

Core Values

Redemption Evangelical Church

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Core Values – Overview

Expository Preaching

Since Scripture is the very Word of God, we believe it to be both inerrant and infallible; as such it serves as the only sure guide for what we teach and how we live together as God's people. Expository preaching takes Scripture as its object and aims to clearly communicate its content.

Spiritual Transformation

We believe conversion is the beginning of the Christian life, not its end. The ultimate goal of such a life is the transformation of the believer from sinfulness to holiness, from wickedness to godliness. Although such transformation takes place only by the work of the Holy Spirit, we see the local church as an essential tool by which He conforms God's people to Christ's image.

Orthodoxy

We affirm the truths of historic Christian orthodoxy. The universal church has a rich history of saints handing down these truths—which are essential for understanding Scripture, doctrine, and Christian living—from one generation of believers to another. We seek to incorporate these truths in worship and other aspects of church life.

Conversion

Believers are those who, by God's grace, have repented of their sins and trusted Christ to redeem them. It is essential that only those who have been converted be admitted into church membership.

Meaningful Membership

We believe that membership matters. As Christians, we are called to live in community with one another. Church membership involves a solemn commitment to serve and invest in the life of a local body of believers.

Authentic Community

Spiritual transformation happens in community with other believers. Therefore, we commit to building authentic relationships with one another. We seek to know and be known by our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Biblical Church Discipline

In order to preserve the health of the body, believers are to exhort, correct and admonish one another in the love and grace of our Lord. We commit to holding one another accountable to biblical standards of conduct, and when necessary to rebuke one another for the sake of Christ's honor.

Church Leadership

A New Testament church is a community of believers living in mutual submission to our Lord Jesus Christ as well as one another. Its offices include elder and deacon. Elders are charged with leading the church in gentleness and truth, safeguarding the purity of her doctrine, and living exemplary lives; deacons are charged with overseeing the specific ministries of the church. While led by her elders, we believe that the New Testament church is ruled by her congregation under the headship of Christ Jesus.

Salt and Light

Believers are called to be both salt and light to the world. As such, we are to stand for morality and virtue. We also seek to promote personal evangelism in the lives of each of our members. We commit to work together and with other believing fellowships both to evangelize our communities and to carry the gospel to the ends of the Earth.

Liturgy

We commit to following regular patterns of worship which remind God's people of their confessional commitments and call them to live in light of those commitments.

Social Justice

Scripture understands all human life to be a gift from God, worthy of being treated with dignity and respect. As Christ's ambassadors, we are concerned to promote justice and to speak prophetically to the broader culture for the glory of God.

Expository Preaching

Now, wherever you hear or see this Word preached, believed, professed, and lived, do not doubt that the true 'ecclesia sancta catholica' [holy universal church] must be there. . . . And even if there were no signs than this alone, it would still suffice to prove that a Christian, holy people must exist there, for God's Word cannot be without God's people and, conversely, God's people cannot be without God's Word.

—Martin Luther¹

As Martin Luther points out, God's Word is essential to the life and health of God's people.² We believe that expository preaching offers the best hope for maintaining the centrality of Scripture in the life of the church. Such preaching has Scripture as its object, taking a particular passage of God's Word as the focus of the sermon. The preacher aims to *exposit* this passage in light of historic Christian orthodoxy, explaining and applying it to the lives of God's people. This is best accomplished by proceeding one book at a time, verse by verse.

Expository preaching is not a matter of style, but rather of content. God uses preachers with a variety of styles to exposit the text. Moreover, expository preaching need not be 'intellectual.' A mind open and submissive to the leading of God's Spirit should find such preaching accessible. Expository preaching differs from topical preaching, which takes some topic as its object and chooses texts which address that topic. We believe that Scripture should be the object of preaching; faithful exposition of God's Word will sufficiently engage topics necessary for the edification of the church.³ The measure of expository preaching is not how well it entertains, but rather how well it exposits the text.⁴

We believe that expository preaching demonstrates reverent submission to Scripture. We also believe that such submission transforms the people of God. Indeed throughout the Bible

¹Martin Luther, "On the Councils and the Church," in *Luther's Works*, vol. 41, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann, trans. Charles M. Jacobs and Eric W. Gritsch (Philadelphia, Fortress, 1966), 150.

²See Colossians 1:24-29. Here Paul states that his ministry is to "make the Word of God fully known."

³This does not mean that topical preaching is *always* inappropriate.

