

# GRACE DISTINCTIVES: WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE BELIEVE



## Worshipping God

Church is not a social club or mutual interest society, we're part of it because God has called us to himself, choosing us in Christ before the foundation of the world, and making us a distinct group of people; a family of God. Church is about Christians living their lives together before the God whom they worship, brilliant youth programmes, great music, buildings or anything else are no substitute. We are a people among whom God has chosen to live.

At the heart of being God's people is the call to be a people of worship, to 'love the Lord your God' (Mark 12:30). To be a Christian is know our whole life re-oriented towards God in all we do!

As God's people, we enjoy a special relationship with God. We are called to delight in him, that is, to enjoy him; his character, glory, magnificence and splendor. He is more glorious than anything in this world, therefore each day is an opportunity to enjoy worshipping God in all that we do, we are called to live lives that are in themselves an act of worship and sacrifice (Romans 12:1-2).

We come together on a Sunday to seek God's preference in worship; to honour him as he would have us, rather than according to our own preferences. Our corporate worship is an overflow of our individual daily worship, and it flows from a heart that adores God, rather than being a performance or a religious rite. It involves us all, and requires that we all choose to engage in worship from the very beginning, whether we feel like it or not! We are to respond to God and share what he gives (1 Cor 14:26)

Our worship style is contemporary, we aim to not just sing about Jesus, but to him, and we hold as vitally important the centrality of truth to our singing.

## Delighting in his word

The Bible is God's inspired and authoritative word (2 Tim 3:16), it is our one constant truth in a world that is constantly changing, and it reveals the goodness and mercy of God. We teach, train, disciple and preach from Scripture, looking for truth to work in Practice (James 1:22). Scripture is our guide above all else; we are not constrained by tradition unless it is useful and according to biblical principle.

We are people who look to build daily habits of feasting on God's Word and of encountering him, through the Spirit, in his Word. We are also committed to making this a communal activity. Moses made it clear (Deut 8:3) that the practise of gathering manna and sharing it among the people of God was just a picture of how we are meant to consume the Bible, each takes what he needs and shares the overflow! Colossians 2:19 & 3:16 give a stunning picture of how God uses each of us to share the life of Jesus with the other as his word dwells richly in us. This call to mutual-discipleship lies at the heart of our church's vision, after all, discipleship lies at the very heart of the mission Christ has given to his church!

As society moves further away from its Christian heritage, holding fast to truth will create a greater contrast between the church and the world. The Bible is very clear on issues like marriage, sex, gender, abortion and end of life issues. We are to stand firm upon what is eternal, not what is temporary, but are to do so with the deepest love and humility.



## Amazed by grace

Grace is an unearned, undeserved blessing, given freely as a gift. We cannot contribute towards it or repay it, or it would not be a gift. It shows God's kindness, lavish generosity, loving choice and is received entirely by faith (Titus 3:5-7). Paul calls it lavish because God has ransomed us from the power of sin by the most precious thing in existence; the blood of Jesus (Titus 2:11-14).

## Grasping God's Grace

The extent of His love is lavish, stunning, dignifying, and eternal (Eph.1:7.8). Our instinct is to try and earn God's favour by doing the right things: this is legalism which is deadly and dangerous [Gal.3:3]. We do not earn God's favour or His gifts. We are to live in His love, and enjoy it (Jude 21)! At the heart of God's grace is the way in which God brings us into an intimate union with himself, through the Son (John 17:21). The miracle of grace is that it has its roots in eternity (Titus 1:1), God chose a people for himself before the earth was created regardless of how we would live, so that it depends entirely upon his grace and not upon our works.

## Responding to God's Grace

Grace doesn't mean that how you live is irrelevant now, we are not to carry on sinning because God will forgive us anyway! [Rom.6:1] We are to be inspired by Grace towards holiness (Rom.6:14, Titus 2:11), growth (2 Pet.3:18), giving (2 Cor.8:1.6), and hard work! (1 Cor.15:10). However grace does more than inspire, it also provides power for us to change. We are to have faith in God's future grace; our hearts are to yearn for more grace by the Spirit, to train us (Titus 1:12).

We live out of gratitude, security, love and joy, not mere duty, debt, rule and law.

## Reflecting God's Grace

Grace is to be seen in how we treat each other, love and forgive each other. We must not be judgmental, harsh or selfish.

Way back in 2005, one of our mottos was: '*No Greed, No Grumbling, No Gossip*'.

We must show Grace to the world, not self-righteousness, radically loving the poor, the lost and the unlovely.

