

Confession of Common Faith and Practice of Followers of Jesus at Thomaston

Our Common Faith—What We Believe

Many people look at Christianity as a set of beliefs. We see Christianity as much more than that. To us it is a living relationship with Jesus Christ, a relationship that produces a new life. We enter into this relationship by: (1) hearing the call of God through His word and His Spirit working in our hearts, (2) repenting of our sins and turning from our selfish life and the world, (3) yielding all to Jesus Christ as Lord of our life, and (4) receiving the gift of a new life offered us through Jesus Christ. In short, we become Christians by choosing to surrender to Jesus as our Savior and Lord. And we live the Christian life in exactly the same way--by a living faith that moves us to a daily surrender to Christ. As Christians, we follow Jesus, we learn from Jesus, we try to do each day what Jesus would do if He were in our world. That is true Christianity.

Even so, as Christians we hold to certain beliefs—and correct beliefs *are* important. We derive our beliefs from the Bible, believing all that it teaches. But the Bible is a big book—a book of history, poetry, exhortation, prophecy. It is not a systematic statement of doctrine. Since even sincere people differ in what they understand it to teach, we find it helpful to summarize key points that we believe. Christians have done this since the beginning of the church.

The earliest known summary of key Christian doctrines is known as the “Apostles' Creed.” It was very likely written while some of the apostles were still alive, or shortly after. Because we want to emulate apostolic Christianity, and anchor ourselves solidly in apostolic doctrine, we give it here as a concise statement of what we believe:

We believe in God, the Father almighty,
Creator of heaven and earth:
And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was
conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary;
who suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died and was buried;
who descended into hades,
on the third day rose again from the dead,
ascended into heaven,
and sits on the right hand of God the Father almighty,
from where He will come to judge the living and the dead.
We believe in the Holy Ghost,
in the holy catholic [universal] church,
in the communion of saints,
in the forgiveness of sins,
in the resurrection of the body,
and in the life everlasting.

Many Christians since then have also written confessions of faith. We present here an abridged form of the "Schleitheim Confession" adopted by the Swiss Brethren on February 24, 1527.¹ We share this "Confession" not only to affirm our own belief, but also to express our appreciation for the earnest attempt to restore apostolic Christianity that became known as the Anabaptist movement. The zeal of this restitution movement inspires us, and we ask God to bless us with the purity of heart and the power that we see there.

The Schleithem Confession

1. **Baptism**

Baptism shall be given to all who have demonstrated repentance and a changed life, to all who truly believe that their sins are taken away by Christ, to all who wish to be buried with Him into death so that they may be resurrected with Him. We baptize only those who understand baptism to mean these things, and who request it for themselves.

2. **Excommunication**

If those who have given themselves to the Lord, to walk in His commandments, should inadvertently fall into sin, they shall be admonished. If after two private admonitions they do not repent, they shall be openly disciplined or excommunicated according to the command of Christ. This shall be done according to the Spirit of Christ before the breaking of bread, so that we may break bread with one heart and in one love.

3. **The breaking of bread**

Those who wish to break one bread and drink one cup in remembrance of the broken body and shed blood of our Lord shall first be united by baptism into the one body of Christ, which is the church of God, whose head is Christ Himself. For as Paul teaches us, we cannot drink the cup of devils and the cup of the Lord at the same time. That is, if we have fellowship with the works of darkness, we have no part in the light of the Gospel. If we follow the devil and the world, we have no part with those who are called out of the world to serve God. So those who break bread together must have been called by God into one faith, to one baptism, to one Spirit, to one body.

4. **Separation**

All men are divided into two classes: the good and bad, the believing and unbelieving, the world and those who have come out of the world, the followers of Christ and followers of Belial. And no one can find fellowship in both classes of people.

To us, the command of the Lord is clear. He calls us to be separate from all evil, that He may be our God, and we, His sons and daughters. He calls us to come out of "Babylon" and "Egypt," that we do not come under their judgments.

From this we learn to flee from all that is not united to our God and Christ. This includes separation from all apostate religious programs and services, from drunkenness, from civic affairs, from oaths, from whatever is contrary to God's commandments. Our separation causes us to be hated by the world. But our Lord Jesus has set us free from our former slavery to our flesh, fitting us to serve God through the Spirit that He has given us.

5. **Pastors**

A pastor in the church of God shall have a good report of those outside the faith. His office shall be to read, to admonish and teach, to warn, to discipline, to excommunicate, to lead out in worship, to lift up the bread when it is broken, to do all that is necessary to care for the

"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Mt. 28:19-20).

"Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Ac. 2:38)

"If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more. . . . And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican" (Mt. 18:15-17).

"For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit" (1 Co. 12:13).

"Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils" (1 Co. 10:21).

"There is one body, and one Spirit . . . one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (Eph. 4:4-6).

"He hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son" (Co. 1:13).

"Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? . . . Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty" (2 Co. 6:14-18).

"If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you" (Jn. 15:18-19).

"A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of

church, in order that it may be built up. A pastor shall be supported by the church that has chosen him, according to need, so that he who serves in the Gospel may live of the Gospel as the Lord has ordained. If a pastor should do anything requiring discipline, he shall not be dealt with except on the testimony of two or three witnesses. When he sins, he shall be disciplined before all that others also may fear.

6. The sword

The sword is ordained of God outside the perfection of Christ. It punishes and puts to death the wicked, and guards and protects the good. Under the Mosaic law, the sword was given for the punishment of the wicked. This sword is now given to worldly officers of law. But in the church of Christ, the only punishment used against sinners is excommunication and the warning to sin no more.

Some will ask, "May the Christian use the sword to defend or to protect the good, or those he loves?" Our answer is unanimously, "No. Christ teaches and commands us to learn of Him, for He is meek and lowly in heart, and in this way we find rest for our souls."

Others may ask, "May a Christian be a judge to settle the quarrels that unbelievers have." Our answer is: "Christ did not wish to pass judgment in the case of a dispute about an inheritance. We also should refuse such things."

7. Oaths

Under the Mosaic law, God ordained that oaths be used only in His name, and only in truth, not falsely. But Christ, who teaches the perfection of the law, prohibits all swearing to His followers, whether true or false. We do not swear at all because, as Jesus says, we cannot change even the smallest thing about ourselves. We cannot always fulfill what we have promised. A simple "yes" or "no" binds us to our word.

filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil" (1 Ti. 3:2-7).

"Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. . . . For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil" (Ro. 13:1-4).

"Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls" (Mt. 11:29).

"Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence" (Jn. 18:36).

"But I say unto you, Swear not at all . . . Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil" (Mt. 5:34-37).

It would be impractical to put in this writing a full confession of every aspect of the Christian faith. But in addition to the above, we would like to briefly affirm key elements of our faith that often come under attack today.

1. Creation

We believe that God created all things in six literal days of creation.

"For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is" (Ex. 20:11).

2. Inspiration

We believe that the whole Bible is inspired of God, the very words of both the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament is the necessary foundation of the New, but we accept the New Testament as the primary guide for the Christian life (Mt. 5; Heb. 8:6-13).

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Ti. 3:16).

"For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (Jn. 1:17).

3. Sin

We believe that Adam was created innocent and pure, but through disobedience to God, he became sinful. All of us have also rebelled against the Holy God of heaven; all are sinners (Gn. 3; Ro. 3).

"By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Ro. 5:12).

4. **The means of salvation**

We believe that we can be saved from sin, death and eternal hell only through Jesus' atoning death, shed blood and bodily resurrection.

5. **The gift of salvation**

We believe that we receive God's gift of salvation through true repentance (turning from our sins to God) and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Saving faith leads us to confess our sins, to be baptized, to confess Christ and receive Him as our only Savior and Lord—into a life of full surrender.

6. **Baptism**

We believe that Baptism is an open expression of one's commitment to Christ and His body, the Church (both universal and local). We also believe that through baptism a commitment is made to actively work in God's Kingdom. We believe that all who have entered the Kingdom of God through repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ must have a basic understanding of the seriousness of the commitment and covenant made at the time of baptism. We believe this can be accomplished through a time of spiritual teaching prior to and after baptism.

7. **Discipleship**

We believe that we cannot be Jesus' disciples unless we deny ourselves and take up our cross daily and follow Him.

8. **Perseverance and assurance**

We believe that God is fully able to keep us, but that we will be saved only if, by the grace of God, we endure to the end. All who continue to hear Jesus' voice and to follow Him have eternal life and can rest in the knowledge that they are eternally secure. Outside of Jesus Christ, apart from continuing obedient faith to Him, we are lost (1 Jn 5:12-13).

9. **Christian fruit**

We believe that the primary test of our Christianity is the fruit of the Spirit in our lives: holiness, righteousness, love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control (Galatians 5:13-26; Ephesians 4:17 - 5:21).