⁴Of course, expositional preaching should not be dry; it is a grievous affront to God to make His word seem dull and uninteresting.

God uses His Word to form and transform His people. The Bible is inspired by the Holy Spirit and thus the very Word of God.⁵ When it is expounded, the Spirit speaks through the text. Expository preaching facilitates growth in both the congregation and the preacher. The preacher continually learns as he seeks not to read his thoughts into the text but rather to let the text speak for itself.⁶ We recognize that the full fruit of preaching will not be realized until Christ's kingdom comes in its fullness. Therefore we seek to be obedient to God's Word and trust the Spirit to honor the preaching of that Word.⁷

⁵See 2 Timothy 3:16.

⁶Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1 that man's wisdom is often foolishness, yet God uses 'the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.'

⁷See Isaiah 55:11.

Church Membership

The early church comprised those who confessed Christ as Savior and committed themselves to obeying His commandments. We understand the local church to consist of those persons who have been freed from the law of sin and death by regeneration in order to pursue the law of the Spirit. Membership in a local church is not salvific. Only faith in the atoning work of Christ brings forgiveness of one's sin and reconciliation with God. Although each person must account for himself before God, no Christian is an island. Rather, we are called to communion with one another within a local church as well as to minister together within that context. We believe the call to gather together in local congregations to be non-negotiable.

According to Paul, believers have various spiritual gifts which, when exercised together within the local church, contribute to its health and well-being. The church is a body of believers (Romans 12:4-8) united in Christ. Its members encourage, support, exhort and pray for one another. Faithful participation in the church is vital to one's own spiritual health as well as the health of the church itself. Therefore, we commit to hold each other accountable for such participation.

Church members are called to participate in several regular congregational practices. We affirm two ordinances: baptism and the Lord's supper. By baptism, new believers testify to their faith in Christ as well as their union with Him in death and resurrection. Members partake of the Lord's supper in remembrance of Christ's death and celebration of the new covenant initiated by Christ's atoning sacrifice.

For Christ's glory, church membership must be restricted to those who trust Christ for salvation and confess Him as Lord. As believers we are strangers in a foreign land. Therefore, the church must distinguish herself from the lost world in which she presently resides.

Authentic Community

We are committed to an orthodox understanding of the Trinity: “The eternal triune God reveals Himself to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, with distinct personal attributes, but without division of nature, essence, or being.”⁸ God exists in perfect community with Himself. Each human person is created in the image of God.⁹ Therefore, as the body depends on food and water, so also the soul depends on communion with God and other human persons. Although marred by sin, the human soul is designed for authentic community and relationships.¹⁰

We are committed to heeding the admonition put forward in Hebrews: “Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together.”¹¹ As a new covenant community, we desire to relate authentically to one another in order to stir one another to godliness. This stirring moves us toward spiritual transformation. Such transformation does not happen in isolation; it depends on community.

We believe man finds ultimate contentment in God alone. But God uses community to help foster love and devotion among His children towards one another, and ultimately, towards Himself. We are therefore committed to authentic relationships characterized by genuine care and compassion towards one another.¹² Luke records in the book of Acts the sacrificial devotion demonstrated by the early community of faith:

⁸*Baptist Faith and Message* 2000, Article 2.

⁹See Genesis 1:26-27.

¹⁰“We were fashioned by a God whose deepest joy is connection with himself, a God who created us to enjoy the pleasure he enjoys by connecting supremely with him but also with each other.” See Larry Crabb, *Connecting* (Nashville: Word, 1997), 55.

¹¹See Hebrews 10:24-25.

¹²As Paul writes, “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.” See Philippians 2:3-4.

And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.¹³

We desire to demonstrate a similar devotion to one another. When a member of the body is in need, the response of the church is to support, encourage and do whatever possible to meet that need.

¹³See Acts 2:44-47.

Conversion

Although God created man without sin, and gave him opportunity to enjoy unending life in His presence, man did not long remain in this honor. . . . Our first parents, by their sin, fell from their original righteousness and communion with God, and we in them, whereby death came upon all: all becoming dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body. . . . Saving repentance is an evangelical grace, whereby a person, being by the Holy Spirit made aware of the evil of himself, does by faith in Christ humble himself with godly sorrow, detestation of himself, and self-abhorrence, praying for pardon and strength of grace. . . . When God converts a sinner, and translates him into the state of grace, He frees him from his natural bondage to sin, and by His grace alone enables him freely to will and to do that which is good; yet due to the corruption of his flesh, he does still also will that which is evil.

