angel created by God had rebelled against God because of pride and his desire to be worshiped. For this rebellion he was cast out of Heaven. This fallen angel came to the first humans and tempted them to distrust what God had told

them, and to disobey God's command. There was deception and they acted against God's instruction. Just as God had warned them, something terrible happened.

Humanity's rebellion against God brought death into the world, and humanity was tainted. Our disobedience caused separation from God, the source of all life, and the result was death beginning with the first people and passing from them on to all other humans since. Though they lived on physically, they died spiritually and lost their intimate connection to God. Their inner peace was flooded with insecurity and fear, and this bled into broken relationships with each other. Lying, blame-shifting, envy and murder soon followed. There also entered discord between humanity and creation as the ground was cursed. On every level of relationship, God's original design was broken.

Redemption

Yet, immediately God began a work of redemption that would carry history forward. He would not abandon humanity or the rest of his creation to the permeating effects of death and decay. In the initial stages of working for the redemption of this broken world, God chose a people for himself, forming them into a nation through whom he would bring a restorative and redemptive blessing to the entire world. The nation began with one family, Abraham and Sarah, and grew to their son Isaac, his son Jacob, and Jacob's twelve sons, who became the nation of Israel. God made great promises to Israel: that they would be deeply used to represent and express God's heart and character and redemptive purposes in the world.

For a time Israel became enslaved in Egypt and in their oppression cried out to God. God was moved by the cry of his people and sent them a man whom he used to rescue them. Moses was given power by God to lead the people of Israel in an Exodus out of Egypt and towards the Promised Land where finally these people would be a nation with a home. On the way to their new home God gave his people a Law which represented his commands for their lives with him, with each other, with themselves, and with creation. This formed the culture for God's people and carried the promise that if they kept the commands God would be intimate with them, would lead them, would speak to them, care for them, and use them in his redemptive work in the world. It also carried the warning that if they broke the commands it would be a break with God, a continuation of the separation and death that began in the first sin.

Once in the Promised Land, God greatly blessed the liberated and established Israel, but blessed them directly in connection to their obedience to represent and live out God's character to the other nations. While God's people certainly had moments of shining embodiment of their calling they often wandered, worshiped false gods, adopted corrupt practices, grew deeply selfish, ignored the poor, lacked justice, and forgot their role as God's representatives. They broke God's commands time and time again. God would firmly discipline his people, but he remained merciful and throughout their history sent prophets to remind them of their true identity as God's people. Through the prophets, God ensured his people that in

spite of their great rebellion he would still keep his promises. Even when the nation of Israel was broken up and sent into exile as a result of their abandoning God's way there remained a hopeful and faithful few who remembered God's promises and looked forward to their fulfillment when peace and justice and renewed intimacy with God would thrive again. One day God was going to establish a kingdom of deliverance, salvation, righteousness and justice, peace, joy, where God's presence was revealed and enjoyed. It was going to be a kingdom of healing and return from exile, a kingdom without end.

The longings for God's Kingdom and for his redemptive work to continue through Israel were fulfilled in the person of Jesus. Just when it seemed like the promises had failed, Jesus was born according to what was prophesied about the Messiah. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and born of a virgin, and in Jesus all the majesty of the God of Israel became a human. Unlike any expectations, Jesus came both fully God and fully man. A new Exodus of God's people began in Jesus, but unlike the first Exodus, this new Exodus would move to every nation in the world. Jesus came announcing the arrival of the promised Kingdom of God, the reign of God being actively accomplished over any rival power or evil in the world. At the time Israel was occupied by the world's most powerful military and political force, the Roman Empire. Though a few followers radically trusted and stayed close to Jesus to witness his miraculous life and message, there were even more who rejected him and sought to kill him because his message threatened physical, spiritual, political, and social powers. Jesus described his mission in terms of proclaiming good news to the poor, liberty to the captives, recovering of sight to the blind, and freedom for those who are oppressed, but he was seen as a threat to those in power.