10. **The Holy Spirit in the believer**

We believe that God gives His Holy Spirit to all His children. If we would live in the Spirit and reap the rewards of the Spirit, we must also walk in the Spirit.

11. **Spiritual gifts**

We believe that the Spirit gives each believer spiritual gifts for the edification of the church, as listed in the Scriptures, according to His sovereign will.

"Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9).

"Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Ac. 2:38).

"If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved" (Ro 10:9).

"And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.

Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." (Ac 2:40-42)

"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Lu. 9:23).

"But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved" (Mt. 24:13).

"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand" (Jn. 10:27-18).

"Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Mt. 7:20-21).

"If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (Ro. 8:9).

"... the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him" (Ac. 5:32).

"Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues" (1 Co. 12:27-28).

12. **The congregation**

We believe God calls believers to function as members of a local congregation, in submission to other brethren, for mutual exhortation and edification. We see the example of a plural eldership in the New Testament congregations, and of deacons called to minister to temporal needs.

13. **Feet washing**

We believe that we should wash one another's feet as an expression of humility and mutual service.

14. **The Christian greeting**

We believe that we should greet one another with a holy kiss of sincere love.

15. **Headship and the veiling**

We believe that God calls men to headship, symbolized by the unveiled head; that God calls women to submission, symbolized by the veiled head.

16. **Anointing with oil**

We believe that God has ordained anointing with oil for the healing of the sick.

17. **Marriage**

We believe that marriage is designed by God to be a holy, life-long union of one man and one woman; that marriage of divorced persons whose former companions are living constitutes adultery; that believers are not to marry unbelievers.

18. **Relationship to civil authorities**

We believe that God calls us to pray for those in authority, to obey them for conscience sake, and to pay our just taxes.

19. **Our enemy and the spirit world**

We believe that we have a real enemy, Satan, a spirit being who tries to turn us from God and damn our souls. We also believe that through God's Holy Spirit, His word, and His angelic ministering spirits, we can overcome him.

20. **Eternal rewards**

We believe that God will punish all the wicked, disobedient and unbelieving in a literal, eternal hell. We believe that the righteous, obedient and faithful will enjoy the bliss of eternity in God's presence.

"Ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another" (1 Pe. 5:5).

"Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons:" (Ph 1:1)

"If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. (Jn. 13:14-15).

"Greet all the brethren with an holy kiss" (1 Th. 5:26)

"Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head. But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head.... If it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered (1 Co. 11:4-6).

"Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord" (Jas. 5:14).

"But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery" (Mt. 5:32).

"Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake" (1 Pe. 2:13).
"Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's" (Mt. 22:1)

"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" (Eph. 6:10-11).

"And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be" (Rev. 22:12).
"And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal" (Mt. 25:46).

Our Common Practice—How We Live

The Christian church not only believes sound doctrine, but also upholds sound practice. What we believe cannot be divorced from how we live. We do not really believe in our Lord Jesus unless we follow and obey Him. Under the new covenant, God writes His laws in our hearts. With God's laws written in our hearts, we learn to fear Him and we want to obey Him. Indeed, we develop personal conviction to obey Him. Even so, our obedience to God is not just a personal matter. God has designed that we serve Him from the context of a brotherhood. The example, exhortation and admonition of others help us apply God's laws to our lives. Jesus said that His laws can be summed up in two great commandments, or principles: loving God with all our hearts, and loving our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-39). The following points of "common practice" all grow out of these two commandments. We live as we do because we love God and our neighbor. If we do any of these things for any other reason—apart from love in its deepest form—our practice becomes empty and meaningless.

1. Because we love God, we worship Him and strive to maintain a living relationship with the Lord Jesus. This relationship is built on the abhorrence of all sin and the daily pursuit of holiness through the crucifixion of our selfish desires by the power of the Spirit. It is nurtured by a meaningful devotional life: Scripture reading, meditation, prayer and fasting.

"Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me" (Jn. 15:4).
"Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit" (Joh. 12:24-25).
2. Because we love one another, we purpose to share in close fellowship with each other. Following apostolic example and admonition, all of us participate as much as are able in our regular and special fellowship meetings. We work together in both spiritual and natural endeavors, for mutual help and encouragement. We also work to strengthen a fraternal relationship with all true brothers beyond our local fellowship.

"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching" (Heb. 10:25).
"Let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Ga. 6:10).
3. Because we love our neighbor, we make it our business to go "every where preaching the word." All of us seek an active ministry to the lost and needy around us. We take personal responsibility to fulfill the great commission of our Lord.