—Revised from the *Philadelphia Confession*, § 6.1, 6.2, 9.4

We believe that a biblical view of conversion is critical to understanding the church's role in the divine economy. A local church is a gathering of God's people—that is, those who have been converted from serving the law of sin and death to serving the law of the Spirit (Romans 8). Understanding conversion, moreover, requires understanding that from which a person is saved. As indicated above, original sin results in unredeemed humanity's servitude to the law of sin and death. And this law, according to Scripture, condemns sinners to death (and eternal punishment). So, given His just character, God stands willing to condemn unredeemed humanity to death. What's more, unredeemed humanity, left to itself, will never value Christ above itself. Therefore, in order for one to be converted, the Holy Spirit must open one's eyes to one's own wretchedness.

God's grace does not come at the expense of His justice. It would be unjust for God to pardon one's sins simply because one shows remorse. Instead, God pardons sin only when the debt for it has been paid—that is, only when atonement has been made. Christ offers Himself as atonement in our place, taking upon Himself the sins of the world. Having opened one's eyes to one's sin, the Holy Spirit reveals Christ in His glory and grace as Savior. Having affirmed Christ as God of very God—crucified as a sacrifice for one's sin, buried, and after three days risen—one is justified in virtue of the atonement wrought by Christ. In justifying the repentant sinner, God changes him from a servant of sin and death's law to a servant of the Spirit's law. God

receives glory as He graciously changes unbelievers to believers, thus saving fallen men from themselves and sparing them from His own wrath.

Unbelievers are slaves to the law of sin and death; believers will ultimately be slaves to the law of the Spirit. Yet, until God fully transforms His children in the life to come, they will at times sin. Sadly, believers do not always esteem God and His ways as they ought. Even so, believers ought always to be maturing in holiness, sinning less and less.

The biblical view of humanity stands opposed to modern sensibilities which esteem man as naturally good. The modern view holds one's wickedness to result from forces external to one. Scripture, however, teaches that wickedness dwells within each man. Therefore, it is virtue, not vice, which comes from without—namely, from Christ, who renews one's heart and mind. Of course, one who shows no evidence of such renewal *ipso facto* shows no evidence of having been converted.

Spiritual Transformation

We commit to cooperating with the Holy Spirit in carrying out the Great Commission.¹⁴ This involves making disciples of *all* believers. An absence of transformation indicates a lack of belief; for life in Christ is transformative. In Christ, we are new creations.¹⁵ The process of transformation begins at conversion; and it continues, by the Spirit, until Christ returns.

We believe that no human being is merely physical. Every human person is *created* in God's image; the believer is being *recreated*—that is, transformed—into the image of Christ. Living apart from Christ results in devotion to oneself; transformation into the image of Christ results in devotion to Christ and His kingdom. St. Paul emphasized such transformation. He exhorts the church at Rome to “be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect” (Romans 12:1-2). Writing to the Galatians, he states, “My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is *formed* in you” (Galatians 4:19).

Christian spiritual formation has been defined as “the Spirit-driven process of forming the inner world of the human self in such a way that it becomes like the inner being of Christ himself.”¹⁶ Inward transformation results in one's character being conformed to that of Christ Jesus. Such transformation aims not merely to change one's behavior but to renovate one's heart. Such renovation *naturally* results in the imitation of Jesus. For the transformed believer, then, disobedience becomes unnatural.

We see the various ministries of the church as contributing to inward transformation. Preaching, teaching, Bible study, counseling, fellowship, worship, evangelism—each of these

¹⁴See Matthew 28:19-20.

¹⁵See 2 Corinthians 5:17.

¹⁶Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (NavPress: Colorado Springs, 2002), 22.

contributes to our becoming more like Christ. We seek to use various spiritual disciplines, both corporately and personally, as a means of discipleship. We deny that inward transformation is an end unto itself. Rather, the chief end of man—and thus the end of such transformation—is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

Biblical Church Discipline

It has been remarked, that when discipline leaves a church, Christ goes with it.

—John Leadley Dagg

We are committed to biblical church discipline so that the people of God may remain distinct from the world, thus honoring and glorifying Christ. Although church discipline rarely occurs today, we reject the cultural spirit of moral autonomy and individualism influencing the evangelical church. We understand church discipline to be redemptive, not vindictive, and view it as necessary for the holiness of God's people. Above all else, then, we see church discipline properly applied as indispensable to the health of Christ's body.