Yet even as Jesus suffered, was rejected, and betrayed, he never sinned. He never for a moment in thought or action went against the way of God the Father or the Law God had given through Israel. Jesus, God the Son, lived the life that no other person had ever been able to live, a life of complete holiness, a life completely controlled by the Holy Spirit. It was a life that represented what God had desired for humanity from way back in the beginning.

Eventually the plots against Jesus led to his betrayal, arrest, false trial, fierce beating, and tortured death on the Cross. God's great plan to rescue the world through Jesus seemed to have failed. It seemed that finally death and evil had prevailed. However, in the mysterious wisdom of God just the opposite had occurred.

"He did not have to die, but submitted himself to the will of God."

Death is the result of sin because sin is separation from God who is life. Jesus had no sin and therefore owed no death. He did not have to die, but submitted himself to the will of God. His death was able then to stand as a substitute death, an atoning death. God dealt terribly harshly with Jesus allowing human sin to be put on Jesus as he was dying. Jesus took all of God's anger and punishment for human sin so that all who would believe in him could be counted as

clean and utterly forgiven. As he died, Jesus cried out, "My God My God why have You forsaken me," and later, "It is finished." He was abandoned on the Cross, for the first time being separated from his Holy Father, while paying the complete penalty for sin so that any one who trusts in him can have their full record of sins done away with. After Jesus died this death in our place, he was placed in the tomb of a wealthy man.

Three days after his death, Jesus miraculously rose from the grave. Because Jesus had no sin, and owed no death, death could not hold him. The power of God raised him from the dead and in that moment a new world began. Soon after Jesus appeared to all who had been following him before his death and announced that what he had taught them was now moving forward in action.

Renewal

Jesus gave those first followers his Holy Spirit and every person since who trusts in his life, death, and resurrection for the forgiveness of sins and the creation of a new life within is given the same Spirit. He puts in those who believe in him the life of God. The Holy Spirit, who had previously exerted great influence yet not lived in anyone other than Jesus, began to fill those who believed in Jesus and called him Lord.

This is one of the great miracles of the Gospel of Jesus. There is nothing that any person could do on the strength of his or her own character to live the perfect life that would be required to maintain intimacy with God. There is also no way that a person can live in such a way to remove the effects and result of their sins which make us separated by nature from God and his Kingdom. So God changes our nature. He gives us a gift that no one could possibly earn or possibly deserve—this is God's grace. We are freely given the grace of forgiveness and the grace of power to live like Jesus. God's Holy Spirit awakens to faith and affirms all those who are God's true children in faith. The Holy Spirit empowers us with gifts, convicts, guides, counsels, and leads us into all God inspired truth through a communal life of worship.

The Holy Spirit also forms those who believe in Jesus into the Church, a family of faith that embodies the life, thought, and action of Jesus in the world. It is the same Holy Spirit that propels us into a life of mission that reflects God's character and desires for all of creation. When we trust fully in Jesus' life, death and resurrection, our relationship with God, each other, our inner self, and the world are healed and restored. We are given a mission to carry that redemption and renewal wherever we go, into all the world.

Those who reject Jesus have no hope of this renewed world. They will suffer an eternal separation from God and his Kingdom because apart from Jesus there is no way to attain God. In the face of this grave reality Jesus' followers must engage in a mission of love. This is the mission of the promised Kingdom of deliverance, salvation, righteousness and justice, peace, and joy, where God's presence is revealed and enjoyed and where there is healing and return from exile.

One day Jesus, who ascended to Heaven after giving his followers this mission of taking his Kingdom to the known world, is going to return. When Jesus returns he is going to judge the world, and bring an end to sin, misery, and injustice. God will reclaim this world, renew it, and rule over it forever. There will be no more war, no more death. Those who have trusted Jesus and been filled with God's Spirit will live forever with God in the wholeness and peace of renewed creation. So we are working now to be a true reflection of Jesus and invite many to believe. We are working for the Kingdom that Jesus inaugurated to be moved toward completion, and though God must fully bring that completion, we get to participate by our faith and obedience now.