"They that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word" (Ac. 8:4)
"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mr. 16:15).
4. Because we love God who planned the family unit, we take our family responsibilities seriously. We promote family unity and togetherness—in worship, in service, in work, in daily routines. As fathers, we lead the family in worship and prayer, and teach sound doctrine and God's principles for holy living.

"Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them. Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord. Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged" (Col. 3:18-21).
5. Because we love God, we accept our calling to love one another, to serve one another, to honor others before ourselves, to share with those in need, to do all things for edification. Knowing that some of the greatest tests of Christianity are found in our brotherhood relationships, we make no place for gossip and evil speaking. Where conflicts occur, we commit ourselves to examine our own lives and to prayer. If the conflict continues after we have given God opportunity to work in our own hearts, we will go directly to the person involved in the spirit of meekness.

"By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (Joh. 13:35).
"If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone.... But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more.... And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican" (Mt. 18:15-17).
6. Because we love God, we renounce all the works of darkness

"Those who had practiced magic brought

and separate ourselves from all demonic practices. We avoid all forms of divination, of mystical meditation, and even every "gray area" where mysterious powers seem to work apart from natural principles.

7. Because we love God and have made Jesus Lord of our lives, we reject anything that brings us under its power by enslaving the body or mind. This includes all habit-forming drugs. This principle also helps us avoid being dominated by even legitimate pleasures or business pursuits.

8. Because we love God and our brothers, we consciously dedicate all our earthly possessions to the Lord. What we have is not our own, but a stewardship of the Lord. We freely share with those in need, especially with our brothers. We view the love of money and the accumulation of treasures on earth as dangerous to our souls. At the same time, God calls us to work with our hands that we may provide for our own (not just our immediate families, but our parents and others) and have to give to those in need. This implies careful management, with a view to living with less that we might share more generously (Acts 4:34-35; 1 Jn. 3:16-19).

9. Because we love God and His Kingdom, we choose vehicles, houses and other possessions for practicality, economy and service. We recognize that our vehicles and our homes reflect our values in life and reveal our sense of stewardship. We want them to show that our treasures are in heaven and our hearts are fixed on humility. We avoid luxury or sporty vehicles, or eye-catching colors. We choose simple homes, with simple furnishings chosen for utility. Because we purpose to invest as much time and money as possible in God's Kingdom, we seek to minimize our spending on what we consume and to avoid what serves no truly useful function.

10. Because we love God and know that He loves us, we purpose to learn to trust Him in every area of life. In the religious world, relying on man's institutions and traditions can undermine our focus on Christ and on following Him in simple faith. Similarly, in the economic world, an affluent life style and leaning on insurances can undermine our faith in Christ. We choose a life style that encourages us to trust God and not man. Because we love our brothers, we commit ourselves to help meet each other's needs, so that no one suffers lack.

11. Because we love God, we strive to maintain an atmosphere of reverence and worship in our homes. We encourage influences that promote holiness and sobriety, and we purpose to shelter our families from the corruptions and perversions of society, which are often promoted through various media sources.

their books together, and burned them in the sight of all" (Ac. 19:19 NKJV).

"Sorcerers ... shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone" (Re. 21:8).

"All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any" (1 Co. 6:12).

"No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier" (2 Ti. 2:4).

"But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" (1 Joh. 3:17).

"It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" (Mt. 19:24).

"If anyone will not work, neither should he eat" (2 Th. 3:10 NKJV).

"Let him labor, working with his hands ... that he may have to give to him that needeth" (Eph. 4:28).

"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.... For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.... Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Mt. 6:19-20, 33).

"If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?" (Lu. 16:11).

"Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ" (Col. 2:8).

"It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in princes" (Ps. 118:8-9).

"That ... your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your want: that there may be equality" (2 Co. 8:14).

"For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light:... proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them" (Eph. 5:8-11).

12. Because we love God, we guard our reading habits. Knowing that what we read molds our thinking, we promote, first of all, the reading of the Scriptures, as well as other wholesome, upbuilding literature. But we carefully guard against anything that takes our hearts away from God. Most of what the world produces has no place at all in our homes. And even much of today's "Christian" literature undercuts sound doctrine, godly morals and values, and sound church and family life.

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable . . . that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works. (2 Ti. 3.16-17).

"Give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.... Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all" (1 Ti. 4:13, 15).

"Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you" (Jas 4:8).