In order to minimize the need to discipline members of the fellowship, we support committed, caring, and accountable spiritual community. Authentic community involves members in deep, interpersonal relationships with one another for purposes of accountability, discipleship and support. Regular confession of sin to a brother or sister helps minimize the need to exercise church discipline.

The difference between discipline and punishment is significant. Parents who punish rather than discipline their children often react in anger, thus failing to teach their children. Parents who discipline their children realize the benefits of correcting and training in righteousness, often connecting consequences to behavior. Godly discipline arises from love and the desire to see change in the one disciplined and leads to righteousness. The author of Hebrews emphasizes the importance of discipline for the sake of righteousness (Hebrews 12:5-11). As this passage indicates, God does not withhold discipline from those He loves.

Matthew's Gospel provides a clear pattern for addressing sin. Discipline exercised before the gathered church and the exclusion of a brother from the body are appropriate only when he refuses to repent. Initially, church discipline is to be a private matter, with one person going privately to the wayward brother. If this does not bring repentance, two or three should confront

the brother. If this also fails to bring repentance, the issue must then be brought before the gathered church (as per Matt 18:15-20). As stated above, these steps aim at redemption and restoration.

Paul was outraged at the Corinthian church for their failure to exclude from the fellowship one engaging in incest. He instructs the Corinthian believers to avoid judging those outside their fellowship and to prevent *any so called brother* from contaminating it (1 Corinthians 5). Allowing sin to go unchecked within the church is like failing to deal with “a cancer that, left unchecked, will spread throughout the entire body.”¹⁷ So, for the sake of both the wayward brother and the community of God’s children, we commit ourselves to the consistent, faithful application of biblical church discipline.

¹⁷R. Albert Mohler, “Church Discipline: The Missing Mark,” in *Polity: Biblical Arguments on How to Conduct Church Life*, ed. Mark Dever (Washington D.C.: Center for Church Reform, 2001), 50.

Church Leadership

We believe that each local church answers ultimately to God. Scripture testifies to the divine governance of congregations.¹⁸ A local church submits itself most explicitly to God by submitting to Scripture. Answering ultimately to God alone, local churches enjoy autonomy, answering to no external body. We further believe that church leadership ought to encourage and nurture lay participation in the life of its congregation. Congregational input is necessary in such matters as electing new members, appointing elders, and disciplining unrepentant members. However, the church is not a democracy; the New Testament does not provide for congregational input on every matter and such input may in fact lead to undesirable consequences. Doctrinal integrity must never be compromised in favor of a misguided sense of entitlement or fairness.

While Christ remains the ultimate Shepherd of His church, He appoints human under-shepherds for His flock. Such under-shepherds correct, encourage, guide, instruct, protect and reprove God's people, submitting themselves also to divine leadership as God's children. We believe that the New Testament identifies at least two pastoral responsibilities—one of servant leadership and another of leading service. Those holding the former responsibility are often referred to as *elders*, those holding the latter as *deacons*. Each of these offices serves a role vital to the health and welfare of a congregation. Consequently, the New Testament provides criteria for each of these positions.

The Greek word for deacon translates to English as 'servant.' This indicates the appropriate attitude and role of one called as a deacon. Deacons serve Christ by serving His church, overseeing and facilitating her various ministries. If the church were a row boat, the deacons would be the oars which keep it moving. Criteria for deacons are given in 1 Timothy 3:8-13.

¹⁸The New Testament refers to congregations as 'churches of God' (1 Thessalonians 2:14) and 'churches of Christ' (Romans 16:1-6); it also speaks of the Spirit's role in establishing churches (Acts 13:1-3).

Elders serve as the church's primary leaders. The New Testament presents the elder not as a single authoritarian figure but rather as a member of a pastoral community; elders serve as equals within that community. Given the stress of ministry, a plurality of elders prevents one person from being saddled with the weight of the congregation's needs. We believe that elders have four main tasks. First, they maintain the doctrinal integrity of the church's confession and teaching. Second, they offer direction—a vision—for the congregation. Third, they oversee the practice of church discipline within the church. Finally, they exemplify and model Christ's love and compassion for the congregation. Criteria for elders are given in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9.