## Proclaiming God's Grace

The Gospel is at the heart all we believe, and it's vitally important that we understand and can speak of the incredible way that God saves and to give the reason for our hope (1 Peter 3:15). The Gospel is the only hope for those who are lost, dead, hopeless and hell-bound. Jesus didn't wait for people to come to him, but sought them where they were, we must not expect the world to come looking for Christ, but must take the gospel to them.

Our evangelism is not chiefly to be centrally organized, rather we must be equipped to speak of Christ in whatever sphere God has placed us in. There is no 'one' method for taking Christ's message to the world, it is his power that will accomplish our mission, prayer is a key.



## Led by his Spirit

### The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is the third Person of the Godhead, is fully God, and so is to be honoured. He is also a Person who has a character and a will and so can be known. He speaks, feels, acts and can be grieved, and must not be ignored.

The Spirit of God dwells in us and daily leads us to know Christ more.

The early believers were filled with the Holy Spirit as a definite experience of empowering for mission and service. They were then to experience ongoing fillings and fullness (Eph 5:18). The fruit and gifts of the Spirit flow from His empowering. At times His 'coming upon' is overwhelming and spreads out into the community in revival. We need to pray regularly, repeatedly and expectantly for His coming.<sup>3</sup>

Paul calls the church to earnestly seek the gifts of the Spirit. We are committed to seeking and experiencing more of the powerful presence of the Spirit in this way, not for personal benefit, but for the building up of the Church. Some people would call this charismatic or continuationist. We are committed to making space in the life of the church for gifts to be practiced and developed, both with accountability and order.

### Body Ministry

The church is a 'body' where every part is important and has a part to play. When everyone takes part fully no one is overburdened and everyone is vital. There is no priestly/clergy divide in the church of Jesus, we are all called to serve Jesus in the power of the Spirit.

The Bible teaches that Everyone has their own spiritual gifts from God [Rom.12:4-8, 1Cor.12:4-11, Eph.4:11, 1Pet.4:8-11]. These lists are not exhaustive, and perhaps less important that identifying what your gift is, is recognising that Jesus calls you to be a builder-up of the church! The church is a living organism, not a cold organization. A lot that we call 'church' works best in small groups, gifts and service are primarily to be worked out within the context of relationship, rather in than the context of meetings.

### Extraordinary generosity

As the Spirit shapes us into a new alternative society, a people of God. We give away our time, kindness, skills, service, possessions and money to those who need them in the church and in the wider community as we would to our own family. The NT church gave freely [Acts 2:42-7, 4:32-6, 2Cor.9:6, Luke 6:38], so must we, this is a huge aspect of committing to partnership/membership.

We don't believe in compulsory tithing, but we do want to respond to God's amazing grace with radical generosity that goes beyond what the law demanded. Church growth will demand faith to be exercised through sacrificial giving. Staff, buildings and mission are expensive. The church must be faith not budget driven. Christians are not living for material gain, but are *hilarious givers* [2Cor.9:7] and there is nothing more deserving, exciting or worthwhile to give to than to the mission of Jesus!



Other important issues:

## **Baptism**

Grace is a credo-baptist church. That means we are convinced that baptism is for adults/mature young people, who have come to faith in Jesus. If you were Christened as a child, but have since come to know Jesus, we would encourage you to think about baptism! It is a hugely important act of faith.

## **The way we are led**

We are an elder-led church, being convinced that this is the New Testament model. This means that we don't have a system of voting. However, we do lead by consensus; what the Spirit is saying through the congregation is of great importance. On decisions like the appointment of elders, we give time and opportunity for the congregation to pray and advise. Leaders are to lead as servants, with humility and on their knees.

Our theology of leadership is also *complementarian*, which means that, in leadership (and in marriage), men and women have different roles. The New Testament is quite clear that elders are to be men of specific qualification and character, this has nothing to do with equality, status or importance, and everything to do with how the Lord has designed the church to be a body of co-operative beauty. We believe that all people, male and female, of all races and backgrounds, have a vital place in the church, and whilst the office of elder is limited by qualification, by character, and by gender, there are many, many other forms of service and leadership in the church that are clearly open to all. We desire to be a church that invests in all people, that trains both men and women to teach and minister.

## **Advance**

Grace is not part of a denomination, but in a sense we are inter-dependent rather than independent. We value highly the important role that other churches and leaders play in our church, providing counsel, advice, accountability and support. Some people might call this the apostolic (meaning *sent*), or inter-church sphere. We are formally connected to a global group of churches call the Advance Movement. This is a group of churches that shares out value and theology and is committed to seeing churches planted and strengthened all around the world.

## **Statement of Belief**

This booklet is not a full statement of what we believe, you can find that in the separate document: *Grace: Statement of Belief*