

WHAT WE BELIEVE AT GRACE CHURCH LANCASTER

(This is from our proposed constitution, Article III. This is the statement of faith adopted by the Charis Fellowship of Churches worldwide.)

In harmony with the Charis Fellowship (formerly Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches), we affirm these following truths as the basic faith and teaching of this congregation. This Charis Commitment to Common Identity is the current expression of our ongoing quest to apply the unchanging truth of God's Word to the constantly changing realities and needs of our world.

1. The Center

We declare that Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word of God (John 1:1.14) as revealed in the Bible, the written Word of God (Matthew 5:17.18; 2Timothy 3:16; 2Peter 1:20.21; Psalm 19:7-11), is the only Savior and Lord (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1Corinthians 12:3; Romans 10:9; Philippians 2:9-11). He is the center of our shared experience of true biblical unity.

2. The Evangelical Core

We affirm our commitment to the following core truths of the Bible which we share with other genuine believers in Jesus Christ:

1. The One True God - There is one, and only one, true God (Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah 43:10; 1Corinthians 8:4-6; 1Timothy 2:5), the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Matthew 22:32; Acts 3:13). He is the Creator and Lord of all (Genesis 1:1; Psalm 146:6; John 1:3; Colossians 1:16.17), existing eternally in three persons, never less and never more - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19; Luke 3:22; 2Corinthians 13.14).
2. The Lord Jesus Christ - Jesus Christ is fully God, existing eternally (John 1:1-3; John 8:58; Titus 2:13). Everything was created by Him and for Him (Romans 11:36; Colossians 1:16). His incarnation took place in the womb of a virgin (John 1:14; Matthew 1:18-23; Luke 1:29-35). He became man (Luke 2:52; John 19:28; Philippians 2:6-8), but never sinned (Hebrews 4:15; 1Peter 2:22). He died a substitutionary death to atone for sin (Romans 5:8; 2Corinthians 5:21; 1Peter 2:24.25), resurrected bodily (Luke 24:36-43; Romans 1:4; 1Corinthians 15:3-8), and ascended into heaven where He remains fully God and fully man (Acts 1:9; Hebrews 4:14), and is presently ministering (Ephesians 1:19-23; Hebrews 4:15.16) until He comes again (Acts 1:11).
3. The Holy Spirit - The Holy Spirit is fully God, existing eternally (Acts 5:3.4). He is a person (John 16:7-15), and was involved in Creation (Genesis 1:2) and the inspiration of Scripture (2Peter 1:21). His works of convicting (John 16:8-11) and regenerating (Titus 3:5) are essential to the believer's salvation. Believers are entitled to the benefit and joy of being filled (Ephesians 5:18) and walking in the Spirit (Galatians 5:16) for empowerment in Christian life, service, and mission (Galatians 5:22.23; Ephesians 3:16-21; Acts 1:8).