Being an elder does not necessarily mean being a paid member of the church's staff; moreover, being a staff member does not necessarily mean being an elder. Whether a staff member serves as an elder depends on his responsibilities within the church. For example, since maintaining the church's doctrinal integrity is one of the primary functions of elders, staff members with significant preaching or teaching responsibilities should be elders. Ordinarily, a church's community of elders should include lay leaders. Moreover, since the New Testament clearly teaches that women should not hold positions of authority within the local church (1 Timothy 2:12), only men should serve as elders.

The elders are charged with nominating to the congregation candidates to serve as deacons or elders. When nominating deacons, elders should indicate the position of service they anticipate the nominee holding. While all nominations should be made with great care, the nomination of someone for eldership should be made with extreme caution in light of the responsibility and weight of that office.

Social Justice

Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, who keeps faith forever; who executes justice for the oppressed, who gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets the prisoners free; the Lord opens the eyes of the blind. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous. The Lord watches over the sojourners; he upholds the widow and the fatherless, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

—Psalm 146:5-9

God is perfectly just. In His earthly ministry, our Lord spent significant time with those considered “outsiders.” As believers, we anticipate the establishment of justice when Christ returns and His kingdom comes in its fullness. Still, as God’s children, we cannot simply wait until Christ returns to seek justice; rather, we are obliged even now to pursue it, though we will have only limited success while Christ tarries. Every step towards justice, however small or temporary, glorifies God.

Scripture clearly states that humans are made in God’s image (Genesis 1:26-27). While a variety of understandings of the *imago dei* have been put forward, all agree that human life is sacred; and the sacredness of human life serves as the basis for a properly Christian view of justice. Whatever one’s mental capacities, physical abilities, gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status or potential for contributing to society, one has incalculable value to God. Moreover, every human being comes as a gift from God and should thus be treated with dignity and respect. Casual disregard for such life amounts to nothing less than blasphemy (Genesis 9:5-6).

Another given for a Christian view of justice is the undeserved grace of God by which believers are saved. At the heart of the gospel is the humiliation endured by Christ in both becoming incarnate and offering Himself up as a sacrifice for us. His humility and willingness to suffer on others’ behalf exemplifies for believers the kind of lives they are to live. Our Lord went to unprecedented lengths—suffering in ways we can only imagine—to love those who hated

Him. If our Lord did not consider such sacrifice beneath Him, how can we consider it beneath us?

Scripture speaks often of the poor. In fact, the Old Testament manifests a deep concern for the poor and oppressed (Leviticus 17, Psalm 146:5-9); so also does Christ Jesus (Matthew 25:45, Luke 14:13). We therefore understand that concern for the weak, poor and oppressed is a sign of Christ-likeness. For this reason, we seek opportunities to minister practically to those in need—whether physically or emotionally.

Christian unity necessarily includes racial unity. We thus affirm that authentic Christian communities judge one not by the color of one's skin but rather by the content of one's character. We deplore racism in any form and believe it inconsistent with Christ-likeness. We thus commit ourselves to seeking racial unity within the church. In Christ is no room for division—racial or otherwise.

Scripture does not anticipate that unbelievers will live as believers; in fact, it states that they will not (1 Corinthians 5:10). It does indicate, however, that believers are to encourage unbelievers to live in accordance with virtue rather than vice (Matthew 5:13-16). Along with the church, God has instituted the family as a fundamental protector of social good. Within contemporary western culture, the rise and increase of sexual promiscuity and perversion constitutes a significant threat to the family. We thus affirm the need to encourage sexual purity both within and without our Christian fellowship.

Salt and Light

Jesus calls His disciples to be both salt and light (Matthew 5:13-16). As God's people, we are to engage the broader culture while preserving the truths of God's Word. As instruments of the Holy Spirit in His work of drawing people to Christ, we must be distinct from those who do not claim Christ. We are called not to isolate ourselves from the world but rather to permeate the culture with the love of Christ and the truth of the gospel. Meaningful membership and biblical church discipline help God's people to maintain their *saltiness* within the world.

Insofar as possible, we seek to eradicate the darkness of sin within our community and around the world with the light of the gospel, bringing sight to those who are spiritually blind. For, of course, only the Christian gospel can bring light to such darkness and sight to such blindness; as Christ Jesus Himself states, only through Him can one come to God the Father (John 14:6). As Mark records, Jesus commissions His disciples to go throughout the world proclaiming the gospel (Mark 16:15). We desire to foster and support ministries within our community that present the gospel and make disciples. We desire also to foster and support efforts to carry out the great commission around the globe.