13. Because we love God and want to keep our hearts in tune with Him, we choose our music carefully. Music communicates with our inner being and shapes our thinking and attitudes. It can take us away from God, or toward God. In this light and in harmony with apostolic practice, we promote acapella singing for worship and praise, as well as for mutual encouragement.

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" (Col. 3:16).

14. Because we love God and His righteousness, we use the New Testament principle of modesty as the basis for the way we dress. We choose simple and serviceable clothing, as the Scriptures teach. Because we love our neighbor, we reject anything designed to foster lustful looks or thoughts. In view of these principles, we reject the display and ornamentation of the world's fashions and fads and rather, seek to glorify God in how we cover our bodies, for our bodies belong to God. We choose clothing that reflects humility and godly virtues. Specifically, we avoid form-fitting clothing, loud colors, and eye-catching styles. The brothers choose loose-fitting trousers and modest shirts with sleeves that cover most of the upper arms. The sisters choose loose-fitting, unadorned clothing with long, full skirts, an additional layer that covers the upper part of the body, sleeves that conceal most of the upper arms and concealed necklines.

"I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting. In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; but (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works" (1 Ti. 2:8-10).

"Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands" (1 Pe. 3:3-5).

15. Because we love God who made us as men and women, we uphold sex distinction in dress and grooming. In harmony with the Scriptures, we brothers cut our hair neatly, avoiding the world's fashions. The sisters have long hair, simply combed and faithfully veiled with an opaque covering. The veiling not only serves as a testimony to the sisters' submission, it also promotes modesty by covering what the Scriptures call a woman's glory: her hair.

"Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him? But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering.... For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn: but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered" (1 Co. 11:14-15, 6).

16. Because we love the God who loves humility, we avoid display and ostentation, whether in our possessions or on our bodies. To avoid pride and to literally obey the Scriptures, we do not wear jewelry of any kind. Recognizing that even watches can be jewelry, those who need time pieces choose watches that reflect humility and simplicity. Both brothers and sisters choose to abstain from worldly practices that attract attention to ourselves, choosing rather to show the world that both our body and spirit are God's.

"All of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble" (1 Pe. 5:5).

"What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Co. 6.19-20).

17. Because we love God, we avoid the pursuits of a pleasure-mad society. As followers of our Lord Jesus, we want to live as He did: serving God and others, not pleasing ourselves. We reject, as we are sure He would, the world's entertainment: amusement parks, sport events, movies, rodeos, and such like. We find godly recreation in family-oriented activities and in Christian service and fellowship.

"For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries" (1 Pe. 4:3).

18. Because we love God and accept the demands of full allegiance to His Kingdom, we do not vote or take any part in political matters. We cannot conscientiously serve on a trial jury. Like Jesus, we know that we are not of this world. We are not called to be judges or rulers over others, but lights in a dark world.

"Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister" (Mt. 20:27-28).
"Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight" (Joh. 18:36).
"And he said unto him, Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?" (Lu. 12:14).

19. Because we love God and belong to Jesus Christ, we do not enter into unequal yokes with unbelievers, that is, into any contract or union that compromises our freedom to act in harmony with Christian principles.

"Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for . . . what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God" (2 Co. 6:14-16).

20. Because we love God and His people, we commit ourselves to work in harmony for the edification of this brotherhood. If a time should come that we persist in failure to do so, we recognize that we forfeit the benefits of the full fraternal relationship of the brotherhood. If we leave this congregation to find fellowship elsewhere with committed believers, we will leave peacefully and continue to work to build God's Kingdom, in truth and righteousness.

"Be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves" (Php. 2:2-3).
"A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject" (Tit. 3:10).
"Let all that you do be done with love" (1 Co. 16:14 NKJV).

We have not tried to address every area of faith and practice in this writing. Others will need to be addressed as we face the questions that come up in congregational life. In every question, we will prefer others above ourselves and submit ourselves to one another in humility (Ro. 12:10; 1 P. 5:5). We will respect the congregation we are a part of, submitting to those who watch for our souls that they may give account with joy (He. 13:17). We will promote "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3). We will work for the "edifying of the church," not for self glory (1 Co. 14:12, 26). We will resist being conformed to this world; by the transformation of our minds we will seek to know the will of God (Ro. 12:2). Scriptures like these show us plainly that "none of us liveth to himself" (Romans 14:7). We live as members of Christ and thus members one of another (Romans 12:5). May our Lord Jesus Christ be exalted over every area of our lives.