4. The Bible - The sixty-six books, and only these, known as the Old and New Testaments, are the written Word of God (Luke 24:25-27; 1Peter 1:23-25). God's inspiration and superintendence of the writing of every word of the Bible (2Timothy 3:16; 2Peter 1:20.21) guarantees that what was written is His Word and therefore authoritative, true, and without error in the original manuscripts (Psalm 19:7-11). God preserves His Word (Psalm 119:89; Psalm 119:160), which is powerful and effective to accomplish His purpose of salvation among all nations (Romans 1:16; Romans 10:8-17; Romans 16:25-27). God's Spirit illumines the minds of believers in every culture to understand and apply the unchanging truth of Scripture in fresh and relevant ways for the benefit of the whole Body of Christ (1Corinthians 2:9-16; Ephesians 1:17-23).
5. Humanity - God created man and woman in His image (Genesis 1:26-28). As a result, all people are bearers of that image (James 3:9). However, Adam's subsequent sin resulted in a condition of spiritual death (Genesis 3:1-24) which all people since Adam have experienced (Romans 5:12.19), marring the beauty of God's image in them in every facet of life. This condition of spiritual death (Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:1-3) has rendered all people unable to save themselves (Romans 8:6-8), and leads to physical death (Genesis 2:17; Romans 5:12). Therefore, new birth is necessary for salvation (John 1:12; John 3:3-5).
6. Salvation - The salvation brought by God is a complete and eternal salvation by His grace alone, received as the free gift of God through personal faith alone in the Lord Jesus Christ and His finished work, as He declares believers righteous in Him Romans 5:1; Ephesians 2:4-9; Titus 3:5-7; 1Peter 1:18-21; Hebrews 9:12; Hebrews 10:14).
7. Church - There exists one true Church, which is called the Household of God (1Peter 4:17; Ephesians 2:19.20; 1Timothy 3:14.15), the Body of Christ (1Corinthians 12:27; Ephesians 1:22.23), and the Temple of the Holy Spirit (1Corinthians 3:16; Ephesians 1:21.22). It is comprised of all true disciples of Jesus Christ and is created by the action of the Holy Spirit (1Corinthians 12:13). Tangible expressions of this true Church are found in local churches (Hebrews 10:25; Galatians 1:2; Romans 16:4.5; Revelation 2:1.8.12.18; Revelation 3:1.7.14).
8. Christian Life - The believer is saved by faith alone (Romans 4:5). The faith that saves is expected to produce obedience (Romans 1:5) and good works (James 2:14-17; Titus 3:8), which are the products of the indwelling Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22.23). The dimensions of biblical ethics are both individual and social, and extend to every facet of life (Matthew 22:37-40; Colossians 3:17). God faithfully continues to finish the work of sanctification, which He initiated in the life of each believer (Philippians 1:6; Philippians 2:12-13) with the goal of Christlikeness (Romans 8:29; 2Corinthians 3:18).
9. Angels, Satan, Demons - God created a multitude of spiritual beings called "angels" (Daniel 7:10; Hebrews 12:22). Righteous angels continue to serve God and work both in the heavenly sphere and on earth (Hebrews 1:14; Ephesians 1:21; Ephesians 3:10). By his disobedience, Satan, a fallen angel, became the adversary of God and God's people (1Peter 5:8.9; Revelation 12:1-10), carrying with him a procession of demons (Ephesians 6:12). Jesus Christ has overcome Satan (1John 3:8) so that the final judgment and doom of Satan and his demons are certain (John 12:31; Romans 16:20; Revelation 2:10).
10. Future Life - The dead will have a conscious existence in eternity (Philippians 1:21-23; Luke 16:19-31) and their bodies will be resurrected (John 5:28.29). Unbelievers, already under condemnation, will be sentenced to suffer eternal separation from God (Matthew

25:46; Revelation 20:15). Believers, already having been granted eternal life (John 3:16; John 6:47), will be judged and rewarded according to their works (Romans 14:10-12; 1Corinthians 3:10-15; 2Corinthians 5:10), and will experience a glorified, eternal existence in the presence of the Lord (1Thessalonians 4:17; Revelation 21:3-5; Psalm 16:11).