We value the gospel of Jesus Christ and its transformational power. We believe he has commissioned his church to make disciples of all nations until his return. We believe bringing this message of the good news of Jesus to the world as his "salt and light" is imperative to the mission he called us to in Matthew 28. We adopt his cause to see lost people saved and to see the Kingdom come and his will to be done (John 3:16, Matthew 28:19-20, Romans 12:1-2, 2 Corinthians 3:18, Ephesians 4:22-23).

Perhaps you have been around the church for a period of time and are still asking, "Am I a Christian?;" "How do I become a Christian?;" "How do I know if I am a Christian?" The good news is that Christianity not about doing/accomplishing anything to earn God's favor. Becoming a Christian is a matter of trusting (faith) and believing that Jesus has done something on your behalf.

We believe the Gospel ("the good news") of Jesus Christ, our Messiah, is the only hope for humankind. Solely by God's grace are people transformed from skeptics who do not believe into believers both declared and made righteous. The message of the Gospel is that Christ has done what is necessary to bring us into relationship with God. We believe that the Gospel speaks to the whole person, and can transform anyone anywhere, bringing the healing and restoration needed to advance God's Kingdom of Heaven on earth.

SALVATION

Salvation is the word we use when we talk about how an individual experiences the transformative power of the gospel. Eugene Peterson defines it as, "*Salvation is God's way of dealing with what is wrong with the world and with us.*"

Throughout the scriptures we read that salvation is experienced as a past, present and future reality. In reading God's Word we understand that salvation is something that has happened, is happening and will happen to those who believe.

Salvation (Past Tense)

In his letter to the Ephesians, the Apostle Paul writes, *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith— and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast* (Eph 2:8-9). In this sense, salvation is something that has already been accomplished for us by God in the past. Past tense salvation is bound up with Jesus' sacrificial work on the cross. It is a finished work and the gift of God to us.

Salvation (Present Tense)

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God (1 Cor 1:18). Notice the phrase, to us who are being saved. In this scripture salvation is revealed as something that is presently taking place. If past salvation has to do with the cross, present salvation is bound up with the risen Jesus and therefore the work of the Holy Spirit. The Bible teaches us that God has not abandoned us now that Jesus has returned to the Father. Quite the opposite; the Holy Spirit is God with us by his Spirit; cleansing and transforming us into Christ's likeness.

Salvation (Future Tense)

Jesus' words recorded in the Gospel of Matthew reveal a final way the individual experiences salvation. *And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved* (Matthew 24:12-13). *The past, present and future tense of salvation is one of the great mysteries of the gospel. Our salvation is assured the moment we enter into a genuine relationship with God through faith in Christ. Yet, despite this guarantee, we must go about allowing the Holy Spirit to make us in reality what we know by faith we are — daughters and sons of God. Even as our bodies slowly deteriorate over time, even to the point of death, God's saving work is being completed within us.*

Again, according to the Apostle Paul, *Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day* (1 Cor 4:16).

Death has no hold nor victory over us in the end because of the saving work of the Father through the death and resurrection of the Son in the past and the present work of the Holy Spirit within us today.

A Statement on FAQs: Women in Leadership & Sexuality

The two most frequent theological questions posed to the Pastors and Elders of our church tend to revolve around these two topics. Therefore, we are stating a shared theology on both—not because there is a biblical emphasis on either that matches the topics covered thus far, but simply out of pastoral response to the questions being asked both within our church and broader culture.

Women In Leadership

The question of how men and women relate and engage in church leadership offices (particularly pastor and elder) has been a subject of significant debate at various points in church history. There are many considerations within the broader subject of men and women in leadership that are dealt with in the Bible. Here we have included a summary of things we see taught across the arc of Scripture that directly bear on our church's position and practice.

- We believe that women and men are created equal in the image of God.
- We believe that full equality between women and men does not mean women and men are completely the same. There is goodness and beauty uniquely represented in each gender that profoundly reflects and glorifies God.
- We believe God gives leadership in the church on the basis of grace, calling, spiritual gifts, obedience, and character.
- We believe both women and men can and should lead, preach, pastor, and minister within the church. We believe women and men doing this together will result in a more robust ministry of love and grace than one gender can sustain alone.
- We believe women and men can and should serve in pastoral leadership in the local church.