All Christians are called to evangelize. Each individual believer has a story to tell regarding the salvation he or she has received in Christ Jesus; so also we as a community of believers have a testimony regarding God's work among us. As Christ Himself indicates, our life together is to bear witness to the Spirit's transformation of us into the image of Christ (John 13:34-35). We thus desire to edify, encourage and equip one another to bear witness to the hope within us. Ultimately, however, we understand that it is God, not us, who saves.

Orthodox Doctrine

Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you. Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.

—1 Timothy 4:13-16

‘Orthodoxy’ means ‘right belief.’ The church is a gathering of believers—that is, a gathering of those who hold beliefs essential to the Christian faith. The word ‘doctrine’ might be defined as ‘a set of beliefs that constitute one’s fundamental commitments.’ *Orthodox doctrine*—the set of those beliefs essential and constitutive of one’s Christian commitment—defines the common commitments which bind together the people of God. Since we value orthodox doctrine as essential to genuine Christian fellowship, we seek to promote one another’s understanding of orthodoxy and to prevent beliefs which are not orthodox from creeping into the community of God’s people.

As sinners affected by Adam’s fall, our musings on God are subject to error. We must learn to think rightly about God and the things of God. Scripture serves as the most important source for our knowledge of God, since it alone is without error (2 Timothy 3:16). Of course, we sometimes err in interpreting Scripture; still, where error creeps in, it is we, not Scripture, who fail. Consequently, Scripture must have the primary place of honor in all preaching and teaching.

Christian Tradition—that is, those beliefs approved and handed down through the church’s long history from one generation of believers to another—provides another source of knowledge about God. Since the Spirit—who, according to Christ, has come to lead His followers into all truth (John 14:26)—has worked within the church throughout her history, we trust that He has guided her deliberations on Scripture. We thus believe that, where the church has spoken with unanimity (or near unanimity), she must be taken with great seriousness. So, while we recognize that tradition may err, we depart from Christian Tradition only when remaining faithful to Scripture demands it. Since much of the church’s tradition has been

articulated in her creeds and confessions, we believe that such statements warrant careful and reverent attention.

As a church, we have affirmed a Statement of Faith which articulates our doctrinal convictions. Since this articulates our fundamental beliefs, we require affirmation of the Statement of Faith as a condition of membership. We affirm the value of confessing together these convictions in public meetings and worship. Faithful membership should result in consistent growth in one's knowledge and practice of orthodox doctrine.

The Statement of Faith also serves to protect the church against unorthodox teaching. The elders, as shepherds of God's people, are charged with the crucial task of ensuring that the teaching within the church coheres with Scripture and the Statement of Faith. The Apostles Paul and Peter continually warn against false teachers within the church. For this reason, the elders must attend to every teaching venue within the church, from the pulpit to the nursery.

Scripture exhorts believers to practice the things of God (Luke 8:21, Philippians 4:9, 1 Timothy 5:4); they are, as Paul instructs, to live in a manner worthy of their calling in Christ (Ephesians 4:1, Philippians 1:27). So, then, *orthodoxy* cannot be divorced from *orthopraxy* (or *right practice*). For this reason, one who lives at odds with the truths of the faith thereby evidences a lack of orthodox belief.

Liturgy

Since the word ‘liturgy’ may have any of a number of meanings, we begin with the meaning with which we use it here. By ‘liturgy,’ we understand a set schedule of ceremonies, ordinances, prayers, and rites to be followed in public worship. As an established order of such practices existed for the services of the Temple under the Old Covenant, so also the historic church has long recognized the value of such an order for her own services. Of course, the Lord himself warns His followers against vain repetition, saying, “And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him” (Matthew 6:7-8). This should not, however, be construed to mean that *all* ritual is meaningless and thus to be eschewed; our Lord’s emphasis is on *vain* or *meaningless* repetition, not repetition per se. And, of course, immediately after issuing this warning Jesus Himself provides for His followers the model prayer, commonly known as the Lord’s Prayer or *Pater noster*, which has itself enjoyed a prominent role in Christian liturgy since the time of the apostles (Matthew 6:9-15).

So, while we reject dead ritualism and meaningless repetition, we nonetheless affirm the importance of liturgy for the people of God. We understand its primary function to be catechetical—to teach the things of God to His people. So, for instance, we anticipate a regularly scheduled time of public confession within the church’s worship—meaning by this a public confession of those truths which bind us together in Christ Jesus; such confession might take the form of a regularly scheduled congregational reading of, e.g., the Apostles’ Creed.