3. Our Charis Identity: The Shared Commitments of our Global Movement

A Summary of Additional Commitments to Biblical Truth

1. We seek to understand the intent of each biblical writer by using grammatical, historical, and contextual principles of interpretation (Matthew 5:18; Luke 24:25-27), focused on Christ, led by the Holy Spirit (1Corinthians 2:14), and oriented by grace. We accept the absolute authority of the Bible rather than that of creeds, traditions, or leaders (1Corinthians 4:6).
2. We commit to an ongoing study, understanding and application of God's unchanging truth in our constantly changing world, whether personal, social or cultural (Acts 17:11; 2Timothy 2:15; 1Chronicles 12:32).
3. We affirm that true believers put their trust in Jesus Christ and are kept forever in the saving grace of God through His promises and His power (John 10:28,29; 1Peter 1:3-5). Every believer has been eternally justified (Romans 3:24; Romans 4:25), blessed with all spiritual blessings (Ephesians 1:3), and set free from all condemnation (Romans 8:1).
4. We affirm that the Holy Spirit's works of baptizing (1Corinthians 12:13), sealing (Ephesians 1:13) and indwelling (Romans 8:11) occur simultaneously with regeneration and are the possession of every true believer. The Holy Spirit gives each believer a unique combination of spiritual gifts for the purpose of serving God and people (Romans 12:6; 1Corinthians 12:7,11).
5. We affirm that Jesus Christ gave ordinances to the church:
Baptism testifies to the reality of our salvation and identifies us as disciples of the Triune God. We therefore encourage the practice of triune immersion (Matthew 28:19; Acts 8:36-38; Acts 10:47).
Communion testifies to our justification, sanctification and glorification, which are accomplished through Jesus Christ. We therefore encourage the practice of these symbols: the bread and cup, the washing of feet and the sharing of a meal (1Corinthians 11:20,23-26; Luke 22:14-20; John 13:14; Jude 12).
6. We encourage the practice of additional biblical symbolic actions, such as anointing with oil and prayer for the sick (James 5:13-16), laying on of hands for ministry (1Timothy 4:14), etc.
7. We affirm that the Church began on a particular day of Pentecost when our ascended Lord sent His Spirit to the waiting disciples (Acts 2:1; Acts 2:37-47). The present Church age will come to an end when our Lord comes in the air to remove His Church from the earth (1Thessalonians 4:16,17; John 14:3) and fulfill His promises to Israel (Zechariah 12; Romans 11:26-29). The second coming of Christ is the personal, physical, and visible return from heaven of Christ to earth (Acts 1:11; Zechariah 14:4) with His Church (Revelation 19:11-16; Colossians 3:4), to establish His thousand-year reign (Revelation 20:4) before instituting His eternal kingdom (1Corinthians 15:24,25).

A Summary of our Commitments to Biblical Relationships

1. We affirm that the Triune God serves as the perfect and ultimate model for human relationships (John 17:20-21). As a result, each person has equal value yet different roles, which are expressed in loving unity (Ephesians 4:1-6).
2. We affirm that differences in gifts and ministries are a manifestation of the multifaceted grace of God (1 Peter 4:10). As a result, we encourage all believers to use their gifts in ways that promote the unity, growth and ministry of the local church (Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27).
3. We affirm our obligation to love and respect one another, and to practice the 'one another' exhortations. As a result, we commit to work together and to resolve our differences, for the good of individuals, churches and communities (The New Testament has over twenty 'one another' references. Compare James 5:16; Galatians 5:13 et al.).
4. We affirm the responsibility of local churches to govern their own affairs (1 Cor 5:12-13) while urging those churches to live and serve in community and interdependency with other churches (1 Corinthians 11:16).
5. We affirm that the mandate and urgency to fulfill the Great Commission leads us to seek ways to cooperate with one another, and with likeminded Christians on the local, regional and global levels (Compare Acts 18:24-28; Romans 15:24-29).

A Summary of our Commitments to Biblical Mission

1. We affirm that God's plan for this age is best summarized in Jesus' command to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18-20; Romans 1:5). This includes the evangelistic call to reconciliation with God by means of the completed work of Christ and the lifelong pursuit of obedience to God by means of the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit (Romans 10:13-17; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4; 2 Corinthians 5:18-20; Galatians 5:16).
2. We affirm that God's plan for this age includes the recognition, training and releasing of spiritually qualified and appropriately trained leaders (Acts 13:2-3). While the specific gifts, abilities and responsibilities of leaders may vary, all leaders must serve as servants of God (1 Timothy 4:6), shepherds of God's people (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2) and stewards of God's resources (1 Corinthians 4:1).
3. We affirm that God's plan for this age is most fully expressed through establishing healthy churches. Although practices may vary between cultures, healthy local churches are comprised of believers in Christ who assume a mutual commitment to worship, learning, service, prayer and witness (Acts 2:41-47; Acts 14:21-28).
4. We affirm that God's plan for this age includes our responsibility to express the compassion of Christ through proclaiming the Gospel in words while loving in deeds (1 John 3:16-18). We are committed to finding creative and practical ways to address the physical, emotional, social and spiritual needs of a fallen humanity (Acts 10:38; Titus 3:8; James 2:1-9).