Bridgetown Church believes that men and women are equally gifted and qualified to lead and serve as co-laborers in the church. We do not simply permit, but expressly value, the presence of both men and women in these various facets of church leadership. Currently, in line with our doctrinal history, we stop short of commissioning women into the office of elder. This is a complex biblical doctrine and one that is being re-evaluated and discussed by our elder board.

Sexuality

One of the great difficulties in defining a biblical understanding of sexuality in our modern context is the unseen, inner pain a person often carries behind the question. In recent history, the church has mishandled the topic of sexuality from a variety of angles. The church's witness has centered on what forms of sexual expression Scripture is against instead of the dignifying, freeing sexual expression Scripture advocates for. Jesus majored in the latter; the church has emphasized the former. More personally, while the church has historically held to an understanding of sexuality distinct from the surrounding culture, the application of that belief in

recent history has become alienating to those whose sexual expression does not line up with the church's. The tragedy of that shift has been that many have been made to feel alienated by the Christian church because of sexual practice and/or sexual orientation.

Because of the complexity presented by recent history, we will succinctly define both our belief and how we express our belief, which carry equal importance.

Belief

We believe in the historically Christian view of marriage and sexual expression; namely, that marriage is a lifelong one-flesh covenant union between two sexually different persons (male and female) from different families, and that all sexual relationships and expressions outside of marriage are sin.

How we Express Our Belief

The expression of this belief is often the more important question to people in search of a spiritual home: Will I (or one of my loved ones) be welcomed at Bridgetown Church? And is there a barrier where that welcome is worn out?

Regardless of sexual practice and/or orientation, Bridgetown Church welcomes all to worship with us. Jesus is the head of the church, and Jesus was uncompromising in teaching and calling people to align with his beliefs, a pathway to "life to the full." (John 10:10) Another group of rabbis, called the Pharisees, were equally convicted of the truth of their beliefs, and held many beliefs in common with Jesus. So why was it that those who felt alienated by the Pharisees also felt so welcome by Jesus? Because of how each expressed common beliefs: the Pharisees did so in pride, as their primary concern was being right, while Jesus did so in love, as His primary concern was compassion for the person and story behind the belief.

The church is called the Body of Christ. We are a communal expression of Jesus' heart, so both our beliefs and our expression of those beliefs should mirror Jesus. When it comes to sexuality, we carry three important convictions that inform our expression:

1. Our first responsibility is to be a living display of covenant love and sexuality. The church was not founded to critique the surrounding culture but to form a distinct counterculture where "life to the full" is on display as an invitation to all. However, in many ways (covenant love and sexuality being one obvious example) the church has mirrored the culture more than forming a counterculture. Therefore, our work is not to change anyone else's mind or critique the world outside of our family, but to live with the sort of fidelity, service, and love within our own singleness and marriage covenants that we become a living witness to the fullest sort of life.
2. We lead with a heart of love and compassion for people. The doors and the arms of our church family are open to anyone, regardless of belief. No one will ever be excluded from worshiping with us on Sundays for any misalignment of belief.

3. We must differentiate between agreement and acceptance. One of the truly fascinating aspects of the life of Jesus is that the very people whose lives least aligned with his ethical teachings were most drawn to him. His dinner company and close friends are made up of people out-of-alignment with his teaching (e.g. Jesus teaches that to even look at a woman lustfully is to commit adultery, then is consistently surrounded by prostitutes who profited on lust; Jesus teaches an ethic of radical generosity, then welcomes a tax collector, whose life was defined by greed, into his inner circle of 12 disciples; etc.). In modern cultural rhetoric, agreement and acceptance are often used synonymously: "If you don't agree with my ethical choices (belief), you don't accept me (expression)." However, in Jesus, we observe the opposite phenomenon: Those who felt most accepted in his presence were those most obviously living in disagreement with his teaching. Therefore, as a church we are committed to becoming a community linked to Jesus in both agreement and acceptance. We are unapologetically aligned with every word of his teaching. Equally, we are uncompromisingly insistent on becoming the sort of community where those out-of-alignment with his beliefs (including sexuality) feel welcome and accepted in our fellowship.